

Defying Exclusionary Democracy through Resilience in Palestinian Higher Education

Yasmin Snounu*
Eastern Michigan University

*Corresponding Author: yasminsnounu@fulbrightmail.org

Received : 2019-10-02

Revision: : 2019-11-18

Accepted : 2019-11-28

How to cite this paper: Snounu, Y. (2019). Defying exclusionary democracy through resilience in Palestinian higher education. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 2(3), 61-78.

Abstract

Through a mode of critical ethnography, this article analyzes disability in Palestine and the experiences and practices of professors and administrators on accommodating disabled students in Palestinian institutions of higher education. I discuss disability in Palestine within the context of what I as the researcher call “segregated/exclusionary democracy.” The term “segregated/exclusionary democracy” refers to the political bonds between Israel and the United States of America that often lead to exclusion of the indigenous Palestinian community from the rights and privileges of civil government and from participation as members of a nation in the affairs of the world. Segregated/exclusionary democracy and its consequences on disability in Palestine are the context in which the experiences of the Palestinian faculty and administrators are analyzed. Using critical disability studies while also drawing from elements of teacher development theories, this paper identifies transformational ways of thinking about disability in which Palestinian educators defy exclusionary democracy through promoting/adopting inclusive pedagogical practices toward accommodating disabled students in higher education.

Keywords: Segregated/Exclusionary Democracy, Palestinian Higher Education Institutions, Disability, Pedagogical Advocacy

Introduction

This critical ethnography discusses how macro factors, the Israeli Apartheid, and the support Israel receives from the United States of America contribute to maiming the indigenous Palestinians. This ethnography also elaborates ways in which Palestinian higher education defies exclusionary democracy through inclusion. Disability in Palestine is intertwined with local and international political factors. Locally, the Israeli occupation maintains practices of maiming Palestinians through the Israeli military policy of targeted shooting of the heads, spine, and legs of protestors and deliberately harming unarmed Palestinians (Jaffee, 2016). Puar (2015) described this as shoot to kill and shoot to maim, which is part of the Israeli exercise of political power and domination. Internationally, on the other hand, the U.S., as a core country with the

largest capitalist system and one of the most powerful global economies in the world, has overwhelmingly supported Israel and its practices against the indigenous Palestinians. And “because of the dishonest brokering of the U.S. and Europe’s impotence in international affairs, Israel continues to enjoy immunity in this process” (Chomsky & Pappé, 2015, p. 38).

The relationship between Israel and the United States has led to social injustice and exploitation of indigenous Palestinian resources while simultaneously enhancing privileges for Israelis. Such a political relationship creates a new form of colonialism in which peace agreements between Israel and Palestine keep Palestinians dependent on Israel (Chomsky & Pappé, 2015). This constitutes the context in which I examine disability in Palestine in general and in Palestinian higher education in particular. This article seeks to advance the field of disability studies through examining the political implications of disability in Palestine. Most importantly, the article highlights values of what Price (2011) called ethics of care, which Palestinian academics in higher education practice through pedagogical considerations. Practices of accommodation and pedagogical inclusion in Palestinian higher education are ways to challenge the current populist American-Israeli relationships and the direct Israeli policies that constantly target Palestinian bodies.

First, this paper discusses the ways in which the political relationship between the U.S. and Israel result in segregated/exclusionary democracy and lead to social injustice for the Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank (internationally recognized together as the State of Palestine). The study also provides a brief history of disability in higher education and disability laws in Palestine. Second, through Palestinian academic voices, this study highlights the consequences of such segregated/exclusionary democracy on disability in Palestine. Third, it describes how faculty and administrators find ways to support their disabled students in higher education as a means of resilience in the face of segregated/exclusionary democracy.

Research Questions

This study examines the following questions:

- What are the macro political factors affecting disability in Palestine (mainly Gaza and the West Bank)?
- What is the role of higher education in promoting negative/positive perceptions of disabled students and in accommodating them?
- What are possible pedagogical practices toward achieving an inclusive educational environment in higher education?

The study findings show that Israel continues to maim the Palestinians with the support of the supposedly democratic U.S. Although U.S. foreign policies contribute to maiming the Palestinians by providing Israel military funds and weapons, the study identifies transformational pedagogical practices which academics in Palestinian higher education use to accommodate disabled students. Through this resilience in supporting students with disabilities, they defy the segregated/exclusionary democracy of the U.S. and Israel.

Segregated/Exclusionary Democracy: The U.S., Israel, and Palestine

In the last few years, there have been debates on what democracy looks like in the U.S. under the administration of Donald Trump. In reference to the Economic Intelligence Unit's (EIU) democracy index, the U.S. is no longer a full democracy (Yakabuski, 2019). Yakabuski maintains that the EIU categorized democracy in the U.S. as "flawed" (para. 1), especially since Donald Trump's tantrum over the refusal of Democrats in Congress to approve funds for building a wall at the American-Mexican border. Yakabuski further argues that Americans have lost their trust in the current democracy. The flaws of American democracy exist not only internally through inequalities within the U.S. such as racism and mass incarceration, but also tend to inflict injustices on other nations through U.S. foreign policies, such as those applying to Palestine. Here, I contend that American democracy is a segregated/exclusionary democracy because its foreign policy contributes massively to preventing Palestinians from attaining their right to self-determination and from participating as members of a nation on the world stage. The influence of American foreign policy has powerful effects because of the U.S. position as a core country in the world system. I argue that U.S. foreign policy decisions contribute to the maiming of both the bodies of Palestinians and Palestinian geography.

