



# Birzeit University: The Story of a National Institution

Edited by Ida Audeh

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**Birzeit University: The Story of a National University**

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# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	
<i>Nabeel Kassis</i> .....	VII
<b>Preface</b>	
<i>Hanna Nasir</i> .....	IX
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	XI
<b>Chronology</b> .....	XII
 <b>PART 1. FROM ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY</b>	
<b>Chapter 1. Beginnings: Sowing the Seeds</b>	
<i>Rima Tarazi and Samia Khoury</i> .....	3
Remembering the Early Years:	
Siham Shawa Nusseibeh .....	11
Amy Aranki .....	12
Hafeez Musa Ghannam .....	12
Huda Farraj .....	12
Samira Chandour Haddad .....	13
Edward Karkar .....	13
<b>Chapter 2. From Vision to Reality: Developing the Junior College</b>	
<i>Gabi Baramki, Samia Khoury, and Rima Tarazi</i> .....	15
Pilgrimage to Sheikh Qatrawani, by Salim Tamari .....	20
Teaching at Birzeit College in the 1950s, by Sami Atallah .....	22
My Home Away from Home, by Firyal Irshaid .....	22
A Student in the Late Sixties, by Albert Aghazarian .....	23
<b>Chapter 3. Navigating Uncharted Waters: From College to University</b>	
<i>Ramzi Rihan</i> .....	25
The First Graduation Ceremony, by Samia Khoury .....	26
Securing Accreditation, by Hanna Nasir .....	30
The Intimate Relationship between Birzeit and Its Larger Context, by Munir Fasheh .....	31
<b>Chapter 4. An Academic Biography</b>	
<i>Sami Sayrafi</i> .....	35
Exploring the Palestinian Landscape, by Kamal Abdulfattah .....	40
“The Past Is in the Present”: Archeology at Birzeit, by Lois Glock .....	40
My Birzeit University Days, 1983-85, by Thomas M. Ricks .....	42
<b>Chapter 5. Graduate Studies at Birzeit</b>	
<i>George Giacaman</i> .....	45
Profiles of Selected Graduate Programs .....	48
 <b>PART 2. CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES</b>	
<b>Chapter 6. Running a University under Israeli Military Occupation</b>	
<i>Gabi Baramki</i> .....	53
Administrative Detention and Deportation:	
One Faculty Member’s Ordeal, by Tayseer Arouri .....	56
Remembering the Early Days of the Occupation, by Isa Masrieh .....	59
When the Pursuit of an Education Is an Illegal Activity, by Jihad Mas’oud .....	59
Qasr al-Hamra, by Khalid Farraj .....	59
The Art of Waiting: Birzeit’s Prisoners Committee in the 1980s, by Penny Johnson .....	60
Campus Means Camp for Us!, by Ibtisam Barakat .....	61
Events of December 4, 1986, by Mohammad Abu-Orf .....	62
<b>Chapter 7. Fundraising for a New Campus</b>	
<i>Hanna Nasir</i> .....	65
<b>Chapter 8. Birzeit and the International Community</b>	
<i>Roger Heacock</i> .....	73
Early Supporters, by Albert Aghazarian .....	78
A Society Making Its Own Destiny, by Mahmoud Ibrahim .....	79
Friends of Birzeit in Britain: A Personal Memoir, by Duncan Macpherson .....	81



<b>Chapter 9. Snapshots of the Student Movement</b>	
<i>Ghassan Khatib</i> .....	83
Birzeit in the Late 1970s, by Hasan Shtaiwi .....	88
What Birzeit Represents, by Bassam Salhi .....	89
Birzeit University, a Microcosm of the Palestinian People, by Marwan Barghouti .....	89
 <b>Chapter 10. The Road Ahead</b>	
<i>Ramzi Rihan</i> .....	91
 <b>PART 3. OUTREACH</b>	
 <b>Chapter 11. Community and Public Health</b>	
<i>Rita Giacaman</i> .....	101
 <b>Chapter 12. A Vibrant Breeze of Living Culture</b>	
<i>Vera Tamari</i> .....	107
Making Art, by Samia Halaby.....	113
 <b>Chapter 13. Community-Oriented Programs and Initiatives</b> .....	115
Institutes and Centers .....	116
The Research Center, by Khalil Mahshi .....	118
The Literacy and Adult Education Program, by Hiyam Abu Ghazaleh .....	119
Voluntary Work Program, by Khalid Farraj .....	120
<i>Al-Hal</i> , by Aref Hijjawi .....	120
Right to Education Campaign, by Anan Quzmar .....	121
 <b>Chapter 14. Making a Difference</b>	
<i>Nabeel Kassis</i> .....	123
Mahmoud Darwish, Excerpt from His Speech upon Receipt of an Honorary Doctorate Degree from Birzeit University, July 7, 1996 .....	128
 <b>Sources and Credits</b> .....	130
<b>Contributors</b> .....	133



# Foreword

In 2004, when I became president of Birzeit University, I noticed that there was no book that would acquaint visiting guests and dignitaries—state presidents, ministers, prominent scientists, business people, representatives of donor agencies, and so on—with the University’s mission and eighty-year history. Established in 1924 as a school for girls in a small village, Birzeit School evolved over the years to become the first Palestinian university and the foremost institution for higher education in Palestine. My appointment as president when founding president Hanna Nasir stepped down from that position marked the beginning of a change in the top leadership; this would be the first time that the institution would be led by someone who was not a member of the founding family. It seemed like an opportune time to begin to record the story of the University, a process that would necessarily draw heavily on the experiences (and memories) of staff and alumni because written documentation by key players in the early period is disappointingly sparse.

The Board of Trustees had formed a committee and tasked it with organizing some activities to mark the eightieth anniversary. I asked this committee to develop a concept and an outline for the book. In order to push the process of writing the book, I joined the effort. We decided that the book would consist of stand-alone chapters written by contributors with intimate familiarity with a period or theme. We wanted to make it possible for readers to select chapters that interested them and to be able to glean key concepts without having to read the chapters sequentially. We decided that telling the story of Birzeit University would require a combination of text and photographs and that a coffee-table format, with plenty of pictures to help in presenting the narrative, would be most suitable. Finally, the committee settled on a draft table of contents and proposed authors who were considered to be most knowledgeable about specific development stages and themes.

With that, the work on the book was ready to start, but 2004 came to a close without making any progress on the book or launching activities to mark the eightieth anniversary. The project was temporarily abandoned,

but it was not forgotten. Although the book was no longer linked to an anniversary, writing it was no less urgent in my mind; in the absence of written documentation, we would have to rely on participant memories for the early years, which tend to fade over time. In 2009 I decided to give the project another push. At about the same time, I ran into Ida Audeh, who was visiting from the United States. She is an editor who attended Birzeit briefly in the mid-seventies and who knew many of the proposed contributors. I approached her to edit the book and to fuel the process for its writing. I gave her the original outline, explained the idea, and asked her to work with the contributors and to edit the final manuscript; she liked the proposal and started working on it. The authors would be given the choice to write in either language, and the book would be published in both English and Arabic. Ida contacted the prospective authors and, insistent as she is, they were more responsive this time. But this was not an easy task, and at some time she might want to write about the process of seeing this book to completion.

The topics and contributors listed in the table of contents are not very different from the ones identified by the committee that tackled the task in 2004. The topics covered in this book fall into three parts. The chapters in part 1 trace the development of the institution and the various phases it went through, from elementary girls’ school to a co-educational high school, to an intermediate college, to a four-year college and then a full-fledged university. These developments spanned four political eras: the British Mandate, the Jordanian rule, the Israeli military occupation, and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), with overlap between the last two. The institution suffered from the turbulent periods that swept the area, starting with Palestinian resistance to British rule and the Zionist scheme, then the Nakba of 1948 and the expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in what later became Israel, the politically turbulent period that affected both the West Bank and the East Bank of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, followed by the June 1967 war, the Israeli occupation, the first intifada, the establishment of the PNA, the second intifada, and the return of quasi-total Israeli military control of the Palestinian territory.



The chapters in part 2 discuss some of the challenges faced by the University. Most were a direct consequence of repressive measures initiated by the Israeli occupation authorities to stifle the opposition of Birzeit faculty, staff, and students to Israeli control tactics. Part 3 includes chapters that describe the leadership role assumed by Birzeit University in Palestinian society.

Reflecting on my six years as president of Birzeit University, I am pleased to note the many developments that have taken place, including the publication of this book. The University grew and expanded its academic offer. Many new academic programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels were introduced, and three new faculties were established (Information Technology, Nursing & Allied Health Professions, and Education); a fourth, Pharmacy, is in the final stages of accreditation. The Community Outreach Units and programs became better integrated into the general operations of the University. A Center of Excellence for Information Technology and an embryonic Center of Excellence in Mathematics and Theoretical Physics—a UNESCO Chair—have been established. The campus grew greener and nicer. There are now 8,800 students enrolled compared to 7,200 six years ago. The increase came through the introduction of new programs, the expansion of campus facilities—seven new buildings with two more to be constructed by the end of 2010—and the recruitment of full-time faculty, which has enabled us to maintain a healthy student–teacher ratio.

Although the chronic financial shortage is still a serious problem—as it is for all Palestinian universities—additional resource development and more diversified fundraising efforts, involving many individuals in positions of responsibility, have contributed to a more relaxed, though still austere, financial situation. Thus the University has been able to hire more needed full-time faculty, establish and upgrade many laboratories, develop the library facilities, introduce additional state-of-the-art technologies, and support a wider range of research and related activities. At least for the time being, the financial hiccoughs associated with payment of salaries are no longer ongoing challenges and those related to the collection of tuition fees have been substantially reduced. This progress is a testimony to the hard work of all involved: the Board of Trustees, which takes care of buildings and grounds, and the University Council, which assists the President of the University in overseeing the offices of Academic,

Administrative, and Financial and Outreach Affairs as well as Planning and Development and Quality Control. All faculty, staff, and students, past and present, deserve credit for the continuity and the development of this remarkable institution.

It is heartening that we have managed to get so many of those affiliated with the institution (now eighty-six years old) to contribute to this book. The accounts in this book are pretty personal; so too is the responsibility for the contents. We are fortunate to have contributors (chapter writers as well as alumni and former faculty and staff) who recall a time when Birzeit was a high school whose classrooms were scattered among family homes and whose accounts can bring that period to life in vivid detail. Equally compelling are the contributions of those who witnessed or played key roles in the early development of the institution, when major turning points were being negotiated. We made every attempt to include as many accounts and contributors as space and time would permit, but we know that this book is not the final word and that many more stories deserve to be collected and documented. I hope that this book is merely the first in a series of books that mine the rich experience that Birzeit University has offered everyone who has walked through its gate with an open mind.

This book is about an institution and not about the people who made it, although of course they are an integral part of the story. Birzeit University is a success story of the Palestinian people. The microcosm of Birzeit University is a reflection of a people and their fine moments, building a center of excellence that made and continues to make a profound difference in the lives of generations of students and the broader society, contributing to the well-being and the development of the Palestinian people, and providing a vivid expression of this people's resilience and dedication to their cause. It is not the story of something that was, but of something that is and that will continue to be and to prosper. This book tells an important part of the story of the Palestinian people, and as such, it must be dedicated to all those who contributed to what Birzeit University became—the founders, the faculty, the staff, successive classes of students—and to future generations of Birzeit University staff, faculty, and students who have yet to make their contributions.

*Nabeel Kassis*  
*President*

# Preface

This book is about Birzeit University—its history and development beginning in 1924, the year it was established as a small family-owned school for girls in the heart of the village of Birzeit. Its enrollment at that time was less than a hundred students. More than 80 years later, it is a full-fledged university with almost 9,000 students occupying a hilltop on the outskirts of Birzeit, offering more than 75 academic programs and employing over 850 faculty and staff members in the year 2009-10.

It is a story of challenges and successes, of devotion and unrelenting commitment. It is a story of dedication to quality education and respect for the lofty values of diversity of opinion. These were the founding principles of Birzeit as early as the year of its establishment. Hundreds of graduates who studied in the early years of Birzeit remember with compassion and fondness the “spirit” of Birzeit—a spirit that continues to steer its direction until the present time.

During the period of its development, Birzeit weathered enormous political changes in the country, the first being the Arab–Israeli conflict in 1948 (al-Nakba) and the consequent loss of a major part of historic Palestine. Yet the institution continued operating and providing educational opportunities to Palestinians, including the refugees who—as a result of the conflict—swarmed into the West Bank and other Arab countries. In June 1967, the institution (which by then had developed into a junior college) witnessed the second shattering event of the Arab–Israeli conflict, namely, the occupation of the rest of Palestine by Israel and its subjugation to Israel’s brutal military rule.

Yet the institution never lost its vision or its *raison d’être*. In 1972, it announced its decision to develop into a four-year college, and four years later it became the first accredited Arab university in Palestine. It gave impetus to other local educational institutions (which were at a pre-university level) to go through the experience of development and thus establish a network of independent local universities. This concerted effort thwarted major attempts by the occupation authorities to establish a university for the Palestinians, a university that would have naturally

put higher education directly under the auspices of the occupation authorities. Birzeit University and other Palestinian institutions of higher learning were a perfect example of how the Palestinians were able to manage their own higher educational needs.

Two major legal steps were taken by the founding family to prepare the way for Birzeit’s growth. First, the Nasir family realized at an early stage that for the sake of continuity, the legal structure of the institution had to be converted into a charitable foundation owned by a Board of Trustees. Second, the family realized that the old family buildings would not be able to handle the expected growth of the institution and decided to bequeath to the newly established Board land that it owned on the outskirts of Birzeit for a new campus.

Had the family not taken these essential steps, Birzeit could not have grown and become an institution governed by the standards of charitable foundations and thus able to be recognized nationally and internationally and at the same time be able to raise funds from private and public sources—funds that are essential for its continued development and growth.

The occupation authorities continue to claim that Birzeit and other Palestinian universities were established under what Israel describes as a benign occupation. That is of course false: the occupation was never benign and moreover, the establishment of Birzeit and other universities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory took place despite the occupation and certainly not with its blessings. In fact, the formal policy of the occupation authorities in relation to higher education can be characterized as one of unrelenting harassment.

Within the context of harassment, it is difficult to forget the brutal Israeli reaction against peaceful student demonstrations in which students were shot and killed on or near campus. Twenty-five students—young, productive, and energetic—lost their lives and hundreds of students and faculty members have been injured, jailed, or deported for a single



reason: their opposition to the occupation. It is a sobering reminder of the human cost of Israel's illegal military occupation.

Similarly, it is difficult to forget Israeli Military Order 854 (issued in July 1980), which required all foreign staff members at Palestinian universities to sign an anti-PLO statement as a condition for obtaining work permits. Faculty members refused to sign these permits because they did not want to be dragged into Israel's attempts to control University affairs, and they deserve tremendous respect for their principled stand. The price of noncompliance was high, and some faculty members were deported and not allowed to return. Yet the universities fought tenaciously against the law and raised the case at various international forums including the UNESCO. Eventually the battle was won and although 854 was not officially annulled, it was quietly dropped. Under military occupation, any success, no matter how small or partial it is, means a lot to people's morale.

As part of its harassment, Israel closed Birzeit University and other educational establishments in 1988 in retaliation for the first intifada. Birzeit had been subjected earlier to at least fourteen closure orders that lasted from two weeks to two months. But the closure in 1988, its fifteenth, lasted for more than four consecutive years and provides an insight into the occupation's apprehensions regarding higher education in Palestine. In spite of the closure, the students and faculty continued to interact in an "underground" system where education was provided in homes and rented facilities, providing yet another example of how the academic Palestinian community faced the challenge in a creative and peaceful manner.

Although I am proud of how Birzeit has dealt with the challenges of occupation and its measures, facing the challenges cannot be a goal

in itself. In order for our student body to grow in an environment that embodies the University principles and values and for the population at large to attain its freedom, the occupation itself must come to an end. This should be the beginning of a new era for the Palestinians in general and for Birzeit in particular. In spite of all the difficulties and complexities of the situation, I hope that the onset of this era will come soon.

This short preface would not be complete without paying special tribute to the founders and cofounders who left their mark on Birzeit and helped to make it what it is today: Nabiha Nasir, Musa Nasir, and Nimeh Nasir Faris. To this first generation of Birzeit's leadership, this book is humbly dedicated. It is also dedicated to the generation of young men and women who studied at Birzeit since its establishment and especially to those who stood heroically against the forces of occupation. It is dedicated to Sharaf al-Tibi, the first Birzeit University student shot and killed by the Israeli army in November 1984 near the campus grounds, and to his colleagues who were killed at later periods as they peacefully resisted the occupation. It is dedicated to the faculty, staff, and administrators who kept Birzeit alive in spite of all adversities. It is dedicated to the town of Birzeit and its people who have always taken pride in the institution that carries the town's name, and it is dedicated to the hundreds of supporters who generously donated to Birzeit, thus embodying their love and commitment to Palestine. Finally, this book is dedicated to future generations of Palestinians whom I hope will keep the "spirit" of Birzeit alive—a spirit of liberal education, tolerance, respect for diversity of opinion, and integrity, while aiming at the same time for excellence and genuine scholarship.

*Hanna Nasir*

*Chairman of the Board of Trustees*

# Acknowledgments

This book describes the evolution of Birzeit from a girls' school to a university and a national institution. I am glad to be part of the collective effort to tell that story, and I thank Nabeel Kassis for providing that opportunity to me; it has been personally enriching in ways I did not anticipate when I agreed to sign on. Working with him closely over the past thirteen months, I am especially grateful to him for his availability for consultation, his meticulous reviews of the content, and his supervision of the translation of the text into Arabic. His hands-on involvement from start to finish resulted in a better final product than I might have been able to shape on my own. I thank him for making our collaboration an enjoyable endeavor.

It has been a pleasure to work with the chapter contributors, whose essays constitute the framework of this book. I thank them for their patience and good humor during what must have seemed like interminable editorial and review processes. Most chapter essays are followed by accounts written by alumni and former faculty members, who provide a sense of what it was like to work and study at Birzeit at specific points in time. Many of us worked to solicit these accounts, casting a wide net in the hope of capturing a range of experiences; with very few exceptions, the responses we received are included in this book. In most cases, I selected excerpts but otherwise tried not to edit the text; I hope the authors feel that their distinctive voices have been retained. Clearly, there are many more themes to be explored and many more stories that deserve to be told. I hope that this book stimulates other efforts to do exactly that.

The members of the photo selection committee—Rula Halawani (committee chair), Yasser Darwish, Isa Masrieh, Ramzi Rihan, Kamal Shamshoum, Vera Tamari, and Rima Tarazi—put in many hours to identify the subset of photos that were selected to give a visual flavor of this institution and its evolution over more than eight decades. That we have a rich selection of photographs from the early years can be attributed

to the tireless efforts of Yasser Darwish, who identified private collections of photographs and then scanned and digitized them for use in this book. Limitations of the university archive prevented the inclusion of photographs of individuals who played key roles in the 1970s and 1980s.

Many Birzeit staff members assisted me in locating references, following up with contributors, and conducting basic fact checking. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Yasser Darwish, Hanna Kreitem, Labib Eid, and Isa Masrieh. Through the many months of work on this project, Penny Johnson was especially generous with her time, advice, and efforts to track down information and individuals; Salim Tamari offered suggestions about topics to include and individuals to contact; and Lisa Taraki offered much-appreciated advice. Judy Barsalou of the Ford Foundation provided information about financial assistance provided to Birzeit over the years. Jumana Kayyali Abbas was recruited to translate the text into Arabic even as the manuscript was being reviewed a final time prior to being sent to the designer for layout. Working on what must have seemed like a moving target, she managed the work (and the many last-minute edits) with grace and good humor. I thank Elaine Dunn and Jennifer Heath for their careful proofreading at record speed and Lena Sobeh of Palitra Design for an attractive layout and design and for her valiant effort to accommodate our schedule.

The manuscript went through several reviews by subject matter experts who helped to sharpen the focus, expand the coverage where necessary, and make it more readable. Former Birzeit University faculty member Tomis Kapitan graciously agreed to give the manuscript a final reading in the weeks before it was sent to the printer. The book is vastly improved as a result of all of these efforts.

*Ida Audeh*  
*Editor*



# Chronology

1920 The British Mandate over Palestine is established.

The Palestinian National Congress (established in 1919 in Jerusalem) holds its third meeting and elects an Executive Committee, which remains in control of the Palestinian political movement from 1920 to 1935.

Beginning in the 1920s, intermittent conflict breaks out between the indigenous Palestinian Arab population and growing numbers of Jewish immigrants who harbor the goal of creating an exclusively Jewish state. Sir Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner in Egypt, had corresponded with Sharif Hussein of Mecca in 1915 and 1916 and expressed British support for postwar Arab independence if the Arabs supported the United Kingdom against the Ottoman Empire. However, the 1917 Balfour Declaration declared the British government's support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

1924 *Nabiha Nasir and Ratibeh Shkair establish Birzeit School for Girls.*

1930 *Birzeit School becomes a coeducational secondary school. Two years later, it is renamed Birzeit High School.*

1936 Palestinians launch a three-year revolt (which included a six-month general strike) against massive Jewish immigration to Palestine.

1942 *Birzeit High School is renamed Birzeit College.*

1947 The UN votes to partition Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state (November 29); armed clashes ensue.

1948 The establishment of Israel is proclaimed on May 14, one day before the end of the British Mandate; Arab states send troops to Palestine the following day in an attempt to salvage areas designated by the UN as part of the Arab state. At least 418 Palestinian towns and villages are depopulated, and 750,000 Palestinians are expelled from or flee what becomes the Jewish state. The following year, Israel and the Arab states sign an armistice agreement.

1953 *Birzeit offers first-year college-level courses.*

1956 Egypt nationalizes the Suez Canal Company and is invaded by Israel, France, and the United Kingdom.

1961 *Birzeit College adds second-year college-level courses to its curriculum and grants its first associate degrees the following year. Over the next six years, it phases out the elementary, preparatory, and high school program; by 1967 it becomes exclusively a junior college.*

1964 The Palestinian National Council meets in Jerusalem. The Palestine Liberation Organization is created.

1967 Israel launches its third war in two decades, at the end of which it occupies (in addition to Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and the Syrian Golan Heights) the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip and rules over 1.3 million Palestinians; at least 200,000 (including many second-time refugees) flee to Jordan.

