

National Identity Development among Palestinian Student Activists in the Israeli Universities

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Abstract: This paper explores the process of national identity development, and closely related themes among Palestinian student activists in the Israeli universities. Informed by the tradition of social identity theory, in-depth qualitative inquiry was conducted with an intensity sample of 35 Palestinian student activists attending the major five Israeli universities. Grounded theory analysis conducted on the open-ended interviews, document analysis and field observation revealed five dominant themes, which characterize Palestinian student activist. First, national identity was conceived as a cause of involvement in student activism, and as a psychological construct, which was reconstructed and developed through the experience of activism itself. Second, a sense of group relative deprivation in comparison with the dominant Jewish group was prevalent and closely related to the students' sense of national identity. Third, political party membership constitutes a mid-range identity linking the individual and the collective levels of identity. Forth, women student activists advocated an intertwined feminist-nationalist agenda. Finally, psychosocial development and adjustment was

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revealed as an outcome of involvement in student activism. Findings reinforce the vital role of the student movement as a national socialization context in light of the continuing Israeli hegemonic practices over Palestinian formal education.

Theoretical Framework and Context

The founder of the European school of social psychology argued that American social psychology has become too reductionist and individualistic by relying on the “most often unstated assumption that individuals live and behave in a homogeneous social medium” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 49). Tajfel’s argument for a “genuinely social psychology was not a call to study sociology or purely social processes” (Turner, 1996, p. 21). The focus remains on the psychological processes within the individual as they are determined by our memberships in larger social groups. These groups are distinguished from social categories in sociological terms (e.g., all single parents) by virtue of the shared psychological connection and affiliation among their members (Tajfel, 1981). Most relevant to our discussion of Palestinian students as a minority group within the sociopolitical context of the Israeli universities is Tajfel’s statement that, “any society which contains power, status, prestige and social group differentials (and they all do), places each of us in a number of social categories which become an integral part of our self-definition” (1977, p. 66).

The term “social identity” — as used in European social psychology — refers to that part of our self-concept, which is based on our membership in larger social categories (i.e., race, gender, and nation). In American social psychology, the term “collective identity” is used to refer to the same construct, while using “social identity” to refer to our membership in small face-to-face groups (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). The current study is concerned with the concept “social identity” (European terminology) or “collective identity” (American terminology). For matters of consistency, the term “*national identity*” will be applied throughout the discussion unless stated otherwise.

Social identity is defined as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his [or her] knowledge of his [or her] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). There are two components of the self-concept: personal identity, which includes specific individual attributes such as feelings of competence, psychological traits, and personal values; and social identity, which derives from one’s knowledge and feeling about his or her membership in a social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) defines the collective self in terms of membership in larger social categories that do not require face-to-face interaction among their members but are defined by the psychological feeling of “we” versus “they.” Brewer & Gardner (1996) argue that we have two levels of collective selves: “those that derive from interpersonal relationships and interdependence with specific others and those that derive from membership in larger, more impersonal collectives or social categories” (p. 83). While the majority of our social groups memberships are ascribed (i.e., race, gender, ethnicity) we have more freedom in choosing our memberships in small face-to-face social groups. This choice of group membership is explicated by Brewer’s (1991) theory of “optimal distinctiveness” which, indicates that “social identity derives from a fundamental tension between human needs for validation and similarity to others (on the one hand) and countervailing need for uniqueness and individuation (on the other)” (p. 477). We join social groups that provide us with an optimal balance between these two contradictory human needs.

In their social identity theory, Tajfel & Turner (1986) stated that there is a relationship between in-group discrimination and self-esteem. What they meant was that type of self-esteem, which derives from our group membership or that specific social identity. People have a need to maintain positive social identity (Tajfel, 1981) or positive collective self-esteem (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1991) in the same manner they aspire to enhance their personal or global self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). Positive collective self-esteem is achieved through a process of social comparison between the in-group and relevant out-groups (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1991). The relationship between social identity, collective self-esteem and attitudes toward the out-group continues to be paradoxical. Luhtanen and Crocker (1991) cite research showing that in order to enhance their collective self-esteem, people tend to view their in-group more favorably than the out-groups, while at the same time people with high collective self-esteem are found to be less prejudiced against members of the out-group. Furthermore, people with high collective self-esteem are more likely to be “active in causes and activities involving the enhancement of their in-group’s status in society” (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1991, p. 230).

Consistent with social identity theory, the concept relative deprivation and its consequences have been the focus of many disciplines. Stouffer, Suchman, DeVinney, Star & Williams (1949) first introduced the term relative deprivation in their classic study *The American Soldier*. In that study the authors found that higher-ranking officers who expected promotion but did not receive it felt more relative deprivation than lower ranking soldiers who did not have such expectations. Gurr (1970), in his

classic book *Why Men Rebel*, defines relative deprivation from a political science perspective as “the actor’s perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities” (p. 24). Consequently, people “rebel against their condition not when they are deprived in an absolute sense but when they ‘feel’ deprived relative to some comparison persons or groups” (Guimond & Dube-Simard, 1983, p. 526).

Runciman (1966) differentiated between egoistic (or individual) relative deprivation and fraternalistic (or group) relative deprivation. Individualistic relative deprivation is the case when individuals compare their situation to other individuals from their in-group, while in the case of group relative deprivation; individuals feel that their in-group as a whole is deprived in comparison to relevant out-groups. The group component of relative deprivation was found to correlate closely with individuals’ sense of ethnic identity among Italian immigrants in Australia (Petta & Walker, 1992).

Another important distinction in the concept of relative deprivation is made between its cognitive and affective components (De La Rey & Ruja, 1996; Guimond & Dube-Simard, 1983; Olson & Hafer, 1996; Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). These researchers argue that relative deprivation involves “a perceived negative discrepancy between one’s own or one’s group’s position and some referent as well as feeling of discontent” (Olson & Hafer, 1996, p. 85). Walker and Pettigrew (1984) call this the “cold” and “hot” components of relative deprivation, and argue that it is the affective component, which motivates involvement in collective action on behalf of the in-group. Research findings indicate that it is not clear whether the cognitive and affective components of relative deprivation are independent from each other or intertwined (Olson & Hafer, 1996).

Thus far, we have discussed concepts of social identity theory and relevant theoretical developments such as collective self-esteem and relative deprivation. Developmental psychology, and particularly psychosocial development theory provides another important aspect of the theoretical grounding of this study. The most important contribution of Erikson’s psychosocial development theory is his introduction of the concept ego identity development during adolescence. Erikson believed that the healthy personality actively masters the environment, shows a certain unity of personality, and is able to perceive the world and the self correctly. None of these aspects exists in the newborn child and identity development involves acquiring different kinds of ego strengths as we resolve positively each of the life crises we encounter. In each stage we build strength of the ego (Erikson, 1968).

Personal identity is broadly defined as the organization of the individual’s drives, abilities, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences into a

consistent image of themselves. Personal identity also involves choices and decisions regarding vocation, sexual orientation and a philosophy of life (Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer & Orlofsky, 1993). Erikson (1968) maintains that the central issue for adolescents is the search for identity and the conscious attempt to answer the question "Who am I?" Similar to the rest of his psychosocial developmental stages, this identity crisis could lead either to positive outcomes of identity achievement or to negative outcomes defined as identity confusion.

Erikson recognized the existence of two components of ego identity. The first aspect is the *inner-focused*, which is the person's recognition of his or her self-sameness and continuity over time. It is our ability to know and accept oneself, or the personal aspect of identity. The second is the *outer-focused* aspect, which is the individual's recognition of, and identification with, the ideals and essential patterns of his or her culture. It includes sharing some kind of essential character with others. This might be seen as the collective or social aspect of identity (Erikson, 1968).

Erikson (1968) devoted one chapter of his book, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, to the concept of racial identity development focusing on African-Americans adolescents. His view of the collective component of identity development highlights both the developmental stage of the individual, and the historical moment during which the awareness of one's racial or ethnic identity becomes salient. Despite Erikson's clear recognition of both the personal and collective aspects of identity, most researchers working with his model focused on the individual component of identity development and ignored the collective or social component. Erikson's (1968) theory of ego identity development, especially the notion of identity achievement vs. identity diffusion, was operationalized and expanded by James Marcia (1966). Marcia developed a research paradigm that measures four possible outcomes as a result of the struggle with the identity crisis during adolescence, and making a commitment to a specific identity.

Marcia (1966, 1980), classified adolescents into four different levels or statuses of identity development. First, identity *achieved* is the status in which after considering the realistic options, the individual has made choices and is committed to pursuing them. Second, adolescents in the *moratorium* status are struggling with their identity crisis but consciously delay making a commitment to a specific identity. Third, identity *foreclosure* refers to adolescents who do not experiment with different identities but simply make a commitment to the goals, values and lifestyles of others, usually their parents. Finally, adolescents in the identity *diffused* status, reach no conclusion about who they are, have no firm direction of future and make no commitment to a specific type of identity (Marcia et al., 1993). The way by which adolescents develop their

sense of ethnic-racial identity—or any other social identity for that matter—received no attention in Marcia's (1966, 1980) model of identity development.

