

# PARC

PALESTINIAN AMERICAN RESEARCH CENTER

PROMOTING PALESTINIAN STUDIES AND SCHOLARLY EXCHANGE ON PALESTINIAN ISSUES

## Letter From the Chair

The last half year has been a busy one for PARC. Our efforts to build individual and institutional support for PARC have continued with tremendous success. We are glad to recognize in this issue those who in 2000 and 2001 have contributed to PARC's success.

Despite the adverse conditions in Palestine, PARC has continued its efforts to complete its field office registration and to establish contacts in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Mouin Rabbani, director of the field office, has provided an update for you on his activities and the events in the region.

We are pleased to announce the successful selection of another round of PARC Research Fellows. This year's competition brought 21 applications from scholars in a variety of disciplines including public health, literature, hydrology, anthropology, sociology, and law. We hope to fund seven of these Palestinian, American, and other scholars. Look on the web site ([www.parccenter.org](http://www.parccenter.org)) later this spring for a list of the new fellows. Our web site is currently undergoing a makeover, which we hope will be completed early this spring. Improvements to the site's content and design will make it a valuable resource to scholars interested in Palestinian studies.

I am also pleased to announce several changes to PARC's organization. Dr. Ann Mosely Lesch, who co-chaired PARC's steering committee with me until recently, has accepted the post of U.S. director for PARC. A professor in the department of political science and the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies at Villanova University and past president of the Middle East Studies Association in North America (MESA), Ann is highly regarded for her scholarship, administrative experience, and leadership. Her talents will go a long way to advance PARC's mission. A brief biography of Ann can be found on page two. Dr. Michael Fischbach, who has until now directed PARC's efforts, has moved onto the steering committee, where he will continue to lend his experience to the organization. We are grateful to Michael for his role as director and to Randolph-Macon College for providing us

with facilities and resources during PARC's nascent phase.

The steering committee welcomes into the fold Dr. Jillian Schwedler, assistant professor of political science at the University of Maryland, and Dr. Dina Rizk Khoury, associate professor of history and international relations and director of Middle East studies at the Elliot School of International Affairs at George Washington University. Jillian and Dina have already jumped into action on PARC's behalf, and we are delighted to have them on the steering committee.



Philip Mattar

Our fundraising efforts have continued to be successful. Our thanks and appreciation go out to the Earhart Foundation for renewing its support of PARC's programs with additional funds this year.

PARC has also begun the process of establishing an endowment that would provide long-term stability and support for its efforts here and abroad. As PARC seeks out other sources of grant support, we encourage you to continue your financial support. Your membership dollars and contributions provide us with operating money that keeps our doors here and in Palestine open. We need your financial help if we are to reach our goals. If you are not sure of your current membership status, please contact our office for an update by calling (804) 752-3790 or e-mailing [parc@rmc.edu](mailto:parc@rmc.edu).

Your input is important to us, and we invite your comments, suggestions, and especially your active participation in PARC's efforts to establish a premier scholarly center in the United States and Palestine that promotes Palestinian studies and scholarly exchange.

Philip Mattar  
Chair, PARC Steering Committee

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# About the Director

## Dr. Ann Mosely Lesch

Ann Lesch has been active with PARC since its inception. As co-chair of its steering committee with Philip Mattar, Ann helped to orchestrate PARC's early fundraising and membership drive successes. Ann's accomplishments as a scholar, writer, and editor; her range of contacts; and her organizational abilities will provide PARC with the breadth of leadership skills it needs to carry it successfully into the future.



Ann Mosely Lesch

Ann is a professor in the Department of Political Science and the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies at Villanova University and past president of the Middle East Studies Association in North America (MESA). She has published five books on Palestine: *Politics in Palestine, 1917-1939* (1979), *Political Perceptions of the Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza Strip* (1980), *Israel, Egypt and the Palestinians*, with Mark Tessler (1989), *Transition to Palestinian*

*Self-Government* (1992), and *Origins and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, with Dan Tschirgi (1998). She worked in Jerusalem for the American Friends Service Committee (1974-77), supervised a grants program on the West Bank for the Ford Foundation (1977-84), and conducted research in Gaza for Universities Field Staff International, while living in Cairo (1984-87). Ann served as editor of MESA's book review *Bulletin* (1997-99) and administered a federally funded exchange program between the business faculties of Villanova and Bethlehem universities (1994-99). She is also a member of the advisory committee of Human Rights Watch/Middle East and a member of the Middle East peace education advisory committee for the American Friends Service Committee.