1972 Israel launches a campaign in the 1970s to assassinate Palestinian political figures in Lebanon and Europe. Novelist, short-story writer, literary critic, and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine spokesman Ghassan Kanafani is assassinated by Israeli agents in Beirut. The following year, three other leaders are assassinated, including poet and PLO spokesman Kamal Nasir.

*Birzeit College launches a four-year liberal arts program leading to bachelors degrees in eight disciplines.*

- 1973 *A Board of Trustees is formed to assume full responsibility for Birzeit College. Israeli occupation authorities close the campus by military order for two weeks (December 15-31). Closures are imposed fifteen times over the next two decades.*
- 1974 Arab states recognize the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.  
*University President Hanna Nasir is deported to Lebanon (November 21).*
- 1975 The UN General Assembly passes resolution 3379, which identifies Zionism as a form of racism. (Following intense US lobbying, the resolution is revoked 16 years later.) Civil war in Lebanon begins.  
*During the 1975-76 academic year, Birzeit College changes its name to Birzeit University.*
- 1976 The first West Bank municipal elections are held since the occupation began; nationalist candidates are swept into office.  
  
On March 30, six Palestinian citizens of Israel are killed, about 100 are wounded, and hundreds are arrested by Israeli soldiers and police during demonstrations to protest the Israeli government's announcement of plans to expropriate about 20,000 dunums of land in the Galilee. The event is referred to as Land Day and is observed annually.  
  
*Birzeit University is admitted in April as a member of the Association of Arab Universities; three months later, it holds its first graduation ceremony conferring bachelors degrees (July 11).*
- 1977 President Anwar Sadat of Egypt addresses the Israeli Knesset.  
  
*Birzeit University is admitted as a member of the International Association of Universities. Students enroll in a graduate program in education. The Prisoners Committee is launched*
- 1978 Israel invades Southern Lebanon.  
  
*The Faculty of Commerce & Economics and the Institute of Community and Public Health are established. By spring 2010, the Faculties of Engineering, Law & Public Administration, Nursing and Allied Health Professions, Graduate Studies, Education, and Information Technology are added.*
- 1979 The Camp David Accords are signed between Israel and Egypt (March 26).
- 1980 The UN calls for an independent Palestinian state (July 29). Throughout the 1980s, Israel suspends West Bank municipalities and deports, dismisses, or carries out assassination attempts against prominent mayors.  
  
*The Israeli occupation authorities issue Military Order 854, which places institutions of higher education under the command of the Israeli governor, giving him control over enrollment and staff appointments. Birzeit University inaugurates the new campus.*
- 1981 *The Faculty of Science Building is completed. Over the next three decades, many more buildings are added to the campus to keep up with the addition of new programs and faculties.*
- 1982 Israel invades Lebanon (June 4). Between 30,000-40,000 Lebanese and Palestinians are killed, more than 10,000 are injured, at least 50,000 are made homeless, and almost 5,000 are imprisoned in Ansar camp. The departure of the PLO from Lebanon is followed by the Sabra and Shatila massacres (September 16-18).
- 1983 Israel expels thirty-four academics from West Bank universities because they refuse to sign the "anti-PLO" pledge.

- 1984 *Israeli occupation authorities close the campus for one month. The Israeli army shoots and kills Sharaf al-Tibi (November 21); he is the first of twenty-five Birzeit University students to be killed by the army between 1984 and 2008.*
- 1985-86 Israel announces in August 1985 that it will use an “iron fist” policy to silence dissent in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The policy includes town arrest, administrative detention, house demolitions, and closures of institutions.
- Israeli occupation authorities close the University campus on two occasions for a total of three months.*
- 1987 Israeli truck collides (December 9) with a Palestinian van, killing four and wounding seven in an incident considered to be the trigger of the first intifada.
- Israeli occupation authorities close the University campus three times for a total of more than four months.*
- 1988 Meeting in Algiers, the 19th Palestine National Council proclaims the establishment of the State of Palestine on the Palestinian territory with Jerusalem (al-Quds al-Sharif) as its capital (Declaration of Independence, November 15).
- In a wave of school closures, during which Israel effectively makes Palestinian education illegal, Birzeit University is closed for the fifteenth time (January 8). The closure lasts for fifty-one months (until April 29, 1992). During this prolonged period of closure, the University continued to operate underground with small study groups in makeshift arrangements outside the campus. Under such conditions, many students needed as long as ten years to complete their four-year degree courses.*
- 1991 The Middle East peace conference is convened in Madrid. The Palestinian delegation includes many Birzeit University faculty members in the Steering Committee and as negotiators and technical experts.
- The Center for Continuing Education is established at Birzeit. Throughout the 1990s and beyond, many more centers and institutes are established to offer community services and policy-oriented research.*
- 1993 The Oslo accords are signed (September 13).
- University President Hanna Nasir returns to the Occupied Palestinian Territory (April 30) after spending more than eighteen years in exile.*
- 1994 The Palestinian National Authority is established.
- 2000 The second Palestinian intifada is triggered by a visit (on September 28) by Likud party leader Ariel Sharon and his bodyguards to the Haram al-Sharif; four Palestinians are killed, and many are wounded.
- 2001 *The Israeli army sets up a roadblock near Surda on the Ramallah-Birzeit road, which remains in place until 2003, effectively placing the University under siege for almost three years.*
- 2002 Following its spring siege of Palestinian towns and villages throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Israel begins construction on a wall (referred to by Palestinians as the Apartheid Wall) that it claims will provide security to Israelis but which it privately concedes will form the borders between Israel and a Palestinian “entity.”
- The University launches the Right to Education Campaign (which developed from the Prisoners Committee and Human Rights Action Project of the 1970s and 1980s) to provide legal assistance to staff and students who are harassed and arrested by the Israeli occupation authorities and to raise international awareness of these attacks on fundamental human rights.*



- 2003 Rachel Corrie is killed by a bulldozer as she tries to prevent a Palestinian home in Gaza from being demolished, becoming the first international human rights worker to be killed by the Israeli occupation.
- 2004 The International Court of Justice declares the route of the Apartheid Wall to be illegal (July 9). Yasir Arafat (November 11) dies; it is widely believed that he was assassinated.
- Dr. Nabeel Kassis assumes responsibilities as president of Birzeit University (September 1); he is the second president in the University's history.*
- 2005 Approximately 8,000 Israeli settlers are moved out of the Gaza Strip; Israeli military forces redeploy to the border.
- 2006 Israel imposes a tight economic blockade and siege on the Gaza Strip.
- 2008 Israel launches (December 27) a massive assault on the Gaza Strip, killing 1,417 Palestinians. A UN investigation (the "Goldstone report") concludes that Israel committed actions amounting to war crimes, and possibly crimes against humanity.
- The Israeli army shoots and kills Birzeit University student Abd al-Latif Ali Mohammad Hroub (March 31), the twenty-fifth University student to be killed since 1984.*
- 2010 *As of April, 82 Birzeit University students and faculty are detained.*







1

From Elementary School  
to University





# Mission

Birzeit University is a Palestinian Arab institution supervised by an autonomous Board of Trustees that is responsible for it and decides its policies.

The University is committed to excellence and encourages creativity, experimentation, innovation, accomplishment as well as team work and democratic practices anchored in pluralism, freedom of expression and respect for others.

The University endeavors to excel in higher education, scientific research, and service to the community. Since its establishment, the University has remained committed to providing equal learning opportunities to qualified individuals and to prepare students to become good citizens active in their society and committed to its advancement and well-being.

The University provides the appropriate environment for students to develop their personalities and realize their potentials in an open and liberal atmosphere that stresses the Arab-Islamic heritage.



Birzeit School, by George Alief

## CHAPTER 1

# Beginnings: Sowing the Seeds

*Rima Tarazi and Samia Khoury*

**B**irzeit has always been the central point of our family's lives. It is where we grew up under the watchful and loving (although sometimes stern) eyes of the women of the family, and it is where we got our education, acquired our values and attitudes, and nurtured our aspirations and talents.

Our aunt, Nabiha Nasir, was the driving spirit behind the school. She was the eldest daughter of Reverend Hanna Nasir, a gentle, generous soul who was blessed with eight daughters and one son, our father Musa. Our grandmother, Sa'da Shatara from Ramallah, had been a teacher before marrying our grandfather. She managed to raise many children and run a household on the limited salary of a clergyman whose home was always open to guests.

We mention our grandparents because they must have had a profound impact on our father and aunts.

Nabiha was asked by her former teacher, Ratibeh Shkair (who hailed from Lebanon), to help her establish a girls' school in Lebanon; our aunt countered with the suggestion that they establish a school in Birzeit, where the need was great. She approached her father for his permission to use his



The Nasir family home, which became Birzeit School.

large home for the project; as a clergyman who traveled between various towns in Palestine and Transjordan, he was happy to give his summer residence in Birzeit to a project that he felt would serve the community well. The school was established in 1924 and was called Birzeit School for Girls, and Ratibeh Shkair was the headmistress. (Despite the name of the school, however, boys were also admitted at the request of the community.)



Earliest graduates of Birzeit School, 1920s, with Birzeit School founders Nabiha Nasir (seated, right) and Ratibeh Shkair (seated, third from the right). The female graduates (in white) are unidentified, except for Wardah Musallam, who sits between Nasir and Shkair. Standing, right to left: Sami Nasir and Rashid Aranki.



Dance (choreographed by Mary Nasir) performed at the graduation ceremony in 1942. Folk and classical dancing, always popular activities, were taught as part of the sports curriculum. During graduation ceremonies, students danced to classical or ballet music.

The year 1932 marked several turning points in the school's history. Ratibeh moved to Beit Jala that year to establish the Rai Assaleh School there (now known as the Good Shepherd Swedish School), and Nabiha became the headmistress at Birzeit. A separate school for boys was established, and Wadi Tarazi assumed the role of headmaster of that school. With the establishment of a boys' school, the institution clearly had outgrown its original name, and so it was renamed Birzeit High School; the label referred to both the boys' and the girls' schools.

In 1942 the school was renamed Birzeit College. The name change did not reflect a change in the curriculum or school structure; at the time, it was customary for schools to be called colleges. Years later, this practice was officially discontinued, but by that time Birzeit had become a college in the sense that the label is used today, and so the name was retained.

## School Facilities

Birzeit College consisted of separate girls' and boys' schools. The girls' school was housed in our grandfather's house and contained classrooms, the girls' dorms, teachers living quarters, and the office and sleeping area of the headmistress. The boys' school consisted of rented houses in the neighborhood. One house was used for classrooms and for sleeping quarters for the male teachers; another rented building was used for the boys' dorm and a dining hall for teachers and male students. A third building owned by the family was used by both schools for public lectures, theatrical performances, debates, and other activities.

There was no electricity in Birzeit—it became available only in 1951—and the school had to depend on an array of kerosene lamps when light was needed. There was no running water either; underground reservoirs were used to collect rainwater, which was then manually pumped daily to fill water tanks on the rooftop. Heating was nonexistent and life was austere, but we were used to it and it made Spartans of us all. We sometimes shiver (but with pride) when we remember those days.



## Staff

Prior to 1947, the academic staff included impressive figures from Palestine, Lebanon, and other parts of the world. Dr. Salwa Nassar, the renowned Lebanese physicist who later became a professor at the American University of Beirut and president of Beirut College for Women (now the Lebanese American University), started her teaching career at Birzeit. Wadi Deeb from Lebanon wrote the words to the school song, which was put to music by the Palestinian music teacher Salvador Armita. Russian artist George Alief designed the olive tree, the emblem of Birzeit. Poet Said El-Issa taught Arabic before leaving to work for the BBC. Michael Karkar, a refugee from Lydda, introduced French to the curriculum during the school year 1948-49. That year, accounting and typing were added to the curriculum when the YMCA moved its typewriters and teacher Peter Sahhar to Birzeit. (The YMCA had been forced to close down in West Jerusalem.)

## Family Involvement

In addition to administering the school, Nabiha (a graduate of the Bethlehem Evangelical School) taught history and Arabic grammar, did the gardening and shopping, accompanied us on the piano, and fought her way through officialdom; in her capacity as headmistress of the school, she played a significant role in the women's movement and advocated with fervor the cause of her people and her country in several forums.

Our father Musa assumed an active role in the school. He shared his sister's strong commitment to opening and expanding educational opportunities to girls, and he strove to make Birzeit an institution that equipped students to face the challenges of their times. His innovative ideas and initiatives enhanced the educational programs of the school.

Three of our aunts worked with their sister Nabiha in the school. Nimeh Faris, who was widowed at an early age, was an English teacher for many

### Student Enrollment

In 1922-23, just over 20% of school aged Palestinian children were in school; by 1947, about 44.5% were in government or private schools.

#### 1925-26

Number of government schools for boys: 283

Enrollment: 16,146

Number of government schools for girls: 31

Enrollment: 3,591

Number of students enrolled in private schools: 19,328

#### 1944-45

Number of government schools for boys: 398

Enrollment: 56,359

Number of government schools for girls: 80

Enrollment: 15,303

Number of students enrolled in private schools, 1945-46: 43,885

#### **Birzeit College enrollment, 1942-47**

1942: 138 (58 boys, 80 girls)

1943: 139 (58 boys, 81 girls)

1944: 184 (108 boys, 76 girls)

1945: 218 (141 boys, 77 girls)

1946: 222 (145 boys, 77 girls)

1947: 182 (106 boys, 76 girls)

### Partial List of Birzeit Faculty, 1924-50

The following individuals taught at Birzeit in the years before the school became a junior college. The names of Lebanese teachers are italicized.

Ghaleb Abu Soud • Amy Aranki • Nasouhi Barghouti • Tal'at Barghouti • Zahieh Bibi • Rasheed Dajani • *Kamel Deeb* • *Naji Deeb* • *Nakhleh Deeb* • *Wadi Deeb* • Said El-Issa • Osama Faris • *Lulu Ghattas* • Naimeh Habib • Emil Habibi • *Georgette Hadba* • Abdel Rahim Khader • Ali Khalaf • Mohammad Khayyat • Elia Khouri • Adib Khoury • George Khoury • Jubran Khoury • Fahmi Jayyusi • *Vera Jreidini* • Farid Majaj • Shaker Mina • Ellen Nasir • Kamal Nasir • Laurice Nasir • Leila Nasir • Nasir Nasir • Rima Nasir • Salwa Nasir • Fuad Nukho • Najib Odeh • Mary Powell • Shaheeneh Rahhal • *Asad Rahhal* • Hassan Sabbah • Naheel Salameh • Salwa Salameh • *Yusef Shdeed* • Salwa Shehadeh • Adela Simmons Evry • David Tarazi • Shawki Tarazi • Hilda Wilson • Leila Zayed



### **Nabihah Nasir (1891-1951)**

Birzeit School cofounder Nabihah Nasir was a prominent women's rights activist (as were many upper- and middle-class Palestinian women during the first half of the twentieth century). In October 1938 she addressed an Arab women's conference in Cairo and advocated Arab unity as the way to confront the threats facing Palestine: "Arabs should not find it hard to unite. They have a common language, religion, and history. ... We

must unite for our own benefit: to teach our children as we want to, not as the others want; in addition to the well-known benefits of exploiting our resources the way we want, and to live in honor and freedom. ... Being an Arab does not mean having Arab blood. It is rather the language one uses. ... I came from Palestine to air this Arab country's pain. Palestine struggles a great deal. But we know that we cannot succeed unless we have the Arab nation, that we are part of, at our side." A letter dated February 28, 1946 from Egyptian feminist Huda Shaarawi to Nabihah Nasir suggests that the two corresponded about their shared commitment to women's rights.

years in the boys' and girls' school. She was a very charismatic person and a fluent public speaker (although she shied away from crowds), and her students remember her as one of the best teachers they ever had. Aneeshah taught primary school. Mary, the youngest sister, assumed responsibility for the Girl Guides for a short while until this movement was discontinued; she became a sports teacher who trained netball teams that won trophies year after year.

The other sisters pitched in whenever needed. Victoria was always ready to provide financial and moral assistance; her twin sister Lizzy taught briefly; and in 1944, Najla joined the teaching staff as an English teacher.

In 1948, our parents, who at that time were living in Jerusalem, had to leave because of the war. They settled in Birzeit and, like the rest of the family members, became totally immersed in the school's administration.

In addition to his active involvement in the administration and development of the school, our father (who had a university degree in physics) taught physics for a while and found ways to simplify and make enjoyable what had been a dry and difficult subject. We recall stories of his students' fascination with his use of a pressure cooker (which was then a new item in kitchens) to demonstrate some principles of physics.

Many qualified teachers left Palestine after 1948, and we were called to help out. One of us (Rima), who had been studying music in Paris, interrupted her studies prior to the death of Nabihah to return to Birzeit and to teach music and English and to lead cultural activities. Our brother Hanna taught for a year after graduating from high school; at the time he was also enrolled in a special postsecondary program that was initiated that year at Birzeit to include courses in political science, economics, and advanced mathematics. Several of our cousins were also called upon to teach. One of them was the poet Kamal Nasir, who taught Arabic during the 1948-49 school year and who many years later and after a tumultuous political and journalistic career joined the PLO; he was one of three Palestinian political leaders assassinated by Israeli commandos in Beirut in April 1973.



Birzeit High School faculty and staff. Seated, right to left: Said El-Issa, Wadi Deeb, Musa Nasir, Linda Nasir, Wadi Tarazi, and Rasheed Dajani. Standing, right to left: Issa Iqal, Fuad Nukho, Fahmi Jayousi, and Adib Khoury.

## The Nakba and Its Aftermath

The year 1948 was a turning point in the history of Birzeit College. By the spring, the political situation looked precarious, and Birzeit administrators worried that the school year (which normally ended in June) would be interrupted by events that might be triggered by the planned withdrawal of British forces and the end of the Mandate that had been established in 1917. The administrators decided to complete the semester curriculum by April. The graduation ceremony was scheduled for April 30 and was to be held under the auspices of Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, the chief commander of the Palestinian forces. But that was not to be; he was killed on April 8 by the Haganah (Jewish paramilitary forces) at the battle of al-Qastal while defending that hill on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

Husayni was a popular, well-loved leader, and Birzeit had a special relationship with him because the village served as one of his headquarters. We remember how female students would knit sweaters for his troops; it was one way of expressing their pride in the noble cause he defended so valiantly.

The graduation ceremony for the class of 1948 took place as planned on April 30. It was a solemn event held in the hall at the entrance of the main building, presided over by the secretary of the Arab Higher Committee, Emile Ghouri, who was one of Husayni's deputies.

Upon finishing the school year in April, the boarding students, especially those from the coastal areas Jaffa and Haifa, left immediately to return home. Israel was proclaimed on May 15, one day after the British Mandate ended, and many Palestinians from Ramla and Lydda who had either been forced to leave or fled in terror took to the road and walked in the summer heat to Birzeit. The school as well as the churches and mosque opened their doors and offered shelter until it was possible for the refugees either to settle temporarily in tents or to continue their slow, agonizing trek to Ramallah and to towns across the Jordan River.



**Musa Nasir (1895-1971)**

Musa Nasir received a degree in physics from the American University of Beirut in 1914. He opened a school to teach public administration in his Jerusalem home but had to close it after 1948. After the Nakba, he immersed himself in supporting, directing, and developing the family school at Birzeit. He introduced in the 1950s the concept of an "experimental year" for students after their last year at the high school. He strongly believed that the specialized education in specific disciplines in universities often meant

that students graduated but were not well-rounded in their general outlook on life. Shortly thereafter, the College offered a freshman-level curriculum.

In the 1950s, he was elected twice to the Jordanian Parliament and assumed cabinet posts in the Jordanian government. In 1959 and 1960 and in his capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs, he gave two powerful addresses at the UN General Assembly on the issue of Palestine and the refugee problem. Disillusioned from the prevailing political situation, he retired from political life in 1961, to harness his time and efforts toward advancing Birzeit College and education in general and to advocate the Palestinian cause through several forums, always focusing on the moral and ethical dimension of the Palestinian cause.

He was president of Birzeit College from 1947 until his death in 1971.

### **Birzeit School Principals**

#### ***Principals of the girls' school***

Ratibeh Shkair, 1924-32; Nabiha Nasir, 1932-51; Nimeh Faris, 1951-67

#### ***Principals of the boys' school***

Wadi Tarazi, 1932-42; Reverend Boutros Nasir, 1942-43; David Tarazi, 1943-51; Elia Khoury, 1951-53

#### ***President of the College (both schools)***

Musa Nasir, 1947-71



Russian artist, teacher, and designer of the olive tree school emblem, George Alief, with some of his students, 1943.

### School Song

O beloved school, May you continue to live in glory and peace  
You are worthy of being redeemed with our souls, as you remain highly  
esteemed by all

We shall never forget you or forget your love  
We shall always keep our pledge to watch over you and bask in your radiance  
Birzeit, you have become the spring that quenches our thirst  
With your loyal sons and daughters you have reached great heights

You are a beacon for the young and a pillar in our homeland  
You are a pride to our Arab nation, everlasting and perpetual  
Engrain within us your great values  
Keep us united so that we may have a peaceful and secure life

—Lyrics by Wadi Deeb

That summer, our maternal and paternal aunts and uncles who lived in the western part of Jerusalem also took refuge in Birzeit after the horrors of the Dayr Yasin massacre. The dorms were practically empty by then, and thus it was possible to accommodate a lot of the family members on the school premises.

As thousands of refugees arrived in Birzeit, our father understood the importance of documenting their displacement, and he took the initiative to hold a preliminary census of the refugees. Assisted by students and relatives living in Birzeit, he collected a lot of data about the refugees, including their towns of origins, which he later presented to the International Red Cross to help provide assistance to them. This early census data, the first to be collected, earned our father a Red Cross citation.

In September 1948, the school resumed classes. But the student body had changed; by the fall, the students came from Birzeit or the refugee population whose resources were almost nonexistent. The challenge was to keep the school operating despite the financial difficulties.

Dwindling enrollment numbers led to the consolidation of the boys' and girls' schools into a single coeducational institution. All classes were moved to the main building (our grandfather's house). A newly acquired building was used as the boys' and male teachers' dormitory and living quarters. All boys below the age of twelve resided in the main building in a specially expanded wing.

