



Bulletin

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A Faculty threatened

The future of the Faculty of Nursing has been under threat even before its first cohort of students receive their degrees. The Faculty opened in 2004 through the energy and enlightened vision of its Dean. These first students are due to graduate in 2008, but whether the ceremony would take place with the Dean has been doubtful.

The Dean is Palestinian, born in Nablus. In 1977, she left for Sweden to study nursing. She eventually made Sweden her home, marrying and having her three children there, and taking Swedish citizenship. She studied for her Doctorate in anaesthesia and her ambition did not end with a PhD. Her love for her native Nablus brought her back, and she took up her post as Dean of the brand new Faculty of Nursing at An-Najah National University.

Being away for so long meant the Dean no longer had a valid Palestinian ID card, and she has used her Swedish passport to come and go. But this makes her vulnerable to the vague rules governing foreigners wishing to work and reside in Palestine. Israel controls immigration into the West Bank and Gaza, not the Palestinian National Authority. The Dean was issued three-months visas each time she returned to the West Bank from abroad, but gradually they got shorter and shorter until her last one was for only one week. This was some weeks ago.

The Dean had no desire to stay illegally. She has been fighting her case with the help of the University. Yet, the University administration has no say in obtaining work permits for non-nationals. Staff recruited from overseas can obtain tourist visas issued by the Israeli authorities, and even these are frequently denied to people who say they are coming to work in West Bank universities (see Right To Entry/Re-entry Campaign - www.righttoenter.org). The tourist visa is generally for three-months, which is not enough to cover a whole semester of classes. The ultimate decision for a member of staff to work at a university does not lie with the Palestinian National Authority, but with the occupier.

The Dean's wish for permission to stay has been granted. After weeks of trying, being denied and then appealing, she has been issued with a permit to stay until the end of this academic year. She will see her first cohort of students graduate, and then she will have to renew her efforts to stay another year.



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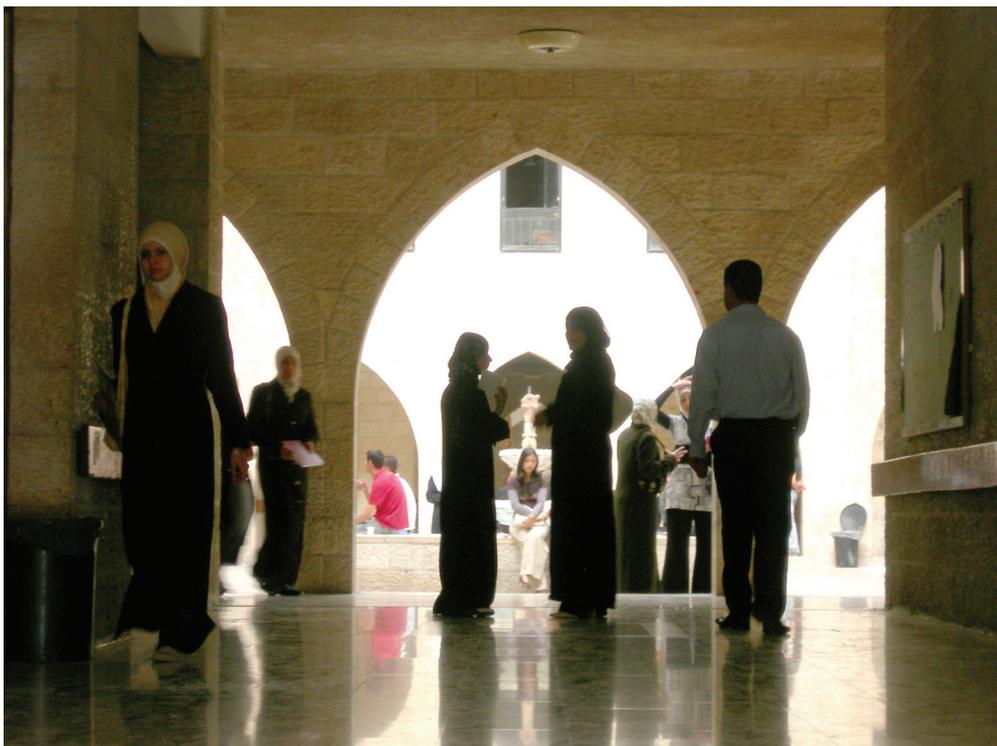
Editorial

An-Najah National University's size has tripled within the past seven years in terms of the number of students, the number and diversity of programmes and types of services, equipment and the amount of student accommodation. Throughout its mission to serve Palestinian students, An-Najah has always challenged the obstacles imposed by the Israeli occupation. Of the 16,900 students who attend An-Najah, more than 10,000 commute to the University from different areas in the West Bank, an area walled in by the Israeli segregation wall and fractured by checkpoints. These students are forced to pass through several checkpoints where they are dehumanised, delayed and even tortured and in some cases prevented from passing or detained for several hours.