## 2001 PARC Steering Committee

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### Palestinian American Research Center Newsletter Spring 2001

**Editor:** Ann Mosely Lesch

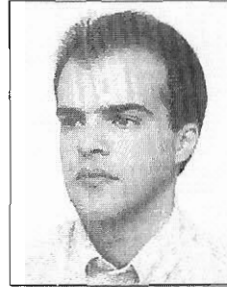
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# News from Palestine

**T**he end of 2000 and beginning of 2001 have proved more eventful than anticipated. As previously planned, PARC established its field office in Palestine. The same period witnessed the collapse of the peace process and the development of the most violent Israeli-Palestinian confrontation the occupied territories have experienced since 1967.



With a mandate to promote Palestinian studies and encourage scholarly exchange that enhances the quality of knowledge about Palestine, a permanent PARC presence in Palestine is above all a natural development that confirms the viability of the organization's mission. In practical terms, PARC now has a functioning office in the Ramallah/El Bireh area, the organization is in the process of registering with the local authorities, and PARC's existing network of contacts with Palestinian and other researchers and institutions in the region is steadily expanding. Efforts related to the latter objective will in the months and years to come increase PARC's membership base and, no doubt, facilitate the work of researchers visiting Palestine.

Of paramount importance, nevertheless, is that the proportion of local Palestinian researchers supported by PARC will also increase. In this respect, PARC was able to attract a significant number of Palestinian applicants affiliated with local institutions for its 2001 Fellowship Program. Many of the proposals submitted, which in addition to topics in the social sciences and humanities included research in hydrology and epidemiology, were of superior quality. In these difficult times when physical isolation is increasingly the norm for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, PARC fellowships are also enhancing the ability of Palestinian researchers and academics to strengthen their ties with foreign colleagues and universities.

In the context of the current Palestinian uprising, Israel's continued control over the details of Palestinian life also poses real challenges. Academic life has been severely disrupted, not so much by the general atmosphere of rebellion and repression, as by specific measures instituted by the Israeli military that impede the movement of students, staff, and faculty. In early March, for example, the army dug a large trench through the main road connecting Ramallah to Birzeit and stationed tanks at the relevant intersection to ensure it would remain impassable. In the current situation, it must be said this latest blockade affected only those who were not already confined to the Gaza Strip or other West Bank cities placed under what is politely termed "closure." Closer to home, the PARC office took a bullet from the settlement of Psagot located on the hills above Ramallah/El Bireh the night after Ariel Sharon's election. Several weeks later, two blocks up the road, a woman was killed by gunfire from the same settlement while out shopping with her husband and children on the eve of the Muslim holidays.

Against this background, the problems confronting Palestinian researchers and their foreign counterparts on account of sealed borders and closed boundaries would appear to be mundane. Yet issues of academic freedom are often a useful microcosm through which to evaluate a larger reality, and in this sense all too germane.

**Mouin Rabbani**  
Palestine Director

## Palestine Office Information

You can reach Mouin Rabbani at the following address and phone numbers:

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## Khoury and Schwedler Join Steering Committee

PARC extends a warm welcome to Dr. Dina Rizk Khoury and Dr. Jillian Schwedler, who recently joined its steering committee. The committee, charged with developing and implementing PARC's programs and setting its direction as an overseas research center, is delighted to have Schwedler and Khoury on its team of volunteers.

"Members of this committee are actively involved in helping PARC to establish itself as a premier research organization," said Ann Lesch, co-chair of the committee. "We welcome the experience and enthusiasm that Jillian and Dina bring to these efforts."

Khoury is an associate professor of history and international relations at George Washington University and director of Middle East Studies in the Elliot School of International Studies. At present her research is focused on the "politics of contestation" (i.e., rebellions and dissent) in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, particularly those in modern day Iraq. Khoury also teaches courses on Palestinian history and, as director of the Middle East Studies program, works with many undergraduate students interested in Palestinian studies and Palestinian-Israeli issues. As someone who has received research funding from the comparable American Research Institute in Turkey, Khoury fully supports PARC's goal to provide support to scholars in Palestinian studies. "There tends to be very little funding for work for Palestinian studies from other organizations in this country," Khoury noted. "I think an organization that deals with Palestinian issues and funds research in them is long overdue." In addition to her academic interests, Khoury, who is from Lebanon, is married to a Palestinian and maintains many connections in the region through family and friends.