In March 1951, our dear aunt Nabiha passed away after a short illness. She had been loved by many and was deeply mourned. (Villagers referred to the school as “madrasat al-sitt Nabiha,” a tribute to her influence and dedication.) The administration of the school was assumed by her sister, Nimeh Faris, who proved to be as efficient and skilled as her sister. Our father continued to support her, just as he had Nabiha, while at the same time separately pursuing his political career.



## The “Spirit of Birzeit”

It is difficult to define what many graduates often refer to as the “spirit of Birzeit.” The warm and caring family atmosphere of the school created solid bonds between the students and the staff who converged on the school from all parts of Palestine, Transjordan, and Lebanon. The school atmosphere was that of a secular national institution; many of the teachers were ardent Arab nationalists, and they engrained certain values in students. Foremost among these values was the placing of the public good ahead of personal interests and needs and service to country and community. The University oath that was initiated by our father for the junior college graduates in the late 1950s reflects these values; so did the morning gatherings during which a national song was chanted every day after a short talk by the headmistress. Honesty, truthfulness, humility, and courage were engrained in the students. Equally important was the special emphasis placed on widening the students’ intellectual and cultural horizons and on character-building activities.

Part of the spirit of Birzeit was undeniably reflected in its educational system and programs. Unlike other private schools, the language of instruction at Birzeit was Arabic, a reflection of the spirit of Arab nationalism promoted by the school. However, students’ English language abilities were honed through instruction by Nimeh Faris, encouragement to converse in English, and the extra science or history course taught in English (referred to as an “alternative”).

## Cultural Life at Birzeit

When students of the pre-Nakba period recall their days at Birzeit, they recall with great fondness the extracurricular activities that made as much of an impact as the first-rate education they felt they received.

Birzeit placed a premium on music and recruited outstanding music teachers. At graduation ceremonies, the choir performed a variety of mainly Arabic songs and national anthems written or composed by staff musicians.



Graduation ceremony, June 28, 1941: Salvador Arnita conducting the Birzeit Choir with members of the Palestine Broadcasting Station Orchestra. Graduation ceremonies before the Nakba were mostly held in the courtyard of the old premises. Community figures would be invited to distribute the certificates to the graduates. The last graduation ceremony before the Nakba, however, was held in June 1947 in the Jerusalem YMCA, a vibrant cultural and sports center for Palestinians.

### Music at Birzeit

Birzeit teachers and composers put music to the words of Arab and Palestinian poets (including some who taught at the school). Salvador Arnita was music director of the YMCA in Jerusalem from 1935 to 1948 and taught piano and choir at Birzeit between 1939 and 1946. He composed national songs, which he wrote for choir and orchestra and which were performed at graduation ceremonies. After 1948, Arnita moved to Beirut with his wife, musicologist Yusra Jawhariyyeh, where he established and directed the music department at the American University of Beirut. Hanna Khatchadourian (Ohan Dourian Narc) taught music at Birzeit College from 1944 to 1946. He wrote the music to Kamal Nasir’s first anthem and created a rich anthology of Armenian songs. Renowned musician and composer Yusef Batroni, one of the earliest musicians to work at the music section of the Palestine Broadcasting Station, joined Birzeit in 1954 and stayed there until his death in 1957, creating a rich body of anthems and songs that were performed by the College Choir. Other musicians who composed original pieces for the choir included Amin Nasser and Rima Nasir Tarazi.



The College netball team won the championship four years in a row (1942-46). Seated, left to right: Rose Qirreh, Hiam Ghandour, and Ina'm Dajani; standing, left to right: Aida Khoury, Nina Musa, Clair Dallal, and Salwa Sa'adeh.

The Birzeit College administration promoted theatrical productions, which were directed by Nimeh Faris and later by Rima Nasir and staged at the school and in other parts of Palestine and Jordan. The following is a partial list of some of the plays produced by Birzeit students between 1943 and 1952: Shakespeare's "Othello," "Macbeth," and "The Merchant of Venice" and Frances Harris's "The Tight Corner" (performed at the YMCA in Jerusalem); the Arabic plays "Al-Hadi" and "The Last of the Umayyads" (performed in Jaffa and Amman); "Adonis" by Farid Modawwar and an Arabic version of Charles Dickens' "Tale of Two Cities" (performed in Nablus, Ramallah, and Amman); and

"Hafnat Reeh," a comedy by Said Takiddine performed by students of the boys' school.

Students received art instruction by able and creative teachers and artists such as George Alief and Alice Hairabedian, who also designed costumes for the school plays. Female students were taught sewing and embroidery; dance was a popular activity.

All students anticipated with excitement the annual poetry competition *Suq Okaz*, a revival of a very old Arab tradition. For a long time, it was restricted to the boys' school. Poetic talents flourished during that event. Extemporizing saved many a contestant from failing! Debates were held to encourage the articulation of sound arguments.

Birzeit was very keen on sports. Netball, football, ping-pong, and high jump were popular in both the girls' and the boys' schools; so were gymnastics and roller skating.

On the annual field day, held toward the end of the school year, boys were divided into four drill teams and competed in track events. The teams were named after famous Arab leaders who led armies during the early Islamic conquests: Osama Bin Zaid, Sa'd bin Abi Waqas, Khaled Ibn al-Walid, and Al-Muthanna Ibn Haritha. The girls' teams were named after famous Arab women: al-Khansa, Khawla Bint al-Azwar, al-Zahra, and al-Zarqa. The competitions ended with colorful parades attended by parents, officials, and members of the community that were held in the football field in Jifna and in a smaller sports ground near the school building, during which trophies were given to the winning teams, generally by prominent community figures.

Looking back at those long years of challenges and achievements, we feel grateful for the legacy that the founders left behind and privileged to witness a remarkable educational institution in the making and to participate, in some measure, in those endeavors.

## Remembering the Early Years

I was eight years old and my sister Lamia was seven when we arrived at Birzeit School in 1934 as boarders, where we were sent by my parents, as there were no good schools in Gaza where we lived, especially for girls.

Miss Nabiha Nasir was our headmistress and Mrs. Faris was the house mistress. Coming in from the main street, you entered into the front garden, then into the main building hall, which had beautiful stone tiles, which we polished every Saturday. I was the defender when we played netball, as I was tall and strong. When the boys' school traveled to Ramallah and Jerusalem to play football, we would wait impatiently for them to return and cheer them.

Then sometimes we would have competitions with schools from Ramallah and Jerusalem collecting wild flowers from the valleys and mountains and have prizes for whoever had more varieties.

It was a good school and we made good lifetime friends.

Then the 1938-39 revolt disturbed my father as it was not safe for us, with the rebels hiding in the mountains nearby, so my father moved us to the Jerusalem Girls College.

*Siham Shawa Nusseibeh (attended 1934-39)*

I am from Birzeit, and I started kindergarten at the school. Nabiha Nasir was the principal, and Ratibeh Shkair was with her. I remember Ratibeh Shkair. I don't know what happened between them, but she [Shkair] left and went to Bethlehem. She established a boarding school, the Good Shepherd, in a place called Qasr Jasir.

The Birzeit girls' netball team was very strong. We used to play against the Friends Girls School, the Ma'mooniya school in Jerusalem, the



Class of 1942. Row 1, left to right: Badi'a Nasir and Alice Ghawi. Row 2, left to right: Amy Aranki (valedictorian), Naheel Salameh, Wadad Abu Rahmeh, Nabiha Nasir, Alice Bisharat, Argentine Sa'adeh, and Badi'a Saba. Row 3, left to right: an unidentified student, Costandi Sifri (valedictorian), Zaki Sa'deh, Wadi Tarazi, Mustafa Nusseibeh, George Khoury, Farid Majaj, and Fuad Farraj.

teachers training school in Jerusalem, British High School, and LGS (a Jewish boarding school). Many times, we won the trophy.

Mrs. Nimeh Faris taught us English. With her we studied Shakespeare—"Merchant of Venice," "Othello," "Macbeth," and so on; it was required for tawjihi. Mary Nasir Tarazi, the youngest of the sisters, was responsible for basketball. At 5 a.m. she would blow a whistle and we would all assemble.

We used to love school. The activities drew us in. We did English country dancing. Miss Mary Powell taught us Guide. She was the cousin of Lord Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of the scout movement. Miss Wilkinson and Miss Pope (English teacher) came during the Mandate.





Class of 1943. Row 1, left to right: Nuha Ghandour, Naimeh Habib. Row 2, left to right: Emarance Saadeh, Lily Ghandour, Salwa Salah, Lily Nasir, Asma Nassar, Huda Farraj, and Salwa Shehadeh. Row 3, left to right: Nasir Salim Nasir, Raouf Salfiti, Hafeez Ghannam, an unidentified student, Fuad Khoury, two unidentified students, and Nassar Suleiman Nassar. Row 4, far right: George Fashho Karam. The others are not identified.

It was such a lively place. We had a *Suq Okaz*, and we had a great choir. [Salvador] Arnita taught piano to interested students. On our graduation day, Arnita brought a busload of Jewish and Arab orchestra players and they performed.

On the basketball team, I was the center center, and Argentine was the shooter. Wadad was also a shooter. Badia Saba was a boarder, and she was a defender on the team. When I became a teacher, we had the system of having one girl in each class be the class leader. Huda Farraj was my class's leader. The leader did things like organize the girls to clean the school.

Birzeit had a good reputation, so the students who attended were from noted families. Students came from Jaffa, Lydda, al-Ramla, and Haifa. Many students and teachers came from Gaza. The Tarazis were from there. For a time we were getting Kuwaiti students, from the Mulla family.

I loved teaching. And not just that, I loved teaching girls discipline, how to care for their health, how to manage their time. When I became the principal of an UNRWA school, I tried to apply what I learned from Birzeit in my own school.

*Amy Aranki (Class of 1942) is a retired principal of the UNRWA Elementary School for Girls.*

I joined Birzeit College in 1939 where I finished my preliminary and secondary classes. [Between Jifna and Birzeit] there was a football playground where sports events used to take place. The Birzeit College team often defeated the Friends School of Ramallah, the Mutran school in Jerusalem, and others.

Birzeit had the best reputation among all schools and colleges, governmental and private alike. Students from all over Palestine came to the College: first, from Birzeit and Jifna but also from Jaffa, Lydda, al-Ramla, and Gaza, in addition to students from Transjordan, from Salt, Alhisan, and Amman. I remember Fuad Khuri, the renowned judge; Mahfouz Ghannam, the well-known businessman; Khadr Nassar, the Reuters editor; and Gregor Awad. I graduated from Birzeit in 1943 in a ceremony whose guest of honor was the late Suleiman Sukkar, Minister of Finance in Transjordan. I also remember Miss Wilkinson, who used to start the day by playing a piece on the violin and a hymn.

*Hafeez Musa Ghannam (Class of 1943)*

One of my happiest memories is when we won the basketball trophy, competing against all schools in Palestine. I also remember that we used to perform in plays in the big hall. One of the roles I played was Portia in a Shakespeare play, directed by Aunt Nimeh. Throughout Palestine, there were flower-arranging contests; our school won first place one year. Birzeit planted in our hearts love of homeland. Most of the songs we learned were about loving the homeland.

*Huda Farraj (Class of 1943)*



From some of my teachers I learned performing arts and reciting poetry and prose and excelling at music and piano playing. Unconsciously, I would imitate them and their personalities when I became a teacher [and administrator] myself [between 1963 and 1989]. Theirs is the credit for my success as an administrator. I am proud to say that during my work at these three schools not one student failed at the intermediate or high school level.

I think many Birzeit graduates went on to lead the best schools in Kuwait, among them Selma Khairy and Inam Dajani and Sharifeh Baba.

I spent seven years at Birzeit and learned so much. So did my sisters and cousins. We were known as the Ghanadeer.

Our lives were full of hard work and great fun. We lived together like sisters in a single family.

***Samira Ghandour Haddad (Class of 1947)***

We were displaced from Jaffa and we arrived in Birzeit on the back of a truck as refugees in March or April 1948. My father was killed in a robbery between Ramallah and Birzeit. I was fifteen years old.

In the fall I was taken by my mother and went to see Miss Nabiha Nasir, head of the college. She was very accommodating. I found a new home in Birzeit and in the College. It was a wonderful experience.

Some students did not return to Birzeit after the war. My class wasn't big; there were maybe twenty students. Some students were from Jordan, and some were from Nablus. There used to be students from the Gulf, but they didn't come that year. Some teachers did not return after the war, too, so they had replacement teachers.

Birzeit had many refugees that year; the people there opened their hearts to the refugees. It was an intimate town, with the College at its



Class of 1949. Seated, left to right: Aida Oweida, Subhiyeh Malhas, Musa Nasir, Nabiha Nasir, and Afaf Taktak. The other graduates have not been identified, except for Edward Karkar (top row, left) and Wadi Nassar (third from the right).

center. It was a fine school with wide exposure in things like music and drama. I remember playing ping-pong with Hanna Nasir, and he beat me in a competition. We were focused on our classes and on our activities.

After I graduated I worked with refugees in Jalazon camp, and then I worked for a year as an accountant at a flour mill. I applied to Stanford and got accepted, and so I went to the United States in 1951 and studied electronics.

I have wonderful memories of that period of my life. I feel close to the people from that period and I still keep in touch with them.

***Edward Karkar (Class of 1949)*** is the founder of an electronic telecommunication equipment manufacturing company.



## CHAPTER 2

# From Vision to Reality: Developing the Junior College

*Gabi Baramki, Samia Khoury, and Rima Tarazi*

**B**irzeit College faced many challenges after 1948. Palestinian society as a whole was reeling from the aftermath of the Nakba, the establishment of Israel on 78% of the country and the forced displacement of the majority of Palestinian residents from those territories. Birzeit College administrators decided to address the new challenges by focusing on providing higher education opportunities to Palestinian students; they would develop the high school into a junior college. That there was a need for such an institution was undeniable: No junior colleges were available in Palestine or Jordan during this period whereas the number of government and UNRWA schools was growing. (UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, was established on December 8, 1949, by a United Nations resolution and charged with carrying out direct relief and works programs for Palestine refugees.) Clearly, then, it was an opportune moment to work to implement the vision of creating the first Palestinian junior college.



Graduates of 1955 with Birzeit faculty. Seated, left to right: Samia Nasir, Badi'a Nasir, Abla Farajallah, guest speaker Dr. Salwa Nassar, Suhaila Nasir, Alice Hairabedian, and Rima Nasir. Gabi Baramki is in the second row, center; the others are not identified.





College library.

## Adding a College Curriculum

College President Musa Nasir enlisted the help of Gabi Baramki, an alumnus who had just returned to the school after earning a master's degree in chemistry from the American University of Beirut (AUB), to help him shepherd the transition of the school to a junior college. In 1953, a freshman class was established, which was made possible by the financial support of the Ford Foundation.

Family members contributed to the phased transition. In 1954, Musa's daughter Samia joined the staff; she had just returned home with a Business Administration degree from Southwestern University in Texas, and she was hired to assume accountant, registrar, and secretarial responsibilities. In addition to her administrative duties, she taught a business course and ran the girls' sports activities. Daughter Rima, who graduated from the AUB in 1954, joined the Birzeit faculty and taught music, educational psychology, and languages; she also led cultural activities. Two years later, Musa's son Hanna (also an AUB graduate) joined the faculty as a physics teacher and assisted the administration in the development of the junior college program. By 1961, a sophomore curriculum was added.

Developing the school into a junior college required expanding and upgrading the existing premises and facilities, including classrooms, laboratories, dormitories, recreational facilities, and the library. This meant that the elementary and secondary classes would have to be phased out gradually. But it was clear that even that would eventually be insufficient, and a concerted effort was made to acquire land in the outskirts of the town, in the Marj area (west of the campus), to allow for future expansion and development.

The administration decided that college level instructors had to have at least a bachelor's degree (and half were required to have a master's degree). Most of the elementary and high school teachers who did not have university degrees underwent short-term training so that they could assume administrative jobs in the junior college. The planning paid off:



King Hussein, in a visit to the College during the 1950s. Left to right: Mrs. Evelyn Baramki, an unidentified woman, Musa Nasir, King Hussein, and Linda Nasir.



Graduation ceremony, 1962. Front row, left to right: physics instructor Hanna Nasir, history instructor Spiro Jouzeh, College President Musa Nasir, and an unidentified guest speaker.



Birzeit's musicians and poet. Left to right: Composers Amin Nasser, Rima Nasir, and Yusef Batroni and poet Kamal Nasser.

### School Oath

We, the graduates, declare that we realize that education does not give us cause to be boastful; rather, it lays upon us grave responsibilities and requires us to use the education and knowledge we have acquired in the service of our nation and humanity. We therefore pledge to honor this principle and dispense of our obligations with honesty, integrity, and loyalty. We also pledge to be good citizens, making sure that our personal interests are always in harmony with the public interest.

The academic standard of the freshman curriculum was sufficiently high that graduating freshman students were able to transfer to other universities in the region or abroad without difficulty.

Because many of the staff at Birzeit had graduated from AUB and regarded it as a natural destination for students, Birzeit administrators began discussions with AUB administrators to learn their requirements

for accepting transfer students. (Arab universities followed a system that made it almost impossible to accept transfer students.) They worked out an agreement with the AUB office of tests and measurement to administer AUB entrance exams at Birzeit. Birzeit students did well on these tests. By 1963 they were able to transfer to AUB without taking an entrance exam. That was a major achievement and a breakthrough for Birzeit students. Over the years, AUB compared the results of Birzeit transfer students in the third year with the results of third-year students who had started at AUB as freshmen. Consistently, Birzeit students as a group had better results than the AUB students in the third year.

In addition to the academic program of the junior college, two other special programs were introduced temporarily to respond to the immediate needs of the country: The first was a one-year teaching training course for UNRWA teachers (UNRWA had not yet established its teacher training centers), and the second was a two-year associate degree program in public administration for selected Jordanian civil servants. This program recruited highly qualified people to run it, and its graduates were able to find immediate employment either within the government institutions or in the private sector.

By 1967, the last class of high school seniors completed graduation requirements. (They missed out on their graduation ceremony because they were taking final exams when the June 1967 war broke out—a minor problem compared to the disaster of the occupation that Palestinians soon had to contend with.) By the fall of that year, Birzeit College was exclusively a junior college.

The junior college provided a necessary bridge in students' lives. Academically, it trained them in basic skills, such as using a library, doing research, and writing term papers, skills that were not taught to high school students at that time. Socially, the coeducational campus offered young men and women an opportunity to learn to interact naturally with each other and to prepare for life in universities abroad.



## Developing Well-Rounded Individuals

Extracurricular activities were an integral part of student life at Birzeit. This was partly due to the presence of boarding students, but the school always focused on building students' characters and training students to think. Students joined clubs (literary, arts, science, and so on) depending on their interests. They could voice their opinions through student billboards and publications like the *al-Ghadeer* student paper. The College administration also encouraged students to practice democratic voting through the Student Council elections.

Birzeit placed a premium on music and artistic expression. Students were encouraged to join singing groups and the College Choir, which performed at graduation ceremonies and in other venues. After music director Yusef Batroni passed away in 1957, several music teachers—Mary Salah, Wadi Khoury, Edith Ott, Betsy Chase, Amin Nasser, and Nadia Mikhail Abboushi—came for intermittent periods of time to conduct the choir and direct musicals. Nadia Abboushi and Amin Nasser later joined the University faculty; in 1993, they cofounded (with Rima Nasir Tarazi, Salwa Tabri, and Suhail Khoury) the National Conservatory of Music. (In 2004 the Conservatory was renamed the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music and was placed under the University umbrella.)

Many students regularly attended the weekly music hours held in the main hall, where they were exposed to classical music, both opera and instrumental. On some evenings, educational and feature-length foreign films were shown.

Birzeit also encouraged sports, tournaments, and trips. Almost every year, teachers and students went on camping trips to places like Petra, Aqaba, al-Azraq, and Jerash. Sometimes hikes or bike rides were organized.

In summary, Birzeit administrators and staff worked hard to develop the College's reputation as an institution that offered high-quality education and numerous opportunities for students to develop their personalities and interests through extracurricular activities.



Performance of Charles Dickens's "Tale of Two Cities," 1952. Plays and light musicals were performed to appreciative audiences; some of the offerings in the 1950s include Oscar Strauss's "Waltz Dream" and Gilbert and Sullivan's "Trial by Jury" and "The Pirates of Penzance," performed in Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Amman.



Gymnastics at Birzeit. Mitri Khashram introduced gymnastics in several schools in Palestine, including Birzeit.

## Pilgrimage to Sheikh Qatrawani

I studied at Birzeit College between 1962 and 1964 just after finishing high school in Ramallah. Birzeit College was still situated in the old compound inside Birzeit village, and the atmosphere within the community was quite provincial. The sight of young men and women holding hands in the town alleys provoked sharp stares if not verbal abuse. The principal, Musa Nasir, was able to prevail on the town council to ban the sale of alcoholic drinks in all stores and cafes. Smoking was similarly banned on campus. Nimeh Faris, who was in charge of the women's dorms, ensured that relations between the students (and faculty) were chaste and pure, which led to widespread sublimated sex among students.

There were two main social outlets available to students outside campus: long walks to Jifna, where Tabash Bar and Restaurant provided affordable beer and arak; and shorter walks to the nearby village of Atara.



College publications: *Al-Ghadeer*, which replaced *Sawt al-Kulliyah* (issued before 1948). Photo: Yasser Darwish.

One of the highlights of my early days at Birzeit was the evening walks we used to take to Maqam al-Sheikh al-Qatrawani in Atara. The shrine was a site of visitations by local women seeking the blessings of the saint, in many cases women seeking conception of a male child or cure from hopeless diseases or infertility. At some point students from the College discovered the healing powers of the serene walk from the northern tip of the village on Atara road, an area which was free from traffic and overlooks a spectacular Mediterranean sunset—the sea of Jaffa clearly visible on cloudless summer days, glittering during the day and sparkling with coastal lights at night. Those were the days, before the June 1967 war, when the Palestinian coastline was totally inaccessible to us, and the memory of life on the sea was a legend told and retold in mythic form by our parents' generation. But these walks toward Qatrawani were more desirable for their venue than for their destination. Atara and Qatrawani became known as lovers' lane, and students found there the healing powers of the sheikh. In the summer of 2009, I took that road again for the first time in forty-five years and was shocked to see the amount of new construction on both sides of the idyllic road. Atara and Birzeit have become one continuous conurbation. Worst of all, the Maqam itself has been renovated, losing its derelict and endearing splendor, and a municipal wiring cordoned it off to the public, making it an Official Holy Site.

