

**POLITICS VS EDUCATION & EDUCATION VS POLITICS:
THE CASE OF THE PALESTINIAN STUDENTS UNDER OCCUPATION**

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ÖZET

İnsan Hakları Evrensel Beyannamesi, Eğitimi, insanın kişiliğinin gelişimini sağlayan, insan haklarına ve temel özgürlüklere duyulan saygının güçlendirilmesine hizmet eden temel haklardan biri olarak kabul eder. Filistin topraklarında sürmekte olan İşgal ve de Filistin toplumunun içsel dinamikleri, yüksek öğretim düzeyinde farklı işlevlerin ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuştur. Bu çalışma, ilk olarak, aileyle eğitim arasındaki ilişkiyi gelenekler ve din açısından incelemeyi hedefler. İkincisi, İsrail işgalinin eğitim hayatı ve öğrencilerin psikolojileri üzerindeki etkilerini ortaya çıkarmaya çalışır. Ve de son olarak, toplumsal cinsiyet ve politika ile ilişkileri içerisinde eğitimin işlevini inceler.

ABSTRACT

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes Education as one of the basic human rights through which development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms can be succeeded. The Occupation existing in the Palestinian Territories and the internal dynamics of the Palestinian community initiate different functions of higher education. This study seeks, first, to analyze the connection between family and education in terms of traditional customs and religion. Secondly, this study tries to explore the effect of Israeli occupation on the educational life and on the psychology of the students and finally to explore and analyze the function of educational space in relation to gender and politics.

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Introduction

This study was initiated by the exceptionality of the Palestinian case. The status of the Occupied Territories¹ and the conditions of living under the military control of Israel raised questions on everyday practices that for the citizens of a sovereign state are thought as normal and taking place automatically.

Education marks the life of people all around the world with its everyday circular character. The restrictions on movement within West Bank and the several closures that Palestinian educational institutions experienced raised the question on the meaning of education under these conditions of danger and resulted to the present paper.

Although there are conventions protecting civilians in time of war or under occupation applicable in the case of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip², violations take place on an everyday basis.

These violations are justified by Israel within the framework of the Occupation and the need for ensuring safety for the Israeli citizens. “State sovereignty and state interest stands before all, suspending laws and violating human rights according to the ‘needs’ and interests of the state”³.

¹ “A territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army”, article 42 of the Hague Regulations, Al-Haq, “25 Years Defending Human Rights”, Al-Haq Annual Report 2004, p. 36

² “The West Bank and the Gaza Strip enjoy a specific legal status in international law referred to as the legal regime of belligerent occupation. As a result, the annex to the Fourth Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, particularly articles 42 to 56, and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War are applicable....The Palestinian population became a protected population under international law. Their legal status is spelt out in article 4 (1) of the Geneva Convention: Persons protected by the Convention are those who, at a given moment and in any manner whatsoever, find themselves, in case of conflict or occupation, in the hands of a party to the conflict or Occupying power which they are not nationals”, “In Need of Protection”, Al-Haq, 2002

³ “Human Rights in Global Politics”, p. 245

Israel has declared an emergency state⁴ since 1950 which will end when the Occupation is over. Until then, Israel suspends basic human rights of its own citizens and of the Palestinian people. “The evils that we witness and create are supposedly the result of the Occupation. The Occupation is presented as a kind of a mystical law, an inevitability. Everything is the fault of the Occupation”⁵.

For Palestinians, Occupation means not to know what is going to happen the next moment. “No one knows what is going on; the rules change every minute. Palestinians get shot because no one knows what they’re supposed to be doing and everyone is scared. That’s why an innocent man died last week. It’s all out of control. There is no sense here..”⁶.

At the same time, Palestinians use the discourse of Occupation justifying their own actions within the Occupied Territories⁷. Occupation has created a space where law is not applicable and both sides violate human rights until the emergency state will be over.

The Occupied Territories seem to acquire all the characteristics of what Agamben calls the ‘camp’. “The camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule. In the camp, the state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger, is now given a permanent spatial arrangement, which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order”⁸.

⁴ “This emergency state or state of exception is supposed to be a temporary tool used by states to overcome a serious and damaging situation. ‘Emergency’ is an elastic and ambiguous concept. It does not permit of any exact definition, but merely points to a state of affairs calling for drastic action. This elasticity is encouraged by the fact that it also includes a range of related notions, encompassing a range of situations described by the terms “state of siege,” “state of alert,” “state of readiness,” “state of internal war,” “suspension of guarantees,” “martial law,” “crisis powers,” “special powers,” “curfew,” and so on. Despite this elasticity and ambiguity, no constitution exists that does not contain provisions for emergency powers”, Mark Neocleous, “The Problem with Normality: ‘Taking Exception to Permanent Emergency’”.

⁵ Edited by Neve Gordon, Ruchama Marton, “Torture, human rights and the case of Israel”, p. 2

⁶ A statement by an Israeli soldier who was stationed at the Qalandia Checkpoint as quoted in the Jerusalem Post, 2 March 2002, cited in “Death Traps: Israel’s Use of Force at Checkpoints in the West Bank”, p. 2, Hanna Haaland, Peter Trainor, Al-Haq, 2002

⁷ Many people have been killed because there were suspicions that they cooperated with the Israelis and many more in order to solve personal issues. These cases are not recorded but circulate among the Palestinians.

⁸ Giorgio Agamben, “Homo Sacer”, p. 168-9

The right of the self-preservation of the Israeli state is carefully constructed on the discourse of a constant threat against the Israeli state from the Palestinians. The Palestinians themselves have been dehumanized and for this reason human rights lose their meaning. “Palestinian life is another simple term that is laden with contrary meanings. In the official Israeli definition, it has been reduced to individual existence, and at that, an existence which is not itself seen as a basic right, but rather subject to the continual dictates of Israeli security”⁹.

The actual power of the Israeli is their ability to give meaning to the life of the Palestinians. As the dominant power in the conflict, Israel had the ability from the beginning to narrate and describe the situation from the point of view of the Israeli thus, silencing the part of the Palestinians. Since 1948, Israel had the opportunity to talk about the situation in the region and establish a dominant narrative about the region, the nature of the Palestinians themselves and the position of the Israeli.

Julie Peteet, when talking about the Israel-Palestine conflict says, “Colonialism typically generates a set of terms and discourses to describe conquered lands as uninhabited, virgin territory, terra nullius, uncharted and undiscovered territory, the frontier, wasteland, wilderness, untamed and unoccupied, regardless of the presence, often extensive and hardly unnoticed, of the indigenous population. Inhabitants of these colonized or subjugated areas have been referred to as savages, heathens, barbarians, or primitives; more recently they are terrorists”¹⁰.

The discourse of terrorism gives the possibility to the dominant power that uses it to extend not only the time of Occupation but also the range of the people categorized under the name ‘terrorist’. “The criminalization of terrorist organizations and the criminalization of participation in or support for such organizations create offenses of collective responsibility.

⁹ “Aspects of Palestinian Life Under Military Occupation”

¹⁰ Julie Peteet, “Words as interventions: naming in the Palestine- Israel conflict”, p.155

The object is to attack actual or potential organizations. It is no longer just the act of committing a crime or even the intention of doing so that is prosecuted. Merely belonging to a group that is considered terrorist by the government is sufficient for punishment”¹¹.

Under this discourse, the Palestinian population is being punished as a whole for terrorist actions that have been taken against the Israeli and for those that might be taken in the future. Every young man in the Palestinian territories is a potential terrorist and for this reason Israel has to protect its sovereignty against them.

Historical Background

After the Second World War and the massacre of the Jewish population in Europe there was an urgent need to create a state where the Jews would be able to live in safety. Searching back in time and on the basis of their biblical rights, the region of today Israel was chosen to establish a Jewish state.

According to the United Nations plan two states were to be established in the region, Israel and Palestine. “That was the signal for the Zionist armed gangs to launch their war of annexation. In 1948 they seized, in total, 80 percent of the lands of the former British mandated territory of Palestine. (The UN plan granted them 55 percent). In 1947 the Jews owned only 6 percent of this territory and represented only a third of its total population: 630,000 inhabitants out of nearly two million. In December 1949, in the wake of the war in which the Israeli state was founded, there were no more than 160,000 Palestinian Arabs on the usurped 80 percent of this territory, as against more than one million Jews”¹².

While the state of Israel was established, Palestinian territories came under Egyptian and Jordanian control until the day Palestinians would be ready to rule their own state. This

¹¹ Jean-Claude Paye, “A Permanent State of Emergency”, p. 1

¹² Gilbert Achcar, “Eastern Cauldron: Islam, Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq in a Marxist Mirror”, p. 117

process was cut off in June 1967 with the Six-Day War and the occupation by Israel of the rest of West Bank.

Since then West Bank and the Gaza Strip are the control of Israeli military forces and two uprisings, the first in 1987 and the second in 2000 mark their fights for establishing a Palestinian state.

The Right to Education

“Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities”¹³.

During the second Intifada education was on an everyday basis a target for the Israeli. The state of Israel tried to disrupt education by direct attacks against educational institutions but also effected it indirectly by imposing military orders on the population as a whole.

Controlling space and the movement within it is the most powerful weapon used by the Israeli government. Fragmentation of the Palestinian territories and restriction of movement have made different regions incapable of communicating and dissolved social bindings. At the same time the organization of the space through the defining of the routes that Palestinians can use and the development of an infrastructure for the better communication of the settlers changes the whole image of the area violating international law.

The control of the Palestinian Territories has led to the creation of a series of internal boundaries. West Bank is separated into 227 areas. Most of the areas do not exceed 2km sq¹⁴. To move from one area to the other Palestinians have to pass through several checkpoints and

¹³ General Comment of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the right to education, Al-Haq, “25 Years Defending Human Rights (1979-2004)”, p. 108

¹⁴ Al-Haq, “In need of Protection”, p. 187

they can do so only if they have the right permit. In West Bank there are 540 physical obstacles controlling Palestinian movement of which 84 are checkpoints¹⁵.

Apart from the checkpoints, the Israeli forces close roads leading from one village to another, interrupting the connections between villages and forcing the villagers to use other routes usually through the mountains. “The population is effectively imprisoned in their respective towns and villages and communities are cut off from one another [...] The main impact of the various closures is the disruption of the productive activity and the paralysis of the Palestinian economy”¹⁶.

These closures have a direct impact on education when the time to get to the school or the university is doubled or tripled. Many students had to change school or even interrupt their education because they didn’t have the right permit to pass a control and there was not a school near their region.

The Annexation Wall

The situation became more difficult since the annexation of the Wall. The Wall is supposed to be a temporary measure taken from the part of the Israeli state to protect Israeli citizens from the suicide bombing attacks. “The plans for the Wall as it is presently being constructed were decided upon on 14 April 2002, when the Israeli Cabinet decided to construct a physical structure in the zone around the Green Line to prevent Palestinian passage into Israel, citing the need to ‘improve and reinforce the readiness and operational capability in coping with terrorism’”¹⁷.

¹⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “The Agreement on Movement and Access”, www.ochaopt.org, cited on 11/12/2006

¹⁶ Al-Haq, “In need of Protection”, p. 189

¹⁷ Al-Haq, “25 Years Defending Human Rights (1979-2004)”, p. 163

Until today the 51% of the Wall is completed and is 362 km long. A 13% is under construction (88km) and the 36% is planned (253km). Along the Wall there are 73 gates from which only the 38 are accessible to the Palestinians with the correct permit¹⁸. The gates are not open through out the day but only for some hours and the Israeli soldiers close the gates some times for the whole day according to their orders.

The annexation of the Wall affects all the aspects of the lives of Palestinians. For the construction of the Wall the Israeli state confiscated land from Palestinian farmers, depriving families of their main source of income. “The results revealed that the percentage of households whose lands were confiscated totally/partly was 42.3% of the households living in the localities affected directly by the expansion and annexation wall (49.6% inside of the wall, 42.2% outside of the wall)”¹⁹.

“Through precise statistics on the amount of land taken change as Israeli authorities re-route the Wall or shift construction to another area, it is clear that the Wall, as presently planned, will annex no less than 11.5% of the West Bank”²⁰.

The Wall serves to isolate Palestinian villages and towns while some of them are completely surrounded by the Wall. This means that the development of the communities on a regional level is impossible while the communication between the different regions becomes really difficult.

Education is affected directly by the Wall since students have to pass through gates everyday to get to school. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 3.4 of

¹⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “The Agreement on Movement and Access”, www.ochaopt.org, cited on 11/12/2006

¹⁹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, “Impact of the Expansion and Annexation Wall on the Socioeconomic conditions of Palestinian Households in the Localities in which the Wall passes through in the West Bank”, p. 6

²⁰ Al-Haq, “25 Years Defending Human Rights (1979-2004)”, p. 169

Palestinians in areas where the Wall is being constructed have abandoned their educational pursuits entirely”²¹.

“As a result of the construction of the Wall, Palestinians are being subjected to violations of several other economic, social and cultural rights, particularly the rights to work, food, health, education and cultural life. Many of these rights are also upheld in the ICESRCR (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), notably the right to work (Article 6); the right to food (Article 11 (1)); the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (Article 12); the right to education (article 13); and the right to take part in cultural life (Article 15 (1)(a)). They are also upheld in other standards such as the UDEHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights), ICERD (International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination), CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) and CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child). It should also be noted that the realization of these interrelated rights is an important element of the ability to in live in dignity”²².

Curfew

“A Military Commander may issue an order requiring every person within a specific area to remain indoors during the hours set by the order. Anyone who is found out of doors without a written permit issued by or on behalf of a Military Commander, in the area or during the hours set by the order, shall be guilty of an offense under this order”²³.

²¹ PCBS, “Impact of the Expansion and Annexation Wall on the socio-economic Conditions of Palestinian Households in the Localities in which the Wall passes through”, cited in Al-Haq, “25 Years Defending Human Rights (1979-2004), p. 175-6

²² *Ibid.*, p. 186

²³ Al-Haq, “In Need of Protection”, p. 204

For 2005 there were 1516 hours imposed on West bank while on 2006 the number fell on 454 hours²⁴. The use of curfew by the Israeli to restrict movement is decreased while the organization of space alone is giving the same results as the curfew. However, even if the numbers are lower today it is still a fact that Israel uses all the possible ways to control the population based on the justification of security²⁵.

“In a public statement issued in November 2000, the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) stated that, ‘as an occupying power, Israel may restrict the freedom of movement of the resident population, but only when and in so far as military necessity so dictates’”²⁶.

Based on statements like this, Israel has claimed in many situations military necessity to restrict or even attack population. During the second Intifada used the justification of military necessity and security reasons based on incidents with children throwing stones to the soldiers. Even in periods when the conflict is rather on low levels Israel is using a war context so that they can use restrictions and violence against the Palestinian population.

“Israel has sought to portray the current situation as an armed conflict short of war, which necessitates a military response rather than one guided by law enforcement codes on the use of force. This has been particularly evident in the tactics that the Israeli security forces have used to confront stone throwing demonstrators. These tactics have been described as more suitable to combat situations than to circumstances warranting police crowd control methods, and explains why the Israeli authorities have failed to investigate the death of many individuals who have been killed as a result of Israeli fire”²⁷.

²⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Protection of Civilians Database”, www.ochaopt.org, cited on 10/12/2006

²⁵ “The village of Huwwara was placed under curfew for considerable period due to the fact that it is the only access point for settlements in the area. Among other affects, the curfew paralysed the educational system as the schools in the village were forced to close disrupting the education for approximately 1,647 students”, Al-Haq, “In Need of Protection”, p. 205

²⁶ Al-Haq, “In Need of Protection”, p. 206

²⁷ Ibid., p. 43

Faced with the difficulties of the Occupation education became a national goal and a right for which the students had to fight for. But during the field research it was made clear that the Occupation was only one of the forces effecting the academic life of the students in West Bank.

The first chapter of this thesis is concerned with the infrastructure and organization of the Palestinian society and the way in which they effect the academic life. Traditional customs together with the resurgence of religion and the rejection of Western types of culture attribute different meanings to higher education.

The patriarchal structure of the Occupied Territories and the organization of the communities according to the *hamuleh*²⁸ situate family in the core of the community. “Palestinians lived and conceptualized their lives not primarily as individuals but as parts of a family group”²⁹.

Within the structure of the extended families the main concern is the maintenance of honour. “Honour was measured and sustained in a very literal way. Insults to a family’s honour had to be avenged in kind or in material compensation. If a man was killed, any member of his family, all of whom were accountable for the family’s honour, had to avenge the death by killing a member of the offending family”³⁰.

One of the major aspects of the ideology of honour that serves the preservation of the patriarchal structure is the protection of the female members of the family. “The honour of families and especially the virtue of their women were accepted as being the responsibility of

²⁸ “A *hamouleh* was a group of extended families claiming descent from a common ancestor. Some *hamayel* (plural) were large spreading over several villages in a region; many were smaller, forming part of the population of one village...Each household was responsible for its own internal affairs, while over all the members families extended the authority of the *hamouleh* elders when questions arose which touched the wealth or honour of the whole *hamuleh*. At every level the interests of the individuals were subordinated to the interests of the group”, Kitty Warnock, “Land before Honour”, p. 20

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20

³⁰ *Ibid.* , p. 22

the whole community. Not just family members but anyone in the village or neighbourhood had the right to report violations of propriety to the woman's father or husband"³¹.

Honour is the main criteria on the basis of which space is divided according to gender and defines the boundaries between public and private space and the duties of the two sexes. The consequences of these divisions are reflected in the decisions made by the family on issues connected to higher education and the position of the girls in the university and in relation to the family.

At the same time, the Palestinian society is gradually embracing a more radical Islam. This started after the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 and the disappointment of the Palestinians by the leadership of Al-Fatah revealing its power with the election of Hamas as their representatives.

Hamas supports the Islamization of the Palestinian society as an alternative to a secular type of society and gains ground among the youth that consider Islam the only way to build a future strong state. Taking into account that Hamas is thought by the International Community to be a terrorist group and that its election led to the isolation of the Palestinian community shows the level at which the people in the Occupied Territories reject the western criteria of measuring democracy and oppose to the western model of society.

The second chapter is concerned with the way the Occupation and the presence of the Israeli military forces effect the procedure of higher education. How do students perceive the difficulties and the obstacles imposed by the occupation forces on their everyday educational life?

Having in mind the external (Israeli Occupation) and the internal dynamics (family, religion, customs) that influence the life of the students, the third chapter is devoted to the life inside the university itself. How do the internal dynamics of the Palestinian community reflect

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25

on the university space and on what level influence the social life of the students? How and on what level the political situation of the region effects the academic life? What are the perceptions of the students of higher education?

Following the linear path of the students from the house and the family, to the way to the university and the interaction with the occupation forces, to get finally to the university space, this study will try to explore a wide range of subjects since higher education is connected to all aspects of the everyday life of the students.

Methodology

Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to explore the meaning of education and educational space for Palestinian youth. In order to do this, the study's objectives are to:

- Analyze the connection between family and education in terms of traditional customs and religion
- Explore the effect of Israeli occupation on the educational life and on the psychology of the students
- Explore and analyze the function of educational space in relation to gender and politics.

Methodology

This study is based a field research conducted in the period between the 7th of December and 7th of February. Having to deal with an empirical subject the inductive method was used, starting with reaching the group of interest and coming into conclusions after the end of the research.

Since education as a field of research is very wide and given the barrier of language, the target group was university students. First of all, most of the universities in the occupied territories are using English as the language of instruction and as a result this communication was possible. Secondly, there is already literature on education in primary and secondary schools but only a few articles on higher education and in most cases these articles are limited to identifying higher education as part of the construction of national consciousness.

Hence a mixed method of research was used. Using mixed methods a research “gains a fuller and more complete understanding of a research question by combining both quantitative and qualitative perceptions”³². At the first stage qualitative and quantitative methods were used sequentially and then simultaneously. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and with the results of this phase closed-ended survey questions were formulated. With the questionnaire it was possible to collect a large amount of information in a short time that could provide the study with a body of rather objective results on the subject. Simultaneously interviews were conducted in order to fill in the gaps left by the questionnaire.

The impossibility to reach the Gaza Strip because of political problems that took the form of arm fighting at that period limited the research to the region of West Bank. Even though the Gaza Strip was left out of the research, the differences between the regions within West Bank gave very diverse results. The level of control that the Israelis have in a region, the economic situation as well as the social ties, are interrelated factors affecting the perception of the students of life in general and of education specifically.

The research was conducted in the following universities: Birzeit University in Ramallah, Bethlehem University in Bethlehem, Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, Al-Najah University in Nablus and Arab- American University in Jenin.

Birzeit was the first university to be built in the region of Ramallah in 1972 and it was accepted by the Association of Arab Universities in April 1976. It was closed down several times under military orders the longest of which last from January 1988 until April 1992. During this prolonged period of closure, the University continued to operate underground with small study groups in makeshift arrangements outside the campus. Under such conditions, many students needed as long as 10 years to complete their four-year degree courses³³.

³² “The Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods”, edited by Victor Jupp, Sage Publications, 2006

³³ Birzeit University, <http://www.birzeit.edu/>, sited on 25/11/2006

Bethlehem University is a Catholic-Christian co-educational institution founded in 1973 open to students of all traditions of faith. It too was closed many times and for three years from October 1987 until October 1990. Classes were held on and off campus³⁴.

Al-Quds University, established in 1984, intended to serve as the region's flagship university for the Arab and Palestinian peoples as it considers itself "the only Arab university in Jerusalem"³⁵.

Al-Najah University, like Birzeit University, was first founded as a school, developed into a college and in 1977 became Al-Najah National University and joined the Association of Arab universities as a full member. In 1988 the campus was declared a closed military area and reopened in 1991³⁶.

Arab American University is a private higher education institution founded in 1995 as the first private university in Palestine. The university is supervised by a selected Board of Trustees, who subscribe to the Ministry of Higher Education in Palestine, implementing an American education system, in affiliation with California State University and Utah State University³⁷.

Totally 140 questionnaires were distributed and 133 collected, which means that 95% of the questionnaires were answered. The sample was random and 44% respondents were boys and 56% were girls. At the same time 15 students and 5 professors were interviewed.

³⁴ <http://www.wikipedia.com>, cited on 25/11/2006

³⁵ *Ibid.*, cited on 25/11/2006

³⁶ <http://www.najah.edu/>, cited on 25/11/2006

³⁷ <http://www.aauj.edu/>, cited on 25/11/2006

Scope of the study

The aim of this study is to highlight the perceptions of education and of educational space by the Palestinian youth. At the same time it tries to explore the influence of education at different levels in the life of the students.

While the subject is quite wide covering many aspects of the life of the Palestinian university students, this study is rather a first step towards further analysis of the issue in the future.

At a first level, there is a discussion for decision making within the family about higher education on the basis of traditional customs and religion as well as the gender issue resulting from customs. University as a social space and relationships developed between students are also examined within the discourse of customs and religion.

At a second level concerning access to and function of educational institutions, the study tries to shed light on the way occupation is effecting the educational life of the students. Checkpoints, control, direct attacks against universities and the separation Wall influence the decisions made on education and in many cases they are the everyday routine of the students.

Taking into account the very danger that students face in their way to the university or inside the university their decision to be in the university is as well a political one. University has served during the second Intifada as a space of political expression and organization of student movements against the occupation by Israel. Because of the importance of university movements in a separate sector, educational space is examined as a political one.

In the last part there is a discussion about the expectations that the students have from higher education. What does higher education represents for these students and what can offer them for the future? What is the role of higher education in their everyday life?

Chapter 1

Family, Gender and Decision Making

Higher Education: Construction of Palestinian National Consciousness

Palestinian higher education during the first years of the creation of universities was identified with the construction of a Palestinian national consciousness. Even in the years under British Mandatory and after the war of 1967 Palestinians were among the most educated people in the Arab world recognizing the importance of education in their struggle for freedom.

Table 1: University students to population ratio in selected countries³⁸

Country	Students/1000 population	Country	Students/1000 population
Palestine/Jordan	11,2	Libya	1,8
Algeria	7	Bahrain	1,6
Lebanon	6	Sudan	0,8
Syria	6	Saudi Arabia	0,5
Egypt	5,4	USA	30
Irak	3,2	USSR	18
Kuwait	3	France	9
Tunysia	2	England	8

³⁸ Muhammad Hallaj, "The mission of Palestinian Higher Education", p. 3, Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 9, No. 4, Summer 1980, pp. 75-95

“The Palestinians’ perception of their loss, including Israeli educational and technological superiority, impelled them to seek to close the gap by improving their level of education and skill. In other words, Palestinians perceived higher education to be the means of personal survival and national salvation”³⁹.

Even though West Bank is a small region the meeting of young people from different parts of the Palestinian territories strengthened their ties and led to the organization of the powerful political student movement. “Throughout the 1980s there was a clear pattern of heavy politicization at Palestinian universities. [...] Politicized Palestinians coming out of local universities constituted the core of the new Palestinian elite and provided the catalyst for social and political change in the occupied territories, from the building of mass organizations to the Intifada”⁴⁰.

The years before the first Intifada university space was clearly a political one while a big part of the student body was actively participating in politics by being a member of one of the political parties existing inside the university. Part of the activities of the student’s movement was the establishment of the Voluntary Works Program, which made compulsory voluntary work by students in fields in order to strengthen Palestinian agriculture. This program became official and is still active today while students need to work in camps for 120 hours for their graduation.

The expansion of higher education during the 1970s and 1980s had as a result the change of the class character of the students. While coming from middle and low income families the student movement became more and more radical. “The activists in the student movement employed strategies to more directly confront with the Israeli military occupation as well as to bring social change within the Palestinian society”⁴¹.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Glenn E. Robinson, “Building a Palestinian State”, p.27

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.36

From the formation of higher education in Palestine, university was identified with the fight against the military occupation and the empowerment of the Palestinian community all through the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In an Academic Freedom Conference held in September 2005 in Egypt Riham Barghouti and Helen Murray presented a paper under the title “The struggle for Academic Freedom in Palestine”. In the introduction they write: “Palestinians have historically strived for education as an end in itself, but also as a means of survival and resistance against military occupation, dispossession and exile. When the first Palestinian universities emerged in the 70s, their vision was to provide opportunities for higher education, but also to support and develop Palestinian society as an intrinsic part of the national struggle for liberation”⁴².

The same opinion about education seems to be shared by the state of Israel which since the 70s attacked and closed universities many times on the basis of security concerns. Universities are supposed to be the space where opposition against the Israeli power can be organized. “As always, the Israeli justification was ‘security’. The authorities argued that schools and universities were sites of student demonstrations and unrest, so all educational institutions had to be closed down”⁴³.

After the second Intifada the demands for freedom of education are still alive. However, education appears to be a lot more than just constructing a national identity. The bad economic situation caused by the siege and the curfews, the embargo of the international community after the election of Hamas and the rise of Islam influence the way the Palestinian youth is thinking of education and at the same time changes the symbolic meaning of the educational space.

⁴² Riham Barghouti, Helen Murray, “The Struggle for Academic Freedom in Palestine”, Academic Freedom Conference, Alexandria, Egypt, September 2005

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Decision making

The family

“Societies worldwide invest the family with sacred significance and base other interpersonal relationships, including community and political obligations, on its model. The family is a primary unit for ritual observance as well as an influential site of religious and secular education and the transmission of religious and worldly knowledge from one generation to the next. It serves as a focus for developing notions of trust, authority and responsibility. In short, the family – and its primary expression of domestic space, the household – is frequently taken as a microcosm of the desired moral order”⁴⁴.

Having a rigid structure, family in West Bank is the main core of balance for the society as a whole. Family rules arrange the role of every member of the family inside as well as outside the house. This way social, public space functions according to the rules taught inside the house and for this reason as an extension of it.

The first part of the research tries to reveal the way the decisions are being made within the family about issues related to education. While family is based on traditional customs and gender distinctions, this study will focus on the differences or similarities in the position of the girls and boys in the procedure of decision making and the position inside the family during studies.

	Boys	Girls
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⁴⁴ Dale F. Eickelman, James Piscatori, “Muslim Politics”, p. 83

Birzeit	52%	48%
Bethlehem	34%	63%
Al-Quds	25%	75%
Al-Najah	52%	48%
Arab-American	43%	57%
Total	44%	56%

Table 2: number of students according to gender

In the random sample of 133 students taking part in the research 58 are boys and 75 are girls. The participation of girls in higher education was always quite high but there

is an increase since 1994. Over 50% of the students studying in Palestinian universities are girls. From 45% of girls studying in 1994/1995 the percentage increased to 52% in 2004/2005⁴⁵.

“Due to socio-economic factors, the number of female students increased as a result of a number of factors: (a) traditional norms that favor the education of male students abroad but discourages the education of female students in foreign universities, meant that Palestinian universities were the only recourse for females; (b) the egalitarian trend of sociological change undergone by the Palestinian society in the last eight years has led society to provide Palestinian females with expanded options in university education; (c) In addition to that, the worsening economic situation has led many parents and females to the belief that living conditions necessitates that females acquire good education and skills in order to overcome life’s deteriorating economic conditions and high job competition”⁴⁶.

Reem, a 21 years old girl studying English literature in Birzeit University said, “my two older sisters studied in the university and became school teachers. They are married and have their children. I hope I will do the same. If you want to find a difference in the way my father is treating us you have to compare me and my brother. My brother is studying abroad but for me it is impossible. My father would never allow this”.

⁴⁵ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, “Statistical Abstract of Palestine, 2006”, www.pcbs.org, cited on 21/01/2007

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

The girls' position is near the family and her carrier has to be one that can allow her to have children. "For Islamists a woman's role as a mother - producing, nurturing, and educating children- is crucial"⁴⁷. The woman-mother is the one who has to teach the children moral values and traditions which they have to follow all through their lives. With family being the model of the society as a whole, a woman has the possibility to affect society indirectly, through her children, by her devotion to the family.

The bad financial condition of many of the Palestinian families has led to the participation of the woman in the realm of man's task, which is the financial support of the family. The woman's going out of the house and working has many implications for the existing gender-based distinctions in the society. For the balance to remain women should work outside the house in a space gendered as feminine, protected by the gaze of men. A very common and desired carrier for a Palestinian girl is to become a teacher.

"There are social reasons for the slightly higher participation of female teachers. Social traditions and norms look at teaching as an acceptable profession for females. They are encouraged to acquire specializations that help them find work as teachers. The fact that female teachers work inside a public rather than a private place of work, is another factor that encourages parents to allow their daughters to pursue this profession. Therefore, socio-economic reasons constitute the prime motivation for females to become teachers"⁴⁸.