Khoury is author of *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire, Mosul 1540-1834* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), and has published numerous articles in journals and edited volumes. She also served as a manuscript reviewer for Cambridge University Press, SUNY Press, St. Martin's Press, Oxford University Press, and Westview Press, reviewed articles for *Ethnohistory and Comparative Studies in Society and History*, and was book review editor for the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

Schwedler is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Maryland at College Park. Her research centers on civil society and the monopolization of dominant voices in public discourse. Her long-standing interest in the way people are represented in their societies focuses more specifically on voices that are not being heard. "The situation in Palestine is both a fascinating case and a compelling one," she believes, and one in which she feels PARC's presence in the field can make a difference. "From my own research experience, I know the value of on-the-ground research institutions that can make preliminary contacts and smooth the way for you. I'm excited to have the chance to work on building this kind of support system in Palestine through PARC."



Dina Rizk Khoury



Jillian Schwedler

Since 1996, Schwedler has been a member of the Editorial Committee of the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), publishers of the quarterly journal *Middle East Report*, for which she also serves as book review editor. She has received fellowships from the Social Science Research Council, the Fulbright Commission, the Council of American Overseas Research Centers, the American Institute for Yemeni Studies, and the Law and Society Association. Her extensive field research has taken her to Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Lebanon, Turkey, Syria, Israel, and the Palestinian territories. Her publications include *Toward Civil Society in the Middle East? A Primer* (Lynne Rienner, 1995), which she edited and for which she contributed the key article. Her articles have appeared in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *Middle East Insight*, *Middle East Report*, and in several edited volumes. She was also program officer for the Civil Society in the Middle East Project at New York University, which was funded by the Ford and Rockefeller foundations.

Khoury and Schwedler will waste no time in putting their talents to work for PARC. Khoury seeks to promote PARC's efforts among scholars and to increase awareness of PARC and its programs. Schwedler has already begun working on the redesign and upgrade of PARC's web site. Like all the committee's members, Khoury and Schwedler have lent their financial support to the center and are looking forward to helping build the center's membership and financial base.

## PARC Sponsors First Panel at MESA 2000



PARC's first MESA panel looked at the legacy and impact of British rule from 1922-1948. Panelists included (l. to r.) Salim Tamari, Roger Owen, Martin Bunton, Michael Fischbach, Ellen Fleischmann, Lisa Pollard.

PARC sponsored its first panel at the November 2000 meeting of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) meeting. The discussion, entitled "Rule by Records: The Impact and Legacy of British Rule in Palestine," featured Dr. Ellen Fleischmann (University of Dayton), Dr. Martin Bunton (University of Victoria and recipient of one of PARC's 2000-2001 research fellowships), Dr. Michael Fischbach (Randolph-Macon College and former director of PARC), and Dr. Salim Tamari (Institute of Jerusalem Studies). Dr. Sandy Sufian (Center for Health Research/Oregon Health Sciences University) was unable to attend but provided a paper on malaria and the sharing of medical knowledge in mandatory Palestine. Dr. Lisa Pollard (University of North Carolina-Wilmington) chaired the panel and Dr. Roger Owen (Harvard University) served as discussant.

While much of the research written on the British Mandate period (1922 to 1948) has tended to focus on diplomacy and the political struggle over Palestine, PARC's panel members explored neglected disciplines. For example, Fleischmann discussed a survey commissioned by the British director of health in Palestine that explored the sexual practices and attitudes of Palestinians, including the prevalence of promiscuous sexual intercourse, polygamy, and "unnatural vices," and "which tells us more about British officials than the Palestinians." Sufian's paper also dealt with public health, mainly the exchange of scientific information on malaria and swamp land between Zionist malariologists and British health officials that the Zionists used to promote Jewish settlement and to argue that their efforts were developing the country as a whole.

