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# Universities and Conflict

## The Role of Higher Education in Peacebuilding and Resistance

**Edited by Juliet Millican**

## 11 Reflections on education as a political practice

The Institute of Women's Studies  
and the role of research as a  
vehicle for change in Birzeit  
University, Palestinian territories

*Eileen Kuttab*

### Introduction

Education at all stages in the Palestinian territories has the potential to act as a vehicle for promoting social and economic development, as well as a tool for enhancing a sense of Palestinian identity and resistance. This dual mission has helped to counter the policies and practices of the Israeli occupation, which can result in dispossession, deprivation, de-development, the eroding of identity and the displacement of individuals, towns and villages. This chapter traces the foundation of the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University in 1994 and the challenges it has faced in establishing itself as a radical academic discipline. Its existence reflects the paradoxical duality that combines struggle for national liberation against what is perceived to be a colonial-settler occupation, with citizenship and state-building, following the implementation of the Oslo agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians signed in 1993.

This agreement resulted in partial autonomy for the Palestinian Authority (PA) over areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, granting the PA full autonomy over various sectors, including education. Since the early stages of its governance, the PA has defined its educational ethos in relation to the principles of 'education as a human right' and 'education for all' as the basis for citizenship and as a tool for socio-economic development. The previous denial of the right to education was used as a form of political subjugation during the 26 years before the arrival of the PA, practiced through a variety of punitive measures, including closing schools and universities for long periods, especially in times of political crises or uprisings, curfews, restrictions on mobility, checkpoints and detainment of students and teachers. Such policies served to weaken Palestinian identity and Palestinian institutions as well as denying students their right to education. However, while educational institutions have since then continued their national role in resisting the occupation, World Bank structural adjustment measures, pressures associated with the massification of Higher Education and the PA's subsequent shift to a market economy, have all caused that resistance to take a different shape. The social purpose of universities is currently being threatened by commodification and the

introduction of a corporate-based ideology, undermining its ability to respond to community need and its role in raising the aspirations of its students.

### **Birzeit University: a leading institution throughout history?**

Birzeit, as a leading higher education institution has always played an important role in resisting the occupation and advancing higher education. Its foundation by Hanna Nasir who was deported to Lebanon by the Israeli forces for 19 years 'went beyond compensating for Palestinians' lack of access to universities in the Arab world' said the acting president Gabi Baramki (Baramki 2010: 32). Baramki says 'we needed a university to develop Palestine, train professionals, act as a laboratory for ideas and create a leadership' (Baramki 2010: 33).

As a university, it developed from an elementary girls' school in 1924 into a full-fledged college then university in 1971 that sought to combine higher education with nationalism and liberalism, responding to community needs, resisting occupation and engaging with international and global scholarship and opportunities. It has been committed to providing quality education that develops human capital to serve society while providing a platform for resisting occupation and encouraging critical dialogue, debate and cultural exchange 'university life would create a haven for the practice of democracy in a situation of political oppression' (Baramki 2010: 35). As such Birzeit University has offered an important model of a public university fulfilling its mission in teaching, research and national and community service. It has played a significant part in the development of Palestinian society and politics through a combination of pluralistic and liberal heritage and everyday democratic practices. Its core aims include the promotion of political tolerance and respect for different views. By holding elections for representatives of the Union of faculty and employees and student council it has been able to internalise democratic processes into its governance structures.

However, its role as a liberal public and national institution has been challenged by the occupation in a number of ways, including the criminalisation of education by Military Order 854 established to control the matriculation of the West Bank's academic institutions. Under 854 the military has total control over who may enter a university as a student, teacher or administrator, and all students must have obtained an identity card distributed by the Area Commander before enrollment (Idewar 2013).

Neoliberal ideas practiced through structural adjustment programs introduced by the World Bank during the 1990s have led to a decrease in financial support to universities and the transformation of education from its original role in enhancing critical thinking to one promoting technical skills and building a market and knowledge economy. Despite becoming a key international, regional and local institution, limited public entitlements have meant that Birzeit is now facing acute financial crisis.