The walling in of Palestinian students exceeds the physical wall erected around them extending to the political measures and regulations that are imposed on their movements. Under occupation, Palestinian people have always been required to obtain permission that is more often than not denied them. The City of Nablus is completely isolated from the outside world by two checkpoints: one at the western entrance of the city and one at the southern.

These realities jeopardise the educational process in Palestinian schools and universities. While there is outstanding sympathy in the outside world with An-Najah, the Israeli occupation continues to isolate the University from its supporters in the international community. There are hundreds of Palestinian professors in the diaspora who would be willing to come to teach at An-Najah if they were given a visa to enter and the permission to stay in Palestine for one semester or more. Many international professors as well are willing to volunteer at An-Najah in the departments where help is much needed. Not only does the occupation deny visas to Palestinians and the renewal of visas to volunteers who are willing to spend more than three months at An-Najah, it puts pressure on Palestinians who are inside Palestine to leave. This walling in of Palestinian people and denial of their educational rights must not be permitted to continue.

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Quantifying the misery of checkpoints

This summer the Right to Education Campaign cooperated with a MA student at the University of York in UK on the topic of the impact of checkpoints on the lives of students. By gathering detailed information on the impact of checkpoints on university students, this was the first study of its kind. Questionnaires completed by students at An-Najah National University and Birzeit University were collated and analysed. The results clearly show that the academic lives and access to education, both for those students who pass checkpoints to get to and from university and those students who do not, are affected to a great extent every day.

Students and staff at Palestinian universities are subjected to humiliating treatment, intimidated and have to go through time-consuming and arbitrary security checks at checkpoints. This is common knowledge to Palestinians living in the West Bank, yet there have been no attempts to study the extent of the ill-treatment and how it affects those in pursuit of higher education. Students are affected in particular because they form part of the population which has to experience checkpoints everyday.

Of the An-Najah sample of 166 students, 95 of them pass through at least one checkpoint on their route to the university and again back home at the end of the day or the end of the week. The responses of these 95 students reveal the nature and extent of the impact of checkpoints on their daily life:

- 92.3% said they are made late by checkpoints;
- 91.3% said they miss classes because of checkpoint delays;
- 85.0% said they have missed whole days at university because checkpoints are closed;
- 84.0% said they avoid travelling because of checkpoints;
- 89.2% said they find alternative routes to avoid checkpoints.

These results indicate that just the presence of checkpoints cause disruption to the academic life of students. No differences between male and female students arose in these findings, suggesting all students travelling through checkpoints are susceptible to delays and missing classes due to checkpoints.

Whilst students' academic pursuits are being hampered, a more disturbing picture arises when they reported on their physical and emotional experiences at checkpoints:

- 63.6% reported having been physically abused at a checkpoint (78.7% of men and 40.5% of women);
- 72.0% reported having been detained at a checkpoint (82.1% of men and 62.2% of women);
- 94.6% reported feeling nervous at checkpoints;
- 96.7% reported feeling angry at checkpoints.

Male students reported being targets of physical abuse and detention at checkpoints more frequently than women, but nearly all of the students reported feeling angry and nervous.

It will not be a surprise for anyone who has experienced the trials



of checkpoints to hear these students' indictments of checkpoints, but what is surprising and a worrying trend, is the number of students who report that they are better able to cope with checkpoints through experience. When asked whether their ability to cope with checkpoints had improved or worsened, 61.2% of those who pass through at least one checkpoint said it had improved through practice. In effect, the daily experience of checkpoints is so familiar that it is becoming normal. Whilst one would applaud the development of coping strategies, it is alarming that checkpoints should become 'normal' in the lives of students.

The obvious implication to these findings is the impact checkpoints have on students' ability to study and maintain concentration, especially when wasting time at checkpoints leaves little time and energy for studying.

Further findings are forthcoming in a full report of the study.



'Prepare for the future and document human rights violations'.

This was the advice Professor John Dugard, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967, gave to an audience at An-Najah National University on 30th September. During a visit to the northern region of the West Bank, Professor Dugard made a speech marking the parallels and differences between the discriminatory apartheid regime in his native South Africa, and the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

Apartheid in South Africa was an institutionalized system for racial segregation bound by legal structures, and whilst the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is recognized under International Law, it is not accepted. Discrimination against Palestinians through the use of checkpoints, restrictions on movement and the denial of family reunification are all similar to apartheid, but in South Africa there were never any segregated roads, as exist in the West Bank. Political repression and imprisonment of those against the regime are also similar features between the two regimes, as is the division of the land into enclaves or Banthustans. Professor Dugard noted that the Israeli military occupation was more akin to colonialism, which is illegal under International Law.