Both Bunton and Fischbach presented information on British land records. Bunton looked at how, in creating English language land registries, the British were interpreting a land tenure situation that they inherited. "A historian can't just look at a land registry and find objective data about who owned what, because you have to understand that all these records were being created by the British who were in a position of power and were writing things down in a language foreign to these Palestinians," said Fischbach. "In turn, these documents would have a profound effect on their economic lives." Fischbach asserted that the English-language land records continued to exert an impact on Palestinians, even after British rule ended in 1948. "The largest study ever done of Palestinian refugee property was done by the U.N. and was based on British land and taxation documents. These continue to affect their economic and social lives decades after the British left Palestine."

Salim Tamari extended the discussion beyond the British rule in Palestine by discussing the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) archives. These records include information collected routinely about some 3.3 million Palestinian refugees registered with the agency. When this voluminous data is transferred to CD-ROM, it will be an invaluable data bank to researchers working on social and economic aspects of the Palestinian refugee communities throughout the Middle East, about whom little is known.



# Many Thanks to Our Members!

*PARC would like to recognize the following institutions and individuals that have contributed membership support in 2000 and 2001. Without your financial support, PARC would still be just a good idea. Thank you for helping us to open our doors, in the U.S. and in Palestine, and to develop programs that support Palestinian research around the world.*

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## Monterescu to Study Space, Place, and National Identity in Israeli Mixed Towns

"The Palestinian citizens of Israel have been described as a trapped minority," said Daniel Monterescu, a doctoral student in anthropology at the University of Chicago. "They live in a state that specifically excludes the possibility of their full citizenship, yet at the same time they are territorially, demographically, and politically peripheral in the Arab world at large."

Palestinians and Jews do live in mixed towns, such as Haifa, Jaffa, Acre, Lydda, and Ramla, where they have created their own identities as separate groups and as a community. Monterescu's doctoral research looks into the phenomena of these mixed towns to examine how space, place, and national identity are represented and produced. Monterescu intends to examine and compare the ways in which these places impact on the identities of their Palestinian and Jewish residents. He examines the historical as well as cultural, demographic, and economic elements that affect those citizens.

"I understand mixed towns not simply as concrete spatial urban phenomena but also as the object of a political and cultural discourse, which embodies much larger questions regarding politics and social classification in the state and society. That is, mixed towns are not only a place where people live but also a place that has been constructed historically at least since the establishment of the state of Israel as a site of contact, confrontation, and co-existence."

Monterescu brings to bear his own upbringing in Jaffa, one of the mixed towns he is studying. There he studied at the College des Freres, a Christian-Jewish-Muslim school that introduced him to both French and Arab cultures. The experience, he said, "nurtured me as an apprentice 'stranger' with a zeal for studying cultural interfaces and strategies for coping with inter-cultural boundaries." From there, he went to Tel Aviv University and then to the University of Chicago, where he is completing his dissertation in anthropology.

Building on the classical sociologist Georg Simmel, who wrote on the social type of the stranger, Monterescu conceives the Palestinian citizens of Israel in mixed towns as a stranger collectivity in the sense that they are navigating within the complex Israeli and Arab political-cultural boundaries. "Life in mixed towns," he said, "is a mixture of dense daily coexistence interwoven with deep cul-

tural distance. This structure constitutes the frame that confronts the Palestinian members with the contingency of their dominant cultural categories (for instance their Arabness) vis-a-vis Western/Israeli society and creates a dialectic between closeness and remoteness, here and there, otherness, and familiarity, friends and foes."

In support of Monterescu's fellowship application, Dr. John Comoroff called the project "an innovative, courageous undertaking." Comoroff, professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago, also highlighted the significance of the study. "These mixed-towns," he pointed out, "loom very large in public discourse in the country: they are the object of a great deal of debate about the nature of Israeli/Palestinian relations and, by extension, about the political and cultural ontology of the nation state. They are also sites of acute political struggle. All of which promises to make [Monterescu's study] a genuinely important piece of work."