However, there have been some positive developments among these dark realities that are impacting on the global higher education sector. The establishment of different institutes and centers have provided a mechanism to connect academia

and community, adapting individual programs to become relevant and responsive to community needs and developing 'academic practitioners' with expertise in different specialist areas, such as gender, water, law, community health and continuing education. Amongst these, the Institute of Women's Studies was established to bridge the gap between the women's movement, its leaders and practitioners, and academic faculty specialised in women and gender issues. By promoting conceptual as well as methodological skills through teaching and research their work has been able to identify the structural reasons for women's subjugation, critically review development practice and develop policies aimed at empowering women and enhancing their role in society.

### **Women's Studies program developing into Institute of Women's Studies**

The Women's Studies program was founded in 1994 as a minor program in the Faculty of Arts. Since its inception as an interdisciplinary program and the first academic program in the region, it has been committed to teaching, research, gender intervention and policy outreach, and advocacy. Through the leadership of female faculty members from different disciplines and diverse political experiences at Birzeit University, a team<sup>1</sup> of women activists and accomplished academics came together with a strategic vision. Their commitment to honoring their academic and social responsibility resulted in a program that promoted academic research on gender relations in Palestinian society adapting approaches and resources developed in gender studies globally and regionally to provide critical view on students' lived realities and contributing to the development of equitable, gender-aware and effective policies that address the complexity of the social, economic, cultural and political issues. They have helped Palestinian women and Palestinian society as a whole to continue to debate ways to build a democratic society of equal citizens.

The Institute addresses local assumptions that Women's Studies programs are projects imported from the West and are not genuine Palestinian creations. Developed by local Palestinian academics it reflects the national socio-cultural and political context, providing alternative critical knowledge from mainstream discourse. As a discipline Women's Studies has never provided ready-made solutions drawn from abstract knowledge but sets out to incorporate local and alternative forms of knowledge from the environment in which it is based. Like women's movements in non-Western countries which have been founded as a response to colonisation and globalisation it emphasises the importance of revisiting gender and development concepts and resources in their local context, reflecting people's lived realities. The program assists its students to critically understand the context in which they live, in order to push for democratic change. It deals with all three levels of women's oppression: colonialism, patriarchy and class, which, combined, constitute structural obstacles to women's advancement and independence.

The team was aware of the importance of addressing gender issues within a national liberation struggle in a colonial context, while at the same time working

towards democratic transformation in state-building. The program represents an important and strategic endeavour in an academic field that can build the capacity of women activists to understand the status quo. By engaging local academics with their international counterparts, new conceptual and methodological approaches can be created to understand gender within the local Palestinian context, making academia a tool for change.

In the mid-1970s, the Palestinian national leadership initiated a process of democratisation of the national movement in order to mobilise and organise people of different social categories including the youth, women, workers and peasants, to face the Israeli occupation policies. They believed that resistance should take a new form – decentralised, mass-based structures that enabled the national movement to challenge the series of economic and political measures implemented by the Israeli occupation that sought to destroy the cultural and socioeconomic infrastructure of the Palestinian society (Kuttab 1998). It is in this context that the 'new' women's movement, represented by women's decentralised outreach committees rather than urban women's societies, was created and a new platform was put forward.

Social movements, and particularly the women's movement, accumulated this democratic culture and perpetuated their national and social function because they sustained a responsive agenda and program, and maintained their relevance through a decentralised framework of women's activism which supported and mobilised grassroots organisations and acted as a legitimate representative to Palestinian women in general (Jad 2000; Kuttab 1998; Taraki 1991).

Different women's platforms mushroomed in the early 1990s to create an alternative space and voice, expressed in different forms like women's organisations, research centers, development centers and counselling centers. All of them took it upon themselves to address gender issues within the struggle, namely the internal challenges of the patriarchal structures of society at large, including the national movement. In this context, women's leadership has shifted from working with women at grassroots level due to professionalising and institutionalising gender issues within new NGOs in preparation for the establishment of the Palestinian state.

