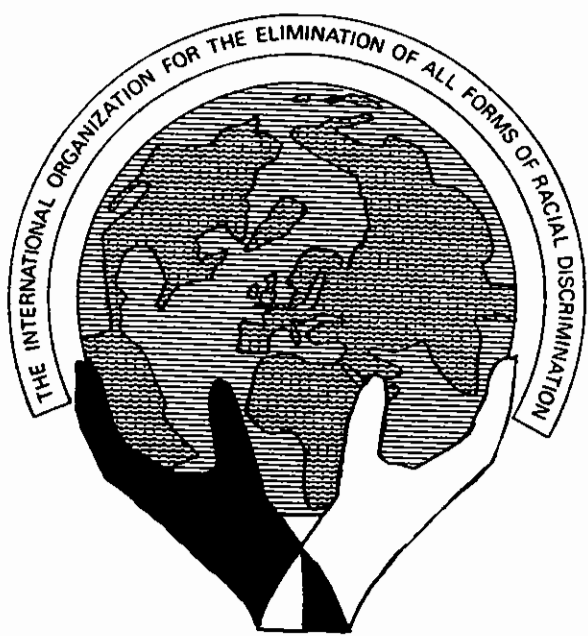


**THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION  
FOR THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF  
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION  
(EAFORD)**



**EDUCATION, CULTURE AND IDENTITY  
AMONG PALESTINIANS IN ISRAEL**  
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Published by  
The International Organization for the Elimination  
of All Forms of Racial Discrimination  
(EAFORD)  
January 1984

Printed by Ithaca Press, London SE1, UK

The views expressed in this Bulletin are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent those of EAFORD.

**All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.**

**Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

# **EDUCATION, CULTURE AND IDENTITY\* AMONG PALESTINIANS IN ISRAEL**

by

**SAMI KHALIL MAR'I, Ph.D**  
**University of Haifa**

In this essay an attempt will be made to expose the educational and cultural realities of Palestinians in Israel as these realities correspond to the national identity. This exposé will be followed by an analysis of the educational policy, administration and content as they are substantial variables affecting the role of education and cultural actions in the extent to which they enhance or weaken the Palestinian identity. Thirdly, the strategies and mechanisms of coping with these policies and contents will be discussed in terms of how, in spite of Israeli control and policies, Palestinians in Israel have maintained and further enhanced their national identity. The last issue to be discussed in this essay is why education, in its broader sense, should be transformed from its being a means of manipulation to its becoming a process of liberation.

## **I**

For the last two decades the population growth among Palestinians in Israel has been stable at 4% per annum (Israeli Statistical Abstracts, 1979). At this relatively high rate of population growth the educational system has to be responsive in order to meet the ever increasing needs of the school. However, Israeli authorities who control every aspect of the Arab educational system have not only been non-responsive, but in fact, they have been consistently negligent. 5000 classrooms are immediately needed to host the thousands of Palestinian pupils who are learning in rented uneducational and often inhumane conditions. Further, within the existing classrooms, 64% host between 30 to 50 pupils. The average number of pupils per teacher in the Arab educational system is nearly 29 whereas in the Jewish system the average does not exceed 19 pupils per teacher. Thus, in order to equalize between the two systems, there is an immediate need of increasing the number of Palestinian teachers in Israel by 50% (approximately 3000 teachers).

However, while there is an urgent need to increase the number of Arab teachers by nearly 50% we are witnessing a mirror opposite policy and behaviour of the Israeli educational authority who control the Arab educa-

\*This paper was presented at the *Palestine Cultural Week*, November 28th – December 1st 1983, Friends House, London.

tional system. Indeed, over five years (1975/1976 – 1980/1981) the number of accepted students in the two and only government controlled Arab Teachers Seminaries in Israel has decreased by nearly 50% from 813 to 415 students (Israeli Statistical Abstracts 1981). Thus, we see that Israeli educational policy for Arabs is inversely related to the educational realities; where there is a need to increase the number of teachers the policy has decreased it.

Furthermore, as far as educational services are concerned the situation is not less devastating. Firstly, it takes at least a decade for an educational service to be introduced to the Arab educational system after it had been introduced to the Jewish one. For example, the special education service was introduced to Arab education two decades after it had been introduced to the Jewish one, and the counselling service was introduced a decade later. Secondly, after their introduction they soon became an oppressive service rather than a liberating educational activity. Counsellors, for example, are supposed to help their pupils discover and liberate and realise their potentials and aspirations. Soon after they got involved in their professional counselling, Arab Counsellors discover that they are tools in the hands of a policy which squelches ability, in that they find themselves involved in telling their student-counselees to accept the limitations imposed upon them by the Jewish-Zionist socio-political structure. As a result, frustration becomes overwhelmingly dominant and aspirations are lowered (Mar'i, 1982).