In those days Birzeit College was bursting with dynamic energy. The teaching staff was young and spirited. The teaching curriculum was still in the experimental stage, and the new teaching staff had great latitude in forming it. The students were encouraged to speak up and interact with their lecturers. The students came from all over the country and from Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon—many of the latter being boarding students. Inside and outside the classroom the campus was permeated with political activities—Nasserist (mostly), Hashimite, Communists, Nationalist (Movement of Arab Nationalists), Syrian Nationalist, and Ba'thist. The latter tendency was encouraged by the fact that Birzeit village, where the old campus was located, was a hotbed of Ba'thist politics. Our readings then consisted of Marx, Lenin, Maxim Gorky, Sati al-Husary (*Yawm Maysalun*), Laila Ba'albaki,

and Colin Wilson. Existentialism had newly arrived in the Arab world, thanks to the writings of Suhail Idris and *al-Adab* literary journal, and many students of the left either had Sartrean tendencies or were aficionados of Colin Wilson, whose *The Outsider (al-La Muntami)* became the Bible of a whole generation in the 1960s. More copies were sold of Colin Wilson than Naguib Mahfouz and Ghada al-Samman combined. (By the onset of the 1980s, none of my students had even heard of Colin Wilson.)

I had just switched from the science track (I gave up on the possibilities of becoming a budding physicist) to the humanities. I immediately became involved with editing the student paper, *al-Ghadeer*, which brought me in touch with the factions, each of which wanted the paper to reflect their perspectives. As assistant editor I would take the proofs twice a month to Jerusalem where the articles were handset by the owner of al-Ma'arif Press, Mishail Mushahwar. Linotype has not arrived yet to Palestine. The draft copies were prepared on blue galleys with the print page set by hand from an open drawer containing the lead letters. Quite often the letters from the same type would be depleted so a different type was used in the same article, and quite often in the same paragraph. Mistakes were rampant. I would work late at night with Mr. Mushahwar, who would go through three and sometimes four galleys of the newspaper with me.

The spring of 1963 was the fifteenth anniversary of the Nakba, and the editorial board of *al-Ghadeer* decided to issue a special supplement to the paper on that occasion. This was a period of border skirmishes with the Israelis in the southern part of the West Bank. Because of censorship the supplement was too hot to handle by the Mushahwar's Ma'arif Press, so we decided to publish it internally on campus, on mimeographed papers with artistic commercial binding. As assistant editor I worked with a number of activists on that issue, but the two I remember most were Abdallah Hammoudeh from Movement of Arab Nationalist (left-wing Nasserite) and Laila Naffa from the Communist Party. My own ideological position was conflicted since I was politically closer to Hammoudeh, but more sympathetic to Naffa in personal terms.

Relations between the two were terse and occasionally hostile, and I had often to mediate the tension. Eventually we printed 500 copies of the supplement. We used the mimeograph machine in the finance office after hours. The Nakba Supplement was distributed secretly to circumvent the censorship board and became an instant success.

I graduated from Birzeit College in 1964 and came back in 1971 as a lecturer in the sociology department. During these seven years the College, like the rest of Palestine, came under Israeli rule and was cut off completely from the Arab world. This was reflected in the makeup of the student body, as well as the teaching staff; it was transformed from an Arab constituency to a regional Palestinian one. Birzeit's loss of students from neighboring Arab states, including Jordan, was replaced by a substantial influx from Gaza (which constituted the largest single region within the University in the early eighties) and from among Palestinians from the Galilee. For the first time Birzeit University became a truly national university.

In my view Birzeit's significance as a free cultural center for Palestinian youth has always been underestimated—first, in the sense of providing a crucible for interaction for young men and women away from repressive social conventions; second, in providing fora for intellectual debates inside and outside the classroom; and third, as an arena for organized student activity at the national level, where the various political currents found full-fledged expression in articulating the national sentiments as a whole.

*Salim Tamari (Class of 1964), director of the Institute for Palestine Studies, Ramallah, joined the sociology department faculty in 1971.*



## Teaching at Birzeit College in the 1950s

In mid-1954, I was finishing the requirements for a master's degree in chemical engineering at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. My father told me that Birzeit was expanding its educational program and that it had added a freshman class in 1953, so I wrote to the school and was offered a position as a lecturer of mathematics and physics to the freshman class and the upper secondary school classes.

Birzeit College at that time consisted of three major structures:

- The old school building in the center of old Birzeit village. This building housed the girls' dormitory, administrative offices, a library, teaching classrooms, a kitchen, and a dining room. The Nasir family lived there as well.



Science fair, 1959. Birzeit became known for its annual, three-day long Science Fair, which attracted busloads of high school students from both the West Bank and Jordan as well as village residents. Students and faculty worked long hours to set up the chemistry, physics, and biology labs for demonstrations that attendees were unable to see in their own schools. Some of the displays consisted of scientific visual tricks. According to one organizer, the whole idea was to inspire and excite young students.

- A new structure about 500 meters away that housed a science laboratory, a meeting hall, and classrooms for upper class students (fourth secondary and freshman classes).
- A hostel for housing the male boarding students. My wife and I had a room there with a private shower. Hanna Nasir, who had recently returned from Beirut with a bachelor's degree in physics, lived across the hall from us. He and I were house "parents" and shared supervisory duties during evening study hours and during the weekly hot water shower for all male boarding students.

Classes were relatively small. I taught freshman math and physics in English, and all others in Arabic.

One unforgettable day was when Queen Dina visited Birzeit; she had just recently married King Hussein. We had just finished a science exhibition and I remember showing her a cutaway of an aerospace rocket that I assembled from cardboard and tin cans. Our science labs also housed a few snakes that the students collected from around the buildings.

*Sami Atallah was a professor of chemical engineering at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, and he is the founder and president of Risk and Industrial Safety Consultants (Chicago).*

## My Home Away from Home

I could not be more pleased at this wonderful opportunity to revisit my own proud ties to Birzeit University, or Birzeit College as it was known then.

I am especially proud of Birzeit's courageous and noble leading role in the resistance against the Zionist occupation, whether through scholarly publications, activism, or the instilling in the minds of its students a profound sense of mission, duty, and patriotism in the defense of their beloved homeland. All too often, the mere act of teaching has required enormous amounts of boldness, determination, and raw bravery in the face of terrible persecution.

All my school years were spent at Birzeit College. As the only school that I ever attended, Birzeit was necessarily a “home away from home” in almost every possible sense. Only one of my siblings was with me from my first days at Birzeit, and I looked upon the Nasir family as though it were my own.

My earliest memory at Birzeit was of the formidable figure of our principal, Mrs. Faris. She had only to utter a few words to send terror and instant obedience through the whole body of students. Those words were “stop that hubbub,” and they still ring in my ear even today! But even at an early age I could not fail to recognize that underneath that stern, authoritarian exterior lay a kind and fun-filled soul.

I loved all of those teachers and faculty who were active in running the school—my piano teacher Amin Nasir; Samia Nasir, who was the bursar; Rima Nasir, who was a very special and accomplished human being; and Hanna Nasir, my last big role model at Birzeit. I had the good fortune to cross paths with Hanna years later when he was living in Jordan, lobbying for the college and against the atrocities of the occupation. My considerable admiration for him grew even more, if that were possible.

Leaving Birzeit really was a “sweet sorrow,” but it was time. Yet I took away with me several priceless gifts that remain with me until this day: the love of learning, hope and enthusiasm in facing the challenges that lay ahead, a profound sense of belonging, and an unshakable pride in our precious heritage and beloved homeland. May God always bless Birzeit and keep it safe and thriving for endless generations of proud and grateful students to come. *Inshallah.*

*Firyal Irshaid, Princess of Jordan, is the founder and president of the International Hope Foundation and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador.*

## ***A Student in the Late Sixties***

I studied at Birzeit College between 1968 and 1970. In 1968, there were about 168 students total (freshmen and sophomores, arts and sciences), and in 1969, about 196. So it was like an extended family, and in fact it was the first setup when we could experience the multiplicity of Palestinians in terms of geography and class. We had students from Gaza and Nablus, it was a coeducational school, which added to the flavor of the place, and it focused on lots of cultural activities. Gabi Baramki and Tania Nasir organized the production of Gilbert and Sullivan musicals like “Trial by Jury” and “Pirates of Penzance.” We used to have an annual carnival with cultural and sports activities, and that gave a sense of belonging. During the time of the late Musa Nasir, followed by Gabi Baramki, all of us used to gather once a week to discuss a theme or topic, usually ethical.

I remember that the first political strike or activity ever in Birzeit took place in December 1968 or January 1969. There were thousands of political detainees, and people were protesting these detentions. In Birzeit we had a sit-in at the village mosque for five or six days. It ended when the mayors of Ramallah and Birzeit came and some sheikhs and perhaps the mufti led us out of the mosque, and we broke our fast.

The elders of Birzeit had a pan-Arab, pluralistic outlook. It had integrity. As an Armenian, I never felt that I was distant, that I didn’t belong. Their Arabism was never exclusivist.

*Albert Aghazarian (Class of 1970) was the director of the Birzeit University Public Relations Office between 1979 and 2002.*







## CHAPTER 3

# Navigating Uncharted Waters: From College to University

*Ramzi Rihan*

**B**irzeit College phased out the secondary school level and became exclusively a junior college in 1967, the same year that Israel occupied the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Syrian Golan Heights. Palestinian society once again had to cope with the effects of massive displacement together with foreign military occupation. Civil protest was harshly dealt with; mass arrests were common, and Israel frequently deported Palestinians with leadership potential to Jordan and Lebanon.

Birzeit College administrators quickly concluded that the agreements they had reached with the American University of Beirut and other universities to accept Birzeit students as transfer students would not be sufficient to address the new realities created by the occupation. The number of students accepted by regional universities was limited, the cost was prohibitive (especially in times of economic downturn), and travel restrictions placed by the Israeli military authorities prohibited many students from venturing from the Occupied Palestinian Territory for fear they might not be allowed to return. Nor was the regional political situation stable in the early 1970s. Clearly there was a need for a local four-year university.



Graduation ceremony, 1980s. From left to right: Board of Trustee member Saba' Arafat; Board Chairman Tawfik Abu Al-Sa'ud; Dr. Gabi Baramki, Acting President; Ramzi Rihan, Dean of Science; and Dr. 'Izzat Ghourani, Dean of Commerce and Economics.

### The First Graduation Ceremony

I remember the day of the first graduation in 1976, a historic event not only for the University but for Palestine, because it was the first university graduation on Palestinian soil.

Nobody could have realized how much work had been put into the preparation for that day. We had to start from scratch because this was our first experience with a university graduation; there was no tradition to build on. The diplomas were designed by Commercial Press in Jerusalem, which did an excellent job; we commissioned the In'ash al-Usra Society to make special embroidered stoles to give the attire of the graduates a Palestinian touch. The caps and hoods had to be ordered from abroad. We had taken the head size of each graduate and faculty member so that when the caps arrived everything would be in order. But to our distress the caps arrived only a few minutes before the graduation. Faculty member Kamal Shamsoum raced to pick them up from the airport and returned barely in time, but then everyone was going crazy trying to fit a cap without even bothering about sizes.

Being in charge of all the logistics for that great day, I was ready to collapse as the music started, but I had to be there; I felt very proud of the legacy that was handed over by my family to the Palestinian community.

*Samia Khoury was a member of the administration staff of Birzeit College (later University), 1954-60 and 1974-79, and a founding member of the Board of Trustees.*

Interest in providing local higher education opportunities was shared by many people—educators, mayors, and community figures—in the aftermath of the 1967 war as it became clear that the occupation was turning into a long phase in Palestinian history rather than a brief interlude. A small Sharia (Islamic law) college was established in Hebron in 1971 and became the nucleus of Hebron University in 1980. A Catholic school in Bethlehem became the campus of Bethlehem University in 1973. The beginning of the transformation of Birzeit College into Birzeit University in 1972 was an important landmark within this process.

The initial thinking and planning to transform Birzeit College into a university stemmed from discussions that Hanna Nasir, Gabi Baramki, and I had in our capacity as senior administrators. At the 1972 ceremony

to award associate degrees, Hanna announced that students who entered Birzeit College the following September could plan to graduate from it four years later with bachelors degrees. It was a bold announcement considering that the plans for that transformation were still preliminary; it signaled that Palestinians would take action as they see fit.

At the time, little did we imagine that our decision would have such far-reaching consequences. What seemed to be a natural but modest development turned out to be the first step in the creation of a large and diverse Palestinian higher education system that is considered by many to be one of the major lasting achievements of Palestinians under occupation.

Weeks after that initial announcement at the commencement ceremony, we placed notices in local newspapers announcing our plans and inviting students to apply. Predictably, the Israeli occupation authorities, represented by someone known to everyone as Captain Maurice, phoned to object, and I happened to be the only administrator available to take the call; I said that the notice would not be run again. (In fact, the initial notice had generated a flood of applicants, a clear sign that the decision addressed a real social need and gave an opportunity to those who could not afford to leave the Occupied Palestinian Territory to get a university education.) It is sobering to realize that had an Israeli bureaucrat not been reassured by an ambiguous response to his order or had he taken more decisive steps to stop us before our plans took shape, the fate of Birzeit University as well as all the universities that emerged in its wake would have been very different.

## First Steps

Looking back, our plans were fairly modest: We anticipated enrollment of 600 students (up from around 200), and we would offer a basic liberal arts curriculum. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that our eagerness and commitment blinded us to some of the very real obstacles in our path. We did not know SWOT analysis, log frame (did these buzz words even exist then?), or any of the other jargon that has come to dominate

professional management and planning. But we were determined to forge ahead, and we learned as we went along.

To facilitate the institution's transformation into a four-year university, the Nasir family decided to convert the legal structure of the College from a private, family-owned institution to a public one and to entrust its supervision to a nonprofit foundation. The informal group that had overseen the College until then (consisting of Nasir family members and some of their friends) was replaced by an official Board of Trustees that was more representative of the Palestinian community. (The Board was formed in 1973 but was not registered by the Israeli occupation authorities until 1978.) The Board enacted its internal regulations and approved the statutes of the University and subsequent by-laws and regulations organizing all the operations of the University. This institutionalization process went on for a few years in the mid-1970s. Samia Khoury, a founding member of the Board, led this process, together with the participation of the administration and other members of the Board.

With the plans to develop the College into a university came the realization that the existing campus could not possibly accommodate the anticipated growth. Architectural plans were begun for a new campus intended to accommodate the future growth of the institution, originally planned for Tireh, a suburb of Ramallah. The Israeli authorities refused to license the project and the location of the new campus was moved to Birzeit. Initially, the Nasir family donated land it owned on the southern outskirts of Birzeit to the Board of Trustees, and in later years the Board purchased land as well for the purpose of building a new campus that could handle the anticipated growth in the number of students and of academic programs. The new campus was inaugurated in 1980 and quickly grew far beyond the original plans.



University Vice President Gabi Baramki confronts Israeli soldiers on the old campus, early 1970s.



Board of Trustees reception, 1970s. Left to right: Board member Rima Tarazi; Sameeha Khalil, founder of In'ash El-Ustra Society; Mahdi Abdul Hadi, Birzeit Public Relations Office; and faculty member Ghassan Harb.



## Transition

The academic year 1974-75 marked the true turning point. Academic departments were established as third-year (junior) courses were offered for the first time. This was the real transformation from a college to a university although the name Birzeit University was not adopted until 1975-76. Some students who had previously completed the two years needed for the associate degree returned to continue their studies for a bachelor's degree. The enthusiasm and involvement of the faculty was an invaluable asset in this transition. Faculty members from abroad joined the institution; many of them stayed only one or two years. In the meantime, as the student body grew, existing facilities became insufficient. So every summer, old space was renovated to accommodate the growth, and some space had to be rented.

As the University grew, human resource needs were as important as financial resources. The American organization AMIDEAST initiated an ambitious faculty development program in the late 1970s to support graduate studies for qualified candidates who would then return to teach in the institutions that sponsored them. Birzeit and other Palestinian institutions of higher education benefited significantly from this program.

In April 1976, Birzeit became the first Palestinian institution to be admitted to the Association of Arab Universities; three months later, the University granted its first bachelors degrees. In 1977, Birzeit became a member of the International Association of Universities.

The transition from college to university took place while the institution was still reeling from the Israeli occupation authority's illegal deportation of University President Hanna Nasir on November 21, 1974. The deportation of the president at this sensitive juncture in the development of the institution was a severe and sudden blow, but we did not allow it to derail us. Gabi Baramki took over immediately as vice-president (in effect, as Acting President), Hanna embarked on public relations and fundraising activities in many countries, and I led much of the planning effort that was required during the transitional period. For two

decades, Gabi ran the University and bore the brunt of handling, with perseverance and patience, the many normal and abnormal problems, maintaining constant communication with Hanna's office in Amman.

## Student Body

The demographic composition of the student body changed in the fall of 1972. Students had applied from all areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and from villages and refugee camps in addition to the more affluent areas of the central West Bank, which had characterized the student body until then. Palestinians from Israel were also applying to Birzeit. Birzeit started to become a miniature Palestine, which it has remained ever since. This social transformation of Birzeit was as important as its academic development. The openness that has characterized the atmosphere of the campus had a strong impact on the students. Most students felt that they belonged to the student body as a whole despite the diversity. Faculty and staff experienced the same transformation. The synthesis of academic elitism and social democratism, a defining feature of Birzeit, has never been an easy combination, and the tensions between these two attributes of the institution were sometimes fruitful and frequently difficult to balance.

As an indication of the growing vigor of the young generation, a Student Council was formed in 1973 as an umbrella for the various student clubs and as a voice for student interests. Successive councils have played a large role in the development of the University.

## Council for Higher Education

In June 1977 the Union of Professional Associations (the umbrella organization for doctors, engineers, and other professionals) sponsored a conference on Palestinian higher education in Jerusalem. Representing Birzeit University, I proposed the establishment of a multicampus central Palestine University; each campus could offer an area of expertise.

This proposal (which had been proposed earlier by Birzeit College in 1971 and rejected) was rejected once again because other institutions preferred to act independently. This decision has had some unfortunate consequences for all universities, including Birzeit—the unchecked growth of programs rather than planned development to meet the social and economic needs of the population base, competition rather than cooperation among institutions, and duplication of programs rather than diversity.

The Union was headed by Ibrahim Daqqaq, who later became chairman of the Board of Trustees of Birzeit University. The conference resulted in the creation of the Palestinian Council for Higher Education. In the absence of a Palestinian government, the Council became the coordinating body for Palestinian higher education, and it was the vehicle through which Arab funds were channeled. Coordination was difficult, and frequently institutional aspirations took precedence over national planning. In 1979, the Council approved a proposal I presented for formula funding, whereby funding for Palestinian higher education institutions was based on indicators such as the number and rank of faculty and staff and the number of programs. The formula was adopted by the Jordanian-Palestinian Joint Committee, which had just been established to oversee the channeling of Arab funding for Palestine, and was used to fund Palestinian higher education for a decade.

## Bold Moves

The transformation of Birzeit College from a private college owned and largely managed by the Nasir family to a nonprofit, nongovernmental institution was a radical pioneering step in the Arab world where most higher education institutions were governmental. The model of a nonprofit, nongovernmental institution was adopted by Palestinian universities that were established later and became the dominant model for Palestinian higher education. Much later, for-profit private institutions of higher education have proliferated in the Arab world.

### **Birzeit's Presidents**

Dr. Hanna Nasir, 1972-2004  
Dr. Gabi Baramki (Acting President), 1974-93  
Dr. Nabeel Kassis, 2004-present

### **Vice-Presidents**

Dr. Gabi Baramki, 1974-93 • Dr. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, 1993-95

### **Vice-Presidents for Academic Affairs**

Dr. Mohammad Hallaj, 1979-81 • Mr. Ramzi Rihan (acting), 1981-82 • Dr. Abdullatif Al-Barghouti, 1982-84 • Dr. Nabeel Kassis, 1984-89 • Dr. Izzat Ghourani, 1989-92 • Dr. Henry Jaqaman, 1992-93 • Dr. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, 1993-95 • Dr. Ahmad Baker, 1994-98 • Dr. Abdul-Latif Abu-Hijleh, 1998 – 2009 • Dr. Adnan Yahya, 2009 – present

### **Vice-Presidents for Administrative & Financial Affairs**

Dr. Izzat Ghourani, 1979-81 • Dr. Suhail Abboushi, 1981-83 • Dr. Othman Abu Libdeh (acting), 1987-88 • Dr. Mohammad Sarsour, 1993-97 • Dr. Carmella Armanious-Omari, 1998 – 2005 • Dr. Sami Sayrafi, 1988-92, 2005 – present

### **Vice-Presidents for Planning & Development**

Mr. Ramzi Rihan, 1983-85, 1999-2005 • Dr. Othman Abu Libdeh, 1985-89 • Dr. Adel Zagha\*, 2009 – present

### **Vice-Presidents for Community Outreach**

Mr. Ramzi Rihan, 2005-2007 • Dr. Ghassan Khatib, 2008-2009 • Dr. Munir Qazzaz (acting), 2009-present

\* Position includes quality assurance oversight.

The achievements of the University, first at the undergraduate level and later at the graduate level, were not easily made; the oppressive hand of the occupation was always felt. When I remember the period of transformation in the mid-seventies, however, I am struck by the remarkable commitment and cooperation we all seemed to share. We often felt that we were embarked on a mission impossible. The available resources—personnel, finances, equipment, facilities, and space—were inadequate, but we had to make them work. And we did.