There are myriad examples of enormous support to Israel from the U.S. The most recent examples are the U.S.'s unilateral decision and declaration in late 2017 of Jerusalem as the state capital of Israel (Jakes & Halbfinger, 2019) and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's announcement in November 2019 that the U.S. does not consider Israeli settlements in the West Bank to be a violation of international law (Jakes & Halbfinger, 2019). Another example is the 2019 U.S. Senate bill that included providing Israel a \$38 billion aid package as part of combating the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement (BDS) against Israel (Wier, 2019). In fact, American administrations have promoted the Zionist project as early as 1887, when President Grover Cleveland appointed a Jewish ambassador to Turkey because of "Palestine's importance to Zionists" (Weir, 2014, p. 5). For years, American military aid to Israel has been calculated at approximately \$10.5 million per day, while the U.S. provides zero dollars in military aid to Palestine (If Americans Knew, n.d.).

Furthermore, multiple forms of apartheid policies against the indigenous Palestinians have been identified. Collins (2008) elucidated that Israel has colonized Gaza through its technology-driven military to maintain control using drones and the siege imposed since 2006. Israel has also promoted building an apartheid wall (Bennis, 2009; Carter, 2006); the wall is now built on 50 percent of the West Bank (Bennis, 2009; Horowitz, Ratner, & Weiss, 2011). Israeli justification of the forms of control they impose on the Palestinians include, but are not limited to, "self-defense" and "protecting themselves" from the Palestinians. In that regard, Chomsky and Pappé (2015) identified Israel as a settler-colonial society. As Carter (2006) and Bennis (2009) have pointed out, the Oslo Agreement, which was signed between the Israelis and the Palestinians under American mediation, gave very little power to the Palestinian Authority (PA), thus establishing a new form of control by giving Israel more freedom to establish complete jurisdiction over Gaza and the West Bank. Thus, the Oslo Agreement gave the Israeli army more

freedom to exercise hegemony within the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Carter, 2006), which places peripheral Palestine at the mercy of both semi-peripheral Israel and the core U.S. Segregated/exclusionary democracy is further manifested and represented by an ideology of Western superiority over the East, which has created a system of knowledge full of stereotypes and misrepresentations about the Middle East (Said, 1979). Ethnocentric European ideas of the East as backward and uncivilized comprised the foundation of American political and economic policies in the Middle East and led as well to inaccurate and incomplete understandings of the Middle East (Said, 1979). The West has viewed the East in a way that distorts the actual realities of the East and Eastern culture to make the people of the Arab region look threatening and to suggest that the only way to deal with them is through violence (Said, 1979). All of this distortion is manifested through inaccurate descriptions in art and other fields to show the East, and Arabs in particular, as barbaric, ignorant terrorists, creating an “Other” (Said, 1979). The foreign policy of the U.S. perpetuates this “Othering” by asserting political differences between Israelis and Palestinians, keeping Palestine as a nation in the periphery.

Said (1979) argues that Western Christian-Judaic ideologies that consider Islam, the East, and Arab countries the enemy are a result of the West’s producing false and inaccurate knowledge. Such false representations are created through fabricating images of Arabs (Shaheen, 2003), thus producing misrepresentations and stereotypes of the East. For example, American textbooks often indicate a negative image of Arabs. As Wingfield and Bucher (1995) described it, the textbooks show “an over-portrayal of deserts, camels and nomads in the chapter on the Middle East” (p. 5), images that are threatening to the West. Shaheen (2003) and Yin (2010) conclude that Arabs and Muslims in the American media and Hollywood are vilified and depicted as subhuman. Similarly, when Palestinians resist the Israeli colonizer, they are described as terrorists, while Israeli violence against them is ignored or justified as simple law enforcement. Such distorted, internalized knowledge is highly politicized and motivated by the American relationship with Israel, and that information is used to legitimize and retain the systemic relation between the two states (Said, 1979). Such a relationship contributes to increase the number of disabled Palestinians maimed by the Israeli army, which uses American money and American-made weapons. Since the Palestinian Authority started governing Gaza and the West Bank around 1993, it has attempted to counteract Israeli damage by using laws and education to address disability.

A Brief History of Disability and Higher Education in Palestine

In light of the political situation in Palestine, the most important Palestinian disability law, On the Right of the Disabled Act (RDA), was enacted in 1999 under the leadership of then-president Yasser Arafat. It stipulated that persons with disabilities must be provided with an equal opportunity for enrollment in schools and universities, and they should be provided with all necessary pedagogic means and facilities (Arafat, 1999; The Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, n.d.). The RDA was followed by the establishment of a department for disabled people under the responsibility and supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs (Amro, 2001). Although the RDA guarantees rights and entitlements for disabled people, particularly in education, Palestinians with disabilities have never had the basic rights of living (e.g., access to

food, water, electricity, etc.). This is because the Palestinian Authority (PA) has continuously experienced political turbulence, including American government threats to cut off American humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, internal division between the Palestinians, and the Israeli army's continual massive attacks on Gaza that make it almost impossible to implement the RDA (Diakonia, 2015; World Health Organization, 2013). Consequently, the PA cannot offer more than 20 percent of necessary services to disabled people (Amro, 2001).

Despite the unstable political situation, the PA—the recognized government of Palestine—remains focused on improving living conditions for disabled people in Palestine, especially because they are twice as vulnerable as those with no disabilities (Amro, 2001). In 2004, the RDA was revised by the Palestinian Legislative Council (Qure'a, 2004). The RDA stipulated that the Ministry of Education and Higher Education must provide an environment in schools, colleges, and universities that is appropriate for the needs of persons with disabilities. This can be done through modifications and accommodations including elevators, technological equipment, accessible restrooms, and fields and sports rooms appropriate for the mobility of people with disabilities (Qure'a, 2004). Nevertheless, implementing the RDA and its executive procedures of 2004 remains difficult in higher education due to the political and financial obstacles. Many higher education institutions have been working to support and include disabled students. Birzeit University, in the West Bank, started accelerating efforts to support students with disabilities to combat cultural attitudes that accept current conditions and to ensure inclusion for these students. For instance, Birzeit University's Committee for Students with Disabilities was founded in 2008 as a student organization advocating for an inclusive environment for students with disabilities. This organization is now providing tools and assistive technology and is working to renovate university buildings by making them accessible through installing more ramps and elevators (Birzeit University, 2015).