Another educational framework within which varied abilities of Arab youth are wasted and through which the future of those youths is determined is the area of vocational-technical education. While we find more than 50% of Jewish youth are involved in vocational education at the school, only 10% of Arab youth are involved in such programmes in their respective schools (Israeli Statistical Abstracts, 1981). This has far reaching implications to the future of those youths in particular and to the position of Palestinians in Israel in general. Not only that those youths enter the Israeli job market as unskilled and thus occupy the lowest echelons in the job structure, but also this reflects upon the position of the whole Arab society in Israel in the sense that it is maintained at the lowest class level and thus most susceptible to unemployment (Mar'i, 1978, Ch.8).

As far as University education is concerned we are confronted with a most unhealthy situation. In 1980/81 Arab students at Israeli Universities comprised less than 5% of the total student population in Israel. This is quite a low figure, especially when we take into consideration the fact that Arabs comprise 15% of the total Israeli population (Israeli Statistical Abstracts, 1981). Furthermore, great gaps do not exist only between Arabs and Jews in Israel, they also exist between Palestinians in Israel and Palestinians on the West-Bank (and the rest of Palestinians as well). It was found that among Palestinians in Israel the ratio of University students to

population is 300 students per 100,000 inhabitants, and on the West-Bank the ratio is ten times more, 3000 students per 100,000 inhabitants (Mar'i, 1979; Mar'i, 1978, Ch.6). These figures place Palestinians in Israel second lowest in the world (following Bostswana) and those on the West-Bank and elsewhere in the world as second highest (following the USA) in the world. Such a gap, if it continues, will have detrimental effects on the distribution of education and skilled manpower among the different segments of the Palestinian nation.

Among nearly 6000 Professors in Israeli Universities only six individuals are Arabs. Many of the qualified researchers and scientists among Palestinians in Israel are found in the Western World as they have been brain-drained from their original and natural locale. Few are found at West-Bank Universities. The six professors at Israeli Universities are not as committed to Palestinian authentic education and culture as one might expect. Generally, they were accepted as tokens and as symbols of "good will" on the part of Israeli-Zionist higher education establishment. Tokenism has a dynamic of its own as far as tokens are concerned. Indeed, following the Camp David Accord, when invited to visit Egypt as a formal academic delegation five out of the six have responded positively to the Israeli establishment which requested them to do so.

Through its consistent policies, Israel has been successful in the obstruction of the process of the development and crystalization of a productive Palestinian scientific community. Palestinians in Israel are studied mainly by Israeli scholars to serve Israeli policies of manipulation, control and weakening of the Palestinian identity. The latest symptom of such a policy is the rejection of Israel's Council for Higher Education to the idea of establishing an Arab University in Israel. The application was based on the principles of cultural and national relativism, yet the rejection, while totally ignoring those principles, was based on demographic grounds, namely that in the near future there was no need for another University in Israel as the projected increase in the number of students would not justify another University!

Thus it is clear that Palestinians in Israel are discriminated against educationally and culturally. Unequal educational opportunity leads necessarily to unequal job and economic opportunity. As a hegemonic centre, Israel has been attempting to solve its internal class and ethnic contradictions (Ashkenazi; vs. Sephardi) by forcing and maintaining Palestinians at the lowest class levels. It has been attempting to prevent the *de facto* transformation of itself from a Zionist State to a bi-national One by excluding Palestinians from the economic, educational and cultural mainstream through an Arab educational system which is impoverished quantitatively and qualitatively.

It is true that Israel has been allowing Arabs to receive an education, but

only up to a point where Arabs become an economically exploitable group and where the surplus of their efforts and work is enjoyable by the ruling Jewish majority. However, it is not true to explain this dynamic, as many pseudo Marxists do, along the lines of class exploitation. Class differentiation as a concept of explanation and analysis is only a secondary one in our case. In its origins as well as in its manifestations, discrimination against and manipulation of Palestinians in Israel through education and culture cannot be but a national differentiation dynamic in which Zionist attempts to differentiate itself through the national and cultural annihilation of Palestinianhood.

