

Sarosh Nandwani

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Autonomy for Palestinian Women in Israel

Introduction

Achieving female autonomy is a struggle in countries worldwide, and even more so in countries under siege or in the midst of a political crisis. Jerusalem, in particular, has been a place of political tension since its beginnings. As such, females have had to endure lingering subordination, especially those in minority positions.¹ Palestinian females in Israel (Arabs in a mainly Jewish populace) have had the disadvantage of being women and cultural and religious minorities. They have, however, begun to break down the gender paradigm and push their boundaries towards autonomy, despite the political tension in Israel-Palestine. An *Israel Affairs* article by Ariela Popper-Giveon and Naomi Weiner-Levy studies the difference between traditional healing and higher education as coping methods by which females have been able to achieve some degree of independence. Though it discusses the benefits of both, it gravitates towards higher education as the more valuable method.² Khalid Arar, Ashmahan Masry-Harzalla, and Kussai Haj-Yehia similarly examined higher education as a means for females to confront the gender paradigm in the *Cambridge Journal of Education*. They ultimately also come to the same conclusion: higher education is a crucial means through which females can gain

¹ Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian. "The Gendered Nature of Education Under Siege: A Palestinian Feminist Perspective." *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 27, no. 2 (2008): 185.

² Ariela Popper-Giveon and Naomi Weiner-Levy, "Traditional Healing, Higher Education, Autonomy and Hardship: Coping Paths of Palestinian Women in Israel," *Israel Affairs* 18, no. 2 (2012): 261.

autonomy.³ Both articles make significant use of qualitative interviews of Palestinian women, have a similar arrangement of information, and come to the same conclusion. However, the methodology utilized by Giveon and Levy is vastly different from Arar, Harzalla, and Yehia. The articles differ in the number and background of the females interviewed, the setting of their interviews, and the methods and models used to gather and analyze the data.

Similarities in methodology

The *Israel Affairs* and *Cambridge Journal of Education* articles both employed qualitative interviews of Palestinian women in Israel, arranged their information similarly, and came to the same conclusion. Because the question of higher education in relation to autonomy for women is qualitative, both studies were compelled to use interviews to gather data. Interviews and questionnaires are one of the few methods anthropologists use in fieldwork to study a specific group of people – in this case, Palestinian women in Israel. Giveon and Levy and Arar, Harzalla, and Yehia took full advantage of this method by conducting interviews on women who were relevant to the study. In this method of study, one cannot ask direct questions about the ontological consequences of the situation. Instead, the interviewers must ask questions that hint around the ultimate conclusion of how higher education shifts the paradigm of the society.

In addition to using the same general method, Giveon and Levy and Arar, Harzalla, and Yehia also approached their studies in similar ways. They began with an introduction to the issue of the subservience of Palestinian women in Israel. They then provided background information that regards higher education as a way for women to become more autonomous and independent.

³ Khalid Arar, Asmahan Masry-Harzalla, and Kussai Haj-Yehia. "Higher Education for Palestinian Muslim Female Students in Israel and Jordan: Migration and Identity Formation." *Cambridge Journal of Education* 43, no. 1 (2013): 61-62.

Both articles quoted their interviews in the study, held a discussion, and came to the same conclusions. In tackling the issue, both articles also mentioned the patriarchal environment and gender roles present in Israel today. This information is gleaned from anthropological studies of the site. The authors make the prevalence of male dominance clear in the background information they provide.^{4 5} From this information, it was concluded that a solution was necessary; the studies show how the solution of higher education in particular is unparalleled.

Lastly, the authors come to the same conclusion: higher education is an unsurpassed method by which Palestinian females living in Israel may achieve autonomy, independence, and empowerment. Though the focus of each study was different, they ultimately agreed on this solution. As explained in their discussions, higher education for women has the potential to shift the gender paradigm and aid the females' journey toward independence.^{6 7}

Differences in interview methodology

Despite general similarities, the articles are unique in the number and background of the females interviewed, the setting of their interviews, and the methods and models used to gather and analyze the data. The two articles, though they both applied to Palestinian women in Israel, each interviewed a different grouping of females. Giveon and Levy interviewed 10 traditional healers, 10 of the healers' patients, and 34 women that were the first from their respective villages to

⁴ Giveon and Levy, "Traditional Healing, Higher Education, Autonomy and Hardship: Coping Paths of Palestinian Women in Israel," 258.

⁵ Arar, Harzalla, and Yehia, "Higher Education for Palestinian Muslim Female Students in Israel and Jordan: Migration and Identity Formation," 53-54.

