



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Educational Development

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijedudev



School as a place of violence and hope: Tensions of education for children and families in post-intifada Palestine

Bree Akesson *

Wilfrid Laurier University, Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

School
Education
Children and families
Palestine
Political violence
Place

ABSTRACT

For children living in the context of political violence, school is often conceptualized as a safe physical place with education representing hope for the future. Yet school can also be a place of violence for some children, especially as they encounter the Israeli military and settlers on their journeys to and from school. Framed by Relph's (1976) theory of place as physical setting, activity, and meaning, this paper uses examples from research with 18 Palestinian families to better understand the tensions posed by school as a place of both violence and hope. The research suggests that children and families' understandings of the place of school are complicated by the ongoing occupation and protracted political violence.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Despite over five decades of protracted political violence, education remains a priority for most Palestinians (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), 2013). In a 2003 survey, 60% of Palestinian youth (ages 10–24) indicated that education was their first priority, and at over 90%, the literacy rate for Palestinians is generally high for the region (The World Bank and the Bisan Center for Research and Development, 2006). Compared to other education systems in the region and the world, school enrollment in Palestine¹ is relatively high, with gross enrollment rates above 90% for both males and females. School can offer protection and structure to Palestinian children living in political violence. Yet school may also be a place of multiple forms of violence. Even if efforts are made to make accessing and attending school safe, students may encounter

physical violence from the Israeli military or Israeli settlers on their journeys to and from school, thereby restricting children's access to education. Within school itself, there may be physical violence from peers or corporal punishment from teachers. Despite these challenges, the act of accessing the place of school can be a form of resistance, with education providing Palestinian children with a foundation for a positive future.

Framed by Relph's (1976) conceptualization of place as consisting of physical setting, activity, and meaning, this paper weighs school as a place of both violence and hope, thereby uncovering tensions in place for Palestinian children and their families. Whereas most studies on schooling in emergency settings use the lens of students and teachers, this study views the place of school from the perspective of families and communities, thus widening the scope of how education develops and changes within the context of political violence. This paper represents data from a larger doctoral research project exploring the concept and meaning of place for Palestinian children and families. The research was organized around four different settings: home, school, neighborhood community, and nation-state. This paper specifically focuses on school. By tackling the theoretical concept of place, the research uncovers how and to what extent the occupation and political violence affects Palestinian children and families' relationship with school and how education protects or does not protect children and families. The paper will first provide the historical background of education in Palestine, a theoretical framework of school as a place, and an overview of the research methodology. Then, turning to the data, the paper will describe the inherent tensions of school as a place of both violence and hope.

* Tel.: +1 514 758 8022.

E-mail address: bakesson@wlu.ca

¹ My use of the term "Palestine" reflects the language of various United Nations resolutions. On 29 November 2012, following a vote that recognized the occupied Palestinian territories as a non-member observer state, the United Nations designated that *State of Palestine* shall be used in all official UN documents (United Nations, 2012). Furthermore, I also use the term "occupation" based on its wide usage by the United Nations and other international organizations. The term *occupied Palestinian territories* was used by the United Nations Security Council (1967) Resolution 242 to refer to land seized by Israel from Egypt, Jordan, and Syria during the 1967 Six-Day War. Today, this area consists of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza. However, due to security concerns and difficulty with access, this research excludes Gaza.

2. Palestinian education under occupation

Prior to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, which began in 1967, Palestinian education in the 1950s and 1960s was subject to Jordanian (in the West Bank) and Egyptian (in Gaza) policies (Abu-Duhou, 1996). During this time, the government education system suffered from deterioration in quality (Affouneh, 2007) and did not reflect Palestinian culture, values, or knowledge (Alzaroo and Hunt, 2003). When the occupation began in 1967, the Israeli military took full control over education in Palestine. During the first ten years of the occupation, no new schools were built, and classrooms became increasingly overcrowded with the average class size reaching up to 60 students per class (Abu-Duhou, 1996). Schools were staffed by uniformed military personnel and little to no funding was provided for school expansion and improvement (Nicolai, 2006). Under Israeli control, Palestinian schools faced frequent and prolonged school closures (Abu-Duhou, 1996) and the banning of educational materials (Alzaroo, 1988).

As one response to the decades-long occupation, the first *intifada* (“uprising” in Arabic) erupted in 1987, with a damaging effect on the Palestinian education system (Abu-Duhou, 1996). Students from primary school to university were expelled, arrested, and prevented from traveling to and from school (Alzaroo and Hunt, 2003). Educational institutions were closed for periods ranging from two years to more than four years in some universities (Alzaroo and Hunt, 2003), resulting in approximately one-third of total school days lost (Brown, 2003). At the time, one-tenth of closed schools were converted into military camps and detention centers (Alzaroo, 1989; Nicolai, 2006; Ramsden and Senker, 1993). These challenges propelled Palestinians to develop a system of “popular education” characterized by home-based schooling (Altinok, 2010). However, Israel countered these activities by criminalizing home-based schooling and imposing heavy fines and jail sentences (Nicolai, 2006).