Methods

This paper relies on critical ethnography for its methodology. Critical ethnography is orientational research that is launched with clear and explicit "ideological frameworks" (Glesne, 2006, p. 16). The purpose of critical ethnography, as Glesne (2006) explained it, is to reveal "unexamined assumptions and the ways in which people may be accepting explanations of the dominant cultural group that serve to oppress those without power" (p. 16). Hence, my understanding of experiences and practices of Palestinian faculty and administrators in higher education is derived from semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes, and pictures taken between October 2015 and December 2015, and September and December 2017. The two stages were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Eastern Michigan University.

In analyzing data and translating the Arabic interviews, I made translation decisions about the meanings of the Arabic transcriptions and adhered mainly to literal translation of the original Arabic verbatim texts. It is important to elaborate on my translation procedure, which was critical to the meaning and analysis of data in this study. In order for me as a researcher to grasp a deep understanding of my data, I chose to transcribe and translate myself, and I

confidently used my extensive experience in translation to work on translating the data of this research. I also printed out all the transcriptions in both Arabic and English and used the hard copies to compare translations and identify themes using color coding.

Subjectivity

Self-reflexivity (Peshkin, 1998; Watt, 2007) has been an integral part of this research. Knowing where I stand politically influenced the process of this research. Born and raised in Gaza until the age of 23, I experienced living under Israeli occupation as a Palestinian. This experience and identity allowed me to connect with the Palestinians in this study. For instance, because I am Palestinian, I had easy access to participants who share the same identity and who have similar experiences under the Israeli occupation. Even though I never lived in the West Bank, participants there were thrilled to be part of my study; they all continually affirmed how important it is to study disability in Palestine because of the increasing numbers of Palestinians with disabilities, as well as lack of support on the medical, economic, labor, and social levels. They often expressed how proud they were to meet a Palestinian working on a Ph.D. Palestinians have always invested in education, especially after losing their indigenous land. Palestinian families often encourage their children to become educated because we consider it a tool of resistance. This is one reason my participants were happy to be part of my study. The second reason is the topic of the study: Many of them were excited that my research is focused on disability, as they explained to me that it would contribute to the field because there is a lot to be improved for Palestinians with disabilities. For these two reasons, I had easy access to academic personnel despite difficulty reaching the locations of these universities due to high demand for local transportation.

In addition, meeting all participants of this study, interacting with them, and observing them on a daily basis was an eye-opening experience for me, especially in an area of Palestine where I have never lived. I came to learn about my fellow Palestinians in the West Bank. I had thought that we, in Gaza, suffered more than Palestinians in the West Bank. Nevertheless, spending four months in Ramallah in the West Bank allowed me to witness that the suffering of the Palestinians in the West Bank due to the Israeli occupation was as severe as in Gaza, but in different forms. In Gaza, Israel imposes siege where Palestinians are not allowed to move freely or travel, the levels of poverty and unemployment increase constantly, and more civilians are killed or maimed through periodic, extensive bombing on Gaza. On the other hand, I had never before experienced the agony of the apartheid Israeli practices in the West Bank, manifested in the wall that cuts the West Bank cities into small cantons with checkpoints between the cities where Palestinians in the West Bank often need permits from Israel to cross from one city to another. Despite that, resilience is yet pervasive in the efforts of Palestinian educators. They create ways to establish inclusive environments, as will be presented in the next sections.

In this study, I alternate between the terms “disabled” and “persons with disability.” This is to emphasize, after having interacted with participants, diversity and different ways disabled individuals asserted their choices and identity.

Participants

I interviewed and observed a total of 15 college faculty members and administrators in Gaza and the West Bank. Interviews were done in two stages. The first stage was between October and December, 2015; the second stage was between September and December, 2017. Observations took place at the University of Eastern Palestine and the University of Western Palestine in the West Bank. (All names used in this study, with the exception of those of public figures to whom I refer, are pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants and institutions.) During this time, I observed 15 class sessions, taking notes and pictures, over a time period ranging from one hour to an hour and a half. I also observed 10 workshops, educational sessions, meetings, and ceremonies relevant to students with disabilities on these campuses, e.g., sign language training. Table 1 provides details and characteristics about the study participants.

Table 1: Participant Titles and Affiliations

Name	Title	Affiliation
Dr. Adel	Professor and Head of Architectural Engineering Department	The University of Western Palestine
Dr. Adham	Professor of Linguistics	The University of Western Palestine
Amany	Lab Assistant and Supervisor at Lab for Blind Students	The University of Eastern Palestine
Dr. Fadel	Professor of Philosophy and Cultural Studies	The University of Western Palestine
Dr. Fadwa	Professor of Sociology	The University of Eastern Palestine
Hatem	Director at service center for students with disability	Southern University of Gaza
Majed	Director of Student Affairs	The University of Eastern Palestine
Dr. Niveen	Psychological Counselor, Academic Advisor, and Part-time Instructor	The University of Western Palestine
Raeda	Social Worker/Counselor and Part-time Instructor	The University of Western Palestine
Rana	Assistant Officer working with students with disabilities	The University of Western Palestine
Dr. Said	Dean of Student Affairs	The University of Eastern Palestine
Dr. Shaban	Professor of Sociology and Social Work	The University of Eastern Palestine
Shadi	Acting Director of Committee for Disabled Students	The University of Western Palestine
Dr. Suhail	Professor of Information Technology	The University of Eastern Palestine
Tala	Sign Language Interpreter Assistant	The University of Eastern Palestine