The current situation in Israel has given Monterescu additional material to scrutinize, Monterescu said, pointing particularly to a series of reports that has been published in *Haaretz* newspaper during the Al-Aqsa Intifada that presents the reality of mixed towns as one of Israel's central and particularly acute problems. "This series," he added, "demonstrates the growing interest in Israeli public opinion in the social, political, and cultural aspects of mixed towns, not necessarily as a site of violent conflict but as representation of Palestinian-Israeli relations in general." In addition, he said, "the effects of the second Intifada and the Israeli-Palestinians' reaction to it have also contributed to a growing discourse calling for the redefinition of Israeli citizenship in order to include more fully and equally its Palestinian citizens." For Monterescu's research, these last developments present "a rare opportunity to analyze in vivo and soberly the changing status of the Palestinian citizens of Israel in the Israeli polity."

Monterescu, who received a research fellowship from PARC last year, is currently in Jaffa interviewing municipal officials and local politicians for his project. His wife, Sivan Schneider-Monterescu, is a student in the M.A. program in social sciences at the University of Chicago and is also studying for a doctorate in psychology at the Illinois School of Professional Psychology.



Daniel Monterescu

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## Rabab Abdulhadi Visits Refugee Camps in Lebanon

**M**ore than any other segments of Palestinian society, Palestinian refugees anchor their Palestinianness in collective memories as they await the time when their homeland will be regained, in the view of Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi. A recipient of a 2000-2001 PARC fellowship, Abdulhadi seeks to find out whether these people are still an integral part of the Palestinian imagined community following the Oslo Accord and the emergence of the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Abdulhadi is collecting field data from two refugee camps each in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank, and Gaza. She is also studying five villages that were destroyed after 1948 or were repopulated by Jewish Israelis. "The abandonment, exclusion, and demoralization experienced by the population in PA areas sow the seeds of what I call 'Palestinian de-identification,'" she posits. The Palestinian leadership, especially the PA, she argues, no longer mobilizes Palestinians into a program of cohesion, consensus, and national unity; other forces, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, "compete for the hearts and minds of Palestinians."

Abdulhadi suspects that Palestinian de-identification is acute among residents of the refugee camps. Abdulhadi hopes to shed light on Palestinian social and political shifts and on Palestinian-Arab tensions and alliances.

"This project tests the validity of my hypothesis by investigating the form and content of emergent identification patterns among Palestinian refugees and the forcibly removed," she explained. Her research also seeks to understand how de-identification processes "influence and shape the collective action of the refugees and the forcibly removed."

Now an assistant professor of sociology at the American University in Cairo, Abdulhadi received her Ph.D. in May 2000 from Yale University. She also received M.Phil. and M.A. degrees from Yale and has a bachelor of arts, summa cum laude, from Hunter College of the City University of New York. Yale awarded her its Prize Teaching Fellowship in 1999-2000 (the highest honor for graduate students), a Henry Hart Rice Research Fellowship for 1997-1998, a summer research grant, and a pre-dissertation research grant. She was also one of 30 graduate students from among 6,000 candidates to receive the Sterling Prize Fellowship from Yale.

Abdulhadi began her field research in February in Lebanon, where she visited Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. At that point, "everyone to whom I spoke was very adamant

about the need to assert the right of Palestinian refugees to return," she said. Prior to the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the demoralization and de-identification in the camps was more evident, she was told.

While Abdulhadi was visiting one of the camps, a group of children of about 13 years of age gave her tours and spoke frankly about their desire to return to Palestine. "It is our land, and that is where we belong," they told her. "This is not the first time I heard these statements from Palestinian children, and it goes to the heart of my argument about the place of memory in the constitution of identity," Abdulhadi said.

Day-to-day life in the camps "is heart-breaking," Abdulhadi reported. "You cannot imagine, and I personally did not actually realize, how bad it was. The houses are on top of each other, the pathways are so small." Abdulhadi learned that people actually "buy air," meaning that they buy access to the roofs of homes "to be able to build a floor, and then someone else would come and do the same. Realistically, the camp can only expand vertically to accommodate its residents because it is not allowed to expand horizontally." The most horrific sight, she said, was the mosque "in which the victims of various massacres lay. There were people buried on top of each other from the Sabra and Shatila massacres [in 1982 and from] the wars in the camps during which Amal militias attacked the camps."

Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon makes camp residents feel that the "Palestinian leadership was not serious about retrieving their rights," she said. Even the children "cited the Israeli withdrawal to say, -Look, the Lebanese forced Israel to withdraw. If we resist, we can get our land back." The children also spoke to her of a trip they made to southern Lebanon after the Israeli withdrawal. "Palestinian children came from two camps, Shatila in Beirut, Lebanon, and Dheisheh Camp in Bethlehem, West Bank. Divided by barbed wire, they stood across the border to wave to each other." One child described how he waved to his relatives who remained in Israel and "how he saw Palestine and smelled it."

Abdulhadi plans to return to Lebanon in April or May to collect oral history narratives from the surviving victims of massacres. When she concludes her research in Lebanon, she will begin in Syria and Jordan.



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## Fred Lawson Examines Early Palestinian Nationalism

The question of whether the elite nationalists of Palestine were challenged by local activists during the period from 1918 to 1920 will be examined by Dr. Fred Lawson, a professor in the Department of Government at Mills College, Oakland, Calif. The recipient of a PARC fellowship for 2000–2001, Lawson hopes to discern any parallels to the political developments during the same time period in Syria. Specifically, “I intend to explore the most important sources for the history of Nablus and Tulkarm during these years to see whether they offer any evidence that elite nationalists in one or both of these two districts confronted significant challenges from popular leaders and organizations with divergent programs and constituencies,” explained Lawson. Both of the towns he will examine hosted a variety of clubs, associations, and political parties which were diverse in nature.

Research on the emergence of Palestine nationalism in Syria, says Lawson, reveals “glimpses of programs and organizations that might have posed a significant challenge to older and younger politicians alike.” For example, two groupings in Syria, the Association of Brotherhood and Purity and al-Fida’iyyah, were considered no more than thugs by the British, “yet they may have had political programs and constituencies that differed dramatically from those of their elite rivals,” noted Lawson.

Lawson’s project will supplement archival work that he has been pursuing for several years into the social bases and “trajectory of the guerrilla movement” that broke out southwest of Aleppo in the fall of 1919. He intends to make broader use of diplomatic and military documents he has previously studied in the U.S. National Archives, the Public Record Office in London, and the Jafet Library of the American University in Beirut.

Since he has not visited Palestine, Lawson plans to conduct an exploratory research trip to Palestine, where he will conduct research at the Center for Research and Documentation of Palestinian Society at Birzeit University and at the Arab Studies Society in Jerusalem. The latter, he said, houses a substantial collection of local newspapers dating from the early twentieth century, while the former should provide primary and secondary sources on the political and social history of modern Palestine.


While in Palestine, Lawson will also meet with Georges Hintilian of Jerusalem, an independent scholar who has been

“systematically accumulating personal reminiscences as part of an effort to preserve the oral history of Palestine during the pre-1948 era,” Lawson said.

Lawson is the author of three books: *Why Syria Goes to War: Thirty Years of Confrontation*; *The Social Origins of Egyptian Expansionism during the Muhammad–Ali Period*; and *Bahrain: The Modernization of Autocracy*. He has taught in the Mills College Department of Government since 1985 and previously taught at Smith College, the University of North Carolina, and the University of California, San Diego. He received his M.A. in 1976 and his Ph.D. from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1982; and an A.B. from Indiana University in 1974. His many articles and reviews examine Syria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, U.S. policy towards the Gulf States, and Middle East peace, among other topics.

A Fulbright lecturer at the University of Aleppo in 1992 to 1993, Lawson was the James Irvine Professor of Government at Mills College from 1995 to 1998. He also received a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Fellowship in 1996 and a U.S. Institute of Peace Research Fellowship for research on Syrian foreign policy in 1989.

James L. Gelvin, associate professor of history at UCLA, whose own research on Palestinian nationalism in Syria informs Lawson’s parallel study, endorsed Lawson’s application for a PARC Fellowship, calling it “truly innovative.” Lawson’s study will “restore to nationalism in Palestine a diversity that has all too often been elided,” Gelvin added.