Amidst all these changes and challenges, and with significant efforts by other women's organisations and research centers, it has become clear that the development of an overall women's strategy requires a new level of research and analysis, alongside consistent and continuous debate and discussion. The Women's Studies program was launched to respond to these challenges, the existing political changes and community needs on one hand, while engaging academically in analysing some of the theoretical issues concerning gender relations in the region on the other. Recognising the absence of an academic institute dedicated to teaching, training and research on gender issues, the Women's Studies program undertook this role and has become a leading national and academic institution in Palestine and the region.

The program concentrates on three major areas: teaching, research, and community outreach and gender intervention. The philosophy and logic behind integrating

these activities in the program was to maintain a coherent plan that was not only scholarly, but also responsive to community needs and relevant to the political situation. This uniqueness of Birzeit's program, compared with other women's academic institutions, is its active involvement in Palestinian life, which has helped the program to earn a positive reputation and legitimacy among women and the women's movement. As an academic institution that is responsive to women's needs in the community, gender intervention takes place by training female leaders, practitioners and researchers in new ways of thinking and advocating for women's rights. For instance, seeing women's rights as independent from human rights, or from national and political rights as it is being promoted by the donor community is unrealistic and conceptually problematic. Similarly talking about gender equality without linking it to social justice or delinking women's issues from the political system are both ineffective. Compartmentalising women's issues, expanding professionalisation and specialisation and delinking economic empowerment from political empowerment or social and political subjugation all ignore the importance of a broader context. Women's projects need to reflect the priority of women's needs, and reflect a comprehensive program that can have a positive impact on women's roles and status, and a measure of their strategic impact. Hence part of the Institute's role is to provide a new framework of thinking on how to address women's issues in order to ensure that real development is practiced, and the majority of women are benefiting.

### Teaching

From its inception, the Women's Studies program at Birzeit University was linked to the aims of the Palestinian women's movement and community needs. Therefore, its educational strategy has been geared to changing perceptions, stereotypes and presenting accumulative academic evidence as scientific knowledge on the conceptual and structural causes behind women's devaluation or subordination. This assumes the development of a critical approach to existing knowledge that leads to the promotion of gender awareness.

This program has evolved within a unique political and colonial context and issues like the relationship between nationalism and feminism, or the gender impact of structural adjustment on development paradigms, have gained more weight and interest for further conceptualisation. The program fulfils an important educational and social role in introducing Palestinian students to gender-informed approaches of understanding social organisation, family, household, gender concerns and gender relations in both Palestinian society and Arab society in general.

The minor program in Women's Studies consists of a package of 11 courses with a core introduction as prerequisite for all courses and one of four required electives for the Faculty of Arts. It offers several sections every semester to students from different disciplines, including sciences and engineering and males constitute 50% of those registered. The other core courses cover different areas such as development frameworks, legislation, theoretical frameworks, methodology, psychology, history and discourse, all of which are relevant and useful to

students of various disciplines. To ensure gender mainstreaming within the university, the program has adopted a strategy of cross-listing its courses with other relevant departments.

The development of the curricula and the introduction of different courses required support activities that posed a challenge for the program. For example, preparing course materials in Arabic continues to be a major problem given the paucity of academic work on gender in Arabic. The term gender cannot be translated into Arabic in one word. A translation project was launched to make available key academic feminist works, concepts and gender tools. While several theoretical articles on Middle Eastern and Arab women were translated and used in the introductory courses, the project became too expensive due to limited funding for translation. An alternative strategy was adopted of developing a special course in English specifically for students enrolling in Women's Studies who had failed the university entrance exam in English to familiarise them with gender and social science concepts and build their language skills. This course has become a model and is offered in some other graduate programs in Social Sciences.