Results and Discussion

Some of the themes derived from the data highlight that participants repeatedly made reference to U.S. and Israeli practices. Data gathered identified the following themes:

1. Intentional maiming of Palestinians as an exclusionary Israeli practice
2. Progressive pedagogical practices in Palestinian higher education

Subthemes also emerged under the second theme as follows:

- a. Accommodation, support, and expectations
- b. Pedagogical advocacy practices
- c. Faculty's involvement in advocacy for the community

Themes describe in detail how Israel maims Palestinians and the practices against Palestinians that impede them from self-determination, all of which contradicts the principles of democracy. In addition, participants also discussed their progressive approaches in higher education to resist such segregation practices that cause Palestinians harm and physical disabilities.

Intentional Maiming of Palestinians as an Exclusionary Israeli Practice

Due to the empowerment and support that the U.S. grants to Israel, the crimes of the Israeli occupation make the percentage of people with disabilities in Palestine among the highest in the world (Abu Fedala, 2009; Amro, 2001). For instance, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Social Development, 49,000 individuals have some type of disability in Gaza (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2017). The continuous killing and maiming of Palestinians occur on a daily basis, as my participants explained. Dr. Fadwa, for instance, describing the daily life of Palestinians, claimed that "anyone may receive a bullet [from Israelis] any time."

The Israeli army often targets specific parts of the body when shooting at Palestinians (Abu Fedala, 2009). Majed described that "most of the physical disabilities are caused by the [Israeli] occupation." Dr. Niveen added that "the bullets used are internationally prohibited, the type of bullet that smashes the bones, so bones can never heal." Shadi also explained that "the occupation tries to focus on causing a disability if it does not want to kill. Most of the injuries . . . are focused on causing disabilities in the leg, in the spinal region, meaning injuries that will create physical disabilities." These examples given by study participants illustrate what medical personnel in both Gaza and the West Bank describe as a notable "shoot to cripple" phenomenon (Puar, 2015, p. 3). This phenomenon reflects what Smith (2005) referred to, discussing ghettoizing people with intellectual disabilities, as "normalized culture" built on "Otherizing" (p. 89). Identically, Israel created itself as a Jewish state, while Othering/Otherizing indigenous Palestinians; Israel here reflects "a normative ideology," a term Smith (2005) used to describe White supremacy in creating taxonomies that consider Whites to be superior and persons with intellectual disabilities to be inferior. Israel in that sense falls into a normative ideology that produces behaviors of prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion. Behaviors, whether by the Israeli army or Israeli settlers, are mainly represented in attacking and shooting Palestinians to kill and to cripple, as a daily practice.

Besides the daily Israeli attacks on Palestinians, several extensive military operations against the Palestinians have increased the numbers of Palestinians with mobility, visual, and/or

hearing disabilities. For instance, during the first Intifada (Uprising) in 1987, 80,000 Palestinians were injured, and 15,000 of them were left with permanent disabilities (Amro, 2001). As for the second Intifada in 2000, 23,336 Palestinians were shot by the Israeli army, resulting in thousands with physical disabilities (Abu Fedala, 2009; Diakonia, 2015). Participants also spoke about the policy of *breaking bones* (Amro, 2001) to deter Palestinians from protesting during the first Intifada; as Shadi pointed out, “breaking bones is practically part of the [Israeli] colonizer’s policies.” The practice of torturing those who protest and breaking their bones perpetuates incursive control and power relations between the Israelis and Palestinians. Here, critical disability studies (CDS) explore social meanings and power hierarchies in connection with systems of oppression and exclusion (Siebers, 2008). From a CDS perspective, the Israeli practices create and reproduce social meanings related to their race as God’s chosen people (Newcomb, 2008), referring back to Abraham’s race (Newcomb, 2008), and thus excluding the Palestinians who are punished by breaking their bones or shooting them to inflict physical disability or to kill them if they resist the colonizing power and its domination.

Moreover, the participants also described other extensive bombings on Gaza. Dr. Said, for example, referred to the extensive attack on Gaza that occurred in late 2008 and early 2009 as “the barbaric bombing that hit even schools.” During that attack, the Israeli army killed around 1,400 Palestinians using phosphorus bombs, which caused physical disabilities in thousands of other individuals suffering internal phosphorus burns and “focused lethality ammunition” (Horowitz et al., 2011, p. 144). The United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Assistance to the Palestinian People and the Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (2014) confirmed that during that attack in late 2008, 9,986 were injured, mostly women and children. In 2014, Israel launched another massive 50-day attack on Gaza, which killed 2,145 and injured over 11,000 Palestinians (UNDP’s Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People & Fayyad, 2014). Similarly, Jaffee (2016) stated that Israel imposes a blockade and prevents Palestinians from accessing health care while it maintains practices of paralyzing Palestinians as an Israeli military policy, targeting the heads and legs of protestors, and deliberately harming unarmed Palestinians. These behaviors show the inhumane discursive practices of domination, while the large-scale destruction Israel inflicts on the bodies of Palestinians and the Palestinian infrastructure prevents local and international healthcare providers from addressing the needs of Palestinians (Puar, 2015).