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# Higher Education in Transition: Current Realities in Palestinian Universities

By Christa Bruhn

*Editor's note: The opinions contained in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of PARC.*

The responsibility for administering education was handed over to the Palestinians in August 1994, nearly a year after the Oslo Accords. After 26 years of Israeli occupation, gaining control over the educational system has posed tremendous challenges to the Palestinians as they struggle to define for the first time what role education will play in their national development. Until now, institutions of higher education have, for the most part, existed in isolation from one another. Recent changes call for greater cooperation and integration within a system of higher education that honors the autonomy and integrity of individual institutions while at the same time facilitates the needs of economic and social development. As stated in the Special Task Force plan for the Ministry of Higher Education, "the degree of success Palestinians will achieve in building a modern state will depend largely on the quality of the higher education system they build."<sup>1</sup> On my most recent trip to Palestine in August 2000, I researched how the role of higher education has changed through conducting 26 interviews with the presidents and/or vice-presidents of the nine universities, as well as officials in the Ministry of Higher Education and other prominent figures in Palestinian education. I found that the role of higher education in Palestine is indeed being transformed. Born as a vehicle for the development of national identity under Israeli occupation, it now faces the challenge of truly serving the educational needs of its people and defining its role in integrating the Palestinian people and contributing to Palestinian national development. This task is met with tremendous obstacles, including a financial crisis in higher education, ongoing repressive Israeli policies, and the explosion of frustration over the lack of diplomatic progress, all of which interfere with meaningful planning and development in higher education.

Overwhelming consensus among ministry and university officials confirms an emerging role of higher education in nation-building. The focus of this effort is to prepare the Palestinian people to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to be productive members of society as the infrastructure and institutions are developed as part of a larger modernization and state-building effort. The Ministry of Higher Education, established in 1996, focuses on raising the quality of programs by developing its regulation and accreditation capacity.<sup>2</sup> There is a general lack of trust among universities as to the extent to which the ministry wants to regulate institutional developments. Rather than be bound to new regulations coming from above, most universities have chosen to ignore calls for program evaluation and accreditation, resulting in an "unchecked proliferation of programs."<sup>3</sup>

Although the relationship between the ministry and the universities appears to be inherently adversarial,<sup>4</sup> the ministry hopes to serve as a facilitator of individual institutional efforts in self-improvement.<sup>5</sup> Elements within both segments have expressed a need for specialization. For example, Al-Najah University President Rami Hamdallah notes that "there is no strategic planning for higher education. We must merge specializations, colleges, and universities" so that we can better serve society and Palestinian development as a whole.<sup>6</sup> Without an integrated plan, it will be difficult for institutions to serve the needs of society at large. The absence of a plan will actually contribute to the developmental stagnation of Palestinian society as a whole.<sup>7</sup> "Everybody's working in isolation, but we all have the same problems," said Daoud Al-Zatari of Hebron Polytechnic.<sup>8</sup> Recognition of what universities share and the role the Ministry of Higher Education could play in coordinating the planning and communication among institutions is the first step toward tapping into the creativity and expertise within the larger system to better serve the social and economic needs of an emerging Palestinian state.

Leaders in higher education can take specific action to strengthen their role in national development in spite of the tremendous obstacles they face due to the confrontation with Israel. Initially, they can develop a common vision by recognizing a shared sense of purpose directed at Palestinian national development. Knowing they are on the same path would foster trust among universities at an institutional and systemic level. In the resulting spirit of collaboration, the unique strengths and contributions of each institution would come to the forefront so that universities, with the support and guidance of the Ministry of Higher Education, could develop partnerships among faculty, programs, institutions, and communities by sharing expertise and resources for mutually beneficial endeavors.

Based on my interviews, I believe that the Ministry of Higher Education neither wants to nor can police the activities of individual institutions. It can, however, provide guidance and support to the universities' own planning and development efforts and can seek to enhance higher education's contribution to national development in an atmosphere of collaboration rather than competition. Both the vision and the responsibility must be shared. Committing adequate financial and human resources to the Ministry of Education to facilitate alignment of these activities within the system is crucial to its stability. With higher education's vital role in economic development, universities must take their shared role seriously in enabling future generations of Palestinians not only to work within a viable