⁶ Giveon and Levy, "Traditional Healing, Higher Education, Autonomy and Hardship: Coping Paths of Palestinian Women in Israel," 261.

⁷ Arar, Harzalla, and Yehia, "Higher Education for Palestinian Muslim Female Students in Israel and Jordan: Migration and Identity Formation," 61-62.

study in Israeli universities. The 10 healers and 10 healers' patients were interviewed for the other half of their study of traditional healing as a coping method for Palestinian women. The other 34 women gave an insight into what Palestinian female in Israel experience entails and how higher education shifted that. In choosing women who were the first from their village, Giveon and Levy were also able to obtain information on how the culture of their forefathers affected the women's decisions and emotions about higher education. Because they are both Jewish and western studying a minority in the East, the participants felt more comfortable speaking openly about their feelings.⁸ In contrast, Arar, Harzalla, and Yehia had other female Palestinian Arab students in Israel be the interviewers. By doing this, they hoped to prevent gender gaps and bias. They interviewed 8 graduates from Hebrew University, Jerusalem and 8 graduates from Jordanian universities. This variety allowed for different perspectives from women who studied in universities that were culturally different. Both groups of women responded similarly in regard to autonomy and gender roles. When the data was analyzed, it was found that higher education provided women with the knowledge to be independent.⁹

Giveon and Levy interviewed the 54 women in the comfort of their homes. By keeping the environment constant with the women's daily lives, they might have been able to glean more personal information about the women's opinions.¹⁰ Though they had pre-scheduled sessions at the women's homes, Arar, Harzalla, and Yehia conducted the many interview sessions at other

⁸ Giveon and Levy, "Traditional Healing, Higher Education, Autonomy and Hardship: Coping Paths of Palestinian Women in Israel," 254.

⁹ Arar, Harzalla, and Yehia, "Higher Education for Palestinian Muslim Female Students in Israel and Jordan: Migration and Identity Formation," 56.

¹⁰ Giveon and Levy, "Traditional Healing, Higher Education, Autonomy and Hardship: Coping Paths of Palestinian Women in Israel," 254.

unspecified areas. This change in environment might have skewed the women's responses, especially if it was in public¹¹.

Besides location, language was also different between the two interview settings. Giveon and Levy used Hebrew to conduct their interviews while Arar, Harzalla, and Yehia used in Arabic¹²
¹³. Because the fieldwork is qualitative, direct translation would distort the women's actual responses quite significantly. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis states that language structures one's experience of reality. In other words, the way a culture speaks revolves around metaphors and connotations and, because of this, direct translation is impossible. Though it is a qualitative study, the discrepancy between what the women meant and what came as the translation could have been significant enough to slightly alter the results.

Differences in data collection methodology

The articles also differ in the methods and models they utilized to gather and study the data. The authors of the article in the *Israel Affairs* aimed for a "comparative research approach that emphasize[d] uniformity among variety."¹⁴ In this way, they were able to find similarities between different groups of women. After the interviews were obtained, they were analyzed using two complementary paths: deconstructive and drawn out. The first path was deconstructive and broke down the text into word combinations, phrases, and single words. The second path

¹¹ Arar, Harzalla, and Yehia, "Higher Education for Palestinian Muslim Female Students in Israel and Jordan: Migration and Identity Formation," 57.

¹² Giveon and Levy, "Traditional Healing, Higher Education, Autonomy and Hardship: Coping Paths of Palestinian Women in Israel," 254.

¹³ Arar, Harzalla, and Yehia, "Higher Education for Palestinian Muslim Female Students in Israel and Jordan: Migration and Identity Formation," 57.

¹⁴ Giveon and Levy, "Traditional Healing, Higher Education, Autonomy and Hardship: Coping Paths of Palestinian Women in Israel," 253.

drew out the central content-related pivots from the text. Together, they analyzed the general picture as well as important details that would otherwise have been lost.¹⁵

The authors of the article in the *Cambridge Journal of Education*, on the other hand, also spent effort obtaining the interview. They first picked the women they wanted to interview using ‘gatekeepers’ and a ‘snowball’ strategy, which conformed to social norms by requiring an introduction to the potential interviewee through relatives or colleagues. While interviewing, they used an endogenous model so that it saw “both the possible causes and the possible effects as located within the country being investigated.”¹⁶ They wanted to “investigate how social phenomena are systematically related to characteristics of the countries researched.”¹⁷ They held two sessions of interviews using two different methods: “Rosenthal’s (1994) open-ended question producing a narrative life story, followed by semi-structured questions conforming with Corradi’s (1991) approach, relating also to specific themes not addressed in the life story, and necessary clarifications.”¹⁸ After the interviews were obtained, the findings “underwent four stages of analysis delineated by Marshall and Rossman (1999).”¹⁹ Finally, the findings were organized and compared to each other within their respective categories and themes. To decrease error, the first author analyzed the data while the other criticized it. In this way, the latter authors were more prepared to conduct and analyze the interview than the former authors, who simply had a method to analyze the interview, not construct it.²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid. 254.