The numbers of Palestinians who are maimed by Israel increases daily. Participants such as Dr. Niveen, Shadi, Dr. Fadwa, Tala, Dr. Fadel, Dr. Shaban, and Dr. Adham shared stories of Palestinians maimed or killed at the Israeli checkpoints while heading to the university or while at home. Tala indicated she has “a student who was shot in his eye from the occupation. He lost his sight.” Dr. Shaban also pointed out that the Israeli army in his village in Jerusalem “stops students [heading to school] and restrains them, makes them step down from the bus, attacks them, and assaults them.” These practices also apply to Gaza but take different forms. On March 30, 2018, thousands of Palestinians in Gaza demonstrated during Land Day at the “Israeli” Gazan borders, and in one day, Israel killed 16 unarmed Palestinians, injured more than 1,500, and caused over 100 to lose their legs due to lack of medical support (Cunningham & Balousha, 2018). The United Nations-OCHA (2018) indicated that “between 30 March and 31 July 2018,

164 Palestinians were killed and over 17,000 injured by Israeli forces” (p. 1). According to the United Nations News (2019), top United Nations officials warned that hundreds of peaceful protestors are at risk of limb amputation due to lack of medical services and the siege Israel imposes on Gaza. Such practices are not accidental or collateral damage, as the American and Western media often claim. Rather, the practices are the essence of the discriminatory and prejudiced culture of colonizing Israelis.

On the other hand, Collins (2008) illustrated how the Israeli application of force, intimidation by the Israeli army, and control of all aspects of life restrict and confine Palestinians’ lives; Israel tightens its control over Palestine, over Gaza in particular, through technology-driven methods such as surveillance, bombing, assassination, and using satellite-guided weapons. All of these practices debilitate the lives of millions of Palestinians. In addition, there are myriads of examples of Israeli atrocities, such as burning alive a Palestinian child in Jerusalem and slaying whole families in Gaza (Pappé, 2014), all of which are “still publicly licensed and approved by the president of the United States, the leaders of the European Union and Israel’s other friends in the world” (Pappé, 2014, para. 4). The Israeli’s systematic oppressive practices in maiming the indigenous Palestinians are part of a colonizer’s agenda supported by the West. The intentional maiming of Palestinians is a result of a “normalized” system that positions Palestinians as inferior and worthy of harm and exclusion. Such a system relies on discourse about “self-defense” and “states’ rights” in order to segregate and maintain an ideology of superiority. The indigenous Palestinian population living in Gaza and the West Bank have been enduring fatal implications of segregated/exclusionary democracy; the U.S. and state of Israel claim to take pride in their alleged “democratic political systems,” yet their actions translate principles of segregation, injustice, and oppression. Nevertheless, Palestinian higher education plays a crucial role in challenging such segregated/exclusionary dynamics through progressive pedagogical practices of inclusion.

Progressive Pedagogical Practices in Palestinian Higher Education

Palestinian faculty consider supporting disabled students as part of their national duty towards their occupied country. Dr. Fadwa asserted her service commitment: “I consider my belonging to the Palestinian human community as a type of resistance and fight My role makes me responsible to be with the society, and not hide from problems.” Disability is an equally revolutionary experience for Palestinians, which means that fighting for disabled Palestinians is considered a way to resist the Israeli occupation that causes these disabilities. All professors and administrators highlighted how they accommodate disabled students despite the absence of any specific mandates or codes from the university. Academics promote the pedagogical practices they adapt in their classrooms in an attempt to advocate for disabled individuals and to support resistance of the Israeli occupation. In addition, participants demonstrated a sense of care through their commitment to advocate for disabled individuals not only on campus, but also off campus, through being involved with the community.

Accommodation, Support, and Expectations

Faculty and administrators in Palestine demonstrated a willingness to accommodate disabled students without a letter of accommodation. They all demonstrated a high level of taking initiatives towards accommodating disabled students. They all provided several examples of actions they have taken to accommodate and make sure students know that they would accommodate any needs. The Palestinian professors not only accommodate disabled students, but they also extend support to them in many ways while still communicating high expectations. Accommodating students without a letter of accommodation is a norm among professors in the Palestinian universities. The examples vary. Dr. Fadel allows blind students to bring someone to write for them; he once said to a student: "I have full trust in you; you can bring anyone; I do not have any problem." Professors not only accommodate disabled students on campus, but they are also willing to extend accommodation off campus based on the circumstances. For instance, in the case of the student with bullous erythroderma, "professors go to her house to give her exams," Raeda stated. Similarly, Professor Fadwa went to the hospital many times to give exams to her students who had been shot by the Israelis. Dr. Adel insisted that there is "an ethical code" among professors in his engineering department that they do not even discuss accommodations; they provide them to students without any concerns. From a teacher development perspective, the practices of the Palestinian professors show what Bowers (1993) indicated as the teachers' consciousness of complexities of a reality. The Palestinian professors are conscious of the political situation that debilitates the Palestinians to the extent that, in any moment, one of their students may become disabled. They are conscious, and they act upon that consciousness. As a result, they adhere to the emotional aspect of their job as educators, as teaching is a job that has been described by sociologists as "emotional labor" (Price, 2011, p. 46). To care for students, especially those with disabilities, is considered an emotional turn in academic discourse.

At the same time, all professors held high expectations for disabled students. Dr. Adham insisted that he is "against exempting disabled students from anything," which indicates that faculty maintain a positive attitude and respect towards students with disabilities and their capabilities to succeed and excel like others. Drago-Severson (2009) suggests that clear expectations should be identified so mutual respect and trust are built and understanding is shared. In fact, many participants in the study argued that maintaining high expectations helps disabled students have high self-esteem and work hard. Rana, for instance, mentioned a disabled student in the architecture major who wanted professors to pass him even though he was not able to pass. University personnel kept encouraging him until he changed majors to study languages, and he is now on top of the honor list. Thus, instead of pitying disabled students, professors promote them to achieve their full potential. Maintaining clear and high expectations from faculty means not exempting disabled students from assignments or tasks. Dr. Said associated exempting students from their academic duties with a lack of self-esteem. He argued, "We do not exempt them because not exempting them has a positive reflection on them and how they perceive themselves." That way, people with disabilities start rejecting pity as "the new thinking by disabled people that there is no pity or tragedy in disability, and that it is society's myths, fears, and stereotypes that most make disabled difficult" (Shapiro, 1993, p. 5). Faculty members in Palestinian higher education promote inclusion, equity, and academic success by being deeply conscious of the needs of their students, emotionally supporting them,

actively responding to their needs, and strongly rejecting any exemptions. Instead, faculty adapts pedagogical alternatives as a way not to exempt disabled students and as a way to advocate for them.