There is wide range of ethnic-racial identity development models in the literature (Phinney, 1990). What is common for most of these models is the conceptualization of ethnic identity as a developmental process that is not age specific (i.e., not limited to adolescence). Furthermore, without exception these models have been developed for specific ethnic-racial groups, which limit their ability to explain similar processes of ethnic-racial identity development across ethnic groups. In her research program on ethnic identity development among ethnic minority adolescents, Jean Phinney (1989) developed a model that is "consonant with Marcia's (1980) ego identity statuses, that reflects the stages and issues described in the ethnic identity literature, and that can be applied across several ethnic groups" (p. 36).

Phinney's (1989) model includes three stages. The first is the *unexamined* ethnic identity stage in which minority adolescents "initially accept the values and attitudes of the majority culture, including, often internalized negative views of their own group held by the majority" (Phinney, 1993, p. 66). Second, ethnic identity *search/moratorium* is characterized by a period of exploration into one's sense of ethnic identity, which comes after the experience of a turning point or a critical incident. Third, adolescents who reach the stage of ethnic identity *achievement* demonstrate a clear and confident sense of their own ethnicity. According to Phinney's (1989) model, adolescents move from a stage of unexamined ethnic identity, through a stage of searching to ethnic identity achievement. There is evidence in the literature indicating a positive correlation between higher stages of ethnic identity and personal self-esteem (Phinney, 1995; Phinney & Chavira, 1992).

Individuals who were in the higher stages of ethnic-racial identity development, (Phinney, 1989; Cross, 1991), were found to be actively involved in cultural and political activities which involve their ethnic identity. It might be inferred that cultural and political ethnic group related activities strengthen the individual's sense of ethnic identity. Phinney's (1990) research on ethnic identity development includes college students (participants were ages 17-23) and has shown that the process of ethnic identity development continues throughout the early twenties. Models of racial identity development (Cross, 1991) view entering predominantly White colleges for many racial minority students as the encounter stage or turning point from which the individual goes through a process of exploration leading to racial identity achievement.

Unlike many ethnic minority groups living in Western societies, the

Palestinian citizens of Israel did not immigrate to the new state; rather, the state as a colonial-settler project was imposed on them, serving the interests of the Zionist settlers at the expense of the national goals of the indigenous Palestinian people. In 1948, the state of Israel was established consequential to an ethnic cleansing campaign leading to the mass explosion of more than two thirds of the indigenous Palestinian population, leaving a fragile minority behind (Morris, 1989). The dramatic change in the status of the Palestinians who fell under Israel's control was traumatic enough that it took them a few years to realize its impact on their collective existence. Almost overnight, they were transformed from a majority living in their own country to a defeated minority who was forced to live, work and study in an alienating system (Minns & Hijab, 1990). Since then, this population has grown from 160 thousands to over one million, making 20% of the state's population.

Most social researchers studying the collective identity of the Palestinians in Israel focused mainly on the label chosen by research participants to indicate their collective identification and then considered this label as collective identity itself. Furthermore, the most common comparison in the literature has been made between the use of the labels "Palestinian" and "Israeli" in order to explain the degree to which these Palestinians have internalized the Israeli identity (Hofman, 1977; Hofman & Rouhana, 1976; Hofman & Beit-Hallahmi, 1979; Rouhana, 1997; Zak, 1976). Among the many labels used in referring to these Palestinians, the term "non-Jews" is used repeatedly in the Israeli official documents as if they were culturally and nationally colorless! While most of the research about the topic focuses on the content or structure of the Palestinian collective identity, the process by which the national component of this identity (i.e., Arab-Palestinian) is constructed and developed seems to receive passing attention.

Rouhana (1997) developed a three-dimensional model delineating what he calls the "conflicting principles" that define Israel's policy towards its Palestinian citizens and consequently their collective identity and political behavior. These principles are that Israel was established as a "Jewish state", that it defines itself as a Western democracy, and that it has extraordinary security concerns stemming from its conflict with the Palestinian people. According to Rouhana (1989), "a state that is defined as belonging to only one people, when its population is composed of two, cannot offer equal opportunities to all its citizens" (p. 40). The recognition of their Palestinian national identity challenges the Zionist claim that Palestine was "a land without people."

Arab education in Palestine has never been run the Palestinian community itself, but rather dominated by external authorities reflecting

their culture and political interests in the region. The situation involving Palestinian education in Israel is even more polarized. While the Palestinians aspire to use their education in order to preserve their national identity and culture, the Israeli authorities retain antithetical goals. They exploit formal education in order to repress national awareness among Palestinian students, and insist on maintaining tight control over the entire educational process, its goals and content (Graham-Brown, 1984). Discrimination against Palestinian schools in budget and infrastructure is prevalent. As reported by the Human Rights Watch (2001) Palestinian schools in Israel suffer from systematic discrimination in budget, school building, support services, teacher qualifications and much more. Neglect and lack of investment in Palestinian education is a well-known practice of the Israeli Ministry of Education for many decades (Mari, 1985; Al-Haj, 1995; Human Rights Watch, 2001).

Failing to define acceptable formal goals for Palestinian education did not prevent the Ministry of Education from striving to drain its cultural and national content. According to Mari (1987), the de-facto goals of Palestinian education set by the Israeli government are threefold: "to instill feelings of self-disparagement and inferiority in Arab youth; to de-nationalize them, and particularly to de-Palestinize them; and to teach them to glorify the history, culture, and achievements of the Jewish majority" (p. 37). Given the choice, the Palestinians would assign the exact opposite goals for their education. They would expect it to "preserve and reinforce Arab national identity - particularly their Palestinian identity - and to instill pride in their own culture, heritage, and nationality; and if it were up to them, the education of their youth would engage in condemning Zionism, rather than praising and glorifying it" (Mari, 1987, p. 37).

Cultural hegemony as manifested in the educational goals set for Palestinian education in Israel has been prevalent and well documented in the literature (Mari, 1987; Al-Haj, 1995; Makkawi, 1999, 2002). The major theme that runs across these educational objectives is the fact that the Israeli Ministry of Education is concerned mainly with the cultural identity of its Jewish students. Palestinian students are not only deprived from similar national education, but are taught to respect and glorify the culture of the Jewish majority. The infusion of such an educational content into the students' minds is not a simple process, and resistance by the students as "human agents" in such an educational process is highly expected outcome (Giroux, 1983).

Two contradictory educational processes are in competition over the Palestinian students' national identity: identity blurring through formal education, and identity enhancement through non-formal education.

Palestinian community organizations involved in non-formal education have not only bridged the gap created by the school system, but actively reconstructed and sustained a strong sense of Palestinian national identity. Mari (1987) concluded more than a decade ago that "as far as this specific point is concerned, the struggle is over, from the Arab viewpoint: identity is maintained and reinforced" (p. 39). Despite all this, the Israeli government is still applying a "computer model" to the Palestinian educational process. The curricula used in the Palestinian schools are still lacking relevance to Palestinian national identity and culture. The pool of high school graduates from which Palestinian university students are selected "is molded to a large degree by this [educational] system" (Nakhleh, 1977, p. 35).

Higher education has two domains of values: socioeconomic and sociopolitical (Mari, 1979). The economic value prevails when higher education provides the individual with potential chances for upward socioeconomic mobility, while politically; higher education is valued when it is relevant to the sociopolitical needs of the individual and society. According to Mari (1979), "non-economic values of higher education seem to have special significance to developing societies as they try to develop national and political identification with their respective nation state" (p. 435). The gloom picture of unemployment among Palestinian university graduates in Israel is a well-documented reality (Al-Haj, 1988; Rekhess, 1987; Smooha, 1988). Lack of economic reward is not the only reason behind the low ratio of Palestinian university students in Israel. The poor level of formal education and the university entrance exams create an additional set of barriers. Graham-Brown (1984) argues that the university entrance exam "has been criticized in some quarters in the West as containing inbuilt cultural assumptions which favor those who come from the dominant culture or social class" (p. 57).

The ratio of Palestinian students to the total student population is significantly low comparable to that of the Jewish students. In 1989/90 Palestinian students composed 5.4% of the general student population in the Israeli universities, whereas the Palestinians composed 16% of the total Israeli population (Al-Haj, 1995, p. 193). Universities are the only educational institutions in Israel where Palestinian and Jewish students are fully integrated. In fact, they are the only situations in which Palestinians and Jews, as individuals, engage in direct interaction with each other on a presumably equal base as students. It is because of this "integration" that the universities find it difficult to apply double standards in their attempt to inhibit Palestinian students' political activism while allowing Jewish students the freedom of political organization. Hence, the relationship between the Palestinian students and the

university authorities is conflictive and corresponds to the government's problematic policy towards the Palestinians at large.