Shama is 20 years old and she studies economics in Birzeit as well. She shares a flat with some other students from the university but she always wanted to study in her second country, Greece. She was not allowed to go but her brother had this opportunity. Although, she has origins in Greece her father wouldn't let her go and study there. "He says that Greece is dangerous for a girl. Girls are dressing different and they go out drinking and dancing with

⁴⁷ Dale F. Eickelman, James Piscatori, "Muslim Politics", p. 91

⁴⁸ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Statistical Abstract of Palestine, 2006", www.pcbs.org, cited on 21/01/2007

boys. This is unacceptable”, says Shama trying to explain the reasons why she has to stay in Palestine.

Apart from the difference in the way that girls and boys are treated there are also differences in the way the two girls experience the same situation. Both girls are refused to go abroad to study and live without protection from and control of the family. The fact that they grew up in different parts of Palestine has influenced the way they are living and what they think of Palestine and the life there.

Reem lives in Ramallah and she is staying with her family. She is not wearing a headscarf, which is acceptable in her city and she has the freedom to spend time in the city.

In opposition to Reem’s case, Shama is coming from Jenin. She is wearing a headscarf (like her mother does, although she is a Greek Orthodox) because it is morally unacceptable in her city to go out without it. For Shama who has spent most of her summers in Greece the life in Palestine is unbearable. For Reem things are quite different. She has never been abroad and, apart from the financial issue, going abroad is more like a dream that is not to come true.

When talking about going to live in another country most of the students, like Reem, felt like betraying their country in a way, even though they said that they would love to travel or even stay permanently in another country. So, the moment one of the students was saying that she/he would like to go abroad then the sentence “but I will come back because I love my country” followed.

The fact that Palestinian territories are under occupation is creating the need to the youth to prove in their everyday lives their determination to fight for a free Palestine. To be in Palestine is a political act in itself. But for a young person who feels the need to live and have fun there is a dilemma: your life or your country. Even though many of the students would love to go abroad to perceive themselves as more important than their country is to betray Palestine and their ancestors.

Although there are several differences in the life the youth experiences in the different parts of West Bank, the family and the country are the values on the basis of which they decide about their future. Every decision has to be in accordance with the family's order and beliefs and the duty towards the country. Of course, every decision is conditioned by life as it is formed under the Occupation as well.

Table 3: Reasons for enrolling to each specific university⁴⁹

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah *	Arab-American	Total
My choice	73%	57%	50%	44%	61%	58%
parent's choice	7%	13%	28%	18%	14%	15%
Cheaper than other universities	-	-	11%	22%	-	5%
closer than other universities	10%	17%	55%	29%	21%	17%
not able financially to study abroad	10%	10%	5.5%	14%		8%
not able culturally to study abroad	-	3%	-	18%	-	4%
Other	-	-	-		4%	1%

The table above indicates that the majority of the students with 58% made their own decision about the university in which they are enrolled. Considering the fact that most of the families are facing financial problems the fact that only 5% of the students chose the university according to the tuition fee is rather unexpected.

This can be explained if we take into account the importance of higher education in the Palestinian society and the help that every university provides to the students. According to the financial condition of each student universities usually make discounts or give an amount

⁴⁹ Some of the students gave more than one answers.

* 6 of 27 students gave multiple answers.

of money annually to support the students that need it. At the same time students have to work for the university or offer social work in refugee camps in return.

In the question why did you enroll to this university 73% of the students from Birzeit said that it was their choice. Half of them are girls and half of the girls are renting a flat with other classmates. The main reason for this result is that Birzeit University is the best in Palestine and graduates from that university are most likely to find a job in the future.

The fact that the students have to rent a flat is mostly for security reasons. Even students coming from Bethlehem which normally is half an hour away by bus or from Jenin that is one hour away have to rent a flat. Checkpoints in the entrance of every city and between the cities make transportation too long and unsafe.

This means that if a student coming from a city other than Ramallah decides to enroll to Birzeit then the family has to be able to economically support this decision. Apart from that, the family has to approve the child's staying in a flat away from the family. Consequently, when a student says that it was her/his own decision to enroll to Birzeit then we have to think that family is again playing a big part in this decision.

From the 30 students only 10% answered that the reason that they enrolled to Birzeit is that they don't have the financial ability to go and study abroad. The interesting thing that comes in accordance with what I mentioned before is that they are only boys.

In Bethlehem University all the students are staying with their family. 57% from the 30 students said that it was their choice to enroll in this university and from them 15 were girls. Only 17% said that the reason was that the university is closer than the other ones and 10% of the students, which were boys, said that they were financially not able to study abroad.

More than half of the students said that it was their choice to enroll to the university which is in contrast with what I heard during my interviews. Joseph, a very active boy aged

21, studying computers and working for the public relations office of the university, described the problems that young people face if they want to go out of the city: “We couldn’t choose to go to another city to study. We cannot afford it and it is really dangerous because of the checkpoints. But it is really boring. Bethlehem is a very small city and you know everyone!”.

Students are aware of the problems and the dangers as well as the desires of the head of the family. The decisions made even if they are coming from the students are always influenced by the general situation and the potentials of the family.

For Al-Quds University the percentages are quite the same: 50% of the students chose the university themselves but 28% followed their parent’s wish and all the students are staying with their families.

In Al-Najah University 6 of the students gave more than one answer. 44% of the 27 students said they chose the university but at the same time there is a variety in the answers. 18% said that their parents chose their university, 22% that they chose it because it is cheaper, 8 because it is closer than other universities, 14% because they were not able financially to go and study abroad and finally 18% said that they were not able culturally* to study abroad.

From the 6 people that gave multiple answers the 4 said that it was their choice. But the fact that they chose at least one more factor that led to that decision makes clear that it’s not the university itself and the studies provided that determine the decision of the student. Financial and safety reasons also influence the decisions being made. In Jenin 61% of the students said that it was their decision to enroll in this university and they as well live with their families. 21% chose the Arab-American University because it is closer than other universities, 14% because their parents wanted them to study there and 4% because their grades in the national exam allowed them to do so.

* Not able culturally to study abroad: Difficulties to adopt to a different culture

Table 4: Place of residency during studies

University	With the family	With relatives near the university	Renting a flat with other classmates	renting a flat alone
Birzeit	43%	3%	47%	7%
Bethlehem	97%	-	3%	-
Al-Quds	94%	-	3%	-
Al-Najah	74%	4%	18%	4%
Arab-American	61%	14%	18%	7%
Total	72%	5%	19%	4%

The majority of the students (72%) are staying with their families. This means that they are usually residents of the city where the university is. Students prefer to stay with their families or they are forced by many factors to do so. Birzeit University is the one with the lowest number of students living with their families while in Bethlehem all of the students except for one stay with their families. The same applies for the students of Al-Quds.

Although the answers showed that in most of the cases the students are the ones who choose the university, there are many factors that influence this decision.

First of all, the everyday movement from one city to the other to get to the class is not wanted because of the high level of risk. This means that if a student decides to go to study in a university in a different city then he/she has to rent a flat. If we think that 77% of the students are supported only by their families to study and that 30% of them have one more member studying, then the possibilities to stay away from the family are quite low.

The family, playing an important role in the decision making, is present all through the studies by checking currently the grades of the student. Only 18% of the students said that their parents never check their grades and 9% of this 18% studies at Birzeit University. 83% of the students have their parents following their development during their studies.

Table 5: Do your parents check your grades?

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Yes, frequently	7%	60%	67%	33%	39%	39%
sometimes	53%	27%	28%	48%	39%	40%
Never	40%	6.5%	5%	11%	22%	18%
Other	-	6.5%	-	-	-	1.5%
no answer	-	-	-	8%	-	1.5%

In the decision making procedure, 30% of the students followed their parents will in choosing their department. Although the percentage is not very high the family and especially the father are present and active when it comes to education. Their influence becomes more powerful considering that they are the ones to pay for the university fees. The price of every university is different but it is always a way for the parents to put pressure on the student (e.g. by threatening cutting off the financial support of the studies).

Usually it is the father who has the power to decide, change or stop the education of the child. In our interview Manal, a 21 year old student in Arab-American University of Jenin, said, “I wanted to study finance but my father wanted me to study biology. I attended one year and it was a disaster. I hate biology. I secretly changed my department this year to finance but I didn’t tell anyone. I am afraid that if I told my father he would stop me from the university”.

This is a story coming out from the minority of the students. 70% chose their studies on their own, mostly on the basis of possibilities of finding a job in the future. The need to find a job is making stronger new departments such as commerce and business while medicine and law are losing their popularity.

The fact that the 64% of the students in Arab-American University of Jenin are in departments like business and commerce can be connected to the fact that the city of Jenin

was the one that suffered more from the siege and the curfews during the second Intifada. It can be thought that choosing business rather than more classical studies is connected to the anxiety of finding a job after graduation. As there are more possibilities to be employed in the private sector young people are turning more and more towards new majors.

From 133 students only 2 were studying law and 2 medicine while 32% of the students were enrolled in departments like business, commerce and computers. Half of this 32% is represented by girls and half by boys. The equal participation in these departments shows an inclination to change the stereotype of the girl-teacher. The future job that a girl can find based on studies as business administration or commerce will automatically put her in the private sector working among men.

This way the position and the role of the woman in the family are changing. Along with the role of the mother, women now are creating a different life outside the house. Of course, this change is still represented by a minority and the picture of the family with the woman inside the house is not going to change in one day, but the new needs are leading slowly towards the entrance of women in a new and different field.

Initiated by financial needs and based on higher education women enter spaces that traditionally are occupied by men. Leila Hessini when talking about space in Moroccan society in "Reconstructing Gender in Middle East" makes a point that also reflects the reality in the Palestinian society. "In the West houses are divided into spaces with specific purposes (bedroom, living room, dining room); in Morocco the space inside homes is more flexible. The division is made not primarily by function but in terms of private and public space. Private space is preserved for the family and is considered a 'female' space; public space is designated as a 'male' area. The division of space parallels the division of gender roles:

women fulfill their roles inside the female space, the interior of the home, while men fulfill their roles in public space, that is, almost anywhere outside the family dwelling”⁵⁰.

This gender based division of space reflects the duties of the two genders with the man being responsible for the financial matters of a family, which means that he has to work outside the house and the woman is responsible for keeping stability in the family. With men actually owning public space women are only able to go through the public space or to be present only in specific public places.

But with the new needs in society women have to intervene more and more in the masculine public space. A way to do that without disturbing the balance between private and public space is the veil. “The veil therefore is a symbol of interiority. Because woman’s space is interior, she is permitted to move through the exterior only if she remains separated from it. Without the veil, societal equilibrium is threatened, if not disrupted”⁵¹.

At the same time, veiling is a means for women to assert some control over the ambiguous moral situation created by the new economic and social pressures (Eickelman, Piscatori, 1996:91). “Women’s subordination to feminine virtues, such as shyness, modesty, and humility, appears to be the necessary condition for their enhanced public role in religious and political life....women resist the dominant male order by subverting the hegemonic meanings of cultural practices and redeploying them for their ‘own interests and agendas’”⁵².

While this change is taking place girls still have the majority in studies like language, literature and history with 72% of the students studying in these departments. The girls are the majority in the science departments as well. 61% of the students studying biology, chemistry and mathematics are girls and 39% boys. The only department where boys are still the majority is civil engineering where 80% of the students are boys.

⁵⁰ Leila Hessini, “Reconstructing Gender in Middle East”, p. 42-43

⁵¹ Leila Hessini, “Reconstructing Gender in Middle East”, p. 47

⁵² Saba Mahmood, “Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject”, p. 6, Princeton University Press, 2005

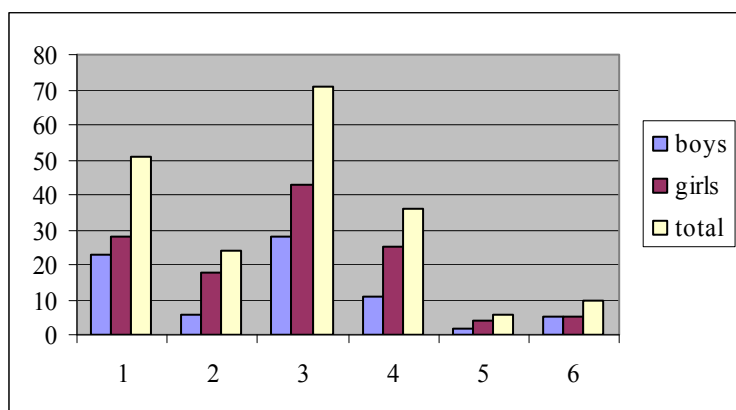
The number of girls studying in theoretical departments is quite familiar to many western cultures as well. The identification of the girl with the family is still valid and studies on language or history can give them the possibility to combine a job as a teacher in a public school and the role of the mother. At the same time, science departments that were thought to suit men more now are full of girls.

In one of my visits to the University of Bethlehem I had the opportunity to talk with a group of 19 year old girls. They were all friends, wearing the scarf, sitting in the part of the garden that was occupied only by girls. At first I hesitated to talk to them but the moment that I approached them they gave me their best smiles and started asking me why I was in Palestine and what was my opinion about the people there. They were all friends from school and they were studying in the departments of biology, chemistry and mathematics.

When I asked them why they chose these departments A. said “we were all good in science in school and each one of us chose the most interesting thing for her. Apart from that studying in one of these fields we have some possibilities to find a job in the future”. L. said that in the beginning she didn’t want to study chemistry but her family convinced her to do so, and even though the classes are very difficult she enjoys her studies a lot. All of them agreed that these departments are not only for boys and that they are doing as good as the boys in the classes.

For a boy or girl belonging to the category of the university students means that life inside the house changes. The structure of the family stays the same, but usually there are changes in the way the student is being treated. The following figure shows the way how life of the students changed after they started their higher education.

Figure 1: Total results on how education effects family life



- 1: the family listens to my ideas
- 2: the family gives me less duty
- 3: allows me more freedom
- 4: my power increases in the family
- 5: my power decreases in the family
- 6: nothing changed

From 133 students 71, more than half of them, have more freedom after entering the university. Freedom in this case means usually the possibility to socialize outside the house as well as the hours permitted to be absent from home.

“Since I started studying in the university, maybe because I grew older, maybe because of the studies, my parents started listening to what I have to say. Of course, I was always talking with my mother but now the situation also changed with my father. He is more willing to talk with me and some times he asks my opinion about things related to the family or politics”.

The student is thought to be more mature and takes more active role inside the family. This is not valid only for the girls but also for the boys. At the same time, a student can be dismissed of the duties with which he or she was burdened before university. Helping out in the house comes second in importance after the duties the student has for the university. Getting a university certificate is important for the family since it means a good job or a good marriage and also the possibility for the young person to start a better life.

Mitra Shavarini in her study on the “Feminization of Iranian Higher Education” came to the conclusion that higher education is “a sphere of hope, a refuge and a place to experience limited freedom; an asset that will inevitably increase their worth in the marriage

market; a tangible right that may enable them to gain financial independence; an escape from restrictive family environments, or a vehicle that earns them respect”⁵³.