Expanding the minor program through twinning with other departments has been another mechanism for mainstreaming Women's Studies and gender analysis. We have succeeded in twinning with the Psychology and Political Science departments and we are targeting other departments such as Media, Philosophy, History and English Literature.

### **Graduate program in Gender and Development**

Building on the experience of the minor program, and in response to women activists and practitioners in women's and development organisations or research institutes, we embarked on developing a graduate program in 1997 which was offered first in 1998. The program aimed to expand and deepen students' knowledge of existing theory and concepts related to gender and development on international, regional and local levels. The graduate program, entitled 'Gender, Law and Development', changed the identity of our program from a Women's Studies Center to an Institute of Women's Studies, giving it a new form, mandate and structure. This transformation encouraged us to raise funds for a building where our Institute could cement Women's Studies as a permanent program. Through a Palestinian solidarity committee in the Bahrain Chamber of Industry and Commerce, and with the support of a female Bahraini colleague who connected us to the committee, we succeeded in obtaining the support required for the building to raise our visibility.

The graduate program aims to develop students' analytical and critical skills in evaluating policies and developmental programs from a gender perspective. It also develops student abilities to conduct research on the need to integrate gender in developmental sectors and the obstacles that hinder it. The law component was dropped after two years due to the difficulty of finding local expertise in Gender and Law, leaving only Gender and Development as the main program. This is

overseen by a graduate committee composed of faculty members from the Institute and other members from university departments.

The Institute engages collectively to build the course content to ensure relevance to the program objectives, maintain its cumulative sequence, interaction and engagement of knowledge in courses, especially as teaching of the different courses is rotated between faculty members.

A separate specialised Women's Studies Library and Resource Center has been established to serve the research community on gender issues and offers researchers inside and outside the university the services needed to enhance their research. The acquisition of books and other materials in Arabic remains a priority for the program, especially as acquisitions in English are available on databases.

In its gender intervention unit, the Institute conducts commissioned research, policy papers for ministries or NGOs, and short courses and training in different areas for policy makers and practitioners in Gender and Development, Gender Audits and Gender-Based Violence. It has succeeded in developing its own curricula based on local research and the team's theoretical work, revisiting mainstream concepts to fit the local context and deepens the trainees' understanding of their daily lived reality. In doing so the Institute has sought to reflect and maintain the original role of the university – as an institution to promote critical thinking and writing as the basis for knowledge production for the public good.

### **Research and publications: interactive and reflective process**

The Institute of Women's Studies conducts and facilitates research on Palestinian women and gender relations in Palestinian society, both through developing and instituting its own research programs periodically every two or three years, and by offering services to others on gender issues of interest and benefit to the Institute. Research output is used to enhance policy formulation and gender planning, in addition to contributing to the development of the women's movement agenda. It is also intended to enhance teaching, training and intervention activities carried out by the Institute. The manner in which research issues, research design, methodologies and conceptual frameworks have developed indicates the organic link between the context, the program's relevance to the reality of occupation and the resilience of the team in maintaining its mission: to produce alternative knowledge that is critical for social change in gender equality and social justice.

Based on my experience as the founding director of the Institute, and maintaining my role as a faculty member since its foundation, my analysis of the research program draws on our collective experience of collaborative discussions, concept notes, proposals, reports and publications since its inception.

The Institute's research program developed in different phases reflecting a logical and accumulative sequence of knowledge on the one hand and a responsive and reflective agenda to external events on the other. It has been shaped by its attempt to conceptualise problems and issues arising from aggression, war

and militarism and their impact on gender relations and gender dynamics within households, institutions and movements,

Since its inception the Women's Studies team has launched an extensive collaborative research project called '*Palestinian Women in Society*'. To date, this project has generated six working papers in the Gender and Society series, including Gender and Feminist Scholarship in the Middle East (1995); Gender and Policy (1996); Gender and Development (1995); Gender, Language and Creativity (1996); Gender and Education: Palestinian Education Under the Palestinian Authority, Vocational Education: Technical Training in Palestine (1996). These working papers marked the first stage of conceptualizing women's issues, addressing the existing gender blindness of Palestinian literature.