Palestinian students are socially and politically alienated due to the educational context of the universities being in contradiction with their national aspirations. Nakhleh (1979), argues that the "Israeli universities are dominated by Jewish-Zionist ideology, and this ideological basis frequently gets reinforced by rituals ... such context places heavy sanctions on an Arab nationalist expression" (p. 113). For the majority of Palestinian students in the Israeli universities this peculiar educational context is challenging and suitable for their involvement in political activism, which in turn illuminates their national identity and political consciousness. Despite the low proportion of Palestinian students in the Israeli universities, their existence is intensely noticeable on all campuses due to their high level of political activism (Makkawi, 1999).

Palestinian students maintain their rights to organize themselves in independent frameworks separate from the General Student Union (GSU). Embedded in the dominant culture of the Israeli universities, the GSU is "dominated by the majority Jewish students who do not cater to the specific needs of Arab students" (Zureik, 1979, p. 176). Despite their legitimate argument that as a national minority group, they have different national and cultural needs, which are not on the agenda of the GSU, the university authorities vehemently refuse to recognize their student organizations. This strange situation of being neither illegal nor recognized was illustrated in a statement by the head of the National Union of Arab Students (NUAS): "the national union is not formally recognized by the university authorities, but there is de-facto recognition: They approach us when there are problems, and we approach them" (Machul, 1984, p. 61). Recognizing their student organizations imply de-facto recognition of their national identity as Palestinians; a reality, which is systematically denied and suppressed by the authorities of the Israeli universities.

Palestinian student groups linked themselves with political organizations throughout the community who shared their political references and ideological affiliations. The central goal of the student organizations has been to maintain and affirm their national and cultural identity as part of the Palestinian people within the parameters of their social and political reality. As such, student activities at the university are viewed as one of the most comprehensive social and political educational processes Palestinian youth experience. Similar to any form of social movement, these students are active and organized in small groups who share similar ideological perceptions and belief systems. Student activists construct their national identity and express it through their membership and involvement as active group members, not as isolated individuals.

Ethnic identity among political activists is theorized to constitute a cause and an outcome of the process of activism at the same time. It might be suggested that a certain level of awareness of one's ethnic identity predicts activism and the more one becomes involved in activism, the stronger becomes his or her sense of ethnic identity. When Palestinian students in Israel graduate from high schools and enter the universities they experience an encounter or shocking event similar to students of color entering predominantly White institutions. Unlike segregated high schools where the expression of nationalistic sentiment is severely repressed, due to the "integrated" nature of the Israeli universities, albeit repressive of Palestinian nationalism, the students have more room for political activism. Consequently, national identity is viewed as a developmental process that takes a new momentum among Palestinian students at the university, a process which is qualitatively different from their high school experiences.

Design and Methodology

My role as a researcher returning to study his own community, after a decade of training and work in Western academic institutions, does not fit nicely into any one of James Banks' (1998) four typologies of cross-cultural researchers (indigenous-insider, indigenous-outsider, external-insider, external-outsider). In fact, my own "cover story" as a researcher (Glense & Peshkin, 1992)—which was my real story after all—included my genuine commitment to the cause and the goals of the Palestinian Student Movement. That was my "access ticket" to the site, and the main reason the students trusted me and shared their stories and dilemmas with me.

Obtaining sufficient trust at the first "gate" to the site created yet another problematic level of trust when I moved among the various groups of student activists in the field. One cannot be involved in Palestinian activism, or any type of collective activism for that matter, and not be identified with one group of activists or another. The students knew that in order to be an activist—which I told them that I was in the 1980s—you must be affiliated with a specific political organization, and they repeatedly pressured me to share with them my political affiliation. I insisted that I was interested in the impact of the student movement as a whole and not interested in differences among the various political groups.

The students put my "story" to the test several times before they were able to trust me, especially when they were competing among themselves in preparation for their committee elections. Only when I was able to establish my credibility by keeping information confidential when I moved from one group of activists to another, they allowed me to attend

their most private organizational meetings. Using this realization as a take off point for this research project, it was clear to me that the first step in this research project would be to “find out what is going on” with today’s Palestinian student activists in the Israeli universities. In this manner, this inquiry was divided into two sequential phases, an exploratory (or a pilot) phase and a follow-up phase, which was designed and carried out after initial findings, were identified.

The first step was to gain access to the site, establish contact with Palestinian student activists, and select a small sample of activists for the exploratory round of interviews. In addition, participant observation was conducted and documents were collected for analysis. The exploratory phase of the study was conducted during the summer of 1996 with a sample of Palestinian student activists attending Haifa, Tel-Aviv and Ben-Gurion universities in Israel. It included a five week long participant observation, daily writing of field notes, in-depth interviews with 17 student activists (12 males and 5 females) and the collection of over 1,500 documents, newspaper articles and communiqués issued by the various Palestinian students groups. Student activists were interviewed concerning the nature of their initial contact with the group of which they were members, their activities, group membership, commitment, self-concept and identity, and their perceptions regarding commitment to activism. All the interviews were conducted in Arabic, then transcribed and translated into English and analyzed for the identification of common themes and categories.

A number of categories were initially identified through the first round of analysis of the transcripts. Briefly, these initial categories include the following: (1) This cohort of Palestinian student activists took initiative in reactivating and reviving the Palestinian Student Movement in the Israeli universities following a few years of non-activism. (2) Participants expressed a strong sense of political awareness and commitment to the Palestinian cause. (3) National identity as Arab-Palestinian was strongly expressed as more salient than personal identities. (4) The majority of today’s student activists came from families with high levels of political awareness and activism. (5) In addition to the general Palestinian cause, they were involved in the struggle for equality and civil rights for the Palestinian national minority in Israel. (6) There was a special focus on issues of discrimination against them as minority students in the Israeli universities. (7) Participants blamed their formal educational system for alienating them from their national and cultural identity. (8) There was a strong sense of party identity and commitment to their specific political organization. (9) The small face-to-face groups of activists were viewed as important contexts for the development of social

relationships and adjustment to college life. (10) Female student activists expressed awareness of the need to address women's issues as part of the political-social agenda of their student organizations. (11) There was an indication that involvement in student activism had contributed to the individual's psychological and social development. (12) The experience of student activism was perceived as extensive processes of socialization for Palestinian youth. (13) They attributed the tendency to persist as activists to internal factors, and attributed possible tendencies for disengagement to external factors.

Following this exploratory phase, a semi-structured in-depth interview schedule was developed in order to delve deeper into these categories. The goal was to investigate if there was substantial support for the existence of the initial themes among another sample of Palestinian student activists. Participants in the second round of the in-depth interviews were selected based on intensity sampling procedures used in heuristic qualitative research. The goal was to select a sample that consisted of information-rich cases that manifested the experience of Palestinian student activists (Patton, 1990).

The sample was not intended to be a representative of the broader population of Palestinian student activists. It was purposefully selected to consist of the leaders of the various Palestinian student organizations in the five major Israeli universities. Following initial contacts, which were established during the exploratory phase of the study in 1996, all student organizations in Haifa University, the Technion Institute, Tel-Aviv University, Ben-Gurion University and the Hebrew University were contacted in 1997-98. Ten groups of Palestinian student activists were identified in these five universities. An attempt was made to interview two leader activists of each group. When the first two activists in a given group were both males, the following most active female student in the group was selected to replace one of them for an interview. In this way, the sample reflected the appropriate distribution of men and women in the student activists' population. A total of 18 student activists (12 males and 6 females) were interviewed during the second phase of the study.

Participants

It is a common practice among qualitative researchers to describe in detail their research participants, or at least describe their general characteristics with some changes in their names and identifying information. Introducing the students with whom this study was conducted would be essential in order to provide real life meaning to the study itself. However, working with research participants in a politically charged environment such as the one under discussion raises another important

concern. How much can a researcher disclose about his or her participants without exposing them to undo harm? Anyone reading the study who is familiar with the political context of the Palestinians in Israel would be able to identify at least some of the participants even after we change their names, the names of their cities and villages, the names of the universities which they attend, and the name of their political organizations. Too much change from the original identity of each participant was required. This might especially be a problem if we describe them individually. However, at least a general introduction of the students who participated in the study is still important. In order to resolve the quandary between bringing the real people into the study, and yet keeping them anonymous for their own protection, I decided to describe them broadly as a group.

Seventeen Palestinian student activists participated in the exploratory phase of the study in the summer of 1996 and 18 were interviewed in the second phase of the study in the fall of 1997-98. Only one student participated in both rounds of interviews. Overall, 35 Palestinian student activists participated in both rounds of the qualitative interviews and they are described as one group.

There were 11 females and 24 males in the entire sample. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 26 years old. Five participants identified themselves as activists of *Abna al-Balad* (non-parliamentary Marxist-Palestinian nationalist organization), 11 as *Jabha* (affiliated with the Israeli Communist Party), 16 *Tajammu* (newly formed parliamentary organization with diverse individuals and political groups) and three as *Islamic Movement* (newly established student branch of the Islamic Movement).