Although Shavarini is focused only on the girls these representations of education can be valid for the boys as well. Being a student in the university has a direct impact on the student itself but also on his/her relations with the family. Because of the different ways by which higher education can help the young person and at the same time the family, education gains in importance and the student has the possibility to neglect activities in the house and earn the respect from his/her elders.

Islam and secular education

When focusing on education itself and the knowledge that university offers to the Palestinian youth a question may arise. How can an Islamic society, that becomes more and more radical in terms of religion, cope with the secular knowledge provided by the higher educational institutions?

Suleyman Dangor in his article “Islamization of Disciplines: Towards an Indigenous Educational System” talks about the problems that Muslim scholars face when trying to solve issues concerning Muslim countries based on their Western knowledge. “The materials used and the methodologies applied in institutions teaching the natural and social sciences in Muslim countries are ‘Western’ in content and form. The natural and biological sciences have been influenced by the dominating philosophy of thinkers such as Darwin, Freud and Karl Marx who explain all phenomena in nature and history in terms of mechanical causation.

⁵³ Mitra K. Shavarini, “The Feminization of Iranian Higher Education”, p. 331, *Review of Education*, 329- 347, Springer 2005, 20/04/2007

Disciplines such as physical science, chemistry, biology, mathematics, history, geography, economics make no reference to the metaphysical realm”⁵⁴.

This secular knowledge completely disconnected from divine principles comes in contrast with the Islamic based society of the Muslim countries and Palestine where religion is supposed to form the everyday life of people and give answers based on the Quran. “In the Islamic epistemology, revelation occupies a fundamental place. In addition to reason, sensory perception, intuition and experience (including experimentation and observation), revelation is a primary source of knowledge”⁵⁵.

Because of this gap between knowledge taught in the universities and the reality surrounding the students Bassam Tibi in his book “Islam between Culture and Politics”, says that “new cultural material in being adopted and, in the absence of an appropriate infrastructure, is coexisting with the existing parochial patterns. The result is the inconsistent set-up for which I have coined the formula ‘the simultaneity of structural globalization and cultural fragmentation’⁵⁶.

For Tibi, western knowledge, as it is imported in Muslim countries, is not derived of the cultural elements but there are connotations of a secular way of thinking, which comes in contrast with how the world is viewed by Islam. He continues saying that a student in the University of a Muslim Country is not supposed to think on what he or she is studying but as it is with the rote learning and memorizing of the Koran the students follow rote learning. The main aim is to get a certificate to find a job in the future.

What Tibi describes can be applied in the case of Palestinian higher education in the following way: while inside the classroom students are getting in contact with western

⁵⁴ Suleyman Dangor, “Islamization of Disciplines: Towards an indigenous educational system”, p. 520, Educational Philosophy and Theory, Vol. 37, No. 4, 2005, 13/04/2007

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 523

⁵⁶ Bassam Tibi, “Islam between Culture and Politics”, p. 177

knowledge outside the classroom, in the social space of the university the rules of Islam are organizing the life of the students.

“For contemporary Muslims schooled in the rational discourse of reasoning it is hardly possible to overlook this tension between model and reality, provided their thinking is not hampered by scriptural dogmatism and religious fanaticism to the extent of dismissing reality as a ‘deviation from true Islam’”⁵⁷.

Islam and Traditional Customs

While the Palestinian society was always organized around tradition and religion there is a tendency for a more strict application of Islam in the everyday life of the youth. Although at different levels in each part of the Palestinian Territories, one of the main ostensible tools of Islam, the headscarf, is used in order to regain the ideal model of distinction between male and female space and this way to ensure moral order.

“Since the 1970s the Islamic civilization has been undergoing a crisis brought about by both internal and external factors. In this situation Islam is in a position to provide the best symbols that can be offered in this crisis situation, inasmuch as these symbols fulfill a dual function. On the one hand, Islamic cultural symbols offer an authentic form for the articulation of political content in a situation in which the outside or non-Muslim world is perceived as a threat to Muslims’ own identity. On the other hand, the political content being articulated Islamically has a chance that secular ideologies, Western-style, do not have, that is to reach and mobilize broad sections of population, in acting as a mobilisatory ideology”⁵⁸.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 121

It seems that in situations of crisis religion gives answers to people whether we talk about Muslims or about other religions in general. In the West as well there is a resurgence of religion as a result of the failure of the secular state. “Globally there is resurgence of religious right and many societies are experiencing renewal of political claims on behalf of religious values and institutions. This trend partly owes to the mixed success of economic systems, poverty, armed conflicts, ethnic and racial tensions, immigration and refugee issues, and human rights”⁵⁹.

In the case of Palestine the resurgence of religion and the desire to revive the true Islam finds its origin in the conflict with Israel which happens to be the closest example of a society formed around western values. This identification of western culture with the Occupying force leads to the demonization of western culture and to rejection.

While rejecting the imported cultural products of the West there is the need for an alternative which in the case of Palestine is the empowerment of tradition and religion. “Religion as a cultural system contains concepts of a general order of existence that are essential to the believers of a particular religion”⁶⁰.

Bassam Tibi talks about religion as a cultural system and that every religion is a model for reality. “Models for reality are abstract, that is, they are views, religious dogmas or doctrines for a reality with which they are not in congruence. On the contrary models for reality relate, either metaphysically or rationally, to human perceptions of how reality ought to be designed”⁶¹.

But it is after 2000 that Islam is becoming more radical inside the university. The Women Training Center in Ramallah working under UNRWA is accepting girls usually from Ramallah and from the refugee camps who have the possibility to stay in the university

⁵⁹ Tahmina Rashid, “Secular State, Citizenship and the Matrix of the Globalized Religious Identity”, p.2, *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 6, No.1&2, Spring & Summer 2007

⁶⁰ Bassam Tibi, “Islam between Culture and Politics”, p. 33

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28

dormitories. The girls living inside the university, in the dorms, are allowed to go out only three times a week to visit their parents in the camps or to go to the city. But the parents have the possibility to call the university and order them not to let the girl to go out of the university.

According to Khadija Shliada director of the Women Training center, during nights there are only women working inside the university. This means that if the parents want it the girls will not come into contact with any male apart from the professors teaching in the university⁶².

The parents of a young, female student have to be sure that she will not dishonor the family. Apart from the fact that it is free for the girls coming from the camps and for this reason it is possible for them to study, The Women Training Center gives the parents the possibility to send the girl to university but prevent her from misbehaving.

Khadija Shliada said that before 2000 90% of the girls were not wearing headscarf and from 2000 on the picture changed completely with 90% of the girls wearing one.

One of the ways that this radical change can be interpreted is that the girls staying in the university are all coming from refugee camps. All around West Bank the main organizing tools are the Islamic and the customary law but in the refugee camps their application is stricter. The difference is quite obvious when you move, for example, from the city of Ramallah to the refugee camp of Qalandia. Even though only 2 kilometers away from each other the way of life in the two communities are totally different.

Dating back to the 1980s when Islam started gaining ground in Palestinian territories the refugee camps were the first to adopt the Islamic practices. “The observance of other Islamic practices – daily prayer, Qur’anic recitation, fasting – was also on the increase, as a

⁶² There is also a Technical Training Center in the refugee camp of Qaladia that was made only for boys but the last years due to the lack of students it is open to the girls as well.

1984 survey demonstrated. These changes were especially strong among refugee-camp inhabitants”⁶³.

Leyla, a 24 year old girl from Ramallah who just graduated from the pedagogic department of Birzeit University told me that she and her friends never dare to go to the refugee camp. The reason is that she is not wearing a headscarf and her way of dressing as a whole is not acceptable. There is a gap between the two communities (Ramallah and Calandia refugee camp) based on appearance which shows the level of devotion to Islam and the customs.

Saba Mahmood in “Politics of Piety” working on the Islamic revival in Egypt and the feminist subject does not accept that veiling can be only explained as a rejection of Western values or a tool to avoid sexual harassment. “While these studies have made important contributions, it is surprising that their authors have paid so little attention to Islamic virtues of female modesty or piety, especially given that many of the women who have taken up the veil frame their decision precisely in these terms”⁶⁴.

While the present study didn’t pose the question on religion it is only through the informal interviews conducted that we can have an idea about the reasons for which girls in West Bank started wearing the headscarf. In these informal interviews the girls told me that the first reason for wearing it is that they believe in Allah. The second reason is that they have the possibility to walk without a problem in public spaces while a girl wearing a headscarf has the respect of the people.

These girls are covering only the hair and their neck. Every girl has her own way to tight the headscarf which is usually colorful and little jewelry put on the headscarf make a great impression in their view. The rest of the dressing is quite modern with tight jeans; high heal shoes and make up.

⁶³ Glenn E. Robinson, “Building a Palestinian State”, p. 136

⁶⁴ Saba Mahmood, “Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject”, p.16

The girls covering the whole of their body were also carrying the Palestinian headscarf identifying with Hamas. They are more strict wearing usually black or blue clothes and no make up. Even though I didn't have the possibility to talk with them about religion and the reasons wearing the headscarf, their political activity and their support of the Islamic party of Hamas reveals a more strict application of Islam to everyday life and rejecting the Western secular way of life. "In the Islamicate milieu of the late 20th century, the conscious adoption of the veil by Islamist women as a marker of their professed ideology is sometimes coupled with greater political activism on their part and ironically, therefore, with greater public visibility"⁶⁵.

"Hamas's charter states that before Palestine can be liberated, society has to be formed along Islamic lines. [...] In this view of a new moral order, veiled women were to embody and display the qualities not only of an Islamic morality but of a Palestinian nationalism, thoroughly imbued with Hamas's notion of an Islamic morality"⁶⁶.

According to Nahda Y. Sh'hada who writes about gender and politics in Palestine, veiling women is part of the Islamists, course to maintain Islamic traditions. The veil as one of the forms of traditionalism "turns the female body into national treasure that needs to be protected by men, and over which women are allowed no control"⁶⁷.

Although it can be true that Islamists use the female body in their nationalistic discourse, women take upon themselves this role consciously. This way they identify themselves with certain virtues as they are described in Koran and support a way of life on the basis of religion. At the same time women gain respect as females which is thought to lack in western societies.

⁶⁵ Asma Afsaruddin, Introduction to "Hermeneutics and Honor: Negotiating Female Public Space in Islamicate societies", p. 8

⁶⁶ Julie Peteet, "Gender and Sexuality: Belonging to the National and Moral Order", in "Hermeneutics and Honor", edited by Asma Afsaruddin, p. 78

⁶⁷ Nahda Y. Sh'hada, "Gender and Politics in Palestine: Discourse analysis of the Palestinian Authority and the Islamists"

National Movement and Female Body

But it is not only Islamists posing female body in central position in their discourse. The national movement in Palestine was followed by distributing roles according to gender. The male power was supposed to fight for the freedom of Palestine while women were to be protected as the means for reproduction and continuation of the Palestinian community.

“Attempts to promote the virtues of heroic mothers have been prevalent in many national movements because along with praising women’s participation in the national struggles, they reinforce a certain understanding of femininity and womanhood grounded in women’s reproductive and nurturing capabilities. In the Palestinian context, for example, the tendency to depict women as ‘mothers of the nation’, which gained particular importance during the first 3 years of the Intifada, embodied both the steadfastness and cultural continuity and warmth, care and companion associated with womanhood”⁶⁸.

Honour and the Female Body

Women depicted as in need of protection is not connected only to the gradual Islamization of the Palestinian society but also to the traditional notion of honour. Traditionally the Palestinian society is organized on the basis of the extended families. One of the main criteria for defining the status of an extended family is honor and women appear to carry the values and the honor of the family.

“A case of honor is synonymous with sexual assault against women. The judgments can sum into the thousands of Jordanian dinars. The amount depends upon such factors as

⁶⁸ Simona Sharoni, “Gender and the Israeli- Palestinian Conflict: The politics of women’s resistance”, p. 34

whether that violation was physical or verbal, whether she was fondled through her clothing, or whether her dress was actually lifted, and the distance the violation occurred from her home. If the violation is felt to be the woman's fault, the men in her 'dishonored' family would feel customarily justified in severely punishing her or even killing her"⁶⁹.

The ideology of honor serves the preservation of the patriarchal structure by putting woman under the protection of man. In relation to the political situation in the Occupied Territories, the preservation of the honor of the family stands for the lost honor in the fights against the Israeli or the cooperation with them.

"For men, especially the less educated and those who work as labourers in Israel, the family compensates for the alienation and humiliation of their experience outside. At work they are powerless, a despised social group, surrounded by a hostile foreign culture. At home they can maintain their self-respect, succored by an environment whose values are their own. Honour and power over women and children might become crucial to men's sense of identity when they have so little else on which to base dignity and status"⁷⁰.

The distinction between the roles of the two genders serves the construction of identity for both sexes. These identities related to religion, tradition and the national aspirations organize the life inside the Palestinian society. Right and wrong are defined clearly and decisions are made easier.

The decisions on issues of education are made on the basis of this distinction. The university is chosen according to the possibilities of movement which are different for the girls and the boys. For example, boys have more possibilities to study abroad than the girls, leaving empty room inside the Palestinians for the girls to fill in the higher educational institutions.

⁶⁹ Adrien Kathrin Wing, "Palestinian Women: Their future legal rights", Arab Studies Quarterly; Winter 94, Vol. 16 Issue 1, p.55, 19p

⁷⁰ Kitty Warnock, "Land Before Honour: Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories", p. 52

Department is selected according to the possibilities of finding a future job and financial needs of the family and the sector that the student can be employed. The financial difficulties that the Palestinian families face have led to a partial divergence from the traditional customs that wanted only the boys to work to support financially the family. Girls are the majority in most of the departments assert a job in the private or public sector.

While traditionally a woman gained power inside the family only after she would give birth, higher education increases the power of the girls inside the family since the parents are more open to hear their ideas.

This means that even though the family makes the decisions on procedures related to education, the moment the students find themselves inside the university their position is changed.

Chapter 2

Education under Occupation

The presence of the Israeli military forces is effecting the everyday life of the Palestinians by controlling the movement within cities and between cities and by the enforcement of curfews and direct attacks. “In November 2004 the United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) recorded total of 61 checkpoints, partial checkpoints, 102 roadblocks, 374 earth mounds, 28 earth walls, 48 road gates, 61 trenches and 39 observation towers throughout the West Bank”. (OCHA west bank closures map, November 2005), (p. 83 Al-Haq, 25 years).

Checkpoints: Obstacles on the way to the university

As it was shown in table 4 (chapter 1, p.24), 72% of the students prefer to stay with their family. This decision implies that students and their families prefer to be stable in one city while the movement from one city to the other endorses a great deal of danger.

For a young person to go and study in a different city means that he or she has to be controlled in the check points in the exit and the entrance of every city every time they want to move. As a result many hours have to be spent in the long cues of people waiting to pass through the check points and there is always the possibility for the check point to close.

The fear to move from one city to another has its roots in the memories of the daily incidents during the Intifada when the Israeli soldiers had the possibility to open fire according to the judgement of the soldier. “Regulations enable firing in situations where there

is no clear and present danger to life or even in situations where there is no life threatening at all”⁷¹.

During the Intifada the level of danger when passing from a checkpoint was very high. Even though it is now rare for a soldier to open fire checkpoints still are to be avoided in any way. To avoid checkpoints between cities most of the Palestinians prefer to use mountain roads. This way they have to spend double or even more time travelling but they don’t have to pass from checkpoints.