Semyonov and Tyree in their study of community segregation and the costs of ethnic subordination in Israel (1981) – concluded that while in the Jewish society in Israel educational opportunity and achievement are determined on the basis of class affiliation, it is not the case for the Palestinian Arabs in Israel. Independently of his class affiliation, educational opportunity and achievement of the Arab in Israel are determined solely by his national affiliation. Furthermore, they added that Arabs are excluded not through class differentiation, but through a structural and cultural caste system which divides across national lines.

## II

Education of Arabs in Israel has been perceived and used as an apparatus of ideology through which the Zionist entity can, so it had hoped, achieve the goal of the annihilation of the Palestinian cultural and national identity. Through its form and content, its administration and substance, Arab education system in Israel has been designed and geared for the realization of such an objective. However, before I embark on the analysis, support and documentation of this statement, it should be added that the annihilation of the Palestinian Arab identity is not only the goal of the educational system, nor, of course, is it limited to those Palestinians who are under Israeli control since 1948.

Other Israeli institutions are geared to the realization of Zionist objectives as far as the Palestinian identity is concerned. Mass media relate to Palestinians in Israel as a conglomerate of Muslim Christian and Druzes. Official Israeli Statistical Abstracts have always been relating to Palestinian Arabs in Israel as “non-Jews” as if they are culturally and nationally colourless. The imposition of sectarianism on the one hand, coupled with deliberate and relentless efforts at emptying the Palestinian identity from its contents have resulted, among other things, in a most oppressive cultural rape in the century: that is disconnecting the Druze community from the rest of the Palestinians culturally and educationally. Now there exists a separate Druze educational system.

These policies of obstructing the flow of Palestinian consciousness and

annihilating it also extend to the occupied West-Bank and Gaza in the sense that, there also, cultural and educational institutions are disrupted and suppressed. The invasion of Lebanon also reflects an effort to exterminate Palestinian structural and cultural existence (McBride, 1983). However, these policies are executed through the apparatus of power, more so than the application of the apparatus of ideology as in the case of Arab education in Israel.

Education is perceived by the State as the most central and powerful means in the creation of a self-disparaged, self-alienated and submissive Arab. Pupils in every activity in the school are to learn and absorb their inferiority *vis a vis* the superiority of Jews in science, culture, literature, history, languages and in the extra curricular activities.

Peres *et al* (1970), Mar'i (1978) and Lustic (1980) have all concluded that the Arab educational system, through its contents and curricular, aim at disparaging, weakening and exterminating the Palestinian Arab cultural identity. The teaching of history is supposed to create an organic and creative link between pupils and their past. However, Arabs in Israel study history in order to glorify Jewish-Zionist past and present, learn the different nations input and contribution to human civilization and culture. But they study Arab history only as a framework within which the Jewish genius has expressed itself. The modern history of Palestine is distorted and reduced to the "history of the lands of fathers", of the desert which was transformed into Paradise by Zionist settlers and "new-comers".

Palestinian modern literature is reduced to sporadic adolescent creations of lust and innocence or to the glorification of Arabs cooperating with the Jews. In the general area of Arabic literature a heavy emphasis is placed on the Middle-Ages and the contents are reduced to personal or tribal glorification and to general themes which hardly relate to the present existence of Arabs, spiritually and culturally.

The following illustration captures this whole issue of education for cultural and national annihilation. It relates to the objectives of teaching Hebrew for Jews and Arabic for Arabs on the one hand, and to Arabic for Arabs and to Hebrew for Arabs on the other. It speaks for itself without a need to explain or comment:

### **Goals for Teaching Language and Literature**

#### *Arabic in Arab Schools*

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Correct reading and understanding of the written and spoken language. | and logical expression of ideas and feelings, orally and in writing. | ciate good literature.   |
| 2. The clear, precise,   | 3. The ability to understand and appre-                              | 4. To open for the pupil a gateway to a knowledge of literary culture, past and present. |

### *Hebrew in Arab Schools*

1. To give the Arab pupil a basic, comprehensive knowledge of the Hebrew language, an understanding of all reading material, a functional command

of the language, both written and oral, for practical and cultural needs.

2. To open the way for the Arab pupil to become acquainted with

Jewish culture and its values, past and present; to facilitate his understanding of the cultural and social life of the Jewish population in Israel.