There were 21 Participants from the *Galilee*, 11 from the *Triangle*, two from the *Negev* and one from the *Center*. There were 20 participants from Arab-Palestinian cities, eight from mixed cities and 15 from Arab-Palestinian villages. There were 13 participants who attended Haifa University, three attended the Technion Institute, seven attended Tel-Aviv University, seven attended Ben-Gurion University, and six attended the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. There were 29 participants who came from activist families, that encouraged and supported them and six participants were raised in non-activist families and received no support for their activism. Majors of studies included medicine, law, engineering, natural sciences, social sciences and humanities.

Data Analysis

The initial categories were identified from the transcripts of the first round of exploratory interviews in the summer of 1996, using grounded

theory development techniques (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). These categories were presented as papers in the American Educational Research Association 1997, the International Education Week at Kent State University 1997 and several graduate classes in qualitative research methodology. Critical feedback about the identification, accuracy, meaning and representation of these categories, and ongoing discussions which were inspired by the presentations, have led to constant revision and refining of the emerging categories. Furthermore, member check was conducted on these categories with student participants during the second phase of the study in the fall of 1997. Member check indicated that the participants recognized these categories and themes as representative of their perceptions and behaviors. As one male student activist attending Haifa University indicated, "of course our main goal is to preserve our Palestinian-national identity under these circumstances, and all these topics you came up with are just different manifestations of this identity."

Other sources of information included, over 1500 documents, which were collected from the field. They included communiqués issued by the various organizations, political programs or platforms of the various student organizations, annual reports of their activities, newspaper articles, and correspondence with the university authorities, one-time publications, and advertisements for various activities. These documents were used primarily for triangulation of the emerging themes.

The initial thirteen categories were as close to the data and the terminology used by the participants as possible. The next step in the data analysis was clustering these categories into a smaller number of meaningful themes. These themes were inspired by the data itself as well as by the theoretical framework of the study. As mentioned earlier, the theoretical framework of the study is informed by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), relative deprivation theory (Walker & Pettigrew, 1984) and ethnic identity development in adolescence (Phinney, 1989).

Boyatzis (1998) suggests a three-level continuum for the development of coding systems used for thematic analysis in qualitative research. At one extreme of the continuum is a *data* driven coding system in which codes are developed directly from a small sample of interviews and then applied to the rest of the data to identify common themes. This coding system was used in the exploratory phase of the study when initial categories were grounded directly in the data. On the middle of the continuum, coding systems can be based on prior *research* findings. On the other end of the continuum there is *theory* driven code development. After examination of the initial categories and review of the literature on social identity and related topics, it became clear that these categories could be grouped based on existing theoretical notions. A coding system

for the five dominant themes was developed and used to identify themes in the second phase of the study (see Table 1).

Table 1: Coding System for Emerging Themes

| Themes | Examples of Topics and Statements |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| National Identity | Being Palestinian is an important part of the self-concept; awareness of the Palestinian national cause and its history; pan-Arab nationalism; pride in Arab civilization and heritage; commitment to serve one's people; activism makes you feel a worthy person; occupation (West-Bank & Gaza), Palestinian state & solution; integral part of the Palestinian people but citizens of Israel; Israel as a Jewish state vs. a state for all of its citizens. |
| Group Relative Deprivation | Equality and civil rights; discrimination in budget for local authorities; land confiscation—becoming a proletarian class; citizenship status—military service as a precondition for civil rights; lack of nationally and culturally relevant school curriculum; discrimination at the university—scholarships, lodgings, activities; discrimination in the job market—political screening. |
| Party Identification and Commitment | Groups included: <i>Jabha, Tajammu, Abna al-Balad, Islamic Movement</i> ; attachment, support and commitment to the group; student groups as extensions of community organizations; intergroup cooperation and competition; importance of the small face-to-face group on campus; the party as a mid-range identification: Personal identity > Party identity > National identity. |
| Between Nationalism and Feminism | Arab society is oppressive of women; fight all forms of oppression; combine the national and social struggles; fighting for a Palestinian state which may end up oppressing women; great lesson from Palestinian women of the <i>Intifada</i> ; not to repeat the experience of Algerian women; hypocrisy of Palestinian male activists—politically progressive but socially conservative. |
| Social and Psychological Adjustment | Become stronger person through the experience of activism; enhancement of leadership and social skills; more political awareness and knowledge; more social confidence in public; satisfied with oneself; it feels good when people appreciate what you do; activism enhances self-esteem. |

Findings

National Identity

A clear sense of Arab-Palestinian national identity was salient among the whole group of participants. In fact, national identity as an Arab-Palestinian was perceived by the participants as both the cause of their involvement in student activism and as something that was constructed and further developed through the experience of activism itself. This sense of national identity was much more complex than self-identification or the choice of a specific label to describe their collective identity. National identity also included a strong sense of national consciousness, the individual's daily behavior, and collective action on behalf of the group's national cause, deep feelings of national pride, and the perception of national identity as part of the individual's self-concept.

In terms of the literature on ethnic identity development (Phinney, 1989, 1992) this group of Palestinian student activists seems to have gone through a process of exploration of their own sense of national identity and what it means to them. They can be safely described as national identity achieved. While most of these participants were raised in activist families that encouraged their national awareness, a few of them have explored and developed their sense of national identity on their own — which at times involved conflict with their parents because of their political activism. However, both groups were similar in the degree of their national awareness and commitment. Let's compare students who were raised in different families as far as political activism is concerned. A female student activist attending the Hebrew University said:

I grew up in a family where the first rule has always been that "you are living in order to give-and-take, not only to take." Since I was in the first grade, my mother made sure that I always serve on my class committee. I had to be involved in something else in addition to my own education. There is no doubt that my family had the most important impact on my political involvement.

Another female student activist attending Tel-Aviv University was also raised in a political activist family, in which, nationalistic consciousness and political awareness were part of the children's socialization. She explains:

I remember since I was very young, even children's songs that I learned were revolutionary and nationalistic songs. Political education was rooted in my socialization through children's songs and stories and much more.

In contrast, a male student activist from Tel-Aviv University, who

was brought up in a different family background, described the reactions of his family, especially his father, to his involvement in political activism and the conflict around this involvement:

I am like any Arab youth who leaves home right after high school with his parents warning him over and over again to stay away from politics and focus mainly on school work as the most important thing. My father is very concerned. He is a nationalist person but he does not like us to be involved in politics. With time you develop your own personality. To be honest with you, there was the opposite of support from my family. Until today I have lots of arguments with my father.

Let's examine the concept of self-identification in the responses of four student activists. A female student activist says: "I define myself as an Arab-Palestinian, Israeli citizen." Yet another female student activist agrees with her by saying: "If I have to define myself, I will define myself as an Arab-Palestinian who carries the Israeli identity card." A male student activist was surprised that I even asked him this question: "I am an Arab-Palestinian period. This issue is nonnegotiable for me." Fourth male student activist points out the contradiction between his national identity and the political reality imposed on him: "I am an Arab-Palestinian who is resisting the reality in which he lives. This is my self-definition." Notice the conscious attempt to avoid using the label "Israeli" in their self-definitions, which indicates their awareness that an "Israeli" identity does not include their nationality.

A question regarding the choice of a label to describe their national identity was included in a larger survey of 261 Palestinian students. Almost half the sample (46.6%) chose the label Arab-Palestinian. Other labels were Palestinian (13.9%), Arab (6.8%), Israeli-Arab (7.6%), Israeli-Palestinian (6.0%), and "Other" (29.2%). The label "Other" was equally divided between those who included the term *in Israel* in combination with Palestinian or Arab and those who included the term Moslem in their identity. No one in the entire sample chose the label "Israeli" alone. Furthermore, participants indicated similar distributions of labels, which they believed their parents would choose to describe their (the parents') national identity (Makkawi, 1999).

Arabic as the national language of these Palestinian students forms an important component of their sense of national identity. When asked about the importance of being an Arab-Palestinian to her self-concept, a female student activist majoring in journalism emphasized the importance of her language and history to her national identity. She had strongly expressed her sentimental attachment to her people and the collective self-esteem she derived from that attachment.

I don't believe that people belong to the state as an institution to which they pay taxes and receive education and other social services. I feel that people belong more to their language. I speak Arabic fluently and I feel that the best way I can express myself is in Arabic. Being an Arab goes back to my language, my civilization, even the Islamic civilization despite the fact that I am not a Moslem. My Palestinian identity means more to me. Maybe the suffering we live through led us to hold stronger onto our Palestinian identity. In my opinion, and I don't say that as an expression of supremacy toward the rest of the Arabs, but I feel that the Palestinians are very, very, very distinctive people.

Another male student activist majoring in Biology was adamant about the use of Arabic as his national language especially at the university as an institution, which was established in order to serve the culture of the majority group, and suppresses the manifestation of his national language.

Arabic is my language, it is an official language; I am proud of it and will use it everywhere. The head of the security at the university says that "this is a Hebrew university and any communiqué we issue in Arabic must have a simultaneous translation into Hebrew." We said in our argument "fine, but why don't we have Arabic translation for the communiqués written in Hebrew as well?" They said "no, this is a Hebrew university and everybody knows Hebrew but not everybody knows Arabic." When I present a movie in Arabic and all the activities of the Arab Students Committee are in Arabic, I will advertise for it in Arabic. They said, "what if someone comes to see that Arabic movie you present?" I said, "if anyone comes to see a movie in Arabic that means they know Arabic, and if they know Arabic then they should be able to read the communiqué in Arabic, but if they don't know Arabic then why are they coming to the movie at the first place?"