Pedagogical Advocacy Practices

The Palestinian professors have been able to accommodate and advocate for disabled students due to their flexible academic practices. They would not abide by any one-way, rigid academic practice. Price (2011) provides examples of one-way, rigid academic practices that eliminate those with mental disabilities, for instance, from spaces or locations, or what she rhetorically calls “Kairotic spaces” (p. 60). *Kairos* is a Greek word meaning “time,” “occasion,” “opportunity,” or “right proportion,” and *kairotic* spaces means appropriate locations where people exchange knowledge. Price (2011) explained that such spaces are challenging for people with mental disabilities and how these spaces work in academia to exclude other ways of “making sense.” Price (2011) urged educators to adopt a universal design that must be accessible to all learning styles, different personalities, and abilities, a design that should always be under revision.

Dr. Adel provides an example of universal design by urging students with hearing impairments to pull up a chair and sit next to him. Dr. Adel’s practices are parallel to what Price (2011) called for as “a way to move” (p. 87) in redesigning the kairotic space of the classroom. The pedagogical practices are also evident when Palestinian professors come up with alternatives in their pedagogy to create an inclusive environment and equal opportunities for their disabled students. Professors do that in different ways, whether by changing the format of tests or formats of test questions from an essay question to multiple choice for those who cannot write, as Rana explained, or watching and listening to a documentary instead of reading a book that is not available in Braille, as Dr. Fadel does.

From a teacher development standpoint, it seems that the Palestinian faculty are immersed in what Drago-Severson (2009) described as a transformational learning process, where they are able to adjust and adopt alternative pedagogical practices. The approaches of the Palestinian faculty also reflect the transformational ways of knowing that Howard (2006) suggested as an attempt to embrace diversity in the classrooms: *knowing my practices, knowing myself, and knowing my students*. When applying this model to accommodating students with disabilities, *knowing my practices* enables professors to examine their curriculum, pedagogy, instructional design, history, and human relations and check if they are inclusive. *Knowing myself* enables educators to question their assumptions, and *knowing my students* enables faculty to relate to their students through knowing their students’ backgrounds, cultures, and social and economic situations. As a result, immersion in different ways of knowing helps educators question labeling and ableism. All of this is in practice by the Palestinian faculty, and thus they trust, care for, and include their students instead of judging them.

Furthermore, faculty discussed in detail how they raise the topic of disability in the classroom and how the topic of disability is part of the course content. For example, Dr. Adel always urges his students to think about disabled individuals when designing a building. The first question he

asks his students is “Where is the ramp?” He lectures his students: “Just like you assume there is someone who can take the stairs, you want to know that someone else needs to take the ramp.” Professor Fadwa also raises questions on disability such as the location of the Palestinian Disability Union and what radio stations focus on disability. All of these practices contribute to avoiding what is culturally taken for granted and to making appropriate teaching decisions, according to Bowers (1993). In that regard, teachers and faculty can make a change through their course content, which will help students learn to consider any minority groups who are being devalued; disability is one of these groups (Bowers, 1993), as Palestinian academics demonstrate through their inclusive pedagogical practices.

Faculty’s Involvement in Advocacy in the Community

The support and advocacy the Palestinian faculty demonstrated in this study was not only a result of their awareness of the Israeli colonizer that debilitates the Palestinian body and infrastructure, but also a result of their involvement with community work on disability. Dr. Shaban, for example, explained how he helped secure a wheelchair for a young man in his village and, most importantly, how crucial it was to help provide a wheelchair. Socially, the young man with a disability was now able to be included, as Dr. Shaban indicated: “He [the young man with disability] went to every street with the wheelchair. You here realize the need for this person to access places and to build social relationships with others.” Faculty and administrators in the Palestinian universities in this study were socially involved in disability matters, so their perceptions on disability focused on the social aspect rather the medical.

Differing from the medical model, the social model of disability “shifted the power to define disability from church and hospital to society and from individual bodies to social mechanisms” (Davis, 2015, p. 228; Loewen & Pollard, 2010). This model acknowledges that disability was generated by society through placing barriers and lack of accommodation. In the case of the Palestinian community, the Israeli occupation has placed barriers by maiming Palestinians and building the apartheid wall and checkpoints between the cities, as well as placing restrictions on equipment and medicine entering Palestine. Nevertheless, albeit surprisingly under the continuous challenges of the political circumstances, “disability in the Palestinian context has become a promising arena for educational inclusion (Crabtree & Williams, 2011, p. 151), through using inclusive educational approaches participants shared in this study.

In addition, the Palestinian faculty support their disabled students in every possible way on campus or off campus by encouraging them to lead activities, funding these activities from their own pockets, advocating for students, validating student voices through listening to them, and addressing their issues. Most importantly, faculty are also engaged in matters of disability in the community. As far as CDS is concerned, Palestinian institutions of higher education play an important role in shifting the idea that “suffering produces weak identities” (Siebers, 2008, p. 14). That misunderstanding of disability reinforces the ideology of ability, and the shift away from it demonstrates that “disability is not a pathological condition, only analyzable via individual psychology, but a social location complexly embodied” (p. 14).