### *Hebrew in Jewish Schools*

1. To impart to the pupil a love of the ideals, outlook, and experience of the nation at its various periods of development, and an awareness of the unbroken historical link between the nation, its country, and its culture. Special attention should be paid to the struggles and achievements of our own as well as of recent generations in the spheres of national revival and cultural and social renewal.

2. To expose the pupils to the cultural treasures of mankind as an expression of

universal human values, and also, as far as possible, to works which express the creative genius of different nations.

3. To develop good literary taste and an appreciation of great masterpieces.

4. To bring the pupils into direct contact with the controversial problems and trends of thought of the world at various periods of its history, and with the Jewish people's way of life throughout history.

5. To develop the pupil's ability to express himself

correctly, clearly, logically, and accurately, both orally and in writing.

6. To help him acquire an organic understanding of the rules and forms of language and its growth, and the ability to distinguish various literary styles.

7. To equip the pupil with a fund of those idiomatic expressions which mirror the uniqueness of our outlook, of our relationship with the world and with ourselves, and which create a common form of expression among individuals and generations.

*Source:* Mar'i, Arab Education in Israel, 1978, pp.77-78

Even the field of arithmetic, which is supposed to be neutral, was contaminated by the policy of imposing the feelings of Arab inferiority *vis a vis* Jewish superiority on Arab youth. In the sixties I was an elementary school teacher. I taught arithmetic to fourth graders in an Arab school. The text was written by Jewish authors (Akhia & Kitov) and translated into Arabic



for use in Arab schools too. In the text an arithmetic problem was exposed to the effect that a smaller number of Israeli tanks had wiped out many of a larger number of Syrian ones. The pupils are to find out how many Israel lost in relation to the larger losses of the Syrians. This illustration illuminates the issue of Arab inferiority *vis a vis* Jewish superiority not only to be taught for the Jewish children, but also for Arab ones as well.

What such a content does to the teachers is not less than frustration and resentment. In many cases they also become alienated from their authenticity and origin. But what such an experience does to the pupils is even more devastating. It makes them antagonistic to the school, its teachers and subject-matter, hence the disinterest and lack of motivation. Another consequence is, like in the case of the teachers, alienation, self disparagement and feelings of inferiority.

Furthermore, according to the formal Israeli policy, as there is no Arab education, but rather education *for* Arabs, there should be no Arab culture, but rather culture *for* Arabs. Joseph Michman in his *Cultural Policy in Israel* (1973) forwards two claims in the defence of his nation that Authentic Arabic culture cannot develop among Palestinians in Israel. Firstly, they are divided according to and governed by their religious differences. Secondly, Palestinians have never produced a culture in Palestine. Instead, they always have consumed the culture produced elsewhere in the Arab world. That is why, according to Mitchman, the Israeli Council for Culture & Arts is attempting to translate Hebrew books into Arabic and to establish Arab-Jewish Cultural Centres. This is the Israeli way of compensation for the lack of culture among Palestinian Arabs inside Israel.

These are simply false and falsifying notions. In fact, a deeper look reveals that these observations are loaded with cultural superiority, if not with a racist ideology as it relates to culture as both a process and product. According to Michman, learning Hebrew solves the lack of culture among Arabs, because once they become fluent in Hebrew "they will have no trouble whatsoever in enjoying cultural activities in Hebrew or in reading Hebrew publications" p.64. Just like that!

In short, Israeli educational and cultural policies for Arabs aimed at nothing less than the de-Palestinization and de-nationalisation of those Arabs under its control since 1948. These policies have operated under the premise that if the Zionist Authorities control the input and the educational and cultural content, then they can cultivate a desirable output in terms of a submissive group which is culturally and nationally paralysed, inferiority ridden, fragmented, and governed by religious differences and hostilities.

The questions which impose themselves here are: what happened? Are Palestinians in Israel a Submissive Group? Did Zionist plans and policies work? . . . etc.

The answer to these questions and others like them is a definite NO. Not

only that Palestinians in Israel have demonstrated their Palestinianhood in more than one sense: passive extra legal resistance through demonstrations and strikes, not only that their input in and contribution to the general Palestinian revolutionary culture and scientific productivity are quite recognizable, but also impartial research carried out by Jewish researchers proved that 85% of them answered that the term "*Palestinian Arab*" defines them well (Tessler, 1977, Table 1, p.317). Further, 82% of Arabs in Israel have strongly rejected the notion that "Arabs in Israel are dividable into Muslim, Christian and Druze according to special needs" (Tessler, 1977, Table 5, p.325). The remaining 15% in the first case and 18% in the second could be explained by the suspicions and anxieties related to such studies especially when carried out by a member of the Jewish Group.