The Israeli universities as sociopolitical contexts suppress the development of national identity among Palestinian students (Nakhleh, 1979). Unlike American predominantly White institutions where there is a majority culture and several minority groups on campus, Israeli universities cater mainly to the needs of the dominant Jewish group with Palestinian students being the only minority group on campus. Not only that, but the existing history of the Palestinian cause and the strong need to assert Palestinian identity within that conflict makes the polarization between the two groups even sharper. Consider how a Palestinian female student activist explains her search for her communal belonging at the university.

See, when I enrolled in the psychology department we were only two Arab students out of 150 Jewish students. When you enter a lecture hall, it

becomes very evident that you are a minority even in terms of your feelings since you have no people around you. I used to go look for other Arab students between classes. There was an area where all the Arab students hang out, which we called *Sahat Falastin* (Palestine Hall), which is the 600 Hall. In this Hall it feels like you are going there to search for your belonging. We used to go there and meet other Arab students. Even if I did not know these students it was enough to hear people speak Arabic around me. It made me feel that I belong and helped me a lot.

Another female student majoring in English would rather attend an Arab university. But instead of enrolling in an Arab-Palestinian university in the West-Bank—where very few Palestinians from within Israel do—she would like to have an Arab university, where instruction is conducted in Arabic, being established within Israel.

I would love to study in an Arab university. It does not feel the same when we study in Hebrew. If we have an Arab university I would go there. It is more important to feel in an Arab environment. When you have an Arab university and everybody speaks Arabic it feels much better. Psychologically, it feels different.

In fact, this demand has been advanced by the Palestinians in Israel since the early 1980s and has been consistently rejected by the various Israeli governments (Al-Sawt, 1981). An Arab university project is viewed from the Palestinian perspective as an institution which would help preserve and develop their civilization and existing national identity in their historic homeland. This of course is in sharp contradiction with the Zionist claim about the non-existence of the Palestinian people with culture and heritage in the same land, hence the adamant rejection of the university project.

Documents, which were collected from the field, provided valid support for the information obtained from the students in the interviews. A number of communiqués were reviewed for the purpose of triangulation. The students who participated in the interviews were recognized as leaders and active members of the political groups that issued these communiqués. The consistency between their statements and the information included in the documents provided sufficient support for the findings.

It is not enough that Palestinian students assert their belonging to the Arab-Palestinian people as an indication of their sense of national identity, but there is also a need to assert that the Palestinian people are recognized as a nation with a legitimate right for self-determination. It makes little sense to affirm your belonging to a nation without this nation being recognized as having all the qualifications for national self-determination. Hence the dialectical relationship between the arguments that Palestinians are a nation with the right for a national

homeland and that the Palestinians in Israel are an integral part of that nation. For example, a communiqué entitled “In the Commemoration of the *Nakbah* (Catastrophe)” was issued by *The Democratic Student Coalition*—Jerusalem (no date) included the following statement:

Our people faced a disaster as a result of the destruction of their national entity, the collapse of their social structure and the disruption of their progress and development. Furthermore, their villages and cities were destroyed and Jewish villages and cities were built on their remnants as part of a comprehensive plan to change the character of this homeland. The Palestinian people, their entity and national aspirations did not disappear as predicted by the leadership of the Zionist Movement at the time of the *Nakbah*. These aspirations, still alive and impact the political developments not only in the Arab-Israeli conflict, but also in the internal life of Israel itself.

Obviously, Palestinian student activists who are members of these political organizations subscribe to these statements. In fact, the activist participants in this study took part in writing and distributing these communiqués themselves. The accounts they gave in the interviews were not only consistent with this documentation of Palestinian national identity but also revealed a personal passion and commitment to defend and advocate the right for national identity and self-determination.

Group Relative Deprivation

As citizens of the state of Israel, participants perceived that their ethnic-national group, the Arab-Palestinians in Israel, when compared to the Jewish majority group was experiencing institutionalized discrimination, inequality and an overall state of relative deprivation. This cognitive perception of relative deprivation was associated with feelings of injustice, anger and frustration, which in turn led to their involvement in political action on behalf of the interests of their group. Furthermore, there was an apparent distinction between their personal sense of relative deprivation as individuals and their sense of relative deprivation as a group. When individual participants did not feel that they were deprived as individuals, they still insisted that the group at large was not receiving what they perceived as its legitimate right. Let's first consider this clear distinction between individual and group relative deprivation. A female student activist who was highly successful as an individual puts it this way:

There are two sides of the issue, which I think, are very connected, but still I can talk about them separately. One is the individual side for me. As an individual, I have accomplished so many things in my life. In graduate school for example, there was a strong competition for the M.A. program and I was among the very few who were admitted. This gave me

lots of confidence in my accomplishments as an individual. I have the same thing in other areas like work for example. I work in a job that had a very long selection process, and I succeeded in that as well. Personally, these accomplishments give me lots of confidence in myself.

This sense of self-fulfillment as an individual, changes in a dramatic way as the same participant shifts the focus to the condition of her social group, the Palestinians in Israel in general. She is articulate, concise and clear in describing both her awareness and resentment about the condition of her group.

On the other hand, I belong to the oppressed group. For example, when I come to the university I see that all the janitors are Arabs. When I go to a restaurant, it is evident that the group to which I belong is the one doing the unskilled labor. They are the oppressed class. At some point, as an individual I can talk about my personal accomplishments, which gives me self-confidence and satisfaction. But on the other hand, on the collective level where I feel strong attachment—I don't feel that I am an individual who can do whatever she wants and move on with life—my feelings towards my group make me feel first of all unhappy. Not unhappy for belonging to the group, but unhappy about the situation of the group itself. Maybe at some point it makes me feel inferior that my group is the one that is working in the unskilled labor and serving the other group. The contradiction here, when I go to a restaurant or when I am at the university it seems as if I am with the Jewish group—I am with the group that had accomplished things. But, on the other hand, most of the people who do the cleaning jobs are Arab people, the people to whom I belong.

Being successful as an individual, obviously this student activist is not experiencing a state of individualistic relative deprivation. However, insisting that it is rather her ethnic-national group, which is experiencing a state of group relative deprivation, indicates a strong relationship between group identity and group relative deprivation. In response to the same question, a male student activist attending Tel-Aviv University gave a detailed comparison between the employment opportunities available to an Arab and a Jewish citizen of the state of Israel.

There are no equal opportunities for both peoples. We receive much less than the other group. There are lots of examples. There is a significant discrepancy in the budget allowances to our local municipalities simply for being Arabs. We have the same number of people living in two localities, one an Arab and one a Jewish, in the same area but they receive higher budget. Job opportunities for us are very limited. If you take for example an Arab mechanical engineer and a Jewish mechanical engineer, the Jewish engineer has all the opportunities in the world to work in factories, which they consider as "sensitive" places. The Arab engineer

does not even have the same opportunity to enter these places. There are lots of places to which we are not allowed access.

According to relative deprivation theory, the most deprived segment of society will not necessarily experience a sense of relative deprivation. Actually, it was the more educated African-Americans, as opposed to the most deprived sector of the community, who led the civil rights movement because they were in a position to compare themselves to middle class European-Americans, which resulted in a feeling of collective relative deprivation (Gurney & Tierney, 1982).

The core issue of the Palestinian cause evolves around national identity and national right for self-determination more than being a conflict over materialistic resources. Collective rights for the Palestinians in Israel go beyond simple possession of materialistic property. Asked if he believes that he receives all of his rights as a citizen in the state of Israel, a Palestinian male student activist attending Haifa University clearly differentiated between material rights and national rights as a group.

You have to ask the question "what do I really want?" A normal person who wants a job, money, a car and a house can accomplish all that. He can work and things like that and make some money. So many people live like that. But a person who looks for self-definition and national belonging will have a hard time getting a job. As Arabs in this country we have never had the feeling of independence. When I watch other Arab TV stations I see that they all have national anthems. Look at the Jordanian people for example, they have their own national anthem and we don't. Materialistic things that we get are not enough. It all depends on what you are looking for. If you are looking for materialistic things it is easy to obtain them. But if you are looking for national and cultural things, your options are very limited.

For matters of triangulation, and in order to match between the students' statements during the interviews and the positions they circulate in their political communiqués, consider the election platform of "*The Progressive Students Block*" at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem for the 1994 Arab Students Committee election campaign (p. 11).

If we add to all this, the issue of job opportunities available to Arab students in order to finance their education, we find that they encounter abundant racist problems because of their nationality. All fields of employment give preference to new immigrant Jewish students. In addition, the frustrating criteria of the army service is used very often even in the most unskilled jobs. More important is the inability of the Arab students to enroll in their preferred fields of study because of the high rate of unemployment among Arab academics and the lack of government

funding for Arab villages and cities. On the other hand, there is the vicious involvement of the intelligence authorities in the process of hiring teachers and staff in Arab schools and the use of loyalty to the government rather than educational qualifications as the main criteria for employment.