In 1997, the Women's Studies program launched a multi-volume publication entitled '*Palestinian Women: A Status Report*'. This addressed gender relations and the situation of women in specific sectors of contemporary life, including labour and the economy, social support, population and fertility, education, and politics, as well as providing an overview of Palestinian society. Six volumes have been published to date, establishing the foundation for baseline studies on gender and Palestine. Another publication produced in 1999, entitled '*Towards Gender Equality in the Palestinian Territories: A Profile of Gender Relations*' drew on the research, analysis and discussions conducted by the team since its founding, including status reports and interviews with different women's organisations, ministries and international donors and Palestinian women from different sectors.

The previous phase expressed the team's awareness to produce reports using national data produced for the first time by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) following the establishment of the PA. These reports positioned women's status in different sectors and produced a gender analysis of statistical data as a new trend in Palestinian studies. They also clearly defined the information gap in available data. This project represented an opportunity for gender intervention within the PCBS and a member of the program played a consultative role, with the PCBS gradually developing a gender unit within their system. These reports indicated the absence of gender analysis in existing literature, mainly in social and economic studies.

The second stage comprised a logical sequence following the need to understand more about gender relations and gender dynamics within the household as the most important playing a socio-economic and political role in protecting the family, socialising its members and enhancing steadfastness in the absence of a national authority.

Hence, the first community based household survey in 1999 administered on 2,254 households was undertaken resulting in two publications. The first volume on the trail was: '*Inside Palestinian Households- Initial Analysis of a Community-based Household Survey*' and addressed characteristics of the household, household management in terms of division of labor, housing arrangements, costs and

benefits of children, history of breadwinner, informal and domestic economy within household, employment preferences, fertility . . . etc. This was the first publication to expose the internal dynamics of the Palestinian household and discuss gender roles and gender dynamics. The second was a book published by Syracuse University Press entitled '*Living Palestine- Family, Survival, Resistance, and Mobility under Occupation*', an important contribution to modern scholarship especially as previous literature on Palestine did not render Palestinian lives. Even Palestinian literature on the first Intifada saw Palestinians as one-dimensional political subjects. The internal dynamics, stresses and contradictions of the social groups and communities or subjectivities of individuals as they negotiated their existence had not received serious attention. This was a serious project that conducted an in-depth investigation of the modalities of social reproduction in Palestinian society and how individuals, households and families negotiate their lives and reach their goals (Taraki 2006). It was a first step towards a critical analysis of patriarchy under occupation with an analysis of survival and coping strategies, class transformation, emigration, urbanisation, kin relations in terms of solidarity or conflict . . . etc.

One result of the first survey was the creation of new research ideas and it defined the new research framework launched later in 2002 after the second Intifada entitled '*Gender, War and Families: Survival, Resistance, Development*'. It was obvious from the earlier survey that gender relations and dynamics are not only governed by patriarchy; wars and conflicts transform these dynamics and promote strategies for coping that are not highly visible but which impact on gender roles and responsibilities. The objective of this research program was to investigate how Palestinians in general respond to circumstances of war, conflict and national struggle; how they survive and strategise for survival, welfare, resistance and opportunity; how the national struggle shapes gender identities (the construction of masculinity and femininity); gender roles (motherhood, fatherhood, sons and daughters); and gender responsibilities and power relations.

Another area of inquiry within this research program questioned how 'development' takes place in the colonial context and how institutional actors (donors, 'state', political parties, religious groups, NGOs) fail or succeed in a developmental vision and practice that addresses these realities. The research findings have enriched our teaching experience in proposing critiques and scenarios for real feasible development.