## ***Securing Accreditation***

In the midst of our efforts to develop Birzeit College into a university, the Israeli occupation authorities deported me to Lebanon on the evening of November 21, 1974. Four other Palestinians were deported with me that night. There were no charges. The only “explanation” given for this illegal action was a statement in the Israeli press that we threatened the security of Israel, a claim Israel routinely made when deporting Palestinians during those years. In fact, deportation was an easy way of getting rid of professional Palestinians against whom they had no charges that would stand up in court. Overnight, I had become a victim of this policy.

The Board of Trustees challenged my deportation and maintained my position as President of the University. I decided to set up an office in Amman, the closest geographical location to the West Bank and to Birzeit itself, where I would have a chance to meet with my colleagues from the University to follow up on official matters. I had two issues on my mind: one was to get accreditation for Birzeit, and the other was to get financial support. Both were complex and demanding objectives.

The effort to secure funding is the subject of a separate chapter. Here I focus on accreditation.

In the early seventies, we sought accreditation from the Government of Jordan, which was the legal custodian for the West Bank at that time. The application to the Government of Jordan was passed on to Jordan University to provide counsel on the issue. The University expressed two reservations, one political and one legal. Jordan University officials argued that an accredited university in the West Bank would provide graduates who were unable to find employment with a means to immigrate, which would work against the goal of encouraging the steadfastness of the people in Palestine. In addition, it observed, there

were no laws to accredit nongovernmental universities in the region. (In fact, the establishment of private charitable or for-profit universities is only a recent phenomenon in the Arab world.)

The first graduation ceremony was planned for July 1976, but as of March of that year we had not yet secured the necessary accreditation. We decided to apply directly to the Association of Arab Universities, which was holding its annual meeting in Sulaimaniyya University in northern Iraq in April 1976; that was our only chance to secure the support we needed. Gabi Baramki joined me in Amman, and then we flew together to Baghdad and then drove the long and somewhat tedious stretch to Sulaimaniyya.

In Sulaimaniyya, we presented all the necessary documents and we spoke with many Arab university presidents. We spent a sleepless night awaiting the verdict in the meeting next day. Our request was approved with flying colors and I scribbled a quick thank you to the various presidents and left with Gabi immediately to Amman. News of the accreditation was flashed to Birzeit and the jubilation was as powerful as that which greeted the announcement of the development of Birzeit to a four-year institution. We were deeply satisfied knowing that the certificates that would be given to graduates in July 1976 would be issued by an accredited institution.

On July 11, 1976, the University celebrated its first graduation ceremony granting bachelors degrees, the first such graduation ceremony by a Palestinian institution. Gabi proudly announced the accreditation of the degrees. I also sent a short taped congratulatory speech to the students for the occasion. It was a challenge to do so because no tapes or letters were allowed across the bridge at that time, but I wanted to be part of this memorable day in the history of Birzeit. There was a big risk of having the tape confiscated, but it got through undetected. Luck was on our side that day.

*Hanna Nasir (Class of 1951) was president of Birzeit College (later University) from 1972 to 2004 and has been chairman of the Board of Trustees since 2006.*



## *The Intimate Relationship between Birzeit and Its Larger Context*

Something surprising and unplanned happened within Palestinian society in the 1970s. People started nurturing and being nurtured by what was around and inside them; they started doing what they were convinced needed to be done. The lack of a legitimate authority gave people the freedom to do what they felt was needed, regardless of the price they might pay for doing it. One surprising aspect was the unplanned harmony in people's activities. I experienced this often enough to believe that it reflects a natural ability within people and communities—an ability that I believe to be constantly suppressed by modern institutions.

Specifically, between 1971 and 1978, we were left alone in the midst of a harsh reality with nothing other than what we had as persons, as friends, as a culture, and as communities. Teachers professed values and convictions that they believed in rather than being driven by gains or careers. It is in this sense that hope is connected to what is abundant in people, community, culture, and nature. We discovered the strength in us.

Young people during the 1970s and the first intifada found their ways through the cracks within oppressive structures and surprised the world and each other with what they could do with what they had.

Creativity in the 1970s as well as during the first intifada was collective creativity, not individual (although some acts took individual form). Similarly, leadership was “elusive” during these two periods. There were no charismatic leaders; leadership moved from one person or group to another according to the situation at a specific place and time.

At the same time, there was a connection with the world at large; many people were in constant interaction with Birzeit and visited it. Birzeit was a mecca for academicians, writers, artists, activists, and



The cafeteria in the old campus.

students from all over the world. Birzeit's intimate relationship with what was going on within the Palestinian context was a result of the absence of rigid structures and boundaries: no boundaries between the administration, teachers, and students; and no boundaries between the University and the surrounding community. There were no walls or gates within which students were caged and nonstudents kept out. University buildings were intermingled with people's homes. The best way to describe its spirit is in terms of hospitality, a word not often used in connection with universities.



Snapshots of campus life. Clockwise from top left: Students and staff on a hike, 1972; dabkeh performance at an event sponsored by the Student Council and Office of Student Affairs; the old campus; and an informal jam session.

Birzeit forms a Palestinian treasure. We would do well to dig into that treasure. In the 1970s, Birzeit was a small college, yet the world was inspired by it; its strength and worthiness sprang from within and from its relationship with the society around it. It sprang from a spirit of rebelliousness against any attempt to crush people.

Birzeit students in the 1970s were very active and alive: there was a lot of walking in surrounding areas and activities, such as singing, folk dancing, demonstrating, picking olives, clearing roads, and organizing book exhibits. Teachers and students interacted not during set office hours but rather throughout the day and in a variety of ways. Discussions about various topics were continuous. In a very true sense, Birzeit students were not only reading words but also reading life; their meanings sprang not only from books and dictionaries but also from experiences, contemplations, and discussions.

I would not describe what we did in the 1970s as optimistic but as actions that embodied hope. Optimism is related to some positive result in the future (an attribute of the mind), while hope is manifested in doing what one can do in the present (an attribute of living in harmony with life). Hope is a manifestation of the force of life. It is hard for a person who

did not experience hope to really grasp what it means. It is an aspect of life that is difficult to express in words and to comprehend totally by the mind. Hope in the 1970s was manifested in thousands of spontaneous autonomous small acts.

The challenge facing Birzeit today is to regain the power of collective memory; it is a main weapon in people's hands and every community has it. Palestinians don't have mines of petroleum or gold, but we have tremendous treasures in terms of experiences, stories, history, and culture. I always stress that Palestine can serve as a magnifier through which we can see what is happening in the world at large. Some of the treasures which Birzeit had and which I mentioned earlier—how there wasn't much teaching but tremendous learning, not much competition but inner callings, not much research but tremendous search for meaning—can be relevant for universities looking for a vision. The history of Birzeit is not only of closures and repression but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, and creativity.

*Munir Fasheh taught math and physics between 1962 and 1989 and served for three years as dean of students. He left Birzeit University in 1989 to establish and direct Tamer Institute for Community Education.*





## CHAPTER 4

# An Academic Biography

*Sami Sayrafi*

As a witness for more than four decades of various phases of academic development of Birzeit University, and having studied at Birzeit when it was a junior college and served in it as a faculty member as well as in various administrative positions for many years after it became a university, I view the year 1967 when Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as a turning point in the academic life of this institution. At that time, Palestinian society was very much worried about the future and people were questioning the feasibility of continuing to study and teach while Israeli occupation continues. Calls for the boycott of schools (most of which were governmental) and denouncing the reopening of schools were rampant. Birzeit College and some other educational establishments, however, called for schools to resume, viewing education as an important factor in fostering steadfastness and encouraging the youth to stay in Palestine. This logic was viewed with caution and suspicion at first, and then it was adopted by Palestinian society at large. Within a few years, Birzeit announced its plan to develop its academic programs so that students could get a four-year degree while staying on their land.

### **Facts and Figures, Academic Year 2009-10**

Number of undergraduate students: 7,441

Percentage of female undergraduates: 59.5%

Number of graduate students: 1,308

Number of students enrolled in teaching diploma, special programs, and postgraduate diplomas: 143

Percentage of female graduate students: 54.7%

Faculty with the largest enrollment: Arts (2,034)

Holdings in the Yusuf Ahmed Alghanim library: more than 139,805 books, 40% of which are in Arabic; 1,745 periodical titles; 3,100 pamphlets; 1,440 University theses; and 47 microforms and indexes. Birzeit University has access to more than 21 electronic databases, of which 9 are obtained by subscription and 12 are free. The Library has been a depository library for the UNESCO publications since 1979 and was selected in 2005 as a regional center for World Bank publications.



### **Undergraduate Degree Programs, 2009-10**

Accounting  
Arabic Language and Literature  
Architectural Engineering  
Biology  
Business Administration  
Business Economics  
Chemistry  
Civil Engineering  
Computer Science  
Computer Systems Engineering  
Economics  
Electrical Engineering  
English Language and Literature  
Finance and Banking  
French Language  
Law  
Major English Language and Literature/Minor Translation  
Major Geography/Minor History  
Major Geography/Minor Political Science  
Major History/Minor Palestinian Archaeology  
Major History/Minor Political Science  
Major Mathematics/Minor Statistics  
Major Media-Journalism/Minor Political Science  
Major Media-Journalism/Minor Sociology  
Major Media-Radio Broadcasting/Minor Television  
Major Physics/Minor Mathematics  
Major Physics/Minor Computer Science  
Major Physics/Minor Electronics  
Major Political Science/Minor Economics  
Major Political Science/Minor Public Administration  
Major Psychology/Minor Education  
Major Psychology/Minor Sociology  
Marketing  
Mathematics  
Mathematics Applied To Economics  
Mechanical Engineering  
Mechatronics  
Nursing  
Nutrition and Dietetics  
Physics  
Public Administration  
Sociology  
Teacher Preparation  
Teaching/General Track  
Teaching/Subject Area Track  
Translation

## **Toward Bachelors and Then Masters Degrees**

The date July 11, 1976 represents the first important landmark in the academic biography of Birzeit. On that day, Birzeit University awarded its first bachelors degrees in eight disciplines: Arabic literature, English literature, business administration, Middle East studies, sociology, mathematics, physics, and chemistry.

Further steps to introduce new academic programs and to develop the academic offer followed. One year later, the Department of Education and Psychology had developed a program that enabled students to earn a master's degree in education. By 1978, the Faculty of Commerce & Economics was offering programs through the economics, business administration, and accounting departments, and in 1979, the Faculty of Engineering was offering programs through the electrical engineering, civil engineering, and mechanical engineering departments.

At the beginning of the 1984-85 academic year, 2,400 students were enrolled in the Faculties of Arts, Science, Commerce & Economics, and Engineering. During the 1980s, programs leading to bachelors degrees in education and psychology, sociology and anthropology, history and archeology, biology and biochemistry, and architectural engineering were added to the list of offerings. And in the tradition of liberal arts education that the University had adopted, it offered courses in philosophy, cultural studies, geography, library science, physical education, music, fine arts, general science, and other subjects, designed to enrich and diversify students' knowledge and skills, either as part of degree requirements or as electives.

By the mid-1990s, history, geography, political science, and philosophy and cultural studies departments were established; so too was the Faculty for Graduate Studies, which introduced a master's program in international relations. In addition, an international summer program was designed for foreign students who wished to study Arabic and to experience how Palestinians cope under occupation. The development of the graduate programs offering continued and by the year 2000 the



University was offering twelve masters programs, including such novel programs as community and public health, gender and development, and democracy and human rights.

Birzeit now offers forty-six bachelor's and twenty-two master's programs. The number of students has been increasing steadily, from 239 students in 1972 to almost 8,800 in 2009, enrolled in eight faculties: Arts, Commerce & Economics, Science, Engineering, Law & Public Administration, Information Technology, Nursing & Allied Health Professions, and Graduate Studies. The Faculty of Education was accredited during the writing of this chapter, and the Faculty of Pharmacy is in the final stages of accreditation. The increase in the number of students was accompanied by an expansion of the physical infrastructure as well as an increase in the number of degree programs and in the qualified faculty, such that the university was able to maintain a healthy student-teacher ratio of 20-1, which is an important indicator of academic standards.

## Program Accreditation

The expansion of the academic offer that took place at Birzeit over the past thirty-eight years was not as easy and straightforward a process as the preceding description suggests. Early on, it wasn't such a complicated affair to add degree programs—administrators were guided by what roughly constituted the core of programs and courses offered by a typical liberal arts college. If the faculty was available, program designs, courses, and textbooks could almost be taken off the shelf. The reality was never quite that simple, of course; adding a new academic program always entailed careful study of need, relevance, and feasibility. (Adding multidisciplinary programs was another story entirely.)

Prior to the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority, the current system of accreditation did not exist. New programs could be proposed by individuals or departments. Once a proposal had an initial go-ahead, it had to go through a process involving the Planning Office in order to ascertain that the University has or can muster what it takes to

In 1972, the new syllabus in modern math swept Arab countries – except Palestine. Birzeit took the initiative and brought together all secondary math teachers in the West Bank for three weeks, where they engaged in dialogue over the new syllabus. On a more micro level, Birzeit welcomed the introduction of new courses; for example, my wife introduced a course in anthropology in 1972 and I designed and introduced a math course in 1972 for freshman science students under the title “Math in the Other Direction.”

**Munir Fasheh**, faculty member 1962-89



Photo: Yasser Darwish

ensure successful delivery. Securing the endorsement of the Academic Council was sometimes a contentious process but generally it was possible to reach agreement and to launch programs for which a valid case could be made.

With the establishment of the independent Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC), the University was no longer completely at liberty to launch new programs. To start new programs, academic institutions have to demonstrate availability of all the requisites for years to come—space, number of qualified faculty, material resources, books



Engineering workshop. Photo: Mahmoud Obede.



Science lab. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

and periodicals, and anticipated enrollment, in which the projected tuition fees was a factor. Today, the process of introducing an accredited degree program can take as long as eighteen months; in the 1980s, the whole process could be concluded in the space of a single semester.

For example, after it became feasible to offer teacher training programs in four subject areas, the process of designing these programs and getting them accredited took a good two years. When Birzeit decided to venture into programs related to health and paramedical professions in 2006, it took two years for it to launch a bachelor's program in nursing and another in nutrition and dietetic. A doctor of pharmacy (Pharm. D.) program has taken sustained efforts for over three years to be accredited. The period of time required to take a program from concept to catalog listing is not all spent on accreditation procedures, however. The internal discussions of the program proposal in the various councils—from department council to faculty council and then to the University Council for an initial go-ahead—can take semesters, and the study of feasibility at the Planning Office can take months. If the program entails long-term commitments and the establishment of a new faculty, then the approval of the Board of Trustees has to be secured. Only then is the program submitted to the Academic Council and after that to AQAC for accreditation.

## Faculty Development

A faculty development program, which was launched to meet shortages in teaching staff, enhance qualifications, and provide training, also helped the University introduce and solidify new programs. In the mid-to late 1970s, Birzeit University faculty included many non-Palestinian professors and instructors in mathematics, physics, economics, English, philosophy, cultural studies, and other disciplines. They offered diversity in teaching methods, and they enriched the cultural life of the University and gave students opportunities to interact with people with European and American experiences. However, Israeli restrictions on visas have adversely affected the University's ability to hire and retain foreign

faculty. Consequently, the University embarked on a long-term faculty development program that took into consideration the immediate and long-term needs of the academic departments. This entailed sending some of its promising graduates and young faculty to study at European and American universities in order to obtain advanced degrees and gain experience in teaching and research, eventually to return to Birzeit and join the faculty. This program was supported through grants obtained from AMIDEAST, the British Council, Arab Students Aid International (ASAI), and other Arab and foreign institutions that focus on higher education. In addition, many Birzeit faculty were able to get advanced degrees and good training in the former Soviet Union and other East Bloc countries and were supported by scholarships and grants that they were able to secure independently. These avenues of faculty development contributed crucial support to many of the academic programs at Birzeit.

## International Visitors

Exposing students to developments in the arts, sciences, and technology and acquainting them with leading academics and thinkers of international stature and with their works are complementary parts of the Birzeit University curriculum. Even since the early 1970s, Birzeit has been a magnet for visitors with international stature who regarded the institution as an important voice for Palestinians under occupation. The list of distinguished guests, too long to cite here in full, includes philosopher Herbert Marcuse, educator Ivan Illitch, and British diplomat Lord Caradon; Professor Dorothy Hodgkin, winner of the 1964 Nobel Prize in chemistry; Professor Sherwood Rowland, winner of the 1995 Nobel Prize in chemistry; physics professors Dyson Freeman from Princeton University and Stephen Hawking from Cambridge University; the late Edward Said, Columbia University professor of comparative literature; and American linguist and political commentator Noam Chomsky from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. For our young faculty and students, such encounters have been unforgettable. The enthusiastic welcome extended to these guests by faculty and students alike and the interest shown in their lectures are the best indicators of a finely developed academic consciousness.



Renowned physicist Stephen Hawking during a 2006 visit to Birzeit University. Left to right: British Consulate staff member, Vice President Ghassan Khatib, British Consul General Richard Makepeace, University President Nabeel Kassis, Dean Munir Qazzaz, Public Relations Office Director Ghassan Andoni, and physics department faculty Ya'coub Anini and Wael Karain (department chairman). Photo: Yasser Darwish.



Dr. Abdul-Latif Abu-Hijleh addresses the audience at the 2007 international conference, "Edward Said: Critical Accounts on (Post)Modernity." Photo: Yasser Darwish.



## ***Exploring the Palestinian Landscape***

Birzeit University was the first university ever to offer a course in the contemporary geography of Palestine. It has been a required course for students majoring in Middle East studies since the mid-1970s. (Since the mid-1990s, however, the scope of this course has been limited to the West Bank as a result of severe mobility restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation.)

The course consisted of class lectures as well as a required four-day field trip through all parts of Palestine—the coastal plains, the mountains, the Rift valley, and the Naqab. Students and faculty members who joined us would gather at dawn in front of the old campus, and then the buses would move to northern Palestine up to the Lebanese-Syrian borders, and from there down south through central and southern Palestine, reaching Um al-Rushrash at the Gulf of Aqaba. We slept in Jenin, Tulkarem, and Gaza (but sometimes in Nazareth or Haifa instead of Jenin). The aim of this field trip was always to give a detailed and integrated knowledge of the physical and cultural Palestinian landscape. The students would write field notes during frequent stops at important places and vantage points. They would walk about 8-10 kilometers every day. They would see and feel the rocks and soil and sometimes taste the vegetation and water; they would take dozens of pictures as part of their coursework and for themselves. In the evenings, we reviewed their observations of the local natural regions and discussed them in the context of an overall comprehensive geography of Palestine. They would also meet with prominent educators and politicians in towns and cities where we spent the night—people like Haydar Abd al-Shafi (a founding member of the Palestine National Council and head of the negotiating team at the Madrid Conference in 1991) and Nazareth mayor, poet, and politician Tawfiq Zayyad. Participants not only gained academic knowledge and the love of the country but also benefited socially; the field trips created tight-knit groups and lasting friendships.

*Kamal Abdulfattah teaches geography at Birzeit University. He is a founding member of the Palestinian Geographical Society and has done extensive research on the Palestinian villages destroyed during the Nakba.*

## ***“The Past Is in the Present”: Archeology at Birzeit University***

When my husband, Albert Glock, went to Palestine in 1962 as a member of an American archaeological expedition to Tell Balata (Nablus), there was already a growing awareness among his colleagues that “the archaeology of the Holy Land” was an exploitative pursuit from the viewpoint of the people of Palestine. Members of the group of American professors subsequently led by Dr. Paul Lapp to re-explore Tell Ta’anek (Jenin region) made some effort to change this. After Lapp’s untimely death in 1970, Albert led the Ta’anek excavations. He began teaching archaeology at Birzeit University in 1975. Soon thereafter, in order to train a corps of professional young Palestinian archaeologists capable of directing excavations in their homeland as well as joining teams of internationals, and with the strong support of the Birzeit University administration, he established the Department of Archaeology and, later still, the Palestinian Institute of Archeology.

The excavations of the 1960s in the West Bank had brought Albert into contact with village life as well as the ruins of some of the 420 villages hidden since 1948 in forest preserves or behind cactus hedges or built over by new settlements. It had become clear to him that Palestine was a living culture with a tradition that had not been examined. He felt that the study of ancient societies through archaeology becomes relevant if it begins with examination of present-day communities in their settings.

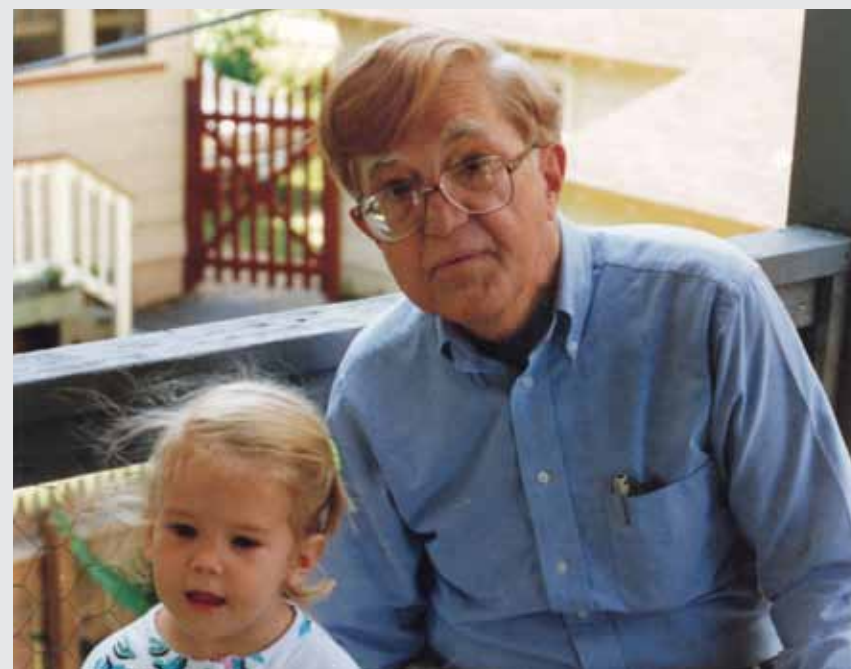
Several principles guided work at the Institute:

1. The pursuit of archaeology is interdisciplinary and requires input and participation from many departments in the Faculties of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering (art, sociology, anthropology, engineering, architecture, physics, and chemistry, to name a few).
2. Library resources are paramount, including publications in Arabic.