In this study, university personnel in Palestinian institutions of higher education are immersed in what Drago-Severson (2009) calls a transformational learning process, embedded in pedagogical alternatives in the classrooms that accommodate and fit the needs of disabled students. Many of the faculty members who participated in his research would go to their disabled students' homes or hospitals and rehabilitation centers to give exams or accommodate their needs without accommodation letters from the student affairs office. The Palestinian faculty in this study care about all their students. Teaching is a job that has been described by sociologists as "emotional labor" (Price, 2011, p. 46); the Palestinian faculty relate to their disabled students by encouraging them to speak up, giving them time out of their office hours, and listening to them. The Palestinian faculty's practices demonstrate a high level of "ethics of care" (p. 47).

Conclusion

The findings of this ethnographic study show that when examining disability in Palestine, it is crucial to consider the macro factors of the Israeli occupation and the international relationships between the countries involved in Palestine. Such relations are root causes for dominant and exclusionary practices against the Palestinians and continue to debilitate Palestinian life, increase physical disabilities among the Palestinians, and ghettoize Palestinian bodies and territory. Israel and the U.S., while claiming to be democracies that include all voices, segregate the Palestinians and deprive them of their rights of self-determination. The study also concluded, through the participants' voices, that a segregated/exclusionary democracy is manifested through practices of maiming Palestinians as an Israeli military policy, which targets the heads, legs, and spines of protestors and deliberately harms unarmed Palestinians (Puar, 2015). Through such oppressive practices, Israel attempts to subdue Palestinians' resistance to eliminate a culture and erase a nation (Jaffee, 2016).

Another theme that emerged in this study is the reaction of faculty and administrators to the segregation and exclusion imposed on the Palestinians, via forming what Smith (2015) called a circle of support for disabled students and individuals. Circles of support are demonstrated through the extensive accommodation that Palestinian professors provide, which they consider an "ethical code" in academia, according to Dr. Adel. Faculty members in the institutions of this study do not dispute providing accommodations of any kind for disabled students. The Palestinian faculty and administrators also support disabled students on campus in many forms, through discussing disability topics in class, supporting disabled students financially from faculty's own funds as Dr. Shaban and Dr. Fadwa have been doing, conducting training for disabled students, and providing pedagogical alternatives while at the same time maintaining high expectations.

Palestinian higher education is informed by Maul and Singer's (2009) suggestion of "moving from the tragedy metaphor to resiliency theory" (p. 155). The work of transforming the current discourses on disability in Palestine is led mainly by institutions of higher education. This study reveals their role in raising awareness of disability and in decreasing stigma and ableism against disabled students and individuals. In this study, Palestinian institutions of higher education

manifest what Smith (2018) calls “alternative representations of the lives of disabled people” (p. 27). For example, while faculty and administrators discussed the challenges disabled students face under the Israeli occupation, they also described disabled students as students with high potential for success.

Finally, although the U.S. supplies Israel with the means to maim the Palestinians, the Palestinians still offer a resilient model for addressing disability. In this study, the questions are still emerging; the arena of disability in Palestine is still open for additional exploration. The most significant aspect in this study, and in any study exploring disability, is the complexity of the phenomenon, which cannot be ignored. The political factors that deepen debilitation, stereotypes, exclusion, and segregation, exacerbated by countries and systems that claim to be “democracies” such as Israel and the U.S, must not be ignored.

Acknowledgment

The author appreciates the editing services that Laura Kovick, who works at the University Writing Center at Eastern Michigan University, provided, and the editing support Dr. Edward Morin provided as well. The author also gratefully acknowledges the support provided by Dr. Michael Saylor, Dean of the College of Education at Eastern Michigan University.

References

- Abu Fedala, A. (2009). *General study on the reality of persons with disabilities in the Palestinian society: Goals and expectations*. The Ministry of Social Affairs website: <http://www.mosa.pna.ps/>
- Amro, Z. (2001). *Report of the rights of those in special needs in the current legislative laws in Palestine*. Series of legal reports number 25, published by The Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights, Ramallah. Retrieved from <http://ichr.ps/ar/1/10#2001>
- Arafat, Y. (1999). *Law No. (4) for the year 1999: On the rights of the disabled*. Retrieved from <https://dredf.org/legal-advocacy/international-disability-rights/international-laws/palestinian-territory-law-on-the-rights-of-the-disabled/>
- Bennis, P. (2009). *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: A premier*. Olive Branch Press.
- Birzeit University. (2011). BZU Center for Development SBZU for Development Studies announces results of disabled persons studies: News. Retrieved from <https://www.birzeit.edu/en/news/bzu-center-development-sbzu-center-development-studies-announces-results-disabled-persons>
- Birzeit University. (2015). Students with special needs find place at Birzeit University, along with more plans for integration. Retrieved from <http://www.birzeit.edu/en/news/students-special-needs-find-place-birzeit-university-along-more-plans-integration>
- Bowers, C. A. (1993). *Education, cultural myths, and the ecological crisis: Towards deep changes*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Carter, J. (2006). *Palestine: Peace not apartheid*. Avon, MA: Simon & Schuster.
- Chomsky, N., & Pappé, I. (2015). *On Palestine*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.
- Christina, R., Mehran, G., & Mir, S. (2003). Education in the Middle East: Challenges and opportunities. In R. F. Arnove & C. A. Torres (Eds.), *Comparative education: The dialectic of the global and the local* (pp. 357-383). Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Collins, J. (2008). Confinement under an open sky: Following the speed trap from Guernica to Gaza and beyond. *Globalizations*, 5(4), 555-569.
- Crabtree, S. A., & Williams, R. (2011). Ethical implications for research into inclusive education in Arab societies: Reflections on the politicization of the personalized research experience. *International Social Work*, 56(2), 148-161.
- Cunningham, E., & Balousha, H. (2018, April 28). Blasted limbs, broken dreams: Israeli gunfire is taking a severe toll on the lower limbs of Palestinian protestors. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/world/wp/2018/04/28/feature/scores-of-palestinians-have-been-shot-in-their-legs-and-some-face-amputation/?utm_term=.2745746d1b92
- Davis, L. (2015). *Enabling acts: The hidden story of how the Americans with Disabilities Act gave the largest US minority its rights*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Diakonia. (2015). *Disability Rights Programme*. Retrieved from <http://www.diakonia.se/en/Where-we-work/Middle-EastNorth-Africa/disability-rights-programme/>
- Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund. (n.d.). *Palestinian Territory: Law on the Rights of the Disabled*. Retrieved from <http://dredf.org/legal-advocacy/international-disability-rights/international-laws/palestinian-territory-law-on-the-rights-of-the-disabled/>