However, a new research paradigm emerged in the aftermath of the second Intifada of 2000; entitled '*Palestine in the Second Intifada: Dynamics of Resistance and Survival*'. It was launched in 2003 with the aim of contributing to critical public debate over issues related to state-building, social policies, citizenship and rights. The reality of social practices, subjectivities, aspirations and values in Palestinian society was highlighted by this research, which problematised concepts of kin and communal solidarity, 'community' and 'neighborhood' moving beyond traditional understandings to explore modern social solidarities and their manifestation in everyday life. The outcome of this research was not only academic and scholarly, but had an impact on family policies adopted by social agencies and

aid organisations. This project also investigated the Palestinian women's movement, expanding the site of research to include the West Bank, Gaza, historical Palestine and the Diaspora and their responses to the national emergency in regard to changing vision, organisational structure and program. Different articles have been produced from this framework by the research team, which have been useful as a critique of the women's movement but also served to historicise and document women's experiences of social and political history that has been neglected throughout the struggle. In parallel, a study was conducted on checkpoints to explore gender identities and community resilience using Qalandiya checkpoint as a research site. Research outputs in addition to articles included a photography exhibition reflecting the daily life of Palestinians at checkpoints and the agonies and problems they face on a daily basis.

Finally, between 2014–2016 we developed a new research framework entitled '*Critical Knowledge for Strategic Change in Gender Equity and Development Agendas in the OPT*'. This aims to produce alternative knowledge to counter dominant gendered rights and development agendas and discourses and place women's lived experience, indigenous knowledge and agency at the center of more liberatory approaches to gender and development in the Palestinian context.

The research findings in Area C (the majority of land in the West Bank which is under Israeli settler and military control) in 2015 indicated that development paradigms and the application of women's rights have not reflected the real hardships and dispossession created by the occupation, treating the West Bank as a post-conflict situation and not as a continuing colonial settler occupation.

Youth as a target group was a category of analysis in all the different research projects and included in qualitative interviews and focus group discussions, and quantitative survey producing research on how Palestinian youth reclaimed their political space within the different Intifadas, in addition to a quantitative survey investigating attitudes and experiences of Palestinian Male and Female Youth in West Bank, Gaza Strip and Arab Jerusalem 2013.

The different stages of the research program illustrate our commitment to local issues within Women's Studies, showing that despite the universities' neoliberal shifts, our research has not become donor-driven. It represents a program rather than a project and is founded on the academic interest and need of communities and sectors to find solutions to problems and responses to the obstacles hindering women's advancement towards gender equality and social justice. It focuses on exposing lived realities, and developing an alternative framework of analysis on gender in Palestine that can enhance and intersect with international scholarship on gender in the Middle East. The research programs, and the teaching that has accompanied it, have not only produced alternative knowledge to existing mainstream literature based on gender stereotypes, but broadened the conceptualisation of gender and brought about new scholarship on gender in Palestine.

Additional research activities have also been undertaken within a regional network of Arab scholars and researchers called 'The Arab Families working group', coordinated by the University of Davis, California, with different publications being produced collaboratively. At the same time, the Institute has maintained

its local, regional and international networks with scholars, and universities that hold the same mission. This relationship has continued through conferences with scholars from different universities participating in our annual conferences, and through locals from the Institute participating in international conferences. Our research findings and publications in addition to the proceedings of our conferences have been produced in our '*Annual Review of Women's Studies*'. Reviews of publications produced in international academic journals or research solicited from local researchers or thesis of our graduate students have been also included. This remains an important vehicle for communicating the research and gender intervention activities of the Institute locally and internationally.

### Gender intervention

As one of the goals of the Institute is to build a democratic society of equal citizens, gender intervention programs and activities have become vital, albeit more difficult to implement due to the financial crisis in the PA and the ten-year siege of Gaza that makes policy formulation irrelevant and unrealistic. The solid research and policy foundation developed by the Institute has brought new understandings and analyses. Examples of policy research include: gender intervention work and research in population and development in the context of a Country Population Assessment; gender and poverty; gender and the informal economy; integration of gender policies in different ministries; gender, land and housing rights in the occupied Palestinian territories; gender audit for Birzeit University, and a gender audit for media institutions. This work links research to policy and intervention, increasing the sustainability of the Institute and making an important contribution.