3. “The past is in the present.” This theory led to the study of contemporary village life to record how contemporary survival skills make use of the same natural resources and practical wisdom as in the recent or remote past, namely, water conservation, agricultural practices, architecture, and manufacture of many kinds of tools and of ceramic vessels. One of the corollaries of this principle is that no period should be disregarded—that includes the Ottoman period as well as the present day (for example, studying current refugee camps and identifying transient Bedouin camps), which had been mostly ignored by traditional archaeology in the search for the ancient past.
4. Productive fieldwork was an integral component of the training of young archaeologists. This presented the most complex challenge to be faced, for reasons related to the obstacles placed by the Israeli occupation; suspicion of the villagers in local communities; the cost of fieldwork; and archeological rights that had to be negotiated with the Israeli and Jordanian governments.
5. Graduate work abroad in specialized fields was requisite.

During the seventeen years between 1975 and 1992, Albert threw himself into his work with both passion and steadfastness. In January 1992, he was killed by assassins whose identities and motives remain unknown. Today, a few young professors who studied in the early years are teaching and conducting research at Birzeit and at other Palestinian universities, heading or participating in excavations in the region, involving themselves in historical preservation, educating schoolchildren in their archaeological heritage, and promoting alternative tourism that begins with the “the past in the present.”

*Lois Glock was the registrar for the Tell Ta’annek excavations, 1963-68, and the curator of records and artifacts until 1995, and she was in charge of the Birzeit University Orientation English Reading Room and Language Laboratory between 1982 and 1989.*



The late Dr. Albert Glock, Director of the Archeology Institute. According to a colleague, “Glock’s contribution to Palestinian archeology has been to free archeology from history and, thus, from the burden of biblical interpretations. His alternative to [a] historical approach is a systematic anthropological study of the living traditions as a source for understanding the past.”



Archeological dig at Khirbet Birzeit. Photo: Yasser Darwish.



Crossing the bulldozed Ramallah-Birzeit road during a winter storm, 2001.



Israeli army patrol confronting students.

## ***My Birzeit University Days, 1983-85***

I arrived at the doorway of the old campus of Birzeit University in the afternoon of a hot July day in 1983, burdened with two suitcases and a knapsack. I was ready to begin my two-year teaching contract as a visiting history professor. I remember best the features of the old campus and its rabbit-like warren of pathways in and out of key offices, the library, and the outdoor basketball court with rows of seats built into the one sideline wall. Due to the closeness of the kitchen facilities to the courtyard, the noon meals with their pungent odors were announced well ahead of the lunch break for students and faculty. Many a heated discussion erupted in any section of the eating area as well as swells of laughter in the midst of lunchtime banter.

My office was across the main village road in an unfurnished home turned into the Department of Middle East Studies under the leadership of Nafez Nazzal. I was not the only “visiting” professor; Wasif Abboushi was on leave from the University of Cincinnati while Islah Jad was a new faculty member.

The routine of attending daily classes was soon disrupted by two grim realities of living and working in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: first, increased closures of Birzeit and second, sporadic shootings of our students by Israeli troops in running confrontations. The interrogation and subsequent detention of twenty faculty members in the fall term was based on their refusal to sign the so-called “loyalty oath” ordered by the Israeli Military Government officials in accordance with the 1980 Military Order 854. I had watched the twenty faculty members being taken into the Ramallah headquarters of the Israeli Military Government across from Hanan Ashrawi’s home, and later in the day, some of the faculty and students visited the detainees in the Ramallah police station and its prison next door to the Friends Boys School. The repeated closures, the fatalities of several Birzeit students, and the temporary detention of faculty meant multiple delays in the fall term, which did not end until March 1984.



In the fall term I was asked to teach surveys of the Middle East and North Africa, and I also taught the historiography seminar as part of the history majors' requirements. In the seminar "The Oral History of Palestinian Villages," I was kindly assisted by guest appearances of colleagues, such as Al Glock from archaeology, Salim Tamari from sociology, Suad Amiri from architecture, and Kamal Abdulfattah from geography.

In spring 1984, Acting President Gabi Baramki asked me to conduct a research project, "Refugees as Victims and Causes of Conflict," and to present the results at the annual Pugwash Conference in Venice in July 1984. Emile Sahliyah and I, along with graduate students Othman Sharkas and Adel Yahya, put together a questionnaire to be used in our sampling of refugee opinions in fifteen camps in the West Bank. Othman and Adel carried out the research by interviewing nearly 300 refugees and together we all wrote the paper. In July, Adel and I flew to Venice for a successful presentation with transparencies illustrating our findings.

Following a brief 1984 spring term and a much-reduced summer break, the fall term began with renewed enthusiasm on the part of everyone. To begin with, the new campus began to grow in size along the crest and hillside of several acres of open land two kilometers south of Birzeit village. The faculty and students of the business, science, and engineering schools had already begun to shift all their courses, offices, and laboratories there to inaugurate the "new campus." Meanwhile, on the old campus, the Middle East Studies Department was changed to the Department of History with programs in geography and political science. I found myself more involved with the Research Center under the leadership of Kamal Abdulfattah. Kamal had asked Salim Tamari and I to initiate an Arabic and English journal devoted to research in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as co-editors. By the end of the 1984 fall term, the *Birzeit Research Review* published its first issue on education.

The cover was graciously designed by Suad Amiri. Kamal also asked me to begin a series of workshops, titled "Palestinian Oral History: Theories and Methods," for the eager and industrious Center staff. The big event of fall 1984, however, was the well-organized planting of trees on Land Day along the empty hillside on the new campus. Today, the flourishing embankment of trees that a visitor sees on entering the University is living testimony to the steadfastness and grassroots nature of Birzeit as a national Arab institution of higher education.

By spring 1985, spirits on both campuses were high as both the village leagues and Military Order 854 had failed in their aim to allow Israeli security into the village politics and Palestinian private schools, colleges, and universities. It also became apparent that Birzeit was about to complete an uninterrupted academic year of full-time teaching for the first time in some years. All faculty members looked forward to a Birzeit graduation ceremony and felt that the University's academic outlook looked very good.

My two years at Birzeit University were some of the most intensely productive and worrisome years of my academic life, but they were also some of my best years as an academic due primarily to the spirit of the students and faculty, the warm camaraderie of colleagues and administrators, and the sharing of joyful and tearful moments of so many courageous and principled Palestinians, young and old, student and faculty. I have returned to Birzeit University nearly every summer since 1985 either to teach a graduate course, to work with a colleague, or to do oral history research. I must say that I will always be proud to be a Birzeiti!

*Thomas M. Ricks is an independent social and cultural historian and lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia).*



مبنى نسيب عزيز شاهين

## CHAPTER 5

# Graduate Studies at Birzeit

*George Giacaman*

The year 1976 witnessed two important events in the history of Birzeit University and in the course of the development of Palestinian higher education as well: the graduation of the first class to receive bachelors degrees and the beginning of planning for the first master's degree program. A year later, students were already enrolled in the program, which was being offered by the education department. Several graduates of the master's program in education went on to earn doctorate degrees at reputable universities in the United States and elsewhere as part of a faculty development program, and some returned to Birzeit University to teach at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

Several graduate programs were launched in the years following the 1992 reopening of the University (after a protracted closure by the Israeli military authorities). In addition, the master's program in education (which had been temporarily suspended in 1983 because of concerns about its sustainability) was resumed in 1994, at which time it was revised and expanded to include concentrations in areas such as science education, administration, and math education.



The chairman of the Board of Trustees, Dr. Sa'di al-Faqih, awards a diploma during the 1983 commencement ceremony as Acting President Gabi Baramki looks on.



## Developing Graduate Programs

The development of graduate programs at Birzeit University was always a collective effort, but the role and contribution of specific individuals were critical and deserve mention. Between the years 1992 and 1995, graduate programs in law, gender studies, and international studies were launched. The University Council, headed by President Hanna Nasir, gave the green light and the final approval for new programs; the Graduate Council discussed and approved academic content. The late Dr. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod chaired this Council in his capacity as vice-president. He was the guiding spirit behind the establishment of the master's degree in International Studies. He saw clearly that Palestinians, whose fortunes were often influenced by regional and international players and factors, needed to understand the political forces at work in order to make informed and well-grounded decisions, and that such an empowered and rational decision-making process was particularly important at that time, because the Palestinian National Authority was about to be established.



Dean of Graduate Studies Lisa Taraki congratulates a graduate student during the 34th commencement ceremony. The banners of the various faculties are in the background. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

In late 1995 the decision was taken to establish the Faculty of Graduate Studies and to appoint its first Dean. I served in this capacity for close to seven years. New programs needed to be developed and detailed academic by-laws prepared in order to institutionalize graduate programs and to exercise oversight over the quality of instruction. The Graduate Council comprised chairs of various masters programs with representatives of the other faculties; the Dean served as Chair of the Council.

It is difficult to overstress the need for institutionalization, where detailed and clear regulations need to govern all aspects of work. Establishing those regulations was no easy task. Birzeit had gone through such a process at the undergraduate level and was fortunate to be able to draw on experienced administrators who could assist in the effort to institutionalize the graduate study program at the University. These included former Vice-President for Planning and Development Ramzi Rihan and former Vice-President for Academic Affairs Ahmad Baker; the latter was succeeded by Dr. Abdul-Latif Abu-Hijleh, who played an important role in this capacity.

Following the appointment in 2004-2005 of University President Nabeel Kassis—he had earlier served as Vice-President for Academic Affairs—efforts were made to decentralize the graduate studies program. Several programs were moved from the Faculty of Graduate Studies to the relevant departments given the increasing number of programs and the need for more efficient administrative arrangements. Today there are twenty-one masters programs; seven of them—democracy and human rights, gender and development studies, applied statistics, international studies, urban planning and landscape architecture, water and environmental engineering, and water and environmental sciences—are interdisciplinary programs offered through the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Another interdisciplinary program, contemporary Arab studies, is offered through the Faculty of Arts. When my term ended, Dr. Khawla Shakhir-Sabri and Dr. Sami Sayrafi served as deans for short periods, but then they were drafted for other posts. Dr. Lisa Taraki has assumed that position since 2004-2005.

## Quality Matters

Throughout the foundational stage and until the present, a pressing issue under continued discussion has been the quality of graduate programs. At Birzeit we followed what turned out to be a conservative path, trying to ensure that the basic requirements for graduate studies were in place, keenly aware of the challenges facing higher education in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. We were able to develop programs that became leading centers specializing in areas of direct relevance to the Palestinian and Arab context. These include programs at several Institutes that offer masters degrees but also do basic and applied research of a very high standard, much of it published in leading world journals. The Institute of Water and Environmental Studies, The Institute of Women's Studies, and The Institute of Community and Public Health can be mentioned as examples. Their contribution in terms of the research they produce and the quality of their graduates is admirable. Many leading international scientists and scholars have actively pursued opportunities to work on joint projects with Birzeit faculty members.

The context in which Birzeit continues to operate remains fraught with challenges. To what degree should graduate studies expand given limitations on available resources? What are the needs of "the market" given that it was never restricted only to the West Bank and Gaza? Is it possible to develop superior programs in all fields, or is it better to focus on a limited number of programs that can achieve world-class level? Such questions among others continue to be the concern of faculty and administrators at Birzeit often resulting in long and detailed discussions at various councils and committees involved in planning. What cannot be denied is that despite considerable obstacles, a committed faculty and forward-looking administrators have succeeded in providing leadership and building graduate programs that address national needs and enjoy a regional reputation.

### Graduate Programs

Applied Chemistry  
Applied Statistics  
Arab-Islamic History  
Business Administration  
Clinical Laboratory Science  
Community and Public Health  
Contemporary Arab Studies  
Democracy and Human Rights  
Economics  
Education  
Gender and Development Studies  
Geography  
International Studies  
Law  
Mathematics  
Physics  
Scientific Computing  
Sociology  
Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture  
Water and Environmental Engineering  
Water and Environmental Sciences

Year in which first MA degrees in education were awarded: 1980

Number of recipients: 6

Number of enrolled graduate students, September 2009: 1,308

## ***Profiles of Selected Graduate Programs***

### ***Business Administration Program***

**Degree awarded:**

**Master in Business Administration**

The Master in Business Administration program is designed for graduate students with varied undergraduate degrees. It is offered through the Faculty of Commerce & Economics, which has a strong regional reputation among similar programs in Arab universities. Faculty members are leading researchers and practitioners, and the program is highly competitive—only 15-20% of applicants are admitted each year. Since the 1999 establishment of this degree program, some 500 students have graduated and found employment locally and in the Arab world as financial managers, treasurers, and directors of public institutions, NGOs, and business corporations.

### ***Community and Public Health Program***

**Degrees awarded:**

**Master in Public Health; Diploma in Primary Health Care**

The degree programs are offered through the Institute of Community and Public Health, which defines health as a social construction. In other words, causes of disease are found not only within the person but also where people live and work and within the broader environment, including the social and political environments. This approach draws on medical, epidemiological, political, social, and other disciplines to understand health. The Institute was one of the first in the Arab world to pioneer this broad multidisciplinary approach, which relies on the work of multidisciplinary teams in research, teaching, and practice. (In the Arab world, the orientation is largely classical and uses the biomedical framework.)

### ***Democracy and Human Rights Program***

**Degree awarded:**

**Master of Arts in Democracy and Human Rights**

The graduate program in Democracy and Human Rights was established in 1999 as an interdisciplinary program, combining subjects in philosophy, political science, law, education, and sociology. It evolved from the public debate in the late 1990s about questions of governance, including corruption, respect of rights, and the rule of law. On the Birzeit University campus, these issues were transposed into more general questions about the role of the University in state building through education, training, research, and related community outreach. The program that was developed aimed at training students in various areas of work including teaching and advocacy, the dissemination of information relevant to democracy and human rights, and academic research in the theory and practice of democracy and human rights in Palestine, the Arab region, and elsewhere. By the end of the 2008-2009 academic year, 143 students had completed the program, and many have occupied key positions in policy-making institutions.

### ***Environmental and Water Studies Program***

**Degrees awarded:**

**Master of Science in Water and Environmental Engineering;**

**Master of Science in Water and Environmental Sciences**

The programs equip graduates with the conceptual, analytical, and technical skills required to identify water- and environmental-related problems, design interventions to address these problems, and monitor and evaluate the results of these interventions. Semester projects and theses are based on emerging local environmental issues and applied engineering problems that are often done in close cooperation with private companies, consulting firms, local or foreign NGOs, and public institutions.



The Institute has played a key role in capacity building of local Palestinian water and sanitation through its masters programs. It has initiated collaborative partnerships that have increased the breadth and scope of research in the field of water and environmental sectors. The research collaboration has increased the size of cooperative partnerships, networks, and the opportunities to develop world-class technologies and solutions that positively impact significant water and sanitation issues facing Palestinian communities.

### ***Gender and Development Studies Program***

**Degree awarded:**

**Master of Arts in Gender and Development**

The graduate program offered through the Institute of Women's Studies was the first program of its kind to be developed in an Arab university. The program establishes women's studies as a relevant academic discipline, and its graduates are sought after by Palestinian institutions and NGOs, as well as international organizations. It focuses on providing students with conceptual frameworks for understanding both Palestinian society and global issues in gender scholarship and developmental debates, coupled with a link to policy planning.

### ***International Studies Program***

**Degree awarded:**

**Master of Arts in International Studies**

The Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies is the only specialized Palestinian institution of its kind to offer a master's degree in international studies. The interdisciplinary master's degree is earned through the study of the four cognate fields of international relations: international politics, economics, law, and history. The degree program is an academically unified one, targeting professionals and others interested in addressing Palestine's evolving relationship with the international system. Teaching in the Institute is done by the foremost scholars in the field living in Palestine.



The graduating class of 2006. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

### ***Law Program***

**Degree awarded:**

**Master of Law**

The law program offered through the Faculty of Law & Public Administration familiarizes students with the two legal systems prevailing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (West Bank and Gaza) and offers training through seminars, working groups, and assignment to Institute of Law projects (such as the inventory of laws in force in Palestine). Many program graduates now teach in the program or occupy key positions in the Palestinian legal community. Students can access Institute of Law resources, including the Montesquieu Law Library, which is the largest law library in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and the Palestinian databank, "Al-Muqtafi," which contains integrated referential, full text, and facsimile image databases of all legislation enacted in Palestine over the last 150 years.







# 2

## Challenges and Responses







## CHAPTER 6

# Running a University under Israeli Military Occupation

*Gabi Baramki*

In the years that followed Israel's occupation of the remainder of Palestine in 1967, Birzeit administrators were guided by specific goals: to expand and develop the institution to meet the educational needs of the population and to further the process of national liberation.

### Resisting Israeli Control Tactics

From the moment Israel established its military occupation, it targeted academic institutions and especially students, and Birzeit started to feel the pressure almost immediately. As administrators, we had to resist Israeli maneuvers to control and stifle campus activities, and we tried to set limits: Israeli military authorities must call before coming to campus and they were not to roam on campus; they would only be met in the President's office. They wanted to inspect our classes, a request we rejected out of hand, because we had never inspected the classes ourselves. Whenever they asked to meet with President Hanna Nasir, I joined him; we thought it safer for two people to go rather than one.

When in 1972 we announced our plans in the newspapers to develop a four-year program, the military governor told us we had to apply for

a permit. Each year, we wrote a simple letter requesting a permit; in 1976, our letter stated that all our operations were long term, that the new campus we were building was a long-term investment, and that we would consider the permit we have to be a permanent one. And that was the last we heard of that bizarre "requirement."

Efforts to control the University took a range of forms. When Birzeit became a university, the military authorities insisted on inspecting the textbooks. We submitted them reluctantly—textbooks are expensive—but continued to insist that they be returned, and ultimately they were. They asked for information about our students, including their addresses and their religion. We told them we didn't collect this information. In general, we responded to requests of this kind with minimal or no information.

We were glad to accept Palestinian citizens of Israel who wanted to study or teach at our campus. This became a bone of contention with the Israelis, but we argued that we could not turn away Palestinians who had been denied opportunities in Israel. Over the years, the Israeli authorities tried to discourage this through various means, including by requiring them to apply for residency permits.

### **The Occupation in Numbers**

Number of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

In 1970: 1,096,000

In 2010: 4,409,000

Number of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory ages 19 years and younger

In 1970: 602,000

In 2010: 2,435,000

### **Arrests, Imprisonments, and Torture**

Number of Palestinians who have been held in Israeli jails for periods ranging from 1 week to life, 1967-88: 600,000

Number of Palestinians arrested during the first intifada (1987-94): 175,000

Percentage of Palestinian detainees who have been tortured during interrogation: 85%

Number of Birzeit University students and employees detained and imprisoned since 2002: 436

Number still imprisoned as of April 2010: 82

### **Deportations**

Number of Palestinians deported between 1967 and 1992: 1,522

Between 1970 and 1973: 785

In 1992: 415

Number deported from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip, 2002-2004: 32

### **House Demolitions**

Number of Palestinian homes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory demolished by Israeli authorities, June 1967-March 2009: 24,145

### **Killings during the Two Intifadas**

Number of Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces and civilians, December 9, 1987- September 28, 2000:

In the Occupied Palestinian Territory: 1,489

Within the Green Line: 60

Number killed, September 28, 2000 - September 28, 2004: 3,234

Probably the first overt Israeli move to deal a major blow to Birzeit took place on November 21, 1974, when President Hanna Nasir was deported to Lebanon, together with four other Palestinians. The deportation took place against a backdrop of widespread demonstrations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in support of PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat, who was addressing the United Nations General Assembly for the first time. We considered it unconscionable that he should be banished from his home and life's work without being accused of a crime or allowed to defend himself, and we continued to demand his return, but our ongoing efforts were unsuccessful.

After Hanna's deportation, I became Acting President. Traveling out of the Occupied Palestinian Territory became difficult for me. Before leaving, I was always instructed not to meet Hanna, and upon my return I was always interrogated to find out whether I had.

In the early years of the occupation, hundreds of prominent Palestinian leaders were deported as a lesson to the rest of us that dissent carried a high price; many were placed under administrative detention, which meant that they were arrested for six-month intervals without charges, a term that could be renewed indefinitely. Birzeit University physics instructor Tayseer Arouri was held under these military regulations for a total of forty-five months.

Our students protested Israeli army actions, like home demolitions, mass arrests, and settlements, and the Israeli army responded with full force and live ammunition. The students frequently hung Palestinian flags in prominent places, and this was like waving a red cape in front of a bull, just infuriating to the Israelis.



## Identifying Support

We looked for ways to help the University survive the occupation, and we thought that relations with universities in Europe would be very helpful. We established contacts with universities that offered scholarships to our students, and we tried to reciprocate by making opportunities available to their students (for example, the International Summer Program, where Arabic was taught) and sending some of our faculty to their universities to lecture or conduct research. A solidarity group in Britain, Friends of Birzeit University, registered as a charity and sent lecturers and delegations. A similar group was set up in Michigan. Both groups sent donations and managed to raise awareness about the pressures we were facing; the British group succeeded in establishing helpful contacts with European parliamentarians. When closure orders were issued for an indefinite length of time, external pressure from our solidarity groups and from students who had attended our summer program was helpful, and it also put Israel on notice that its repressive measures targeting universities was noticed by the world. Friends and supporters with foreign passports played a crucial role in bringing us books and journals that would have been intercepted by the Israelis had they been sent to us through the mail.

In July 1980, the Israeli occupation authority issued Military Order 854, which placed institutions of higher education under the command of the Israeli governor, giving him control over enrollment and staff appointments. This violation of international law was resisted by all universities. To assert control, the governor demanded that nonresident faculty had to sign a statement in which they agreed to abide by Israeli military orders and disown the PLO, which it referred to as a terrorist organization. Signing this statement, which came to be known as the “loyalty oath,” was a condition for getting work permits, and faculty members with foreign passports who refused to sign would have to leave the country. We got around this only by photocopying the statement without the offensive clause and asking staff to sign that; the Israeli authorities did not immediately notice the



Student injured by the Israeli army on the Ramallah-Birzeit road, 2002. Photo: Rula Halawani.