The Occupying powers affect the everyday life of the students not only by making difficult the movement but also affect their academic life and psychology. The table below shows the percentage of the students that have to be controlled while getting to university in terms of frequency⁷².

Table 6: Percentages of the students experienced control on the way to university

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Once	20%	13%	5%	33%	29%	21%
Often	50%	23%	28%	22%	14%	37%
Daily	10%	7%	45%	15%	21%	23%
Never	10%	57%	11%	30%	36%	40%
No answer	10%	-	11%	-	-	4%

⁷¹ B’Tselem, Israeli human rights organization, viewed in “Death Traps: Israel’s use of force at checkpoints in the West Bank”, Hanna Haaland, Peter Trainor, Al-Haq, 2002

⁷² These results reflect only the level of control in relation to university and not the control that might be experienced generally in everyday life.

Flying checkpoints⁷³ is the most possible reason for the 21% of the students that had only once to pass from control to get to the university. Ala is studying in Birzeit University and she is living in Ramallah. She described to me what happens with the flying checkpoints. “There was a period that they had a flying checkpoint between Ramallah and Birzeit University almost every morning. We were taking the bus in the morning to go to the university but we couldn’t know what time we will be there. We had to wait in the checkpoint for long time and then they wouldn’t let the bus to go on. We had to walk 20 minutes on the mountain to get to the university. Imagine if you have a class at 8 or 9 o’clock in the morning in winter!”.

The table below shows how many flying checkpoints there were during the years 2005 and 2006 in the 5 cities that are being studied. It is not possible to know the number of the students that were affected by these checkpoints but their presence around the cities disrupts the movement of the residents generally.

Table 7: Number of flying checkpoints in the West Bank by month and governorate⁷⁴

Year	month	Ramallah	Bethlehem	Jerusalem	Nablus	Jenin	Total
	Jun	14	22	16	29	15	96
	Jul	17	39	11	17	8	92
	Aug	16	36	0	16	5	73
2005	Sep	18	55	23	14	2	112
	Oct	3	60	13	17	5	98
	Nov	4	47	3	19	12	85
	Dec	11	24	16	108	7	166
2005	Total	83	283	82	220	54	722
	Jan	4	41	11	73	6	135
	Feb	57	47	25	81	12	222

⁷³ Flying checkpoints are usually two or three military cars with a small number of soldiers, parked at a point in a selected area and controlling all the vehicles passing from that point. These checkpoints are not permanent but they are exceptional and last one day or a few hours.

⁷⁴ OCHA, “Protection of civilians Database”, www.ocha.org, 10/12/2006

	Mar	56	67	24	96	36	279
	Apr	41	126	7	90	63	327
	May	11	91	19	62	70	253
2006	Jun	7	90	51	31	94	273
	Jul	6	143	78	59	130	416
	Aug	1	118	10	59	130	318
	Sep	0	102	0	36	113	251
	Oct	24	90	1	13	57	185
	Nov	21	137	0	20	65	243
2006	Total	228	1052	226	620	776	2902

While Birzeit University is attracting students from all around West Bank students have to pass from control every time they want to go back to their home town. Because of that half of the students answered that they have to pass from control often while only 10% had never had such an experience. The more students move around West Bank in order to study the more they have to face checkpoints or flying checkpoints.

For students from Bethlehem the situation is quite different. “More and more we don’t have students from the North. We just have students from Bethlehem or Jerusalem. It is very hard for the students to come from other cities or villages because of the checkpoints”⁷⁵. The majority of the students studying in Bethlehem University are originally from Bethlehem city. The university is located inside the city (not like, for example, Birzeit University that locates a few kilometers outside Ramallah) and the students don’t have to pass from the normal checkpoints.

Although Bethlehem according to the table had for 2006 many flying checkpoints, half of the students had never been checked on their way to the university. This is connected to the place of residency of the students in relation to the university campus and the route followed on an everyday basis.

⁷⁵ From my interview with Hanna Musleh, professor in the Humanities department of Bethlehem university.

The low percentage of students in Bethlehem University being controlled is also connected to the young age of most of the students that participated in the research with 63% of the students are in the age of 18 and 19. Since the end of the Intifada the Israeli military activity in West Bank has been decreased and the young students, in contrast to the older ones, have the opportunity to have a more normal academic life.

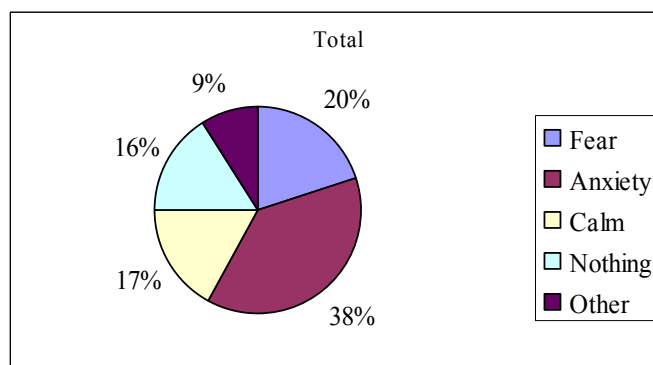
With Al-Quds being located in Jerusalem the control level is very high. Already 45% of the students said that they are checked daily. Al-Najah University is in the city of Nablus and Arab-American in Jenin. These two cities suffered a lot during the second Intifada and because of the refugee camps that are located in these cities (3 refugee camps in Nablus and one in Jenin) the control is higher than the rest of the cities.

Military forces control very strictly the entrance in these cities and curfews are very often. For example in the end of February of this year both these cities were under curfew for a week. The military entered these cities in order to find wanted Palestinians that are active against the occupying forces.

In my interviews, when I asked the students how the procedure of being controlled affected their everyday life and their academic life, most of them told me that it has become a part of their lives. Reem told me, “In my first year in the university there were everyday checkpoints. I didn’t want to come to the university. I was crying everyday. But now I am used to it”.

But this is only one of the ways the students are reacting to control. As the figure 2 below shows the majority of the students that have experienced control by soldiers felt anxiety. This anxiety is the product of the unpredictability of the actions of the soldiers.

Figure 2: reaction towards control⁷⁶



The way students react doesn't seem to be connected to the frequency with which they are being checked. Although, some of the students during the interviews said that one get used to it after a while if it happens often, the results from the questionnaires shows that even if someone has to pass from a checkpoint everyday one can still feel anxiety.

Only 16% of the students appear to feel nothing and 17% stay calm. Among the different answers student gave the most common was humiliation. Oli was describing one of the many stories that she had to tell about the way the soldiers treated her in the checkpoints while she was trying to get to the university.

Oli is coming from the city of Jenin and studying in Birzeit University. Every time she goes to Jenin to see her family she has to pass three checkpoints and the possibility for an incident to happen between a civilian and an Israeli soldier is high.

“Once I was going from Jenin to Ramallah. I left Jenin at eight o clock in the morning nad I reached Ramallah at 4 in the afternoon which means 8 hours on the road. There was a very strict checkpoint and they closed all the road and you will go when we say it. And we stayed in that check point 4 hours under the sun. It was so hot because it was June. We were waiting and the guys were raising their hands and they were standing over there and they asked them to take off their clothes to check them.

⁷⁶ Based on the previous question the table includes the 93 students that had the experienced of being checked and the percentages are made according to these numbers.

And there were a lot of kinds and they wanted to drink water and they were just crying. And by the way the soldiers were eating ice-cream and drink cold water. It was soo bad. And I went to the soldier and I asked for water. And he said “you want water?” and I said “yeah” and he said, “ok, I want to be home. Go and wait in your car. Which means not everything you want I can do it”. And I said “Yes, but I asked you for water, I want to drink I am so thirsty” and he said “I don’t have water”. I said, “you are liar, I saw you were drinking”. He was ready to kick me, you know? He was going to kill me but I was so bad. You can imagine the condition when they are drinking and eating in front of you but they just don’t let you pass without a reason just to make you feel bad. And I am just carrying a lot of stuff inside of me and I felt so, so, so bad. I was like “will you bring the water?” and he was like “wait”. And he brought a little water but I didn’t want to drink because it was so disgusting. You know when the soldiers are drinking after each other, its so disgusting. I said “I don’t want to drink this water and I’m not an animal and he said, “If you don’t want its ok, there is no other water”. And I was ok and I wanted to bring water from the house and he was like “do you think you can go?” And I was “please can I go?”, “No you are not going”. And I was like “what exactly do you want? Do you want me to die ever here? Stop it. But he actually didn’t. So we stayed there until 4 o clock when they let us to go”.

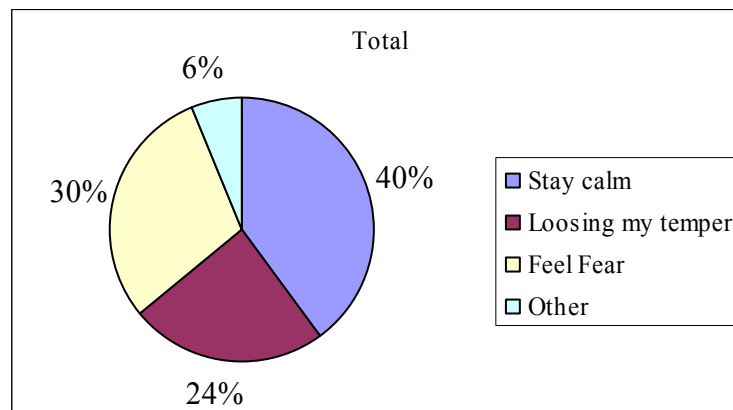
Having in mind that the girl is carrying the honor of the family, I thought that it would be harder for a girl to be humiliated by a soldier. When I told my thoughts to Manal, a girl from Arab-American university of Jenin, she told me that, it is harder for the boys. “Boys are supposed to be strong and able to protect the girls. When Israeli soldiers treat them bad at a checkpoint their self confidence is hurt”.

A student can feel humiliated by the procedure of control itself but what the girls described is harassment from the soldiers to the students. In the question if they had experienced harassment from soldiers on the way to the university the 76% answered that they have experienced it at least once.

Table 8: percentage of the students experienced harassment

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Once	17%	13%	11%	37%	11%	18%
Few times	37%	13%	22%	26%	25%	25%
Many times	23%	27%	33%	30%	53%	33%
Never	20%	47%	28%	7%	11%	23%
No answer	3%	-	6%	-	-	1%

Figure 3: Reaction towards harassment



Of the 77% of the students that have experienced at least once harassment on their way to the university, the 40% answered that they stay calm.

During the interviews students tended to make jokes on the incidents taking place at the checkpoints. When Ala was saying that the soldiers were making them walk a long

distance to the university, she laughed and commended that soldiers always think of the good physical condition of the Palestinian students. Rafat, a student in Al-Quds, was talking of the dance of the checkpoint, while soldiers were asking them to take off their shirts with their hands in the air. While Rafat was telling about the 'dance at the checkpoint', his mother who was present was laughing.

While having to deal with armed men, the young students have to suppress their emotions. Making a joke out of a humiliating situation gives them the possibility to cope with this kind of behavior and get on with their own life when leaving the checkpoint. It is the same for the parents of the students, who know that every moment something bad can happen to their children. While dealing with the soldiers a wrong move or a wrong thing to say can have unpleasant consequences. But living in everyday fear that something bad will happen is not possible. For this reason, through jokes and laugh this situation can be normalized and become an integrate part of their everyday life.

The Effects of Annexation Wall on Education

The separation Wall tracking down the borders between Palestinian Territories and Israel, has annexed a big part of the Palestinian land as it was formerly settled by the green line. "Palestinians have received military orders confiscating their land along the Wall's route, in the Seam Zone, and along a strip parallel to the Wall on its eastern side. Through precise statistics on the amount of land taken change as Israeli authorities re-route the Wall or shift construction to another area, it is clear that the Wall, as presently planned, will annex no less than 11.5% of the West Bank....In some instances, Israeli authorities have in fact declared land between the Wall and the Green line to be Israeli land"⁷⁷.

⁷⁷ Al-Haq, "25 years Defending Human Rights", p. 169

The result is that many of the Palestinians had to move from their houses, change their place of residency which at the same time effects the academic life of the students. According to OCHA, fifty-one percent (51%) of the West Bank Barrier construction is completed (362 km), 13% is under construction (88 km) and 36% remains marked as planned (253 km). Of the completed sections, 42 km are concrete segment slabs and 320 km of the Barrier consist of approximately 50 meters wide areas of fences, patrol roads, barbed wire, tracking sands and an electronic observation system⁷⁸.

Table 9: Areas surrounded by Barrier⁷⁹

	Amount of area (in dunams)	Percentage of West Bank
Area west of the barrier (including East Jerusalem)	479,881	8.5
Area east of the barrier that are completely or partially surrounded	191,040	3.4
Total land area affected	670,921	11.9

Table 10: Palestinian population affected by the barrier's route

	Number of Communities	Number of Residents
Communities west of the barrier [*]	17	27,520
Communities east of the barrier that are completely or partially surrounded ^{**}	54	247,800
East Jerusalem	21	222,500

⁷⁸ OCHA, "Preliminary Analysis of the Humanitarian Implications of the April 2006 Barrier Projections, www.ochaopt.com, 20/12/2006

⁷⁹ B'Tselem, "The Separation Barrier", www.btselem.org, 10/12/2006

^{*} Residents of these towns and villages will require permits to live in their homes, and they will be able to leave their communities only via a gate in the barrier. The figure does not include three communities that are presently situated west of the barrier but lie east of the barrier according to the currently approved route.

^{**} Residents of these towns and villages will not require permits or have to pass through a gate

Total	92	497,820
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The movement from one side of the Wall to the other is quite restricted and for a Palestinian to go through he/she has to have a special permit or the Israeli identity. Even if someone has the permission to go to through the Wall the procedure can be long. “There are seven types of gates built into the Wall: agricultural, checkpoint, military, road, school, seasonal, and the settlement gates. Of the 55 gates in the sections of the Wall constructed as of this writing, only 21 are accessible to Palestinians. Those gates which are accessible to Palestinians are not open throughout the day: In many instances they are open three times a day for an hour or an hour and a half although in practice the opening hours are erratic”⁸⁰.

Table 11: Effect of the separation Wall on academic life according to university⁸¹

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Change your way to the university	23%	30%	50%	4%	39%	28%
Change place of residency	16%	3%	-	4%	11%	7%
Change university	3%	10%	-	7%	18%	8%
Drop education	3%	6%	17%	11%		7%
Didn't affect me	56%	52%	28%	74%	32%	50%

A total 50% of the students is not affected by the Wall in terms of education. According to the place of residency and the location of the university a student can be fully effected by the Wall, so that he or she will have to move to a new place or change university or even drop university. For the university of Al-Quds 50% of the students said that they had to change the way they go to the university after the creation of annexation Wall on 2002. Al-

⁸⁰ Al-Haq, “25 Years Defending Human Rights”, p. 165

⁸¹ Hedi, a student in Birzeit University coming from the city of Halil asked me to stress that this table shows how the Wall affected the academic life of the students alone and not the affects on their life in general.

Quds University is located in the region Al-Quds which is part of Jerusalem. Until 2002 students were able to go from one side of the city to the other but today that the Wall goes through the city of Jerusalem students have to go all around the city in order to find open ways to get to the university.