The most pressing domain of group relative deprivation for these Palestinian students was the repression of their national identity and culture through their formal education. Student activists who graduated from public high schools (the majority) were very critical of their formal education for depriving them of their national and cultural identity. Due to its control by the Israeli government, the Palestinian formal education was perceived as an instrument for political and cultural hegemony. The teachers, as role models who represent the school and its social, educational and political goals to the students, were perceived as co-opted and ineffective “system servants.”

A female student activist attending Ben-Gurion University who was active in several community and women’s organizations in addition to her student involvement, had this to say about “testing” the political limitations of her high school English teacher:

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

In contrast, private schools, being the exception rather than the rule, are more involved in the nationalistic education of their students. There are only three of these schools in the whole country, which are not managed by the Israeli Ministry of Education. Therefore, they have somewhat more freedom to address the nationalist needs of their Palestinian students. Consider a male student activist from Tel-Aviv University who was a graduate of one of these private schools:

What usually prevailed in my school was that we were allowed to think and debate political issues. As part of the discussions we were exposed to lots of information that was not part of the formal curriculum. We used to study this information as part of the social awareness period. For example, there was an activity in which we had to read information about the history of Palestine, which was not included in the history books. Our school believed in this role in order to bridge the gap that existed in the formal curriculum from which we have been suffering for so long.

In contrast, participants expressed strong feelings of resentment toward the biased curriculum taught in the public schools. Clearly, participants who graduated from public schools compared their own educational system, and its relevance to their national identity, to that of the Jewish students. Not only that, but they were frustrated because they had to study Jewish history instead of their own. A female student activist attending Haifa University describes her formal education with a deep sense of anguish:

Everything we study is about the Jews. Everything is Jewish culture. We study Bialik and Rachel. Why do I have to study them? Why don't they teach me Mahmud Darwish? Why don't they teach me Nizar Qabbani? Why don't they teach me Edward Said? Why don't they teach me about Arab philosophers and Palestinian poets? I know that my Arabic language is not very strong, because I know if I don't speak fluent Hebrew I can't function in this country. Without Hebrew I can't get on the bus and go to the grocery store, especially because I live in a mixed city like Haifa. I know that Arabic language in Palestine is endangered. Schools, not individually, but the educational system as a whole has a very negative impact on our identity. The whole world now recognizes the existence of Palestine and that there is something called Palestinian people. So why are they still teaching me about Bialik and Rachel? What is the problem in teaching us Palestinian history? The problem is that they are afraid. They don't want us, Arab-Palestinians, to develop any sense awareness of our national identity.

The gap between the "home culture" and the "school culture" with regard to Palestinian students' national identity is a problematic area for the formal educational system. The formal educational system continues to disregard the growing awareness among Palestinian students of the need to adapt the curriculum to fit their national belonging. Continuing to do so will only alienate the students from the school altogether.

Party Identification and Commitment

Identification with the group (or political party) and its political program was expressed strongly in most of the participants' responses. Party identity could be viewed as a mediating level of identification linking between the personal identity (self) and collective identity (society). In order to express their Palestinian national identity, student activists join political organizations that represent best their political views regarding the Palestinian national cause. The political organization provides them with the opportunity to examine and express their ideas about the national cause and their feelings of belonging. In this sense, membership in the party provides a deeper psychological connec-

tion that exceeds the practical goal of achieving a specific political objective.

Consider how two different student activists are equally enthusiastic in their commitment and defense of their respective political organizations. A female student activist of *Abna'a al-Balad* puts it this way:

I don't believe that anybody had joined Abna'a al-Balad for personal interests. Even if we talk about changes within 50-60 years that may benefit the masses, no one is that naive to think that the situation will change in five or six years so that they themselves can benefit from it. People who join Abna'a al-Balad know that they will never get jobs. You go to the university just to get a degree to hang it on your wall. If you are Abna'a al-Balad you go through so many police interrogations, lots of troubles, they dismiss you from the university, and lots of sacrifices. I work with lots of people who went to jail and got beaten by the police. Every single person in Abna'a al-Balad joined based on principles and conviction. I am positive about that because this involves lots of sacrifice.

This strong sense of commitment and in-group bias may lead to tension and conflicts with other Palestinian student political groups. The debates among supporters of the various political groups are substantially centered on political views, ideology and deep commitment to their respective organizations. The content and process of these discussions is the "stuff" from which the student activists construct their sense of national identity and political consciousness. Another female student activist of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (*al-Jabha*) is passionately committed to her political organization. She describes her party identity as an important aspect of her self-concept.

I am telling you that I have lots of criticism of al-Jabha today. We have an unusual leadership vacuum. I feel that it is during this time that I have to stand with al-Jabha. When al-Jabha was strong in the seventies maybe it did not need me as much as it needs me today. The true test of your commitment is at the time of crisis. If we have principles then we stand with the people who share our principles at times of crisis. I would be a defeated person if I leave al-Jabha when it is weak and then come back after three years when it passes the crisis

Involvement in collective action is obviously conducted through membership in small face-to-face political organizations. Friendships and social interactions were more common among in-group members. Furthermore, cooperation among the various political groups of Palestinian student activists increases as they face any sign of outside threat stemming from their confrontation with the political system and the university authorities. Their political differences and the ongoing competition over the political support of the general Palestinian student

population have become a secondary issue as their confrontation with the university administration has intensified.

It is possible to explain the choice made by individuals to join one particular political group or another based on two needs; (a) the extent to which the group serves as a mid-range level of identification with the Palestinian people, and (b) its level of “optimal distinctiveness,” which allows members to feel part of a group but remain unique individuals at the same time (Brewer, 1991; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). The small groups of activists also provided important social contexts for interpersonal relations and adjustment at the university. Being a member of a group of activists who share similar ideas is psychologically helpful in institutions where Palestinian students not only form a small minority, but also face national discrimination and oppression. It is probably because of this dual role (i.e., serving as mid-range identification with the national group and providing specific social context for adjustment) that Palestinian students are strongly committed to their respective political organizations.

Between Nationalism and Feminism

Female student activists expressed awareness of the need to address women’s issues as part of the socio-political agendas of their student organizations, more so than their male comrades. Being women in a patriarchal society, which is also suffering from national oppression as a whole, Arab-Palestinian women activists found themselves advocating both nationalist and feminist agendas at the same time. They also perceived an inherent tension between their national identity as Arab-Palestinians and their gender identity as women and expressed commitment to consolidation between the two. The complexity of this multiple oppression of Palestinian women is best illustrated in the program of *Al-Fanar: The Palestinian Feminist Organization*.

As Palestinians they suffer from oppression and discrimination based on nationality, as women they are dominated by the patriarchal system throughout their lives, and as female workers they are the most deprived sector of the workforce. These forms of oppression do not operate separately, but are intertwined, and clearly influence one another. The liberation of women—as persons with a social, personal, gender, and national identity—requires a simultaneous struggle on many fronts, which cannot be fragmented or conducted in separate stages (1991, p. 1).

By stressing all aspects of oppression as they are manifested in the life conditions of one particular group, it is clear that Palestinian women are calling for the most radical socio-political agenda. A psychology major female student activist defines herself as a feminist, and she is active both in political groups with mixed membership, and inclusive women organi-

zations. She had this to say about the relationship between her gender and national identities:

These are very complicated and interrelated issues. We have the question that my belonging to the Arab-Palestinian society provides me with feelings of attachment and belonging to the group. But on the other hand, my belonging to the Arab-Palestinian society oppresses me as a woman. There is a clear contradiction here and the question is how can we deal with this contradiction? How can we consolidate the two without satisfying one of them at the expense of the other? What has been going on in the various political organizations, so far, is their emphasis on the political-national side only.

The contradiction between the revolutionary political consciousness and conservative social consciousness demonstrated by many Palestinian male activists remains a major dilemma facing Palestinian women activists. Asked if she sees any contradiction among Palestinian male activists between their political attitudes and their attitudes towards women, the above female student was not even surprised that male activists, themselves, are not aware of that contradiction.

Palestinian male activists believe it is their role to maintain our national and cultural identity, including traditions. They do not see that many of these traditions were there to oppress women in the first place. I don't think that many Palestinian male activists are aware of this contradiction.

Another female student activist was not willing to accept this contradiction among Palestinian male activists. She insisted that in many cases, Palestinian female student activists were treated by their male comrades in a way that constantly reminded them of the traditional domestic roles imposed on Palestinian women.

Take the student movement as a good example. I am used to sitting in meetings as the only woman and feeling that I was being treated differently. It used to make me angry and want to cry. When I go to these meetings and hear a guy giving me complements on my clothes, I tell him "why don't you say the same thing to the guy next to you? We have a meeting to discuss certain issues so let's get to work." No matter how much confidence I have in myself, when I confront all of these men, they still look at me differently. While they say it as a compliment that another male activist has a strong personality, and I agree with them, they still wonder why I, as an activist woman, am that strong. I am expected to be very soft, not to speak in a loud voice, not to smoke, not to interrupt a guy when he is speaking, not to stand in the cafeteria and speak to a crowd of students. As a woman, I am not expected to do any of this but instead go to dances and things like that. There are certain

roles imposed on us as women in the student movement, which are similar to our domestic roles.