The “loyalty oath” drew protest from an unlikely source: the U.S. State Department. Secretary of State George Shultz called it “an abridgement of academic freedom” and described it as “totally unnecessary” for Israel’s security; he went so far as to call upon “people in the intellectual community” to protest what he characterized as “an abridgment of freedom of thought.” Prior to Shultz’s public statements, 200 Israeli academics had signed a protest statement.

omission. Ultimately they had to abandon enforcement of the order because they were getting pressure from other countries and because Palestinian universities refused to comply. However, they could still exert control over our ability to employ foreign faculty because they could deny visa applications.

### **Administrative Detention and Deportation: One Faculty Member's Ordeal**

I was arrested for the first time on April 22, 1974, during a wide wave of arrests undertaken by the Israeli occupation forces against the Palestinian national front, which had formed in the summer of 1973 and consisted of some of the main national forces and some independents.

I was told by the Ramallah prison administration that I would be administratively detained for three months. At the end of that period, my detention was renewed for six months. And this was repeated six times, with the result that the detention period totaled forty-five months. Amnesty International declared me a prisoner of conscience, and the solidarity campaigns and denunciations of my arrest grew locally and internationally. Many prominent local, international, and some Israeli physicists and mathematicians got involved, too.

During the entire time of my detention (which was based on what are called emergency regulations and precautionary detention), I was never formally charged. Perhaps the most curious thing is that after three years of detention, I was able to get an answer from the prison administrator to a question I had raised repeatedly: why have I been detained? I have a right to know. His answer: The security agents thought that you might be thinking of doing something against Israel. You were imprisoned so that you wouldn't do anything.

Among the worst things about my detention was the severe overcrowding in a way that is hard for anyone who has not experienced it to imagine. I was held in room number 1 in Ramallah prison, a room that was 30 square meters (6 X 5), and there were sixty-three prisoners. This lasted for several weeks. But during my detention, I read slightly more than 200 books. I learned a lot during this period, and I learned a lot from prison life itself.

I was arrested for the second time on March 14, 1982, and my detention lasted eighteen days. It happened as part of a wave of arrests that the occupation forces regularly conducted at this time every year to stave off mass political demonstrations organized by national forces to commemorate Land Day.

My third arrest was on August 8, 1988, during the first intifada. On August 17, an order was issued to deport me and sixteen other Palestinian activists. This was the third list of deportations during the intifada. An Israeli officer read this charge to me: The Israeli commander of the central region has decided in his official capacity to deport you from the country, because of your role in planning and leading popular committees. The signature on the order was that of Amram Mitzna, the same general who became the mayor of Haifa a few years later, and thereafter a leader in the Israeli peace bloc.

Four colleagues and I engaged in a struggle against the deportation order that lasted more than a year. Working with a committee of defense lawyers, we decided to exhaust all available avenues to expose the cruelty and illegality of the policy of deportation. We succeeded in ending this policy for at least two years, although we were deported at the end of August 1989. I was able to return in April 1994.

During my imprisonment Amnesty International once again considered me a prisoner of conscience—the only Palestinian prisoner to be so designated twice.

And once again, solidarity campaigns were launched to denounce my detention, and these campaigns were much larger than the previous time. Participants included intellectuals, scientists, union leaders, politicians, and legal and trade organizations from many countries. Perhaps the most important was an open letter published in the *New York Times* and the *Jerusalem Post* addressed to the Israeli defense minister, Yitzhak Rabin, asking that he void the deportation order. This letter was signed by nearly 1,400 physicists and mathematicians, including twelve Nobel Prize recipients. This document might very well be the only document in the world signed by such a large number of physicists and mathematicians.

**Tayseer Arouri** has been a physics instructor at Birzeit since 1973.

## Surviving Repeated Closures

Probably the biggest challenges we faced were the repeated and prolonged closures. Birzeit was closed in December 1973; we launched a media campaign and as a result, the closure did not exceed two weeks. But in May 1979, the University was closed for two months; the pretext in that case was an incident in which students threw stones at Israeli settlers marching through Birzeit in celebration of Israel's independence day. During that two-month closure, administrators, faculty members, and some students worked together to figure out how we would handle classes and make up for lost time. We developed a system so that everyone knew what to do and off-campus facilities were lined up for alternative classrooms. Later, when the new campus was built, we met there when Israelis closed the old campus. And sometimes the new campus would be closed, and we would hold classes in the old campus. We had to hold classes through the summer so that students could complete course requirements and make up for lost time, which was not easy.

At first, we focused on making sure that students who were only a few credits short of graduating could complete the requirements, but soon it became clear that the closures would be lengthy and that all students would be affected. We held alternative classes in buildings we rented in Ramallah; for a while, we held some classes for Jerusalem and Bethlehem students at the YMCA and YWCA and St. George's School. Offices we set up were raided, and we frequently had to smuggle students on campus to use certain lab facilities, whose equipment we could not transport elsewhere. People who are determined can be endlessly resourceful and innovative, and none of these arrangements would have worked without the determination of the students and staff. Other Palestinian universities that were closed benefited from our experience with off-campus teaching.

The fifteenth and last closure, imposed on January 10, 1988, barely one month after the outbreak of the intifada, lasted for fifty-one months. It was the longest closure imposed on a Palestinian university. The graduation ceremony of 1992 was very moving; 700 students who had completed requirements during the closure graduated that year, and two

### Closures

December 15-31, 1973  
March 20 - April 4, 1979  
May 3 - July 2, 1979  
November 14-22, 1980  
November 4, 1981 – January 4, 1982  
February 16 - April 16, 1982  
July 8 - October 8, 1982  
February 2 - May 2, 1984 (old campus)  
April 2 - May 2, 1984  
March 8 - May 8, 1985  
December 8, 1986 - January 3, 1987  
February 18-21, 1987  
March 27-30, 1987  
April 13 - August 13, 1987  
January 10, 1988 - April 29, 1992

large Palestinian flags flanked the stage. Many tears were shed—tears of joy but also of sadness at the loss of life during the intifada.

In addition to keeping classes going while maintaining certain academic standards, we were involved in organizing remedial programs for incoming freshmen who were ill-equipped for University coursework because of the disruptions they faced during the last few years of high school. Often their teachers had been unable to complete their practical training, and so they were not fully qualified to teach. It took years to overcome the handicapping of students caused by the long-term closures.

After the Oslo accords were signed, the education portfolio was assumed by the Palestinian National Authority. Closures are now a thing of the past, but the universities are still controlled by the Israeli military through the checkpoints it sets up, which can make the trek to campus a lengthy and uncertain undertaking.



### **Birzeit University students killed by the Israeli occupation forces**

Sharaf al-Tibi (November 21, 1984)  
Isa Shamasneh (November 15, 1986)  
Jawad Abu Salmieh (December 4, 1986)  
Saeb Dhahab (December 4, 1986)  
Musa al-Hanafi (April 13, 1987)  
Abdullah Alawneh (November 11, 1990)  
Ibrahim Qasim (May 25, 1991)  
Jamal Ghanim (March 22, 1992)  
Hazim Eid (July 9, 1992)  
Imad Klab (January 6, 1994)  
Abd al-Munem Abu Hamid (May 31, 1994)  
Mohammad Abu Shaqra (October 7, 1995)  
Fathi al-Shiqaqi (October 26, 1995)  
Yahya Abd al-Latif Ayyash (January 5, 1996)  
Yasir Abd al-Ghani (February 24, 1997)  
Abdullah Salah (March 29, 1997)  
Khalil al-Sharif (September 4, 1997)  
Nasir Eraikat (December 9, 1998)  
Diya al-Tawil (March 27, 2001)  
Ayman Halaweh (October 22, 2001)  
Salih Talahmeh (December 1, 2003)  
Jamal al-Faqih (December 1, 2003)  
Ihab Abd al-Qader Abu Salim (September 9, 2003)  
Omar Mohammed Mustafa Abd al-Haleem (May 29, 2007)  
Abd al-Latif Ali Mohammad Hroub (March 31, 2008)

## **Commemorating Events**

We found constructive ways to observe national occasions. Land Day, which commemorates the 1976 shooting to death of six Palestinian citizens of Israel by the government for protesting the confiscation of land in the Galilee, was usually marked with demonstrations. One year, we decided to observe the occasion by planting trees on the new campus. The Israeli military governor approached me and asked if we had a permit to plant trees. I said that we did, although in truth it never occurred to me that anyone would ever require a permit to plant a tree. He didn't press the matter, and we continued with our business; students were so determined to join the effort that they braved checkpoints and used back roads when they found that the Israeli army had closed the main roads.

Similarly, we transformed observation of Balfour Day on November 2 into a day to help farmers during the olive-picking season. By making it part of the official University calendar and culture, we could observe a historical event in a way that connected students to the land and to rural communities.

Students developed annual activities through which their national feelings and resistance could be expressed. One such activity was the Palestinian wedding, a cultural celebration of the folklore associated with wedding celebrations; a book fair; and an annual exhibition, which included artifacts made by students who had been imprisoned.

## **Planning Ahead**

Against all odds, the University managed to continue to function and even to expand its offerings to meet the needs of a growing population. In addition, we attempted and to some extent succeeded in reversing the brain drain in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Keeping young students in the country also helped the steadfastness of the community and hence the peaceful resistance to occupation.

## ***Remembering the Early Days of the Occupation***

This is my thirty-second year at Birzeit University as an employee and my forty-first year since I enrolled as a student at Birzeit College in 1968.

What I remember most is the long history of confrontation between Birzeit and the Israeli occupation army. Two days after we came to the hostel (in the old campus) in 1968, we were ordered by the Israeli army to gather in the Post Office Square where we stayed the whole day sitting in the street while everybody was interrogated. I remember how students used to throw stones at soldiers who, in turn, fired tear gas canisters and live bullets and forced them to get back to campus; then negotiations would start on allowing the students to leave for their homes, which usually lasted until late in the evening. In between, much used to take place; we had to figure out how to protect students, how to feed them, how to give first-aid treatment to the injured, and much more.

I remember the sadness and anger we used to feel when a student was martyred as a result of those confrontations. I remember the anger I felt when I saw an Israeli soldier slap the Acting President after one of these confrontations. And I remember clearly when I became aware of the first intifada; I went with my colleagues one day to check what is happening in Birzeit, and we immediately realized that something unusual was taking place.

*Isa Masrieh (Class of 1970) is the director of the President's Office.*

## ***When the Pursuit of an Education Is an Illegal Activity***

It took me eight years to earn a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering because of successive closures of Birzeit University by the Israelis. The final closure during the first intifada lasted for more than four years. We attended "classes" in apartments in Ramallah and Birzeit. While students all over the world like to show their student ID



Israeli army threatens a peaceful University protest.

cards, we had to always remember to hide them so that we would not be mistreated at Israeli roadblocks.

*Jihad Mas'oud (Class of 1992) is a mechanical engineer working in Palestinian Standards Institution.*

## ***Qasr al-Hamra***

The acceptance letter was from Birzeit University and carried as its logo the olive tree. The class schedule also carried the same logo. But the places weren't University locations; they were Qasr al-Hamra Hotel in Ramallah and the YMCA in Ramallah. Neither resembled the University; they were the locations forced on us to continue the educational process. They were places used by Palestinians as a response to the policy of enforced ignorance implemented by the Israeli occupation authorities during the years of the first intifada, when Israel closed schools and universities.

My life as a Birzeit University student started with Qasr al-Hamra and faculty homes and student dormitories; I did not set foot in the campus until six months later, after the occupation authorities permitted the

University to reopen. This was not the first time the University had been closed; Birzeit University has a long history of closures and other Israeli military decisions that made the lives of students and staff miserable.

To state the least significant difference between Qasr al-Hamra and the University campus: In the former, you study in a punishing environment for 50 minutes in bitter cold temperatures, two or three times a day, even as we students possessed new, modern, and beautiful buildings and gardens and conveniences in the new campus. We were denied use of them because we were being denied our education and the ability to develop ourselves and live normal lives like students in other countries. This was one of the occupation's practices that reveals its aggressive core.

Attending classes at Qasr al-Hamra has special significance. The place is only a few hundred meters from the Ramallah city center, al-Manara, and the time is the beginning of the 1990s, during the peak of the first intifada and the popular movement against the occupation. Time mixes with place and imposes a role on you; you find yourself immersed in and interacting with public issues and not being restricted to a student role of preparing for an academic degree.

I entered the University for the first time six months after being accepted as a special student. I had known Birzeit University only as a participant in general activities, such as commemorating the launch of the various factions or the memorial services for martyrs, and occasionally on personal trips characteristic of teenagers.

Once I became a student there, the role was different. It wasn't that far removed from the refugee camp or the prison or political activity, all of which had been my identity before becoming a University student. The University melded these identities and made them one.

Among the tens of pictures and documents I have in my home that summarize my life at the University, there is a personal file concerning my imprisonment in 1995 for seventy days in Israeli interrogation centers. In this file one sees evidence of the University's intense concern

and involvement, through the Public Relations Office, which sent tens of letters to the United Nations, to B'Tselem, and to many international law organizations. The University lawyer Iliya Theodori visited me in all the centers in which I was held and represented me in military courts. And he supervised my release in the final hours.

This shows the philosophy of the University, which is not only about academics and tuitions but also about playing a leading national role. The University nurtures its students not only on its grounds but also wherever they are.

*Khalid Farraj (Class of 1996) is the associate director of the Institute for Palestine Studies, Palestine.*

### ***The Art of Waiting: Birzeit's Prisoners Committee in the 1980s***

Thinking about Birzeit's Prisoners Committee, an informal group of faculty and staff that worked throughout the 1980s to help students and staff who were unfortunate enough to come to the hostile attention of the Israeli military authorities, I resurrect the memory of a lost art in these busy post-Oslo times: the art of waiting. For while committee members also documented violations, contacted lawyers, and talked to anyone who would listen, the majority of our time, in those far-away days, was taken up with the critical task of waiting—for students under interrogation, for students on trial, for a staff member whose identification card regularly was seized. There was a particularly desolate and dirty tin and cement shack outside Ramallah Military Headquarters where we devotees of waiting sat on a scarred bench and carried out our craft, usually for many hours at a session. We only broke the monotony occasionally to ask the soldier in charge what was happening. He rarely replied. Occasionally, we and the waiting families would hear the sound of a bus approaching the gate and rush to catch a glimpse of the young prisoners inside.



When I came to Birzeit in the autumn of 1982 to work at the Public Relations Office—and with the Prisoners Committee—my predecessor, Anne Scott, had recently been deported, leaving behind much good will (at the University if not with the Israeli army) and a stack of mimeographed reports of human rights violations. But fortunately, there were others to teach me the art of waiting: a particular master was philosopher Hugh Harcourt; with a paperback of the *Iliad* or of Plato tucked in his knapsack, he was ready for any waiting challenge. English teacher Kathy Hess also had a Zen-like ability to sit serenely in the most miserable of military environments. Faculty members with foreign passports constituted the “waiting” division of the committee: we feared that those bearing only West Bank or Gaza identity cards would be subject to the same treatment as the students they were trying to defend. Indeed, the founding impetus for the Prisoners Committee came from a faculty member who was a released prisoner, Ghassan Harb.

Hanan Ashrawi, then head of the English Department and the informal chair of the Prisoners Committee whose home was conveniently located across from military headquarters, was always ready to spend endless hours telephoning lawyers and getting and conveying information from students, abilities she later shared with global audiences. In the early 1980s, having a telephone was in itself a priceless resource: on the old campus of the University, calls could only be made through the operator and a morning could be spent getting through to a lawyer just to find out where a student was being detained. In those golden days, we could (mostly) get to Jerusalem, and Rita Giacaman, who owned one of the few cars in our committee, would kindly leave her work in community health when emergencies required a visit to a lawyer’s office.

And emergencies there were—from the army’s closure of book exhibits, to closures of both campuses, to the drastic effects of Rabin’s “iron fist” policies in 1985, to the first deaths of students on campus, and finally to the “criminalization of education” during the first Palestinian intifada, with numerous students and staff under administrative detention, and the deportation of student leaders, just to name some of the events of those tumultuous years. Reports on human rights violations moved from

mimeograph to more professional publications from the Public Relations Office, international volunteers increased the capabilities to document and disseminate information about violations of academic freedom and human rights, and the Prisoners Committee eventually became the Human Rights Action Project. But in many ways, human rights activism at Birzeit University started in that broken-down tin hut outside the Ramallah Military Headquarters—and with the art of waiting.

*Penny Johnson is a researcher and co-editor of Institute of Women Studies’s Review of Women’s Studies. In the 1980s she worked with the Public Relations Office and wrote the quarterly reports “Palestinian Universities under Occupation” for the Journal of Palestine Studies.*

## ***Campus Means Camp for Us!***

Right away at Birzeit, I feel at home like I’d never felt before, and that my life has expanded by almost 2,000 new people, the number of the student population then. And I feel more Palestinian! I am not just with my relatives and classmates from Ramallah and Jerusalem. My new classmates, Mohammad, Ibrahim, Ghada, Nasser, Suheir, Ra’fat, and many others, are from various parts of Palestine. I am meeting people who speak different dialects, coming from Palestinian villages, refugee camps and cities I’ve only known by name in the past. Not only the student body was a coming-home of a people, but also our professors represented that as well. Carmela, the math instructor, was from inside the Green Line; Marwan, another math teacher, has just returned from the US to teach us. Zaki, the chemistry instructor, had studied in Russia. Birzeit University campus felt like a camp, for us all Palestinian refugees of one kind or another, taking shelter in the brilliant hope of education.

Less than a month after starting, however, the Israeli army closed the campus and declared the University a no-reach area. Two months passed without classes. I read my science books and learned little beyond what I had known in high school. The chemistry and physics and all of the complex equations were as complex as my feelings trying to predict the future of my education. How will we finish the semester? Some of the

teachers and students snuck into campus pretending that they needed to get this or that item from their offices, and taught a few things in the hallways to students who followed them. Some met on the streets, in homes, at coffee houses, but it was difficult to grasp it all. And my mother insisted that I, a young woman, could not go to people's homes for classes.

Two months later, we returned, and exams were to be conducted right away. But after a short time, the University was closed again. The first semester in Birzeit lasted from October to June. Some of my classmates dropped out and sought other universities.

And the second semester started up in June with hardly any break. I shifted to literature. At least I could do my readings alone, I told myself. I could write alone. I would have less need for my teachers during closures, which promised to be numerous.

Transferring to literature took me from the new campus to the old campus, a move I celebrated greatly. Even on the days I did not have classes, I still came to Birzeit. Sitting with classmates in the courtyard of the old Nasir house, the heart of the old campus, and discussing poems and stories and words was like sitting in the hand of happiness. And we talked about harsh events such as the Sabra and Shatila massacres of Palestinians in Lebanon and the aftermath events that happened while we tried to study for our second and third semesters. We debated the news, we raged, we comforted each other. We wrote graffiti and songs. I took on work to record readings for blind students. And on many days, we went on academic strikes or demonstrated against the Israeli occupation.

The University was closed again and our education was interrupted, but many of us managed to graduate because our teachers at Birzeit often acted like our future was their future. No efforts to educate us were held back. And we all had a desire for education and succeeding forever burning in our souls and lighting up the dark moments.

*Ibtisam Barakat (Class of 1986) is the acclaimed author of the international memoir, Tasting the Sky, A Palestinian Childhood (2007).*

## ***Events of December 4, 1986***

In the fall of 1986, the Israeli occupation tried to enforce a new order, which would require students from Gaza to obtain a permit to be able to stay in the West Bank and study at the University. This order would provide the legal authority for the occupation to deport any student from Gaza who didn't have a permit, and so all students refused to cooperate. Because many Birzeit University (BZU) students resided in Ramallah, checkpoints between Ramallah and Birzeit were often established randomly, with soldiers checking students' ID cards to catch those without permits.

Since becoming a BZU student, I lived with my brother Ghassan in Ramallah. On December 4, 1986, we learned that a checkpoint between Ramallah and BZU had been set up and that Gazan students were not allowed to pass to the new and old BZU campuses. Students on campus were demonstrating in solidarity with those who were unable to reach campus, and several people had been wounded and transported to Ramallah Government Hospital. Ghassan and I decided that since we couldn't go to campus, we would head to the hospital to donate blood and help the wounded.

At the hospital we learned that two students, Jawad Abu Salmieh from Khan Younis Refugee Camp and Saeb Dhahab of Gaza, had been killed. In those days, Israeli soldiers often confiscated the bodies of the martyrs; the military claimed that it wanted to conduct an autopsy to confirm the cause of death, but we believed that the real intention was to remove internal organs and otherwise desecrate the bodies. Since we strongly believe that martyrs must be buried in their own clothes and without being washed, we decided that we had to remove the bodies from the hospital as quickly as possible and deliver them to the families, so that they could mourn their sons with dignity.

Several of us broke into the morgue and placed the two bodies in cars waiting outside the hospital. We got the bodies to my apartment, and I tried to go back and help those who were trying to evacuate the

wounded to homes in the nearby al-Amari Refugee Camp to prevent their arrest while in the hospital. But the military had surrounded the hospital and it was impossible to enter, so I went home and waited for my brother.

Soon I learned that he had been arrested while trying to leave the hospital. When we evacuated the bodies we didn't have a specific plan for how to transport them to their families. With my brother arrested, I realized that this responsibility was now mine.

I feared the consequences if the military got a sense of their whereabouts and attacked the apartment. I recall trying not to stay inside the apartment for more than five minutes at a time to evade being caught with the bodies in case the soldiers knew and attacked the apartment.

I contacted some students from Gaza, and they volunteered to transport Saeb's body to his family. They brought a white Fiat to the apartment, and we wrapped the body with a dark blanket. Saeb was tall, and we could not bend his knees to sit the body in the back seat, so we laid his head behind the driver's seat; his wrapped feet were hanging outside the car window. As we drove away in the late afternoon, the wind unwrapped the blanket and his feet were visible outside the window all the way. Rather than stopping and rewrapping the body, we kept driving. We delivered the body to the students who knew Saeb well, and I went back to the apartment to guard the second body.

I had known Jawad very well since we graduated the same year from the Khan Younis high school in 1982. As I opened the apartment's door, I saw Jawad's body on the bed in the living room and observed that his face was very bright and peaceful as if he were alive.