### III

It becomes of utmost importance to this discussion as it addresses itself to those who are interested in Palestinian education and culture in relation to the crystalization of an Authentic Palestinian Cultural and National identity to explain how and why Israeli devised sophisticated policies and practices in the spheres of education and culture failed to annihilate or even weaken the Palestinian identity.

To start with, Palestinian awareness has never ceased to exist among Arabs in Israel. It took different shapes and forms depending upon inter-Arab politics and movements for liberation on the one side and upon internal dynamics on the other. However, at the primary cultural level of folk singing and dancing, story telling and reminiscing, Palestinianhood has never ceased to be a central theme. For example, in singing and dancing, Palestinian villagers have always been singing to their land and homeland:

You are my life you are my death

You are my independence in Palestine.

While these expressions reflected primary romantic cultural dimensions of Palestinian identity, their existence was the grounds upon which the national and political dimensions of this identity have evolved. The all-embracing revolutionary trend in the Arab world embodied by Nasser on the one hand, and the internal political movements and parties in Israel, namely El-Ard and the Communist Party on the other hand, have helped transform the emotional romantic dimensions of the Palestinian identity to a national awareness in which Pan-Arabism and Arab Unity were the driving forces.

The Authentic and distinct Palestinian identity was evolved around the specific and more clearly defined political dimension of Palestinianhood in the mid sixties due to the rise of and continued cultivation of success by the Palestinian revolution. This has set in motion among Palestinians in Israel

an accelerated process of political socialization which is strictly Palestinian in nature. This has brought about a distinct political Palestinian identity which rests upon a revolutionary dynamic, the expressions of which are observable in the political behaviour, cultural action and creation, educational thought and practice and the initiation of scientific and cultural institutions.

The initiative to establish an Arab University in Israel was put forward by the Society for the Advancement of Arab Education. There are two main objectives of such a University: one is *expressive* so that it would embody and symbolize the spiritual existence of Palestinians in Israel. The other objective is *an instrumental* one – so that such a University will carry out research and development projects relevant to the society within which it functions. It also will train students in a relevant way to their culture and society as well as host Palestinian scholars who otherwise immigrate.

A second recent initiative is the establishment of the Council of Arts headed by the known poet Mr Samih El-Kasim, the goals of which are the revival of Palestinian Arts, the creation of a nationally relevant threat and the crystalization of a community of Artists.

A third recent initiative is the establishment of The Centre for the Advancement of Study of Palestinian Heritage headed by a prominent figure on the Palestinian scene Mr Saleh Baransi. The goals of such a Centre are the revitalization and revival of Palestinian heritage and folklore in a way that suits the current flow of Palestinian revolutionary consciousness; and to study the historical as well as contemporary dimensions of Palestinian heritage as it shapes identity.

However, as these recent initiatives come to express a further transformed and revolutionised Palestinian awareness, they remain as initiatives and activities even though important, but, nonetheless, without a Palestinian plan for education and cultural action. The need is urgent to develop and crystalize a Palestinian educational and cultural policy which should guide initiative and regulate action.

#### IV

Education and cultural action should be geared towards liberation. They must be related to as integral components in the general strategy for liberation. As we discussed education and culture as they pertain to Palestinian identity, liberation becomes of a scope wider than national or political only. Liberation must extend the national-political sense into the socio-cultural spheres. Women, children, the poor etc. are all to be liberated from external as well as internal oppression.

What then are the most salient structural features of education for liberation in both the political and socio-cultural spheres? Four distinctive features seem to be most essential to the strategy for liberation through

education among Palestinians in Israel and elsewhere:

### **1. Education for Unity:**

What is meant by unity here is not uniformity. For Uniformity is the cause of, and at the same time, the effect of conformity. Conformity is a most undesirable feature because it obstructs revolutionary awareness. What is meant by Unity then, is the development and crystallization of a shared and learned core value system and orientation, directionality and intentionality of the flow of collective consciousness within the framework of shared aspiration toward social, cultural, political and national liberation. Education and cultural action are the major means through which these values and aspirations are emulated.