economy but also provide leadership to a people that has struggled for both identity and survival.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education, "Proposed Direction for Palestinian Higher Education: A Vision for the Future, Report of the Special Task Force on the Proposed Direction of Palestinian Higher Education," Ramallah, September 1999, p. 26.
- <sup>2</sup> Interview with Rubhi Abu-Sneineh, Ministry of Higher Education, Ramallah, 7 August 2000.
- <sup>3</sup> Interview with Jacqueline Steir, Bethlehem University, Bethlehem, 10 August 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> Interview with Ramzi Riham, Birzeit University, Birzeit, 14 August 2000.
- <sup>5</sup> Abu-Sneineh 7 August 2000 and Interview with Gabi Baramki, Ministry of Higher Education, Ramallah, 17 August 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Rafi Daraghmah, "Hamdallah tells Al-Ayyam: Al-Najah is turning into a first base for science and technology in Palestine," *Al-Ayyam*, Jerusalem, 8 August 2000, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Abdul Jawad Saleh, "Indigenous Problems of Institutions of Higher Education in the Occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip" (Jerusalem: Al-Quds Center for Research, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Daoud Al-Zatari, Hebron Polytechnic, Hebron, 16 August 2000.

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*Christa Bruhn is a doctoral student in educational administration at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. This article is based on a paper she presented at the Middle Eastern Studies Association (MESA) Conference in Orlando in November 2000.*

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## Palestinian Universities' Web Sites

by Megan Markward

*Editor's note: The opinions contained in this essay are those of the author and not necessarily those of PARC*

The last PARC newsletter introduced web sites of interest. These web sites represented various institutions, organizations, and universities related to Palestinian issues. This brief commentary focuses on the web sites concerning Palestinian universities.

Each university web site has shared elements, which simplify comparing and contrasting them. Each web site offers general information about the university including its unique qualities, examples of historical difficulties it has endured or withstood, and information about the surrounding geographical areas. For example, the Arab American University in Jenin web site ([www.aauj.edu](http://www.aauj.edu)) provides an "overview" section that includes subsections such as "reasons for a university" and "about the university." Each sub-section offers valuable information. For instance, the reader discovers that the university is affiliated with California State University and is located in the Jenin governorate, which has more than 225,000 residents, including two refugee camps and approximately 83 villages.

The Hebron University web site ([www.hebron.edu](http://www.hebron.edu)) has similar information under its "general information" section. There, you learn that Hebron University was established in 1971, and you can follow a timeline from its establishment to the present day. This details such occurrences as the settler attack on the university in 1983, which killed three people and injured 50 others. Along with Hebron University, an-Najah University ([www.najah.edu](http://www.najah.edu)), located in Nablus, offers an "About Us" section. Birzeit University ([www.birzeit.edu](http://www.birzeit.edu)) offers an "About Birzeit" section, Islamic University of Gaza provides "Word of the President," and Bethlehem University ([www.bethlehem.edu](http://www.bethlehem.edu)) offers an "Information" section. These web sites are all easy to use and offer comprehensive, general information on the universities' operations, location, and educational goals.

Each web site typically describes academic programs and provides special features, a list of faculty, a university news section, a way to contact the school by e-mail, campus maps, and a general search option to find specific items. These features are

sensible and are the same features that you would find on a university web site in the United States.

After examining these web sites, there was one that stands out in my mind. Birzeit University offers a unique and information-packed web site that is easy to use and provides an abundance of information. Located north of Ramallah, Birzeit University is dedicated to the preparation of "young Palestinian women and men to be responsible leaders and citizens." Its homepage offers myriad options, including information on the history of the university, the latest news, and information on current cultural events throughout Palestine. Under the site's "brief information" section, you find facts and interesting notes about the history Birzeit has both enjoyed and endured, such as how the university dealt with living under military occupation. In the dozen years from 1979 to 1992, the university was forced to close its doors to students approximately 60 percent of the time. Fortunately, Birzeit has not been closed in the past eight years. Nonetheless, the university faces difficulties in dealing with the continual arrest and detention of students, which interrupt their education.

Despite these obstacles, the web site displays the students' enthusiasm for their academic studies as well as for furthering their political objectives. By clicking on the "latest news" section, you can immediately view timely Palestinian cultural and political events in which students participate. Other sections include the "Ramallah Online Travel Guide," "Birzeit, Palestine, and the World Wide Web," and "What's New on this Web Site." Currently, the web site is being restructured to enhance its commitment to providing a top quality, informative, and up-to-date web site. Overall, the profusion of information available on the Birzeit University web site makes it a unique and special Palestinian university web site to visit and peruse.

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*Megan Markward is a master's degree candidate in political science at Villanova University.*

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