Faisal is a student in Al-Quds in law department. His family has the Israeli identity and he has the possibility to pass the gate from the Qaladiah checkpoint to go to Jerusalem and his university. "I could be in the university in 15 minutes but the checkpoint is always so crowded that it takes hours until you cross it. So, I prefer to drive around the Wall for like one to get to Al-Quds".

According to the information given from the Ministry of education, the construction of the Wall has serious impact on the property of the university and the movement of the students.

"Almost one third (60 acres) of its total land area (210 acres) will be annexed by the Israeli Wall construction. The lost land area is currently used as football and volleyball fields, and for other potential expansion projects. Many of the University students and teachers have to find rental housing in the local community to avoid restrictions and travel difficulties, or have to move to institutions back in their own communities, disrupting their lives and plans, as well as the University's attendance and operations.

Estimated cost of losses caused by the Wall construction is about \$5 million, in addition to inability to carry out the planned construction of the \$8 million sports complex and stadium, and a swimming pool. Damage and destruction to the university property by Israeli bulldozers also is estimated at \$100 thousand.

The Wall also caused high tension and frustration among the students due to the military controls imposed on their mobility, which led to student protest and consequent arrest

of over 60 students, and the killing of one female student, Hind Suleiman Sharateha, on 2 December 2003”⁸².

Arab-American University in the city of Jenin appears to be effected too by the Wall since 39% of the students had to change their way to university, 11% had to change their place of residency, 18% to change university and only 32% were not effected by the Wall. “In the Jenin area, 5 population centers were isolated in the first phase of the Wall construction: Barta’a Sharqieh, Um Al-Rehan, Khirbet Abdallah Alyounes, Khirbet Tahr Al-Maleh, and Khirbet Barta’a. Their total population is 4100 people, have 4 schools that include 890 students. Seventy-five of the students from these areas are forced to travel to other areas to continue their higher grades education”⁸³.

There is a 7% of the students who had to drop out of education for a time period because of the annexation Wall. “It has been reported that 3.4% of Palestinians in areas where the Wall is being constructed have abandoned their educational pursuits entirely [...] It should also be emphasized that it is difficult to separate these issues from each other. Students drop out of school not only just because of the travel restrictions resulting from the Wall. The inability of Palestinians to obtain adequate health care has a direct impact on their ability to work, and the decline in the family income results in the inability of family members to obtain adequate health care. This inter-connectedness is arguably one of the most pernicious aspects of the Wall”⁸⁴.

Most of the students who had to drop out of education are boys and they are in the age of 22. If the building of the annexation Wall started on 2002 then these students were just enrolling to the university. While the route of the Wall was not known probably these students started studying and then had to drop out of university because of the inaccessibility of the

⁸² Ministry of education and Higher Education, “Expansion and Annexation Wall and its impact on the Educational Process”, International and Public Relations, 2004, www.moefe.gov.ps, 21/01/2007

⁸³ Ministry of education and Higher Education, “Expansion and Annexation Wall and its impact on the Educational Process”, International and Public Relations, 2004, www.moefe.gov.ps, 21/01/2007

⁸⁴ Al-Haq, “25 years Defending Human Rights”, p. 176-177

university. Now that the biggest part of the Wall is already built, students are aware of the places where they can travel and according to the new conditions that the Wall created they decide about their education.

For the 8% percent of the students the Wall meant that they had to change their university, which probably means longer way to the university, losing friends, going to a university that you might not consider as good as the previous or to a more expensive one, which will have the analogous affects on the family's financial condition.

The annexation of Palestinian land and the difficulties in movement created by the Wall lead 7% of the students to change their place of residency whether this means the moving of the family as whole in a situation where the family loses land or the student moves alone in another city in order to be near the university.

Direct attacks against universities and university students

Until now I talked only about the indirect ways by which Israel effects the academic life in the Palestinian Territories. Apart from checkpoints and the Wall the Israeli forces have attacked directly educational institutions by closing them down for a period of time or by entering in the universities.

Universities have been a target for the Israeli forces as the leaders of the political parties within the university are thought to be organizing resistance movements against the Israeli powers. So, one of the main reasons for the military forces to attack a university is to find and arrest these students and weaken the student movement. "Those arrested can be detained under emergency legislation for periods of up to six months without explicit charges

being made against them and without evidence being made available in open court for defendants to challenge”⁸⁵.

According to the statistics provided by the Central Bureau of Statistics, from the 28/9/2000 until the 13/11/2006, 720 students were arrested, 1245 were injured and 200 died during military attacks in the universities.

Apart from taking into custody many of the students, closing a university for a period of time have also long term affects. “Complete closures are extremely damaging: faculties are not working; faculty research stops; students are not studying; university employees are out of work. Also affected are the families in the neighborhood, where in Birzeit or Ramallah, who live indirectly from the university by providing services: transportation, lodging food and clothing”⁸⁶.

While most of the researches are focused on primary and secondary education information on the exact numbers of attacks and closures of the universities is not available. In this study, in the question if the university was ever attacked or closed during each student’s studies the results are not exact because some of the students tried to recall incidents which they didn’t experience themselves.

Students on their last years of their studies are most likely to have experienced such events during the last years of the Intifada, while the students just starting their higher education had the opportunity to have a more quite and undisrupted academic life.

Table 12: Closures and attacks against universities

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Once	7%	30%	17%	22%	14%	18%

⁸⁵ “The Impact of Military Occupation on Palestinian Education”, Right to Education Campaign, Birzeit University, <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/downloads/pdfs/OccShockRight2Edu.pdf>, cited on 12/11/2006

⁸⁶ Gabi Baramki, “Building Palestinian Universities under Occupation”

Few times	60%	30%	28%	52%	36%	56%
Many times	33%	10%	17%	22%	43%	34%
Never	-	30%	33%	4%	7%	14%
No answer	-	-	5%	-	-	-

More than half of the students (56%) experienced at least a few times the disruption of their academic life because of military intervention. This disruption has as a result the loss of classes and the malfunctioning of the university. Apart from the loss of class and exams the concentration of the students is focused on the incidents of the closure or the attack and not on their duties as students.

“Especially during the last years of the Intifada, everyone was talking about the students that were arrested and different incidents happening everyday between students and soldiers. I didn’t want to come to school because I knew that I would hear about another student who got arrested or killed. No one was studying! We were all thinking about the political situation”, said Gadah, when I asked her about the reaction of the students towards such incidents.

Of course, the fact that Intifada is over doesn’t mean that the soldiers cannot still close down a university. On national elections or even student elections, military closes the University for Security Reasons. During my visit in West Bank not only I had to pass from the flying checkpoints on my way to Birzeit University but the soldiers came in the University and closed it for one day. It was the time when the fighting between Hamas and Fatah escalated in Gaza Strip and in the university there was a general anxiety and several meetings of the political parties were organized.

In the question what were the reasons announced for the closure or the attack the students appeared to be confused and not sure. Some of the students answered positively to the question, if the university was ever closed or attacked, were not able to give an answer about the reasons for that.

Table 13: Reasons announced for the attack or the closure

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
National Occasion	43%	14%	8%	19%	31%	26%
Students Elections	30%	24%	25%	27%	42%	30%
Throwing stones nearby the university	27%	33%	25%	35%	15%	27%
Other	23%	43%	17%	15%	8%	21%
no answer	-	-	25%	4%	4%	4%

National occasions, such as national elections or celebrations, constitute the 26% of the students as a reason for the Israeli military powers to attack or close down the university. The concentration of a big number of the population for voting or celebrating can be transformed to protest against the Israeli occupation and even to an attack against the Israeli soldiers or the settlers living inside West Bank. Again the need to ensure security is identified with the use of military and imposing of emergency measures to prevail an uprising.

In the same way and taking into account the importance of the student's movement all through the second Intifada, student's elections attract the interest of the Israelis who try to control the situation inside the university space. The young students who participated in the second Intifada known for their activity against the Israeli army are more likely to get organized in a space like the university.

Conflicts between Israeli army and students taking place outside university is also one of the reasons for the 27% of the students for which the university can close for as long as these conflicts take part. In a case like that, the university can be closed for security reasons, to avoid military entering the educational space and attack against students and the staff or the military itself can enter the university and order the closure until the conflict is over.

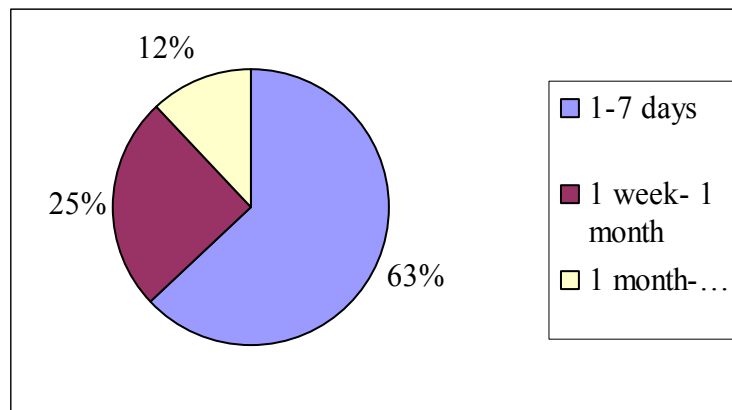
Of the 21% of the students who gave a different answer the 21% said that the main reason for which the military enter the university is to arrest students who are thought to be dangerous or to be active against Israel, or to search for wanted people who may be hiding inside the university.

For Bethlehem University, 43% gave a different answer from the already existing ones and all of the students referred to one event, the 40 days of siege of Nativity Church, where some wanted Palestinians were hiding. University was as the whole of the city under siege and didn't work for 40 days⁸⁷.

In the question, how long the university was closed, only 73 from the 133 students answered. The fact that the students were not able to answer makes possible that they gave answers according to what they heard about events inside the university when they were not still students themselves. The 63% of students answered that the university was closed from one day to one week. 25% of them that it stayed closed from one week to one month and 12% from one month and more.

⁸⁷ On [April 2, 2002](#), approximately 200 Palestinians fled the advancing Israeli forces into the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. During the siege, the Church bellringer and nine Palestinians inside the Church were killed and many more wounded. While the Israelis were performing a psychological attack on the militants, a fire broke out. According to a PBS documentary, an IDF flare was responsible, but the cause is disputed. [Frontline](#) Following extensive negotiations, the Israeli forces laid siege to the Church for a total of 39 days, during which many civilians and Palestinian policemen left, some of whom were taken into temporary Israeli custody according to Frontline, www.wikipedia.com, 09/05/2007

Figure 4: Number of days of university closure



This disruption of the life of a university, even if it is only for one day, has major consequences in the lives of the students as well as the lives of the staff working in the university. Classes have to be extended, exams to be rearranged and people to be concentrated again on their jobs. For a student to be arrested means that the whole university will be concerned and focused on the specific event. Occupation becomes again the main subject to discuss and the most important thing in the lives of the students.

In one of my visits in Birzeit University there was a festival organized by one of the leftist parties. Students dressed in military uniforms and with their faces all covered with the Palestinian headscarf were marching through the yard. After dancing, singing and remembering the leaders who died while fighting for a free Palestine, the leader of the student political party called 5 students who had just been released from jail and offered them a placket for their political action and their sacrifice. In the end, he read the names of the students who were currently in prison and pray for them.

The crowd watching was applauding the released students and the ones still in prison. The power coming out of the students singing, the pictures of the martyrs and the voice of the leader calling for resistance were so inspiring and moving that anyone would feel the need to become one of the admired martyrs or one of the fighters.

For a student to get arrested and survive prison is an honor. He/she is a hero for the university and the students focus on it for many days⁸⁸. Information circulates among universities and students focus on incidents like these for many days. University is the space where students inform each other about a new tactic used by the Israeli soldiers or another students who go to prison. When I asked Amin, a student in Arab-American University, if he is enjoying his studies, he told me, “it is becoming quite boring for me, doing the same thing talking about the same subjects. About the situation in Palestine, who was killed and what happened”.

After experiencing the second Intifada, students are trying to get their lives back to normal. Although the Occupation is the most important issue concerning all the Palestinian people, students put a lot of effort to concentrate on their own lives. Politics and resistance against the Occupation that used to be the main subject of discussion among the students, loses exclusivity.

However, the fact that students choose to enroll and attend classes in the higher educational institutions under the difficult conditions formed by the Occupation is a political act in itself. Students do not have to talk about politics when they practice it every time they pass through a checkpoint in order to get to the university. Reem: “Israelis do not want us to be educated. That is why they attack the universities all these years. They want us to be ignorant and by this way more easy to be controlled. We are not going to give them this pleasure. Education is our right and we will use it even if the cost is very high”.

Today, after two uprisings and with the Israeli power pressuring more and more, students are trapped into localities, detached one from the other. In this regard Israel was quite successful, since accessibility between regions is cut off it is hard to share experience and get organized in political groups.

⁸⁸ Most of the students interviewed had relatives that at some point were arrested and talked about it with pride since having being arrested by the Israeli military means that you are active in the fight for freedom of the Palestinian Territories.

But the more the soldiers put pressure on the students the more turns education into a way of fighting against them. Students appear ready to face the challenges of the occupation in order to stand for their right to be educated. Using jokes and with the belief that education can offer them a better future students try to make the everyday violence part of a normal life.

Chapter 3

Semiotics of Educational Space

After trying to identify the ways in which family and society rules as well as the Occupation effect the academic life of the Palestinian students, I will try to explore the perceptions of the students of education and the symbolic meanings of university space.

Jeanne H. Ballantine in “The sociology of Education”⁸⁹ defined five functions of education:

1. Socialization: Learning to be productive members of society and passing on of culture,
2. transmission of culture,
3. social control and personal development,
4. selecting, training, and placement of individuals in society,
5. change and innovation.

These functions represent the goals that each educational institution and as an extension the state and in this case the Palestinian Authorities want to achieve through higher education. Educational institutions and the knowledge provided by them expresses the ideology of the political powers as well as the needs in labor of the society.

Socialization and transmission of culture have to do with the reproduction of already existing cultural models through higher education in order to create a unifying cultural base for the youth who will be able to recognize the codes with which society is working and stand in society when they are out of university⁹⁰.

⁸⁹ Jeanne H. Ballantine, “The sociology of education”, p. 26

⁹⁰ Social and cultural reproduction seen as the interplay of parallel models of education and society does not exclude the possibility of change. For more see Carlos Torres, Theodore Mitchell, “Sociology of education: Emerging Perspectives”, Jack Demaine, “Sociology of Education Today”.

Beck suggested that the forces of late modernity encourage youth to see the world as apolitical and the idea of solidarity as less significant. Rational modernizing forces, therefore, encourage youth to place themselves at the center of their success, thereby choosing a life plan not on the basis of social meaning or virtue but on the premises of an instrumental notion of individual progress.

In our case, Palestinian youth is caught in the middle of two different tensions. On the one hand, there is a need for an always increasing amount of technological knowledge and modernization of procedures that are competitive with western ones that can lead to individualization as Beck suggests. On the other hand, solidarity within Palestinian youth is the presupposition for their survival through the occupation, which makes every decision in their life planning a political one. At the same time, these decisions have a social meaning while virtue, as defined by religion, is as well one of the basic dimensions forming their lives.

University is the space where these different dimensions taking form in the everyday life of the students, in the way they conceive their studies and create a social and political life.