Women's organizations such as *Al-Fanar* and their rigorous feminist-nationalist agendas inspire many Palestinian female student activists. However, instead of setting up their own women's organizations on campus, they advocate their feminist agenda through the political organizations of which they are members. A female student activist majoring in education expressed her frustration and pessimism about what the future may hold for Palestinian women. Her awareness of this conflicted situation and commitment to keep working despite the frustration is being supported by examples from women's experiences in other Arab revolutions such as Algiers.

I am fighting for the establishment of a Palestinian state where I would feel much more comfortable among other Arabs. But on the other hand, the oppression of women in Arab society bothers me. First of all, women are oppressed all over the world. Everywhere their rights are being confiscated. But the situation is worse especially in Arab society. We have a double problem here. Before we liberate our country we first have to liberate ourselves. We have to be liberated both politically and socially in order for the state of Palestine to be a democratic state, which we all aspire for. We are experiencing in Palestine something similar to what happened in Algiers. It was Algerian women who fought in the revolution and now they are oppressed. This is actually what happened in the Intifada. The women were the most active group during the Intifada and now they are left with nothing to do. Men go to work and women stay at home. There is a problem here. There are contradictions among all of these things. This makes me very depressed. The whole situation of being an Arab-Palestinian woman living under occupation, under oppression and repression is agonizing.

Palestinian male student activists on the other hand did not voluntarily share their views on women's equality unless they were specifically asked about it. In their responses, they were careful to maintain their image as progressive political activists, but at the same time they did not push too far to challenge the traditional Arab-Palestinian society. They supported women's liberation but were not committed and willing to challenge widely accepted social traditions. A Palestinian male student activist attending the Hebrew University expressed careful views about the relationship between women's liberation and the fear of bluntly challenging the traditional social structure.

It is true that we have our culture and traditions, which we must take into account when we talk about social change. I am not saying that we have to get rid of our culture and traditions, but we have to take what is

positive in our culture and traditions. It depends on what kind of equality we are talking about. Complete equality in rights and responsibilities is a good idea but we must also take into account our culture and traditions. If we consider these factors, I personally have no problem with complete equality between men and women. We have to be realistic and make our demands in such a way that we can accomplish them.

This mechanical view of traditions is contrasted with the dialectical perception that deeply rooted cultural traditions, which are oppressive of women, have developed under a prolonged history of foreign occupation. Similarly, another male student activist attending the Technion Institute was supportive of women's liberation but was not prepared to challenge the patriarchal social structure of the Arab-Palestinian society.

Women have rights and they must receive them. Of course we still have some issues with equality between men and women. What kind of equality are we talking about? We still have the issue as an Eastern society that has its own customs and traditions. We should keep and develop the good customs and get rid of and fight the bad customs. The remaining question is how to fight these customs? Do we want to change everything all at once? Fast and sudden changes may lead to chaos.

The issue from the Palestinian women's perspective is not only that individual Palestinian male activist are more conservative in their social views, but that many strategic political decisions regarding the Palestinian national cause are inspired by such views. The most controversial example was the tendency of the Palestinian National Movement to compromise women's issues in order to avoid confrontation with conservative forces such as the Islamic Movement during the *Intifada*.

Social and Psychological Adjustment

Involvement in student activism was perceived as having a positive impact on the participants' sense of social competence, interpersonal skills and leadership capacities. College experience in general and involvement in student activism in particular, were perceived as the most comprehensive experience of political socialization and social development for Arab-Palestinian youth in Israel. Probably the most immediate reward Palestinian students gain from being activists is the sense of self-satisfaction it gives them. Consider the remarks of a female student activist attending the Hebrew University.

Activism gives me lots of satisfaction especially when I see that other people around me appreciate what I do. When we succeed in an activity and somebody says "congratulations" it means a great deal to me. Despite the fact that most of the time we conduct our activities with so

much sacrifice, when I look back I feel good about the things I have done. I believe that anybody involved in political work benefits from this work. When I was in the student council, we used to work at the expense of our own studies but I used to feel that I was getting something in return. This person in front of you was not born like that.

Late adolescence as a psychological developmental stage is characterized by search for meaning and construction of ego identity. Involvement with peer activists during this age, is important to the individual's healthy sense of psychological development. Reflecting on the impact that the interaction between activism and age may have on the students' personal development, a male student activist majoring in law said:

In terms of age, it is during the university years when you start to develop your political ideas. When you start to build something new you feel that you have reached the stars. You feel that you have accomplished a lot. You are still in your youth. When you do something important you feel satisfied and fulfilled.

Being involved in student activism was also beneficial to the participants beyond their personal developments. Activism provided the opportunity to meet and interact with other Palestinian students, especially those from different geographical regions. Consider how a female student activist believes her political involvement had contributed to the development of her social relations.

I believe this experience added so much to me especially being active since I entered the university and even before that in high school. Personally, there are many issues such as social interaction with a group of people other than only my friends. Being an activist allowed me to interact with certain groups of people that I would not have interacted with them otherwise. I would have never had interacted with these groups of people if I was not an activist myself. You can also say that activism had enhanced my interpersonal skills. On the other hand, I have also developed many friendships with people in the same organization. Furthermore, there are all the issues of leadership development and group interaction that I learned from this experience.

For the first time in their history, Palestinian students in Haifa University have elected a female student as the president of their Arab Students Committee. She reflects on the impact this experience had on her leadership and interpersonal skills.

I have improved my leadership skills through my role as the president of the Arab Students Committee. I have developed much more in terms of my social skills. I can accept criticism more openly now, something which I did not do in the past. I still have a problem accepting criticism

but it is much easier for me now. I became more critical of myself and of those in front of me. I am better in making decisions in a group. I consult with more people. This helped me become more flexible and accepting of other people's opinions.

Unlike the previous four themes, the psychological outlook of the individual student activist is not mentioned anywhere in the documents that were collected in the field. After all, these communiqués are issued by groups of student activists (not individuals) and addressed broader issues that go beyond the individual. To gain a second insight into the social and psychological adjustment of these student activists in addition to what they expressed in the interviews, I had to rely on my personal impression as I interacted with them during the interviews and on other occasions. Articulate, self-confident, assertive and strongly committed young men and women impressed me in my interaction with them. It is hard to claim whether it was activism that helped develop these psychological characters, or whether people with such strong personalities are more inclined to be involved in activism. However, it is safe to conclude that there was a strong relationship between the two. Nevertheless, the possibility that activism improved and enhanced these characteristics is repeatedly articulated in their statements.

Discussion

As indicated earlier, education among the Palestinians in Israel is one of the most sensitive and conflictive political tools used within the current state of political affairs. The Israeli government has manipulated the formal educational system in order to shape Palestinian students' national identity according to the status quo (i.e., Israel being defined as a Jewish state). There has been an indication of growing resistance among Palestinian students to this colonizing educational process, which has been facilitated by the work of several political and grassroots organizations active throughout the Palestinian community. To some degree, Palestinian students in Israel are shaped by the contradictions between their community and their schools. Palestinian student activism in the universities is considered as a pivotal link in the process of national socialization among Palestinian youth in Israel. For a great number of them, an intense process of national awareness and social development takes place through their involvement in the Palestinian Student Movement in the universities.

Findings show that Palestinian students' involvement in activism was not only an expression of their national identity, but also guided by

their deep awareness of the need to explore, construct and maintain this sense of national identity among the Palestinian population in general. Motivated by their awareness of the planned attempt (by the government) to eradicate this sense of Palestinian national identity, the students in the study committed themselves to student activism directed specifically towards raising national identity and political consciousness among the general Palestinian student population. As active agents in such an educational process, student activists themselves refined and developed their own sense of national identity, clearly viewing it as a cause and an outcome of their social and political involvement.

Having a strong sense of national identity for these Palestinian students does not develop in a vacuum or in a conflict free environment. It is precisely because of the inter-group power relations and the Palestinian cause, that national identity becomes most salient for the Palestinian population in Israel. Realizing that the Israeli authorities have consistently targeted Palestinian nationalism, student activists make it their explicit goal to counter this process by helping develop this identity among the broader population of Palestinian students in the Israeli universities.

Ironically, the Israeli universities as academic institutions are not independent or free from the political system and the dominant Zionist ideology. As such, they take upon themselves the mission of protecting the status quo against the "intimidation" stemming from Palestinian students' awareness of their national identity. Palestinian student organizations are still not recognized by the universities and their activities, especially the ones addressing their Palestinian national cause, are still to a large extent, censured and repressed by the university authorities. It is because of this repression of their national identity by the university authorities that Palestinian students persist in their activism. A strongly committed Palestinian male student activist puts it this way: "Problems like these motivate us to work even harder. Indirectly, by creating these problems they give us incentives for more resistance and work against them."