- Drago-Severson, E. (2009). *Leading adult learning: Supporting adult development in our schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Horowitz, A., Ratner, L., & Weiss, P. (2011). *The Goldstone report: The legacy of the landmark investigation of the Gaza conflict*. New York, NY: Nation Books.
- Howard, G. R. (2006). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools*. (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- If Americans Knew. (n.d.). U.S. military aid and the Israel/Palestine conflict. Retrieved from <http://www.ifamericansknew.org/stat/usaid.html>
- Jaffee, L. J. (2016). Disrupting global disability frameworks: Settler-colonialism and the geopolitics of disability in Palestine/Israel. *Disability & Society*, 31(1), 116-130.
- Jakes, L., & Halbfinger, D. M. (2019, November). In shift, U.S. says Israeli settlements in West Bank do not violate international law. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/18/world/middleeast/trump-israel-west-bank-settlements.html>
- Levy, G. (2017, December). The Israeli military first took his legs, then his life. *Haaretz*. <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/the-military-first-took-his-legs-then-his-life-1.5628827>
- Loewen, G., & Pollard, W. (2010). The social justice perspective. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 23(1), 5-18.
- Newcomb, S. T. (2008). *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the doctrine of Christian discovery*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum.
- Pappé, I. (2014). Israel's incremental genocide in the Gaza ghetto. Retrieved from <https://electronicintifada.net/content/israels-incremental-genocide-gaza-ghetto/13562>
- Pappé, I. (2018). Finding the truth amid Israel's lies. Retrieved from <https://electronicintifada.net/content/finding-truth-amid-israels-lies/24531>
- Peshkin, A. (1998). In search of subjectivity: One's own. *Educational Researcher*, 17(7), 17-21.
- Price, M. (2011). *Mad at school: Rhetorics of mental disability and academic life*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Puar, J. K. (2015). The "right" to maim: Disablement and inhumanist biopolitics in Palestine. *Borderlands*, 14(1), 1-27.
- Qure'a, A. (2004). Decision number (40) of the Palestinian Legislative Council of year 2004, with executive procedures of law 1999 regarding the rights of disabled. Retrieved from <http://muqtafi.birzeit.edu/pg/getleg.asp?id=14620>
- Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Shaheen, J. G. (2003). Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood vilifies a people. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 588(1), 171-193.
- Shapiro, J. P. (1993). *No pity*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.
- Siebers, T. (2008). *Disability theory*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Smith, P. (2005). Off the map: A critical geography of intellectual disabilities. *Health & Place*, 11(2), 87-92.
- Smith, P. (2015). *Disability and diversity: An introduction*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt.

- Smith, P. (2017). Defining disability studies and its intersection with madness. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 37(3). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v37i3.5940>
- UNDP's Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, & Fayyad, S. (2014). *The 2014 Palestine human development report: Development for empowerment*. Retrieved from <http://www.ps.undp.org/content/dam/papp/docs/Publications/UNDP-papp-research-PHDR2015.pdf>
- United Nations News. (2019, May). Hundreds of wounded Gaza protestors risk limb amputation without immediate help, warns top UN official. Retrieved from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/05/1038101>
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2017, September). Gaza: People with disabilities disproportionately affected by the energy and salary crisis. Retrieved from <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/gaza-people-disabilities-disproportionately-affected-energy-and-salary-crisis>
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2018). The humanitarian impact of restrictions on access to land near the perimeter fence in the Gaza Strip. Retrieved from <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-impact-restrictions-access-land-near-perimeter-fence-gaza-strip>
- Wallerstein, I. (2004). *World-systems analysis: An introduction*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Watt, D. (2007). On becoming a qualitative researcher: The value of reflexivity. *The Qualitative Report*, 12(1), 82-101.
- Weir, A. (2014). *Against our better judgment: The hidden history of how the U.S. was used to create Israel*. North Charleston, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing.
- Weir, A. (2019, January 9). First Senate bill of 2019 would give Israel billions of dollars, combat BDS. Retrieved from <https://israelpalestineneews.org/first-senate-bill-of-2019-would-give-israel-billions-of-dollars-combat-bds/>
- Wingfield, M., & Karaman, B. (1995). Arab stereotypes and American educators. Retrieved from <http://www.shankerinstitute.org/>
- World Health Organization. (2013). *Mainstreaming the rights of people with disability in Palestinian ministries*. Retrieved from <http://www.emro.who.int/palestine-press-releases/2012/seminar-mainstreaming-disability-rights-in-palestinian-ministries.html>
- Yakabuski, K. (2019, January). Democracy in America is down, but not out. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-democracy-in-the-united-states-is-down-but-not-out/>
- Yin, T. (2010). Through a screen darkly: Hollywood as a measure of discrimination against Arabs and Muslims. *Duke Forum for Law and Social Change*, 2, 103.