At this stage, the focus is on how to expand this experience in a policy universe in Palestine that is absent, and how policies can be promoted without politics to meet the needs of women, men and children in society. The realisation is that we need to continue working with the women's movement to shape future agendas to maintain our work as effective and relevant.

Our work with the women's movement has never stopped, but has taken different forms, including training based on revisiting gender concepts: redefining 'empowerment' as 'resistance', expanding the concept of 'political participation' to include informal participation of women in the civil society – unions, political parties, social clubs etc., challenging the Gender Empowerment Index which the UNDP developed to measure political participation within the government only.

Gender intervention touched home at Birzeit too. Having served in Birzeit University for almost 35 years, it became apparent that women take longer to achieve promotion and to become effective in decision making. The fact that most of the faculty are in the lower academic ranks and administrative organisational pyramid prompted us to conduct a gender audit of the university to address issues of women's marginalisation or misrepresentation in decision-making circles. Women held roles within the university linked to teaching, to research and institutional building, without any concern for gender roles within the family. As the first initiative of its kind in the region and in an academic institution, the audit drew a



gender map that located female employees in all sectors within the institutional hierarchy, identifying the existing gender gap and its root causes in relation to existing policies and regulations of the university. The aim of this exercise was to develop gender mainstreaming tools and to promote gender-specific policies that could bridge the gender gap and transform the university into a more equitable democratic institution. An important outcome of this was the establishment of a **Gender Monitor** to ensure that the recommendations of the audit materialise in gender specific policies and expand opportunities for women to enhance their roles and capacities.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that over the past two decades and more, the Institute has continuously survived the different historical phases of the occupation by making its program more relevant and critical to the needs of the community in general and women in particular. Research achievements have been produced in a cumulative and logical sequence, indicating the dialectic relationship between our planning and the design of our programs in both teaching and research, and the colonial context and lived realities experienced by women. At the same time, most of our research has been useful for international organisations, governmental and non-governmental organisations, and in the academic world for students and researchers.

The production of knowledge has been critical in opening the door to debate and further research. This is a core activity of a university when education is not commodified and has not lost its academic value. It had a positive impact on various governmental and civil society organisations, in addition to regional and global organisations, as it presents the issues affecting Palestinian women in a meaningful manner and in the correct context. Palestinian women face different levels of oppression: the occupation that represents national oppression; social and patriarchal domination; and economic and class exploitation and marginalisation. These concepts have constituted the framework for analysis and practice and represent cyclical, structural and ideological factors that make resistance a complex issue for women. The Institute's role lies in conceptualising, deconstructing and revisiting existing gender issues, social phenomenon, development paradigms and concepts in a continuous process to maintain their relevance and responsiveness to the majority of the women's lived realities. At the same time, its continued social and political responsibility remains to ensure that the agenda is not donor driven and is responsive to the real setting where women are facing continuous aggression and war. Addressing women's resistance and coping strategies for steadfastness against the daily practices of the occupation in dismantling Palestinian households, displacing families, arresting youth, breadwinners and children is being voiced in a scientific, scholarly and activist manner. We should not forget that as intellectuals, we are women, we are gender specialists, but at the same time we are Palestinians and we remain committed to the national cause, understanding the aching of our people and advocating for women's rights. Hence

critical knowledge production to us becomes a responsibility, and a vehicle for resistance and change.

With academic activism and genuine moral and ethical political engagement and social responsibility, the Institute maintains its role as a radical public institution that is critical and uses alternative knowledge as a vehicle for change in the context of occupation and resistance.

### Note

- 1 The founding team included (alphabetical order): Eileen Kuttab, Ilham Abu Ghazaleh, Islah Jad, Lamis Abu Nahleh, Liza Taraki, Penny Johnson, Rema Hammami and Rita Giacaman.

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