¹⁶ Arar, Harzalla, and Yehia, “Higher Education for Palestinian Muslim Female Students in Israel and Jordan: Migration and Identity Formation,” 56.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. 56-57

¹⁹ Ibid. 58

²⁰ Ibid.

Values and limitations

Because this subject is specific to Palestinian women in Israel, sufficient perspectives were difficult to obtain. The studies cannot be completely trusted because, though the sampling was random and large, there will always be some degree of error because these same issues and solutions do not apply to every Palestinian woman living in Israel. The authors are limited in their ability to approach the studies and history without some degree of bias in accordance with their own experience. This issue is entirely quantitative and there was no great need for a concrete historical background; therefore, results and conclusions are drawn from opinions and actions, not quantitative evidence. Also due to it being qualitative, the time difference is relevant. Because the articles were published a year apart, their value together increases because the conditions in Israel-Palestine would have been similar in both.

Authors

Ariela Popper-Giveon and Naomi Weiner-Levy were the authors of “Traditional Healing, Higher Education, Autonomy and Hardship: Coping Paths of Palestinian Women in Israel.” Ariela Popper-Giveon is a lecturer at Israel’s Open University as well as at David Yellin Academic College in Jerusalem. She also has skills and expertise in complementary medicine and therapy, alternative and traditional medicine, healing, oncology, supportive care, cancer, and integrative medicine. She has previously written about health psychology, social psychology, positive psychology, cultural anthropology, and medical anthropology. Naomi Weiner-Levy is a senior lecturer at David Yellin Academic College in Jerusalem. She also has skills and expertise in cross cultural studies and psychology, multiculturalism, and higher education research. She has previously written on social psychology. Because both authors lecture at colleges in Jerusalem,

they would naturally understand the environment of the women they interviewed. In addition, they are experienced in culture differences and social constructs. This would add to the value of their analysis because they can compare thoughts and examine their results with different lenses.

Khalid Arar, Asmahan Masry-Harzalla, and Kussai Haj-Yehia were the authors of “Higher Education for Palestinian Muslim Female Students in Israel and Jordan: Migration and Identity Formation.” Khalid Arar is a senior lecturer at the Center for Academic Studies and he is also the principal of the Jaljoulia Home of Education and Sciences High School in Israel. Asmahan Masry-Harzalla has a B.A. in Education and Geography, and M.A. in Geography and Urban and Regional Studies, an M.A. in Education Policy and Management, and a Ph.D. in Geography from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She was a teacher at the Arab Teacher Training Institute at Beit Berl College, where she headed the Department of Informal Education. Later she began teaching at the Center for Academic Studies. She was also the coordinator of the Strategy for the Advancement of Arab Society in Israel project at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. She coordinated two other research groups and currently is in charge of a research group and is participating in one. Kussai Haj-Yehia has skills and expertise in cultural studies and diversity, multiculturalism, qualitative analysis, qualitative ethnography, international migration, acculturation, and oral history. He has previously written on higher education, academic writing, teacher education and training, and international education. Because of their backgrounds, Arar, Harzalla, and Yehia are well-equipped to conduct and analyze the data they obtained from the interviews. As they have experience in both the anthropology aspect, the cultural aspect, and the education aspect, they were together able to form a reliable method of administering and analyzing the interviews.

Conclusion

Ariela Popper-Giveon and Naomi Weiner-Levy examine the effects of traditional healing and higher education as coping methods for females to gain autonomy in their article in the *Israel Affairs*. They concluded that both achieve the goal, but higher education has a lasting effect and a deeper significance. A *Cambridge Journal of Education* article by Khalid Arar, Ashmahan Masry-Harzalla, and Kussai Haj-Yehia analyzed higher education in different environments as a way for women to become independent. They came to essentially the same conclusion that higher education can shift the gender paradigm. The use of qualitative interviews of Palestinian women, similar arrangement of information, and ultimate conclusion are common to both articles. Despite these similarities, the methods and models differed greatly between them. The number and background of females interviewed, the time and place of said interview, and the methodology utilized to conduct and examine the interviews were decidedly different. Though both articles took different routes, they ultimately achieved the same conclusion: in obtaining a higher education, Palestinian women in Israel could shift the gender paradigm and achieve more autonomy.

Works Cited

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