In talking about the future, he expressed his view that while USA continues to hold sway with the Quartet and the UN General Assembly, the prospects for Palestine were bleak. He noted that Palestinian universities and academics play an important role in developing the future structures of statehood and in monitoring the violations against human rights. He added that in the land of miracles, we should all hope for one that leads to the Palestinian dream of establishing an independent state.

Professor Dugard lent support to his audience by saying that he understood the despair people feel having lived through the dark apartheid years in South Africa without any hope for its eventual removal.

To make the world aware of the difficulties Palestinians live under, he urged the university to do what it can to document the human rights violations perpetrated under the occupation.

Seven years in Nablus

On 16th September 2000, Nasser bade farewell to his parents, four brothers and three sisters in Beit Hanoun. In possession of a permit that would allow him to travel between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, he assumed he would be back with his family before too long. He has not seen them since.

One of 115 Gazan students at An-Najah in 2000, Nasser was used to dealing with difficulties travelling between the two territories. Often his route would take him through Egypt, then by boat to Jordan and finally across the Jordan River into the West Bank. Using cases like Nasser's as evidence, the Palestinian Authority had won its battle to ease travel restrictions for students from the Gaza Strip and Nasser was granted a permit to travel through Israel.



But as the second Intifada intensified, the restrictions were brought back, doubly so. Not all of the Gazans had returned to Nablus before the Erez and Rafah crossings out of Gaza were closed. Only 75 of the 115 students had made it back, the others had to transfer to universities in the Gaza Strip. By 2001, their number dropped to 50. Some graduated and left for home or overseas, but others were arrested by the Israeli military and sent back to Gaza Strip. There are no Gazan students at An-Najah at all now.

Even though Israel withdrew its settlers and military presence from the Gaza Strip in 2005 in what was called the 'disengagement plan', it retains control of Gazan airspace and territorial waters, the population registry, entry of foreigners, movement between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, imports and exports and the tax system. Residents of Gaza who are caught living in the West Bank without a valid permit are considered illegal and are expelled to Gaza even if they have been living in the West Bank for years.

Nasser faces immediate expulsion to Gaza if he is discovered. To elude detection he avoids travelling out of Nablus. The last time he left the city was five years ago, and even then he avoided passing through the checkpoints littered across the West Bank.

Nasser is now teaching part-time at An-Najah, staying with the three remaining Gazan graduates. He could go back to Gaza if he wishes, but the work prospects there are even worse than in Nablus. In effect he has swapped one prison for another.

Academic boycott up-date

In May earlier this year, Britain's union for higher education, UCU, voted at its annual congress in support of an open debate on whether to institute a boycott against Israeli academic institutions. On 28th September, UCU issued a statement to its members stating that legal advice 'makes it clear that making a call to boycott Israeli institutions would run a serious risk of infringing discrimination legislation'. Thus, the UCU was cancelled the proposed year-long debate on the boycott.

Dr Amjad Barham, the President of the Federation of Unions of Palestinian Universities' Professors, expressed his disappointment at the decision in an open letter to the General Secretary of UCU, 'we believe that our British colleagues have

been deprived of an opportunity to better inform themselves about an issue which is of concern to conscientious academics and intellectuals the world over.' He queried how closing the door on debate could contribute to academic freedom.

BRICUP (British Committee for the Universities of Palestine) condemned the decision. In a press statement dated 29th September suggested the UCU leadership 'is hiding behind legal advice which they have not disclosed to their members in order to sabotage a decision with which they disagree'.

The next moves of UCU should be monitored carefully, because this muzzling of debate may have wider negative implications for the support and solidarity that Britain's academics show for their Palestinian counterparts.

Denied entry at the border

If only such cases as Muriel van den Abbeele's were rare, but they are not. Muriel, a Belgian citizen married to a Palestinian, taught at An-Najah's French Department for three years. She had received tenure and was happily settled in Nablus with her husband, also a lecturer at An-Najah and their two children. In August 2006, Muriel returned from vacation in Belgium but she was refused entry at King Hussein Bridge crossing from Jordan. She tried everything possible to get back in to join her husband and two children in Nablus, but was not successful. The only avenue open to them to live together was to leave their university jobs in Nablus and take up residence in Belgium. They are still there today unable to return as a family.

Tens of thousands of foreign nationals married to Palestinians are similarly affected. Israel controls the borders of the occupied Palestinian territories, and forbids foreign spouses from entering. In a report on what is known as family reunification¹, 'Right to family life denied: Foreign spouses of Palestinians barred' (March 2007), Amnesty International estimated that in 2006 there were at least 120,000 families affected, and that the number is on the increase since further restrictions have been applied to spouses from countries previously not requiring advance visas.