In as much as it constitutes a source of motivation for involvement in student activism, Palestinian national identity is shaped, developed and enhanced through the process of activism itself. This dialectical relationship between national identity and activism led to the conclusion that involvement in student activism during the college years is in fact, a process of national education and development for Palestinian student activists themselves. This healthy educational process of national consciousness is not only neglected, but also suppressed through the formal educational system. Realizing the potential of the Palestinian Students

Movement in the universities to compensate for this denationalizing education, one of the main educational implications of this study is to guide or facilitate the students' efforts to sustain their national identity through activism.

The findings about the student's perception of group relative deprivation or inequality and systematic discrimination practiced against their group, the Palestinians in Israel, was intertwined with their sense of national identity and belonging to the Palestinian people in general. The relationship between the students' commitment to the broader Palestinian cause and their struggle for equality within the Israeli system uncovers the strange contradiction, which is inherent in their status as a non-voluntary, non-assimilating national minority. They did not immigrate to the state of Israel in order to become a minority group, but rather the state was imposed on them against their national aspirations. Hence, they believe that their demands for full equality within the current political arrangement, do not contradict their Palestinian national identity.

The participants were clear in their choice of the relevant out-group for comparison when they expressed the injustice inflicted on their group and the confiscation of their civil and national rights. They compared their life conditions to that of the Jewish majority group. This awareness of their relative deprivation as a group was associated with their feelings of injustice, anger and frustration, which in turn led to their involvement in political action on behalf of the interests of their in-group.

While several areas of oppression were mentioned as examples of this state of relative deprivation (e.g., land confiscation, employment opportunities, and budget for local municipalities), the repression of their Palestinian national identity and culture through the formal educational system was most pressing to them. The students in this study, repeatedly pointed out the overwhelming emphasis on Jewish history and culture in their high school curriculum, and yet the complete absence of Palestinian history and culture. This specific finding is interpreted as an indication of the intimate relationship between the Palestinian national cause and identity on one hand, and the systematic oppression and discrimination against the Palestinians in Israel, as an integral segment of the Palestinian people on the other. To recognize their national identity as Palestinians raises a critical challenge to the definition of Israel as a "Jewish state in Palestine."

For many outside observers of the Palestinians in Israel, the contradiction between asserting their belonging to the Palestinian people and sharing their national aspirations on one hand, and their struggle for equality within the state of Israel on the other, seems incomprehensible. The pressure to "trade" their Palestinian national belonging with only

limited civil rights as “second class” citizens, is clearly manifested in the use of service in the Israeli army as a precondition for legitimate civil rights. For obvious reasons (i.e., national identity, religion, and loyalty), the Palestinians in Israel cannot and will not serve in the Israeli army, which is a mandatory requirement for the Jewish citizens. However, using this as a legal bases for educational and economical opportunities is bluntly racist.

Political activism as a collective action is obviously conducted through membership in political organizations, and Palestinian student activists are committed members of such face-to-face organizations. These groups served as mid-range identification through which individual student activists were able to identify with their national group and express their national identity as Arab-Palestinians.

Another important function of these groups was the fact that they provided their student members with a meaningful context for interpersonal relations and social support. Face-to-face interaction in small groups of like-minded activists is crucial to the students psychological well being and social adjustment at the university. As stated in Brewer’s (1991) “optimal distinctiveness” theory, groups like these provide the individual with an optimal balance between two competing human needs; the need to belong and feel included on one hand, and the need to be differentiated and recognized as an individual on the other. Unlike belonging to the ethnic-national group, which is ascribed, students have some degree of choice of membership in these groups, which may help maintain that level of optimal distinctiveness and facilitate their adjustment at the university. This is an interesting research area which may help bridge the gap between the European school of social psychology which focuses on larger social groups in society (Tajfel, 1981) and the American school of social psychology which focuses on small face-to-face groups and interpersonal interactions (Lewin, 1945).

With regard to gender issues and women’s participation, the prevailing finding was that Palestinian women activists advocated an integrated nationalist-feminist agenda. They articulated clearly the relationship between their national oppression as Palestinians on one hand, and their social oppression as women on the other. Through their involvement in student organizations, which include both male and female members, Palestinian women activists consistently advocated a comprehensive nationalist-feminist agenda as part of the political programs of their respective groups. This is not to suggest that Palestinian male activist were opposed to gender equality—after all their progressive political outlook requires that they support women’s liberation as well—but the issue was less “burning” for them in comparison to their female com-

rades. This brings to mind a similar situation encountered by women of color in American society.

According to bell hooks (1984) White women and Black men are both oppressed and oppressors at the same time. White women suffer from sexism, but the practice of racism still enables them to oppress Black women. Similarly, while Black men are oppressed in terms of racism, they still can be sexist in their relationships with Black women. Her conclusion is that Black women suffer from oppression both ways. The same analogy can be found in the relationship between Palestinian women and Palestinian men on one hand, and between them and Israeli Jewish women on the other. In fact when Israeli Jewish women groups, approached Palestinian women (mainly on the West-Bank) to work on common issues as women, it was clear to them that unless they support the Palestinians' struggle against occupation, such a cooperative relationship would be fruitless. The results were manifested in the establishment of several Israeli Jewish women groups such as Women in Black and Women Organization for Women Political Prisoners, both of which support Palestinian women as women and as victims of national oppression and occupation (Falbel, Klepfisz & Nevel, 1990).

Palestinian male activists on the other hand share with Palestinian women activists a progressive agenda regarding the national-political cause. But their reluctance to seriously challenge the traditional patriarchal system, which in the final analysis, places them in a superior position over women, reveals the contradiction between their progressive political outlook, and their conservative social attitudes. Palestinian women activists in the study were aware of this contradiction and challenged their male comrades to maintain consistency between their political and social commitments.

There was clear indication that a process of social and psychological adjustment has been significantly enhanced by the involvement of the participants in student activism. While the direction of the relationship between activism and psychological adjustment could not be established from correlation studies, in depth interviews with participants revealed the valuable impact that their experience as activists had on their psychological development. Contrary to a popular criticism leveled against Palestinian student activists that "they neglect their studies and waste their time on activism," two compelling points are advanced in their defense. First, high activists who participated in this qualitative study were all successful students majoring mostly in demanding subjects like medicine, law, engineering and psychology. Second, there was evidence that their experience of activism helped facilitate their psychological and social adjustment at the university.

College experience in general and involvement in extra curricular activities in particular have a positive impact on the student's social and psychological development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Extra curricular activities in the Israeli universities cater mainly to the Jewish students' culture and for the most part are not only irrelevant, but also antagonistic to Palestinian students. This essential component of the campus social life experience is made available to Palestinian students through their involvement in their own political organizations. Reaching the great majority of Palestinian students on campus in order to increase their involvement in such activities is not only fundamental to their national awareness, but also to their psychological development as individuals.

In conclusion, taken together these five themes paint a coherent picture of the social psychological outlook of the Palestinian student activist, with national identity being not only the most dominant theme, but the thread that connects all the other themes together. Seeing student activism as a natural expression of their sense of national identity, Palestinian students organize themselves in political groups that address simultaneously the Palestinian national cause and their civil rights as a national minority group in Israel. Palestinian women activists also advocated a call for social change within Palestinian society. As a group, Palestinian women have the most important investment in such a social change. The result of this involvement was a positive contribution to the social development and psychological adjustment of the individual student activist.

This study has twofold implications. First, it shed some light on the importance of group identity in inter-group conflict situations. The discourse among multicultural educators in Western societies evolves around the need to address minority students' ethnic identity for three main reasons. First, the failure of the "melting pot" model to accommodate a large number of visible ethnic minorities who would rather maintain their unique ethnic identity and culture. Second, from an educational perspective, we must recognize and nurture the students' cultural and ethnic background in order to create equal opportunities for success. Finally, the more people are confident and secure about their own ethnic identity, the less they become prejudiced against members of other ethnic groups in society (Aboud & Doyle, 1993; Carter & Goodwin, 1994). The findings of this study regarding national identity among Palestinian students in the Israeli universities reinforce the importance and legitimacy of the quest for ethnic identity development among minority students.

The second implication of the study is for the Palestinian students themselves. National identity of the Palestinian people has been the core

issue in the Arab-Zionist conflict since the turn of the century. After all, the Zionist agenda for the establishment of a “Jewish state in Palestine” was based on the myth that “Palestinian people simply did not exist.” Since their uprooting in 1948, maintaining their national identity has been one of the main concerns for the Palestinian people. The Palestinians who remained in their land and became Israeli citizens are also part of this national survival. The argument for their national identity as Palestinians is beyond doubt. This research project was concerned with student activism as a process by which the youth of this group of Palestinians construct and maintain their sense of national identity. Furthermore, the study was concerned with the social and psychological implications of such an identity for the individual student activist. The finding that the Palestinian Student Movement constitutes an educational context within which Palestinian youth construct their national identity is imperative to education in light of the fact that the formal educational system continues to do exactly the opposite; blurring rather than developing Palestinian national identity.

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