Family interests interfere in the academic life of 79%⁹¹ of the students directly by checking their grades frequently or at least sometimes. This way family can observe and force the student to hard work which includes attendance in the classes. However, students, when being at university, have the freedom to make their own decisions at least when it comes to decide whether they will attend a class or not.

Being outside the house, in a space where parents cannot control their activities, students have the possibility to act more freely and according to their desires more than their duty. If we take into account that the desires of the youth are more or less repressed by rules then even this freedom gains an importance.

⁹¹ See first chapter page 24.

Although 63% of the students said that they enjoy their studies, 71% of the students were sometimes or many times absent from the classes. The frequency of absence from the lectures is neither connected to the level of control that parents pose on the students, nor to the level of how much students enjoy their studies.

Table 14: Do you enjoy your studies?

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Very much	13%	37%	17%	33%	25%	25%
Much	40%	43%	44%	33%	29%	38%
Little	30%	7%	33%	7%	25%	19%
Not really	17%	13%	-	17%	21%	15%

University as a social space

Table 15: Were you ever absent from class?

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Once	3%	33%	5%	26%	3%	16%
Sometimes	40%	47%	56%	41%	61%	48%
Many times	50%	-	17%	22%	25%	23%
Never	7%	20%	17%	11%	11%	13%

Both, boys and girls, seem to make their choices to attend a class or spend their time in a different way according to their needs. The main reason for not joining a class is not to be

interested in it. Apart from that students spend their time socializing with other students, doing their homework, being busy with political activities inside the university or taking part in cultural and sport activities. There is a 17% of the students that were not able to be present in class because of closure. This shows that external uncontrollable reasons can affect their academic life.

Table 16: If you were absent, what was the main reason?

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Closure	18%	21%	7%	17%	20%	17%
Coffe/chatting with friends	18%	8%	21%	17%	20%	17%
not interested in joining the class	36%	12%	43%	46%	36%	34%
Doing my homework	7%	17%	14%	4%	12%	10%
busy with politics	14%	21%	14%	8%	8%	13%
Other	7%	21%	1%	8%	4%	9%

University is the main space where students can socialize, meet their friends or make new ones, fall in love and find out things about themselves. Lectures are used by students as a justification to be outside the house away from the family, the rules and the duties. Students arrive in the university early in the morning and they don't leave before three o'clock even if their lectures finish a lot earlier⁹². Spending time in the university is accepted by their parents who might not be aware of the exact activities of their children.

Table 17: Do you spend extra time in the university? If yes, how?

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-	Arab-	Total
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⁹² This is more of a personal observation during my visits in the universities. Most of the students with which I socialized and talked with tried to spend as much time as they could in the university campus before they returned home.

				Najah	American	
Never	-	23%	33%	11%	14%	15%
Using the library	10%	37%	11%	30%	11%	20%
Talk to professors	10%	3%	-	11%	14%	8%
Have coffee with friends	67%	27%	56%	44%	57%	50%
Dealing with politics	13%	7%	-	-	4%	5%
Other	-	3%	-	4%	-	2%

Only 15% of the students said that they never spend extra time in the university apart from their lectures, while half of the students find an opportunity to have a coffee with their friends and chat before, after or between their classes. Only 5% spend their extra time dealing with politics and 28% are using their time for working in the library and talking with their professors.

Division of university space⁹³

The cafeteria is the most busy place of each of the universities. The moment the students arrive in university, they make a first stop in the cafeteria to take their coffee, meet their friends and go to their class. Apart from the cafeteria, where you can meet everyone at one point of the day, the university space is divided into smaller spaces, like sitting areas in the garden or inside the building of each department, occupied by different groups of students.

The criteria by which these spaces are separated from each other are many and defined by the main common attribute of the students present there. For example, in the campus of Birzeit, which is the biggest one, the gathering of the students depends mainly on the faculty in which they study. Students from engineering are for example meeting at one and students from history faculty at a different place.

⁹³This subchapter is mostly based on my own observations when walking around the universities. Also, during the distribution of the questionnaires these distinctions were made clear. The students helping me to distribute the questionnaires gave names to each space according to the people present there.

There are spaces occupied by students who are members of the different political parties or students being involved in arts and music. In Bethlehem University, Mirra, a 19 years old student was showing me around explaining these different sectors of the university. There is a space in the garden where only girls can meet. Most of them are religious and covered and the presence of male students is quite rare. A little further down the garden, there is a more quiet place with trees that do not allow to see from distance who is sitting there and it is the place where couples can meet.

The place where spends time in the campus can be interpreted by the rest of the students in the way that they will be able to know if one is politically involved and in what level, if one is religious and how religious one is, what one studies or what is one's age. Of course, moving from one space to the other is very common and shows openness and high level of socialization.

The dressing code of the students, the way they talk with other people, where they walk and where they hang out are all conscious choices that identify them. Every movement has a meaning and is forming the life in the world of the campus.

Friendship and gender

The university campus offers a wide range of opportunities to be active in different fields and meet new people from different backgrounds. The four years of higher education is a period during which students form their identity and getting mature. Students feel more free to interact with students from the opposite sex and establish friendships with them, which during the years in high school is not that common.

Table 18: Do you think there is a difference in the friendships established in the university comparing to your previous ones?

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Yes	77%	77%	78%	78%	61%	74%
Somehow	17%	23%	22%	22%	28%	22%
No	6%				11%	4%

This opportunity given by university to interact with people from the opposite sex applies even more to those students who spend their teenage years in gender divided schools. For these students university is the place where for the first time in their lives they have the chance to interact with students of the opposite sex who do not belong to their family circles.

Table 19: What would you say about friendship between boys and girls?

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Agree and practice	70%	40%	50%	52%	57%	54%
Agree but don't practice	20%	13%	11%	22%	18%	17%
Disagree this kind of friendship and oppose it	7%	13%	22%	7%	11%	12%
Disagree but don't mind	3%	34%	17%	19%	14%	17%

From the sample of students taking part in the research, 54% agree on having friends from the opposite sex and they themselves create this kind of friendship, while 17% agree but do not have the chance to create this kind of a relationship. The Birzeit University, with 70% of the students mingling, is the most open and it tolerates friendship between the two sexes.

Still there is 12% of the students who disagree and oppose this kind of friendship and with the 17% of the students who disagree but they don't mind if other students establish

close relationships, it comes up to 29% of the whole students who do not mingle with people from the opposite sex.

The position that students keep towards this matter is one of the major criteria for the division of space within the university. Students, who disagree and oppose friendship between boys and girls, distinguish themselves by occupying a specific space in the university. These spaces are usually delimited by using ostensible codes but they are open for the people of the same sex even if they have friends of the opposite sex.

It is more likely for the girls to have their own space where boys are not allowed to enter. Big groups of girls meet at a specific point inside the campus while boys usually spread around the campus among the rest of the students without occupying a clearly male space.

Although university has the characteristic of bringing together students of both sexes, female students identifying themselves with religion create a space inside the university where the rules of Islam can be applied. This way they can accomplish their duties towards their beliefs and follow the virtues that they have chosen to lead their lives.

Surprisingly enough, 75% of the students studying in Arab-American University of Jenin agree with having friends from the opposite sex. It is surprising if we consider that the city of Jenin is considered as one of the most conservative in West Bank. Almost all of the girls in Jenin are covered and the social life is restricted to one among members of the family. However, university as a counter society allows the youth to create their own rules and a community different from the traditional one existing outside the university campus.

The very restricted possibilities that students have to meet outside the university stresses the importance of the campus as a social space; as a space parallel to the society, where social rules can be used as valid, rejected or altered according to the student's views.

Table 20: Do you meet your friends in places other than university?

	(% of students meeting outside the university)			(% of students not meeting outside the university)			No Answer
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	
Birzeit	42%	58%	86%	100%	-	7%	7%
Bethlehem	55%	45%	66%	80%	20%	34%	-
Al-Quds	69%	31%	72%	80%	20%	28%	-
Al-Najah	44%	56%	66%	100%	-	19%	15%
Arab-American	52%	48%	78%	80%	20%	18%	4%
Total	67%	83%	74%	31%	7%	20%	5%

When looking at the percentages of the students that are able to meet with their friends in places other than university it is clear that the girls have the same possibilities as the boys. When it comes to the students who are not able to meet their friends outside the university then the majority is girls.

The fact that girls appear to have the same chances as the boys to meet with their friends is misleading while most of the girls have the possibility to meet each other in their houses. Inside the house the family is present unlike university where girls have the possibility to meet alone.

Shopping is as well one of the main excuses for girls to meet and go to the city. Shopping requires a constant movement; it is a go through the city activity that does not give the opportunity for staying in one place for long time. This comes in contrast to the boys who have the possibility to meet and hang out at the streets. This is connected to the male occupied public space that allows women only a passing through.

Table 21: Places where students can meet

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Home	33%	45%	23%	23%	41%	34%
Cafe	42%	20%	-	56%	27%	31%
Restaurant	13%	10%	16%	11%	-	10%
Shopping	4%	-	15%	-	9%	5%
Street	4%	5%	8%	5%	14%	7%
Other	-	20%	15%	-	-	6%
No Answer	4%	-	23%	5%	9%	7%

Cafes and restaurants are as well places where students can meet but again there is a difference in the frequency that boys and girls can meet in these places. The words of Ala could give a hint about this subject. “My brother is 17 years old, 3 years younger than me and he can go out with his friends’ everyday to drink coffee and smoke water pipe. For me the situation is very different. I have to ask for permission from my mother one week before, tell her with whom I am going out and where we are going and then maybe she will let me go. And imagine that my mother used to be very modern but she is getting influenced by her environment and acts the same way”.

Boys have more possibilities to socialize and actually most of the cafes in the cities are only for boys. When I asked some friends to go with them for a coffee they replied: “What are you going to do there? We will smoke water pipe and play cards. You will cause problems. There are no girls in there”.

Of course, there are places that welcome both girls and boys but the difficulties to arrange a meeting with mixed friends are many and the procedure very long even to try it. In the end, university, if it is not the only place to meet your friends, it is the only place where girls and boys can meet freely and without having to ask for permission.

Intimate relationships

Inside the campus students have the possibility to talk about everything with their friends. Academic matters are an everyday issue in the life of a student. Classes, exams, the performance of each professor are normally main subjects to discuss in a university. The interesting information that we can get from these answers is the low percentage of students who seem to be interested in discussing politics, in other words, social and cultural issues are preferred.

Some traditional customs met in the everyday life of the students are accepted as positively organizing their social life and others are doubted and even rejected. Customs organizing their social life and delimit the boundaries of their friendship and more intimate relations are for this reason under discussion on an everyday basis as part of their own experiences.

For the students mixing with each other there is a need to define the boundaries between friendship and more intimate relationships. First of all, the fact that students have the possibility to come in contact with people of the opposite sex comes in contrast with the traditional division which wants the girls being protected in the private sphere of the house. Once this traditional division is overcome inside the university with girls and boys being able to be in the same place and actually establish friendships, students have to delimit the boundaries that define the nature of their relationships.

The biggest part of my informal discussions with students was devoted to the interpretation of the movements or small talks between students developing or having a desire to have an intimate relationship with another student. Excitement caused by a look or disappointment caused by lack of communication of any kind (stare, smile, small talk, a touch etc.).

Students tried to explain the codes used to communicate one's interest and the ways to understand what is the relationship between the students. For example, if a girl and a boy

walk together in the campus this shows that they share something more than a friendship and they are considered to be a couple. “For a woman or a man to come within a distance of half to one meter of another is a clear sign of a positive favorable attitude. A close distance signifies intimacy, and touch suggests hope and desire”⁹⁴. The semantics of every movement, the way one looks at or talk to someone other than one’s beloved can create jealousy and even end the relationship.

The biggest problem that students face is the refusal of their parents to accept the one they are in love with. Both girls and boys represent their whole family. When they admit to their families that they are in love and want to be with someone, the family tries to get information about the other family. If the family and the background of the person one is in love with fulfills the demands, then the romantic love can be accepted. If not, then the lovers have to forget each other.

While girls seem to be more persistent in matters of love, boys are more probable to accept in the end the family’s position and follow their demands. Amin being disappointed from love says: “I loved once a girl and we were meeting only in the university. And then we stopped it. So, I think that is better if my family finds me a girl. I don’t know how to explain that. Our religion and habits says that is not good to walk with a girl and not being her husband. So, my family will choose a girl for me and then I will be able to walk with her and sleep with her”.

Apart from explaining how intimate relationships work in their society, students were very interested in the way young people perceive and create intimate relationships in western countries. Although, they were familiar with the western cultures usually from films, most of them were asking about what someone means by saying ‘friend’, ‘boyfriend’ and what is a

⁹⁴ Fuadi Khuri, “The Body in Islamic Culture”, p. 102

couple doing. Some of the students expressed their approval of western model of relationship but many of them preferred their way considering it more meaningful.

Table 22: Main subjects of discussion among friends

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Academic matters	33%	47%	45%	38%	21%	36%
Social and Cultural issues	43%	43%	33%	48%	65%	47%
Politics	20%	7%	22%	7%	14%	14%
Other	4%	3%	-	7%	-	3%

University as political space

Politics as an issue among the students seem to decrease in interest if we consider the importance of the student movement in both uprisings. This is connected to the fact that more and more students feel tired by the political situation. After the intensity of the second Intifada students need more to concentrate on internal issues leaving the occupation outside of their framework. All of the students, with which I had the chance to talk, were expressing their disappointment from politics.

Because of the fact that these students live under occupation, the political situation has for a long time been the main subject of discussion distracting them from different issues that might occur in their community. The reorientation of the youth in internal matters that have to do with the formation of the life inside the Palestinian community can be a first step for a more organized society which can finally lead them to the solution of the political problems.

These students that in a few years will be active members of the Palestinian society by occupying positions in the labor will probably change the way of thinking and the issues on which to be focused.

Even though university's political life is not as intense as it used to be, the majority of the students still thinks that university is the main space where they have the opportunity, if they want to, to be involved in politics.

Table 23: Percentage of the students who consider political life as one of the advantages of the university

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Yes	73%	47%	33%	48%	50%	52%
Somehow	17%	30%	28%	22%	11%	21%
No	7%	23%	28%	26%	36%	23%
No Answer	3%		11%	4%	3%	4%

There is a quite high percentage of students (40%) who are not involved in the political life of the university at all, breaking the tradition of the Palestinian universities as the source of political movements. Al-Quds University and Bethlehem University students appear to be the least interested in politics with 67% and 50% of their students.

Table 24: Percentages of student's involvement in politics

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Yes, active	43%	17%	11%	30%	43%	30%
Yes, partly	37%	33%	17%	30%	21%	29%
No	17%	50%	67%	40%	36%	40%

No Answer	3%	-	5%	-	-	1%
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There is still a 30% of the students who are active in politics by being members of political parties, taking part in discussions about the political situation in West Bank and organizing festivals or resistance movements against the occupying forces. The rest of the students are involved in politics informally. They are not members in political parties but they are usually affiliated to the political position of a party and they occasionally participate in political activities⁹⁵.

Apart from the fact that students feel disappointed by political parties and tired of talking about the political situation in West Bank and Gaza, which doesn't seem to change, safety reasons keep them from being active within a student political party.