Amnesty points out that these restrictions are profoundly discriminatory because no such restrictions apply to the foreign spouses of Jewish settlers to reside in settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories which are illegal under International Law.

In the meantime, the French Department makes do with one less lecturer, but the loss of a native French speaker is felt keenly. Dr Bilal Shafei, the Head of the French Department, fears that it will not be possible for Muriel to return. But on a more positive note, hopes to attract other native speaking lecturers later this academic year.

¹ Amnesty International - 'Right to family life denied: Foreign spouses of Palestinians barred' 21st March 2007



In prison

In August 2007, there were an estimated 818 Palestinians held in administrative detention in Israel¹ and 11,000 Palestinians held with charge in Israeli prisons. Six of them are members of An-Najah's academic staff and an estimated 100 of them are An-Najah students. These include the following:

Dr Abdel Aziz Dweik is a professor of Geography and at the time of his arrest in June 2006 and subsequent re-arrest in August 2006 was the lawfully elected Speaker for the Palestinian Legislative Council. He was charged with being a member of Hamas. He refused to recognize the court that tried him because his immunity from prosecution as a member of parliament was ignored.

Dr Omar Abdel Raza is a professor of Economics and, at the time of his arrest, was the serving Minister of Finance to the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Professor Esam Al-Ashqar, professor of Physics, was taken from his home in March 2006 and has been held without charge in administrative detention ever since. His family reports that his health is poor and they are extremely worried about him.

Additionally, a member of the Journalism Department and two security guards are also in prison. The imprisonment of staff serves to further hamper the education process at An-Najah.

¹ B'Tselem - http://www.btselem.org/english/Administrative_Detention/Index.asp



The Irony of an Academic Boycott

The University and College Union of the UK recently announced a decision not to pursue a year long debate with its members on the viability of calling for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. The Union heeded legal advice that such a boycott may cross discrimination laws. At the time of writing, UCU is not going to pursue its discussion of an academic boycott.

How paradoxical that the discussion of a boycott is halted while the de-facto boycott of Palestinian universities is in full swing. Of course, there is no official document outlining the terms of the isolation of universities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but it is insidiously on-going nonetheless.

One example of how the covert boycott of Palestinian universities manifests itself is the shortfall of lecturing staff at An-Najah. A recent advert published by An-Najah sought over 40 teaching positions to be filled. The difficult economic situation has frozen salaries for years, which results in meagre offers to entice fresh staff to Nablus. The encirclement of Nablus by the Israeli military checkpoints deters many would-be lecturers from considering An-Najah as a career move. As do the nightly raids on the city by Israeli military.

Lecturers from overseas wishing to take up posts at Palestinian universities are subject to the whims of the Israeli border control. Visas to allow them to stay for longer than three-months have to be obtained by leaving and re-entering the country, often resulting in the teachers being denied entry at the border.

This boycott by default may not be intentional, but it is in place all the same.

For readers wishing to help redress the shortfall in teaching staff at An-Najah, positions are sought for Master or Doctorate degree holders in: statistics, calculus, economics, political science, management, accounting, finance, computer science, management of information systems and computerised information systems, English, Arabic, translation, interpretation, creative writing, web-based journalism, TV and film production, radio production, social science, social work, graphic design, sculpture, interior design, psychology, commercial law, constitutional law, electronic engineering, communications, civil engineering, construction engineering, architecture, mechanical engineering, manufacturing, optometry, nursing and in the vocational subjects of car mechanics and vehicle inspection.

Please contact the Public Relations Department on pr@najah.edu.

Campaign news

a) New Right to Education group opened at SOAS

The Palestine Society of the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London has established a new sector devoted to the right to education of Palestinian students. It gathered support from over a 100 students during Freshers' week of the new academic year. The new group wishes to strengthen links between British and Palestinian student groups by holding events, such as exhibitions, tours, visits, to raise awareness of the difficulties that Palestinian students face in pursuit of their education. Contact Sabah on sabah_soas@yahoo.com for more information.

b) Checkpoint Project

The Right to Education Campaign at An-Najah National University launched the Checkpoint Project in September 2007. The first group of observers, 28 in total, attended training to find out more about their role. They will note down their regular day-to-day checkpoint experiences and report them to the Campaign. Incidents and the length of time wasted at checkpoints will be compiled by the Campaign to monitor the impact on students' life.

c) Making links

The Campaign welcomes links and affiliations from universities to stand in support of Palestinians to be able to pursue their higher education. Please contact the Campaign Coordinator by email on righttoeducation@najah.edu



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