The first *intifada* ended in 1993 with the signing of the Oslo Accords between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) (later established as the Palestinian Authority (PA)). As a part of the agreement, educational responsibilities were transferred to the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), which was tasked with reforming the whole Palestinian education system, including curriculum, teacher qualifications, and facilities (Dyke and Randall, 2002).

Though at the time the Accords were hailed as a means to establish Palestinian control over some of the West Bank, they actually further fragmented the West Bank (Jones, 2012). The Accords resulted in the temporary division of the West Bank into three areas (Areas A, B, and C) and additional areas annexed by Israel, effectively turning Palestine into a “swiss cheese” state (Krouzman, 1999; Weizman, 2007). These noncontiguous territorial divisions remain today leading to physical, political, and jurisdictional fragmentation within the West Bank, and currently impairs the authority of the MoEHE to manage the education system.

In 2000, the MoEHE's (2000) first initiative was to develop a Palestinian curriculum and a five-year development plan, emphasizing improving the quality of education, providing vocational education, meeting the needs of girls, and developing human resources. However, 2000 was also the first year of the second *intifada*, which halted any education development proposed by the MoEHE. Compared to the first *intifada*, the second *intifada* was more devastating and marked by higher levels of violence perpetrated by both Israel and Palestine. The actions of the Israeli military during the second *intifada* suggested that it was specifically targeting the Palestinian education system (Affouneh, 2007; Halstead and Affouneh, 2006). According to the MoEHE

(2004), children were unable to access schools because of school closures, curfews placed upon whole communities, and violence throughout Palestine. In the first four years of the second *intifada*, more than 1125 schools were closed (MoEHE, 2004), 295 buildings were damaged due to Israeli shelling, 97 were vandalized by Israeli soldiers, and 43 schools were converted into Israeli military bases (UNICEF, 2004). According to the MoEHE and UNESCO (2005), damage to education infrastructure alone totaled more than \$5 million. During this same four-year period, 516 school students were killed, 3417 were injured, and nearly 670 were arrested by the Israeli military (MoEHE, 2008). Additionally, 28 teachers and seven school employees were killed, with a much higher number injured or detained (MoEHE, 2004). The second *intifada* tapered off in 2005,² ending with approximately 4000 Palestinians and 1137 Israelis dead, as well as more than 50000 Palestinians and 8341 Israelis injured (B'Tselem, 2013; Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), n.d.).

Since the second *intifada*, a 700 km separation wall between Israel and Palestine has been under construction, adding more obstacles to the movement of teachers and students. The separation wall currently isolates at least 35,000 Palestinians and 50 communities in the area between the wall and the Green Line, the internationally recognized border between Israel and the West Bank (Schwebel, 1994). According to Halstead and Affouneh (2006), almost 3000 students and teachers pass through the gates in the wall everyday, subjecting them to lengthy delays and random closures. Save the Children (2004) reported that the wall makes children's journey to school “terrifying” and prevents teachers from bringing materials and resources to school.

Illegal Israeli settlements remain a primary reason for the development of the route of the separation wall. Settlements are residential, agricultural, and industrial areas exclusively for Israelis, built and sustained by the Israeli government on Palestinian land within the internationally recognized border between Israel and Palestine (UNOCHA, 2007). The settlements have been declared illegal by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council (Hollander, 2007). Yet, since 1967, Israel has established 135 settlements with over 350,000 Israeli settlers live in the West Bank and 300,000 living in East Jerusalem (Sherwood, 2012). The ubiquity of Israeli settlers in Palestine has led to increased instability in the region and violence against Palestinian children and families who live near settlements or who travel past settlements on their journey to and from school (Defence for Children International (DCI), 2010, 2013). For example, between January 2008 and the end of 2012, there were 129 documented cases of Palestinian children affected by settler violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including four fatalities (DCI, 2014).

Despite a strong cultural commitment to education, harsh economic and social conditions challenge the Palestinian educational system, complicate children access to education, and ultimately contribute to high dropout rates (UNOCHA, 2013). Ma'an Development Centre (2012) reported that in the Jordan Valley—95% of which is designated as Area C—10,000 children were attending school in tents, caravans, or tin shacks, and one-third of the schools lacked adequate water and sanitation facilities. Violence within schools—from Israeli soldiers or Israeli settlers or between Palestinians—is also a problem for Palestinian children, contributing to psychosocial distress and increased dropout rates (DCI, 2010, 2013). During the first six months of 2012, there were 14 documented incidents resulting in damage to schools or interruption of education, and in some cases, direct injury to children (UNOCHA, 2013).³ Children, especially those living in Area

² The ending date of the second *intifada* remains disputed, as there was no definitive event that effectively brought it to a close.

³ Eleven incidents were perpetrated by the Israeli military, two by Israeli settlers, and one by Palestinian armed groups.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6841267>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6841267>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)