Table 25: Percentages of the students considering the level of safety implied in involvement in politics

	Birzeit	Bethlehem	Al-Quds	Al-Najah	Arab-American	Total
Yes	7%	23%	6%	26%	21%	17%
Somehow	53%	23%	61%	30%	21%	36%
No	37%	54%	33%	44%	58%	46%
No Answer	3%	-	-	-	-	1%

Only 17% of the students are positive in supporting that being involved in politics is safe while 46% share the position that being a member of the student political parties can be dangerous and result into unpleasant consequences.

⁹⁵ Among the students interviewed there were two members of Fatah. The rest of them were either not interested at all in politics or supporting the position of a political party, took part in festivals and activities but they were not members of a party.

As it was noted in the previous chapter (p.53) in a period of six years between 2000 and 2006 720 students were arrested, 1245 were injured and 200 died during military attacks in the universities. When a student makes the decision to be active in politics by being a member of a political party he or she has in mind the danger of being arrested for organizing against the Israeli forces or get injured or even get killed.

Another reason that keeps students away from the political scene of the university is the problems created among the political parties. Especially after the election of Hamas last year university space has been transformed many times into a battle field among the supporters of Hamas and Fatah. These conflicts weaken the power of the student political movement and create an unpleasant situation inside the university campus.

A third and last reason stressed by the students is that getting involved in politics usually distracts the students from the classes and as a result it is more difficult to finish university on time. This has financial implications for the families of the students having to pay the university fees for longer time.

Students not involved or partly involved in politics, but still have the obstacles from the occupying forces integrated in their everyday lives, are trying to live their academic years as normally and happily as possible. Being involved in politics means that almost on an everyday basis one has to come in terms with the problems posed by the occupation, instead of using the short period of four years to build up one's individual identity and one's future.

For the students being involved in politics individual identity and personal future cannot be seen separately from the fight for national liberation and creation of a Palestinian state. This doesn't mean that the rest of the students do not want the occupation to end but there is a difference in the level of identification of the personal, individual existence and organizing of the future according to the national goals.

The meaning/s of higher education

Four years of higher education, mostly spent inside the university, offers the students the opportunity to come to their own conclusions on what they think to be more important in their lives and plan their future according to it.

Figure 5: Meaning of education to the number of students according to university⁹⁶

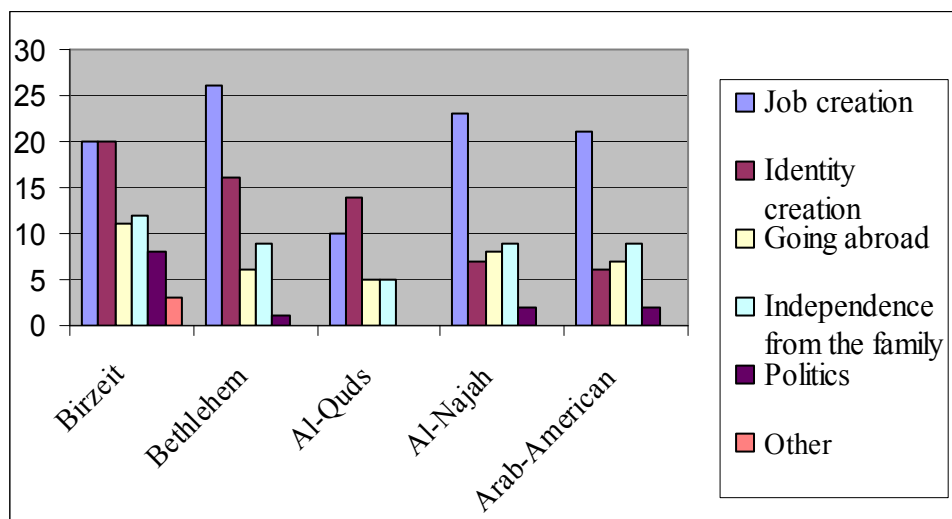
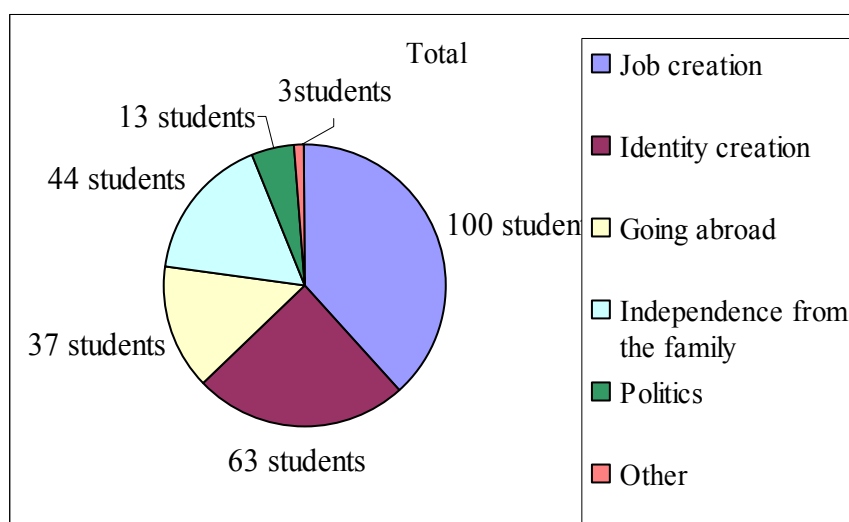


Figure 6: Meaning of education for the total of the students



⁹⁶ Because students gave more than one answers to this question showing the multiple functions of education in their life, I preferred to use the actual number and not percentages. Again the main perception of higher education is made clear.

To the question “what does higher education mean for you?” most of the students gave multiple answers stressing the fact that education serves different functions. However, higher education for the majority of the Palestinian students (100 students, 75%) is the mean to ensure a future job.

Unemployment is one of the most serious problems now facing the Palestinian society and the choice of the students in this question reflects the anxiety of the last generations to find a job. “The rate of unemployment since 2000 continued to rise in comparison to previous years reaching 31.3% in 2002. In the Palestinian Territory the unemployment rate in the third quarter 2004 was 26.8% as compared to 10.0% in the third quarter 2000. In the West Bank the rate rose from 7.5% in the third quarter 2000 to 22.3% in the third quarter 2004”⁹⁷.

The economy of West Bank is directly influenced by the occupation and the politics of the Israel in the region. The fragmentation of West Bank and the isolation of the Palestinian cities by checkpoints and the building of settlements among the local cities and villages do not allow communication and trade relations to develop.

At the same time the annexation Wall had serious impact on the movement and employment of Palestinians in Israel and by confiscating a big part of the Palestinian land many families lost their main income coming from agriculture.

“Results of the survey indicated that 60.9% of the Palestinian households in the Palestinian localities affected by the wall depended on Agriculture as a main income source before the construction of the wall, against 53.1% depend on this source after the construction of the wall, and 49.9% depended on wages and salaries from Israeli working sectors as a main income source before the construction of the wall, against 35.9% depend on this source after the construction of the wall, and 21.6% depended on Social assistance before the construction of the wall and 25.1% depend on the same source after the construction of the wall, and

⁹⁷ “Statistical Monitoring of the socio-economic conditions of the Palestinian Society”, Central Bureau of Statistics Issued the third Quarter 2004 Report, <http://www.pcbs.org>, cited on 27/12/2006

20.3% of the Palestinian households in the Palestinian localities effected by the Wall depended on Household projects as a main income source before the construction of the wall, against 19.1% depend on this source after the construction of the wall”⁹⁸.

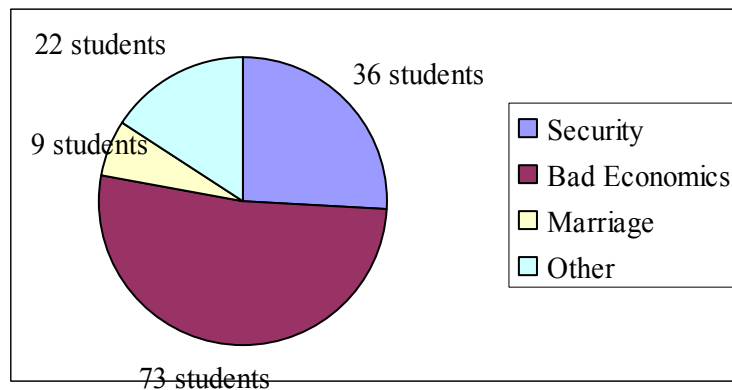
The limited opportunities to work that West Bank offers to young people leads them to search for a job outside the region, usually in neighboring Arab states. Although boys are more often the ones to travel and work abroad, the students expressing their desire to go abroad were both boys and girls. The financial difficulties that the Palestinian society is facing are pushing towards the change of the traditional visions of work and traveling.

Identity creation is considered as the second main value of higher education. The years spend in the university are in West Bank, as all around the world, years of search of one’s self approaching maturity. Independence from the family is connected both to job creation and identity creation. By finding a job a student can become financially independent. At the same time, having formed an identity the student can think and act according to his/her own criteria balancing the power relations inside the family. Politics come last reaffirming the change in the perception that students have of politics, moving from the only focus point to one of the issues that concern the Palestinian youth.

Connected to the financial problems of the Palestinian society, the main reason for a student to drop out of education would be the bad financial condition of his/her family. According to the research conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics on the impact of the expansion and annexation Wall on 2005 it was found that 25.6% of the households taking part in the research had a student dropping out of education for financial reasons⁹⁹.

⁹⁸ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, “Impact of the Expansion and Annexation Wall on the Socio-Economic Conditions of Palestinian Households in the localities in which the Wall Passes through in the West Bank; August 2005”, Press Conference on the Results, February 2006, <http://www.pcbs.org>, cited on 27/12/2006
⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 12

Figure 7: Reasons to drop out of education¹⁰⁰



The presence of Israeli military forces causes anxiety to many of the students that could lead to quitting higher education. A possible worsening in the political situation in the region, which would mean increase in the level of danger in movement and reaching university campus, would force part of the student's body to leave education.

However, 22 students said that nothing could stop them from studying. Ala said: "Education is my right. I will not let the Occupation take this away from me no matter what". Joseph: "If I have to climb mountains to get to the university I will do it. I am not afraid. Nothing can stop me".

Only a minority of the students would quit higher education in order to get married. Of the nine students saying that they would drop out because of the opportunity to get married, 4 were boys and were 5 girls. In the case that a boy would get married, he would be obliged to quit higher education in order to work for the family. But for the girls the situation is quite different. There are many girls who are studying in the university and in many cases it was actually the husband who encouraged the wife to study. This means that a girl has the possibility to decide whether she will continue her studies or not (of course, this decision is connected to the families involved as well).

Quitting education to get married is connected with the way higher education is viewed by part of the population. Higher education is the way for a girl to gain more in value

¹⁰⁰ I preferred to use the actual numbers because some of the students gave more than one answers.

for the future proposals to marriage. University diploma is either one more advantage in the list or it is covering the lack of other qualities that the ideal wife should embody (e.g. beauty, money).

The girls interviewed, thought the diploma to be an advantage that can offer them a good future husband, but they rejected the idea of not finishing university to get married. Manal: “Well, I am not beautiful like most of the girls, so I have to try harder in school. I am doing a double major and I will be able to find a good job when I finish my studies....With my education and a good income I think I will have the same opportunities to have a good marriage like the other girls”.

Marriage as the normal step to be made by the students after graduation has to be planned and it is connected to every stage a person goes through until the time for it has come. Education has its implications on marriage. However, as it was shown by the answers given by the students, education serves the realization of many different goals and is a goal in itself. Considering the high ratio of students enrolling at higher educational institutions, higher education is not thought to be a privilege of the few but a desirable and possible good reached by students of all the social and economical strata of the society.

Higher education in West Bank as all around the world is a procedure through which students construct an individual identity and a national one. But in the case of the Palestinian students this procedure gains in importance considering the social organization and the political situation of the region.

On one hand, the restrictions on movement imposed by the Israeli military forces isolate the Palestinian communities. People living in different cities are detached from each other and the youth doesn't have the possibility to come in contact with new people.

On the other hand, the Palestinian society itself, with the application of rules that organize the movement, diminishes the social life of the youth who in return find an exit in the university space.

Both external and internal factors try to organize and control the life of the young people. The only opportunity that the youth has to move and act more freely is inside the university campus.

Conclusions

Higher education institutions in the West Bank fulfill the same goals as in the case of every establishment of a nation-state. Construction of a national identity, an individual identity and preparation to become active members of the society.

In the case of West Bank, university gains in importance considering the social organization and the political situation of the region. The occupation of the West Bank by Israel and the violations of the right to education attribute a national and political character to the institution of higher education.

For the Palestinian students higher education is not only a right but also an obligation towards the nation and their fight for freedom. The obstacles posed by the Israeli military forces have kept a number of students outside of the university but at the same time made the rest of the students more devoted and determined to be educated.

Checkpoints, curfews, attacks against educational institutions and students have become part of the everyday life of the Palestinian youth who today, after having experienced two uprisings, put the occupation on the background and try to give meaning in their lives detached from the occupation.

Financial difficulties and the anxiety caused by the high level of unemployment have led the students to think of their society and the way it functions not only in connection to the occupation but also to the possibilities of their internal development. After the four years of the last Intifada, the students now tired of the conflict show more anxiety about their individual future. A diploma from a higher educational institution is necessary for them to find a good job inside the West Bank or abroad.

Although politics inside the university still preoccupy the academic life of a part of the students, the large majority only partially is involved considering the dangers of being arrested by the Israeli authorities and the distraction from their studies.

Connected to the internal dynamics of the Palestinian society university space reflects the changes taking place in the political and social realm. The politicization of Islam changes the picture inside the university campus since there is an increase of the students accepting as valid a way of life as it is described in Koran in opposition to western models.

The rise of Islam together with the strong belief in the traditional customs organizes the Palestinian society. The gender divisions of space becomes stricter and the choices of the individuals clearer and on the basis of the needs of the family.

To the same direction lead the controlling of space and of the movement within it as it is used by the Israeli government. Fragmentation of the Palestinian territories and restriction of movement have as a result incapability of communicating between the different regions and the dissolution of social bindings. Universities used to be full of students coming from different parts of the Palestinian Territories but now the majority of the students of a university are residents of the city where the university is located.

This has as a result the isolation of the universities from one another which has a direct impact on the economies and the social life of the cities. Being constantly close to the family the students feel more intensely the control and the need to follow the rules and the wishes of the family.

The students spending their whole life within a city feel more responsible towards the family and the perseverance of a good reputation, while students who live away from the family and the familiar community feel more free to act according to their own wishes.

While public space is considered to be a male space, interaction between the two sexes is very limited and in many cases university is the only possibility for mingling with people of the opposite sex. At the same time, when males occupy public space, girls are quite restricted inside the house close to the family.

The possibilities for the girls to socialize are limited inside the house or shopping with their friends after having the permission from the family. Boys enjoy the possibility to socialize with their friends in cafes or at the street where girls are not welcome.

University becomes for the girls the only place where they can socialize and spend time with their friends without having to ask for permission. For both girls and boys, university space gives the chance to come in contact with people of the opposite sex that are not their relatives.

Higher education offers the student the knowledge they need so that they can be able to form their own way of thinking and their own ideas. The family that plays an important role in making decisions on educational issues seems to recognize the importance of higher education since the position of most of the students inside the family changed after they enrolled to the university. The strict patriarchal relations become more loose in the sense that students have more power and the possibility to express their ideas and being heard from elder members of the family.

Through higher education the students can create their own identity and personality and, at the same time, offers them the possibility to become financially independent from the family.

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