Neither in its form nor in its content is the education of Palestinians under Israeli control or elsewhere unifying. On the contrary, and especially so in Israel, the education of Palestinians is most fragmenting and disuniting. At this point of history where Palestinians have not achieved political independence yet, and, thus cannot develop a relevant educational system, a non-formal educational network should be developed as one which is far removed for political manipulation of a trend or an interest group.

### **2. Education for Diversity:**

Diversification of education is a universally valid structural feature of any educational system which is future orientated. However, beyond that diversity in and of education is a special relevance to Palestinians because of the nature of their current society and its future as well. Four themes are essential as the centre and core of diversified education for Palestinians. First, is the technical-electronic field. Computer literacy and proficiency is urgently needed. Not less urgent is the need for highly skilled and qualified technicians in the different fields of technology. Suffice it to say at this point that as the current and future characteristic of an advanced society is Hi Tech, and it is a must for the reconstruction of an independent nation.

The second theme around which nationally relevant and diversified education for the Palestinians should be entered is agricultural education. In spite of the fact that most of the cultivatable land of the Palestinians has been confiscated, agricultural education is of utmost national significance. Such an education is not and should not be limited to mere mechanical and technical farming of land. It is organically linked to technology, food production, and social and national organisation. Nor agricultural education is limited to the cultivation of land. It extends to fisheries: Palestinian in Acre, Haifa, Jisr-El-Zarka, Jaffa and Gaza have always been involved in fishing as major source of living. In fact a whole Palestinian sub-culture has evolved around such a source of living. Finally, agriculture is associated with land,

with homeland. Thus it becomes an imperative not in spite of, but *because* of, land confiscation.

The third theme to be embedded in a Palestinian educational strategy is the *academic-scientific* one. I should immediately warn here that what Palestinians need is not a mass of diploma carriers who are hunting for class benefits without being deeply involved in the scientific productivity. We need academicians who are able to cross the barriers from learning to thinking to creation in a nationally relevant manner. We need a Palestinian Scientific Community . . .

The fourth theme is *Aesthetic education*. All forms of art and artistic expression or orientation are to be emphasized. Language arts, performing arts and all other forms should be at the centre of the Palestinian educational and cultural project. It should be organically linked to heritage and folklore as it is anticipated to have a significant input into the formation of an Authentic Palestinian identity.

### **3. Education for Equality:**

Palestinian education should flow *in* and *for* equality. In Israel equality between Palestinians and Jews should be achieved in physical facilities, educational resources, and, most important in cultural and national relevance. For we cannot allow our educational system to continue aiming at the undermining of our identity.

However, there is more to equality *in* and *of* education than to liberate Palestinians from the oppressive grip of Israel. Internally, within the Palestinian society, great educational gaps exist: rural-urban, Bedouin – and the rest, males – females, and all contexts of inequality and some are contexts of oppression. Further, Palestinians of 1948 and others differ quantitatively and qualitatively in their educational achievement. It becomes clear then that liberation through education cannot and should not be limited only to the Palestinian-Zionist context where the latter oppresses the former, but it should extend to the Palestinian society itself. Egalitarian education should help liberate the oppressed child from centuries old oppressive tradition, should help liberate females from their being manipulated as objects of oppression.

As the transformation of the awareness of Palestinian masses has gone beyond community and political leaders' ability to cope and lead, the awareness of Palestinian women has gone beyond the ability of Palestinian men to cope and, not lead, but cooperate. If this issue is not coped with by egalitarian education and by the elimination of sexist contents and values, we should expect a schism in Palestinian society, the costs of which might be heavier than what we expect.

#### **4. Education for Conscientization:**

Conscientization is a concept which was developed by the most prominent revolutionary educational philosopher of the latter part of the 20th century. In his *Pedology of the Oppressed*, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970) called for the development of critical consciousness if education is to become a liberating force. It should be the structural feature which cuts across all features of the educational process and cultural action. Without conscientization and critical consciousness, true liberation becomes a mission impossible. It is only through it that the masses are self-mobilised into liberation from oppression.

In short education for liberation is and should be a cornerstone in any general strategy for liberation and the development and realisation of an authentic Palestinian identity. It is not an enough condition of course. For it should be followed by a series of committed actions towards liberation. In fact it guarantees the production and flow of these committed actions. Thus, while it is not an enough condition for liberation it is definitely a necessary one; one without which many of the educated, the diploma holders, will continue to be futile and irrelevant, portions of the masses, will continue revolutionarily immobile, and, of course, women will remain on the margins of the revolutionary flow of consciousness and action.

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