I had talked to activists in Gaza about securing the body to his family and the plan was set: around midnight a commercial truck for transporting crushed stones would park in the street under my second floor apartment. We would load the body in the back of the truck and

then the truck would be filled with crushed stones covering the body, allowing secure transportation across the checkpoints to his family.

The head of the Islamic Bloc at BZU learned of Jawad's death and he came by; together we prayed on Jawad's body. He asked what I was going to do, and I assured him that everything under control. He left with great sadness and we both had tears in our eyes.

However, members of the Student Council arrived at the apartment and wanted to take Jawad to a press conference that had been called. I argued with them but they assured me that they would secure his transport to his family in Khan Younis.

They didn't. Two days later, the Israeli military in Khan Younis delivered Jawad's body to his family. I later learned that after the press conference, the students didn't know what to do. They placed Jawad's body in the back of a pickup truck and left it in a place where it was discovered by the Israeli army.

As for Saeb, I learned later that the students who took him were able to position the body sitting down in the middle of the back seat in a Mercedes taxi and wearing sunglasses and a baseball cap on the head, and they leaned his head on the shoulders of the person next to him. As they approached the Erez checkpoint, they handed Saeb's ID card to the soldier and told him that Saeb was feeling sick all day and was asleep. The soldier gave back their ID cards and they went on their way. Thanks to those brave youths, Saeb's family was spared the agony that Jawad's family endured.

Looking back at these events as an adult, it breaks my heart to think of a generation of kids who had to bear not only the deaths of so many of their friends but also the responsibility to care for them after death.

*Mohammad Abu-Orf (Class of 1987) immigrated to the United States in 1989 and is the biosolids national practice leader of AECOM Water.*





## CHAPTER 7

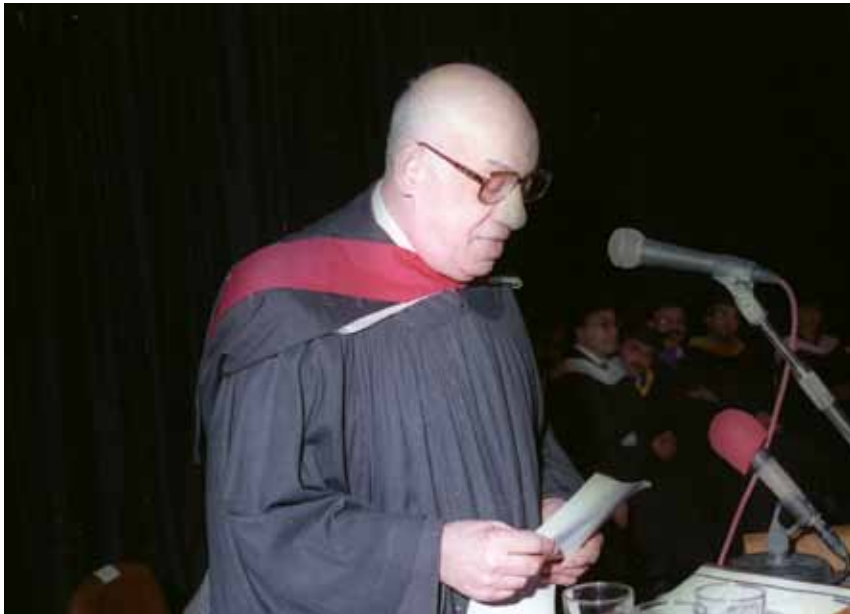
# Fundraising for a New Campus

*Hanna Nasir*

The financial support that Birzeit University has received over the years from individuals, foundations, and governments has made possible the construction of the campus and provided sustainability to various programs as well as student scholarships. In this essay, I want to focus on the activity that occupied me during my long involuntary exile from Palestine between 1974 and 1993 and in the years since my return to Palestine: fundraising in the Arab world to build the University campus. But I was not alone in this endeavor. Others shared in this process, and the lovely campus on the hilly outskirts of Birzeit is a testimony to the teamwork of Birzeit personnel as well as the generosity of several of its Palestinian and Arab friends. What follows is not an exhaustive account, nor is it necessarily chronological. It aims at providing snapshots and sometimes a narrative of some of the processes that enabled Birzeit to build its present campus.

The groundbreaking ceremony for the new campus took place in 1976. The first building to be constructed was the Science Building, and partial funding for that came from Bread for the World, a German foundation. The rest of the funds came from various Palestinian and Arab donors. The building was completed in 1981. That was an encouraging beginning, but there was a whole new campus to be created.

In early 1977, I took our concept plans for the new campus to Saudi Arabia, where I met our first major donor in the Arab world. Omar Aggad, a businessman in the fields of investment and communication, is a native of Jaffa, forced by the Nakba to leave Palestine and to take residence in an Arab country.



Abdel Mohsin Al-Qattan giving an address after receiving an honorary doctorate degree from the University, 1999. He donated the construction cost of the Kamal Nasir Auditorium.

I got a good sense of his serious, no-nonsense approach when I walked into my first meeting with him and saw that he had set a timer for ten minutes. I gave him the whole story of Birzeit in less than five minutes and presented him with a brochure that listed various projects; the Engineering School was one of our priorities with a cost estimate of \$2.4 million. He promised to look into the matter. I returned to Jordan with a promise, not a pledge, but I was hopeful. His brother had studied at Birzeit as a high school student, and he was full of praise for what Birzeit had done over the years.

Two months later, Mr. Aggad called me in Amman and told me that he and his wife would commit to building the Engineering School and that I would soon receive a letter to confirm that verbal pledge. That was a major breakthrough.

Our estimates for the construction turned out to be more than \$3.5 million short. The University was in the early stages of its construction programs, and we were not fully experienced in costing analysis.

However, Mr. Aggad saw the project through until the end. In the early 1990s, he visited the campus and expressed his pride and pleasure at seeing for the first time the impressive building that bore his name, the Omar Aggad Faculty of Engineering.

The next major donation came from Saudi Arabia as well—but this time from its government. Friends in Saudi Arabia suggested that it would be worthwhile for a delegation from Birzeit University to meet with Prince Fahd, who at that time was heir apparent to the throne. During the summer of 1978, both the chairman of the Board of Trustees, Tawfik Abu Al-Saud, and I went to Riyadh for that specific mission. We asked for a meeting with Prince Fahd and were told that we would hear from his office soon. Forty-two days later, the call came telling us that the meeting would be held the next day. The Chief of Protocol told us that we had a maximum of fifteen minutes, and we agreed to be brief in our request for support.

The meeting started with the Chairman saying that he came from Jerusalem and brought greetings from the Holy City. The Prince began to describe his interest and attachment to Jerusalem and Palestine. The meeting ended without us having the chance to say a word about Birzeit or about our mission.

I called the Chief of Protocol the next day and asked if there were any results of the meeting; he said he had none. My goodness—forty-two days with no results.

The next day, however, the Chief of Protocol called us and told us that we had a check for \$5 million! Unbelievable. That was much more than we expected, but it showed the generosity of the Prince. The donation was used to support the general construction and infrastructure of the campus as well as the running expenses for several years—a much-needed support at that stage of the University's development.

On subsequent visits to Riyadh, I met two other Palestinian businessmen, Zein Mayassi and Walid Kattan, who had a successful construction and



development company. They showed tremendous interest in Birzeit and pledged \$800,000 to support the construction of the administration building. Walid Kattan later took on a new project: the establishment of the Computer Center that bore the name of his wife Helen, and he recently supported the establishment of the Walid & Helen Kattan Building (Administration II). At a later stage, we worked with him to draw up concept plans and programs for a science museum on campus, but the 2009 global financial turmoil temporarily halted the project.

On another visit to Saudi Arabia, Omar Aggad introduced me to a Saudi friend of his, Sheikh Hamad al-Hinti, who decided to build the Commerce & Economics Building (estimated cost: \$3 million). He paid the amount on the spot; a fatalist, he explained that he wanted to honor his pledge in case something happened to him the next day! The building was completed in 1993 and Sheikh Hamad decided to name it in honor of his friend, Abdul Rahman Juraysi. I was saddened to learn of Sheikh Hamad's death a few months after the inauguration of the building.

Another major arena for fundraising for Birzeit University was Kuwait, where during my first trip, I had the pleasure of meeting with the don of the Palestinian society there, Abdel Mohsin Al-Qattan (Walid's older brother). He showed interest in supporting the construction of a facility in memory of his close friend (and my cousin) Kamal Nasir, a political leader and poet who was assassinated in Beirut in 1973 by Israeli commandos. His tribute to his friend was the Kamal Nasir Auditorium, the main meeting hall on campus, which seats 288 and has an exhibition display space that is heavily used for University as well as public activities.

During another visit to Kuwait, I attended a conference sponsored by the Arab American University Graduates (a US-based organization) and heard a great presentation by Kutayba Alghanim, a Kuwaiti businessman who had the manufacturing license for metal building structures (Kirby). I asked to see him and told him that we would like to build our library in the manner he described. He responded enthusiastically and sent a

team of experts from Italy to Birzeit to construct the metal framework. I visited him again later and asked him for more support to complete the building (essentially for the stone cover of the metal works), and he immediately approved. The building is the University's main library, and it bears the name of his father, Yusuf Alghanim.

During that same visit to Kuwait, I was introduced to Dr. Dawood Musaad Al-Saleh. He used to work in real estate, and his brother was the editor of a national newspaper. His interest in Palestine was strong and he made a generous donation in the name of his father toward the cost of a wing in the Science Building. Later he became governor of Kuwait City; I had occasion to meet him again in 2008, after he had retired from government work. He continued to be committed to the Palestinian cause and donated generously to a library on campus, which now bears his father's name.

In the early 1980s, a delegation of Board of Trustees members, led by its chairman, Dr. Sadi al-Faqih, went to the Emirates and met with Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the governor of Dubai, who approved a grant of \$2.4 million to build a community center for students and services. The University converted the money to Jordanian dinars (the currency used to pay construction bills). It promptly lost a lot of its value, and we had to stop construction midway.

My nineteen years of exile came to an end in 1993. It would be hard to describe my pleasure upon my return or at seeing the campus in person, after years of knowing it only through photographs. Actually seeing the campus was an emotional and overwhelming experience. There were six main buildings: the Faculty of Science Building, the Omar Aggad Faculty of Engineering Building, the Administration Building, The Kamal Nasir Auditorium, the Yusuf Alghanim Library, and the Commerce & Economics Building (in its last stages) as well as the unfinished structure of the Maktoum Building. Not bad for a beginning, but the University could not stop at this stage, and more space was needed to accommodate the increase in student enrollment and program offerings.



Naseeb Shaheen at the inauguration of the Faculty of Arts Building, 2007. Photo: Yasser Darwish.



Hasib Sabbagh inaugurates the Diana Tamari Sabbagh Center, with the chairman of the Board of Trustees, Dr. Darwish Nazzal, and President Hanna Nasir, 2000. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

The first project I tackled upon my return was to get funds to complete the Maktoum Building. I wrote to Sheikh Maktoum and explained the situation, and he graciously provided the funds we needed. The building was completed and inaugurated in 1999.

Another job that needed to be tackled was to build a University clinic that could handle emergencies and routine medical consultations. Azeez Shaheen, a well-known philanthropist from Ramallah, donated the funds; the clinic was completed in March 1998 (unfortunately after the death of Mr. Shaheen at age 101). At the inauguration, his son, Dr. Naseeb Shaheen, a professor of English literature at the University of Memphis in Tennessee, made a personal pledge to provide funds for the school of graduate studies. It was duly built and inaugurated in 2001. He passed away last year in Memphis, far from his beloved hometown of Ramallah.

Shouky Shaheen, another son of Azeez Shaheen who lives in the US, also donated generously for the construction of the Faculty of Arts Building, a much-needed facility, in the name of his late father. Construction funding was supplemented by other donors: Lubna Olayan, Marwan Sayeh, Bassam Abu Rudeina, Mr. and Mrs. Karim Ajlouny, Mohammad Bamieh, Mohammad Tarbush, and members of the second generation of the Shaheen family, David Shaheen and John and Angela Shaheen. With the completion of this building (inaugurated in 2007), the University is proud to have three buildings on campus that exist because of Azeez Shaheen and his sons' commitment to education in Palestine.

Another great benefactor of Birzeit (and other Palestinian institutions) was Hasib Sabbagh, who was originally from Safad. (Sadly, he passed away during the writing of this essay.) He was a main partner in the construction company CCC, one of the leading construction companies in the world. He donated generously to establish the Diana Tamari Sabbagh Center in memory of his wife, who passed away several years ago. His business partner, Said Khoury, also donated for the Development Studies Building, which was inaugurated in June 2009. It houses the Center for Development Studies, the Institute of Community & Public Health, and the Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies.

The University needed a soccer field and Munir Atallah, a prominent businessman originally from Jerusalem and presently living in Amman (and whom I knew while we were students at the American University of Beirut), provided funding for it; the field was inaugurated in October 2004. Soon thereafter, we succeeded in locating financing for a gymnasium for indoor athletic activities.

In 1996, Omar Aggad visited the campus again, bringing with him Mohammad Imran Bamieh, a Jaffa native who was very impressed with Birzeit and donated toward various facilities over a number of years. However, his major donation was for the gymnasium (along with a friend of his, Walid Kayyali). The building was inaugurated in 2006. He recently donated to construct a power station, which is much needed because of the increased number of built-up facilities on campus.

In 1998, Mr. and Mrs. Yousef Nawas, who own an international travel agency in California, donated generously toward a scholarship fund for students from his native city of Taybeh as well as for a laboratory and part of the museum and fine arts gallery. Mrs. Nawas is from Lebanon and I discovered recently that her father, the late Hanna Jurdaq, was a well-known professor of mathematics at the American University of Beirut and had actually taught my father in 1914!

Recently, the Kuwaiti government helped us to build an annex to the main library that added about 25% more space to it. The Islamic Development Bank in Saudi Arabia was able to provide us with a long-term loan to build housing for female students, close to the main campus itself and under University supervision. The Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development helped us over the last twenty years or so in a water utilization project to make use of rainwater. The project consisted of building various underground water wells and a water tower with the infrastructure needed to utilize rainwater. It has been a significant project because it helped us reduce our dependence on commercial water sources.



The Qatari, Palestinian, and French Ministers of Justice at the inauguration of the Institute of Law, funded by the French and Qatari governments, 1998. Photo: Yasser Darwish.



Inauguration of the Commerce Building, 1993. The construction costs were donated by Abdul Rahman al-Juraysi. Photo: Yasser Darwish.





Omar Aggad, recipient of an honorary doctorate degree, 1995. University President Hanna Nasir is on the left; Public Relations Office Director Albert Aghazarian is on the right. Mr. Aggad funded the construction of the Engineering building, which bears his name.



University President Nabeel Kassis gives alumnus Talal Nasriddin a University award, 2006. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

Several individuals helped us establish computer labs and infrastructural support for the roads on campus as well as classrooms and halls. I would like to acknowledge some of these individuals. One is the late Dr. Kamal Shair of Dar Al-Handasah in Jordan. His firm is a leading international consulting firm on the international level and his support was admirable. Others include Salim Edde, who owns a company specializing in financial forecasting in Beirut with offices all over the world; Bassam Jabr, a successful Palestinian businessman living in Saudi Arabia; Samir Aweidah, a Palestinian businessman living in the Emirates; and finally Awni and Hashem Farsakh, two brothers from Birzeit working in the Emirates. Awni owns and runs an auditing firm, and Hashem (a high school classmate of mine) owns and runs an engineering consulting firm.

In 2008, we were happy to inaugurate the Najjad Zeenni Center of Excellence in IT at Birzeit. The project was funded and executed by ANERA through a generous grant from Najjad Zeenni, a Palestinian living in the Emirates and an entrepreneur in the field of constructing platforms and facilities for oil and gas fields situated under the seabed. It is interesting to note that he funded similar projects at two other Palestinian universities. Also that year, and through the efforts of President Nabeel Kassis, we received a grant from the French Government to add an annex to the Institute of Law. It enabled the Institute to almost double its space area.

Although most of the fundraising for construction has been done by the chairpersons of the University Board of Trustees or the University presidents, I must mention two cases where faculty were instrumental in getting funds for construction. One is the Institute of Law, which was inaugurated in 1998 and where funds were received by the governments of France and Qatar. The funding process for that project came through the efforts of Dr. Camille Mansour, the dean of the Institute of Law at the time. The second is the Institute of Women's Studies Building, which was funded by the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce in the year 2004. Funds came through the efforts of Mrs. Eileen Kuttub, who was then director of the Women's Studies Program.

In December 2009, the University completed the Nursing School & Allied Health Science Building through a generous grant from Ghalib Younis, a former teacher at Birzeit in the early fifties who established a successful contracting company in Kuwait. Dr. Kassis learned of his interest in developing the nursing profession and contacted him with a project proposal, which resulted in a grant that exceeded \$3.7 million.

Presently we are involved in the construction of the Faculty of Education. It is a 5,000 square meter structure that is being built through funding from a number of friends whom I had met recently in Amman. They have tremendous compassion for Birzeit and refer to themselves for this specific project as “Friends of Birzeit University in the Arab World.” The building is expected to be completed in July 2010.

Recently we received a generous pledge from Mr. Munib Masri, a prominent Palestinian businessman and philanthropist, for the construction of a much-needed building for the Faculty of Information and Technology. We are now in the process of finalizing the design, and we expect the construction to start around July 2010.

As indicated in the introduction, this essay provides just a snapshot of the generous benefactors who have helped provide the space in which thousands of Palestinians under occupation receive a first-class education. It is certainly a story of toil and success. The University is still looking for funding for two major projects: the Law & Public Administration Building and a large auditorium to handle the increasing number of students and the various University programs (internal and public). Once we build these two structures, then we can be assured that the first important phase in the construction of the campus has been completed and we will have to start the planning for the second phase. But that would be another mission, and hopefully another success story to be told.



Inauguration of a student garden financed by the Federal Republic of Germany, 2007. Photo: Yasser Darwish.



The Najjad Zeenni Information Technology Center of Excellence (NZITCE), established to promote research and development, innovation, training, and consulting services in Information technology and to form a bridge between the University and the local community. The generous donation from Najjad Zeenni not only covered the construction, furnishing, and equipping of the Center but also provided a startup fund for administration and overhead costs for two years. Photo: Yasser Darwish.







## CHAPTER 8

# Birzeit and the International Community

*Roger Heacock*

**B**irzeit was from the outset an indigenous project, and this continued to be the case as it developed into a university; it has come to combine the qualities of a genuinely national Palestinian and Arab institution with the openness of a global cultural crossroads. The University was created against the Israeli occupation, not thanks to it: it was very important to find ways of leapfrogging over the obstacles. And so the University always welcomed its international links. These were vital to its survival and development and important to its international partners, who had taken up what they considered a noble cause.

Birzeit has thus long combined characteristics of the eminently local in its strong commitment to the community with the decidedly global. Localism and internationalism, in this case, fit together well, and international work camps based on the campus and extending into the community have a long, distinguished, and continuing history.

The University was for decades one of the actors and loci of the Palestinian cause, domestically, regionally, and internationally. As such it entertained relations with those around the world who supported its mission. These have included committed individuals, institutions (usually universities), and regions. The latter include people from



International conference on diplomacy, hosted by Birzeit University in 2007. Left to right: Alain Rémy, French consul general in Jerusalem; Dr. Roger Heacock, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies; and Jorge Torres Pereira, representative of Portugal to the Palestinian National Authority. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

areas that easily identify with Palestine's situation like the Italian South (the Mezzogiorno), Scotland, and South Africa. Other support came from organizations, whether governments, political parties, or NGOs, motivated by their progressive politics, such as French municipalities. And until the end of the cold war, the Soviet bloc's support for third-

world liberation likewise led to the strengthening of ties with the University's faculty and students.

English had been the main language of instruction ever since Birzeit became a junior college, but this gradually changed in the early 1980s with the process of Arabization that accompanied Birzeit's rapid growth. As the university of its students, it adapted to the arrival of more and more village and camp dwellers and helped them rise from their subaltern origins to become mature and forward-looking intellectuals, as well as Palestine's national and cultural elites. Relations with the outside world, in a context of increasing strictures on the ability of students to travel, played a signal role in ensuring the sustainability and success of this process. One would be hard put to find a comparable institution of higher learning in the Arab world and beyond: one that exists in service to the best students, regardless of social origin, while fully attuned to the requirements of maintaining and strengthening its position as a significant actor in the global academy.

## Role of Foreign Faculty

International faculty members played an important pedagogical role in the early period that must be remembered. Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory were several years from being able to staff the University fully, and the possibility of bringing expatriates back was then even more than today severely limited by the Israeli occupation authorities. Various people with an internationalist outlook performed vital, multidisciplinary tasks, such as Kathy Glavanis (sociology/anthropology), Peter Heath (Arabic literature), Leighton Pratt (English), and Tomis Kapitan (philosophy). One who deserves particular mention is Hugh Harcourt, a professor of philosophy and cultural studies from 1977 to 1986, who helped to build academic programs as well as train numerous future faculty members (some of whom had previously studied with him at the American University of Beirut). After the mid-1980s, those who left did not need to be replaced.

## International Solidarity

The Public Relations Office was, in the pre-Oslo period, the nodal point of concerted action to protect the life of the community and the very existence of the institution. Albert Aghazarian, a Palestinian Armenian Jerusalemite, was long its voice. The office (often a virtual one, because of the many prolonged military ordered closures) became the center from which the team he led (and which counted another of Birzeit's vital internationals from that period, Penny Johnson) sounded the alarm bells that rang throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the region, and the international arena. It was through that office in large part that solidarity passed. How many delegations, marches, and demonstrations were organized, and in how many different languages did Albert and others address them? Media coverage of University activities was also organized from the office, for a long time the hub of its international relations, including academic ties to other universities. The Public Relations Office was also the vortex through which ran the concerted effort of local and international support of students and staff indicted or imprisoned by the Israeli occupation, support coming from Birzeit's own academic staff and world legal authorities, including the Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists.

International ties were also important in keeping Birzeit open and in obtaining its reopening on the many occasions when it was shut down. Students because of their backgrounds, their limited means, and the restrictions placed upon their movements could not take the lead: faculty members and administrative staff were constantly reaching out to their foreign contacts, most notably in the academic world, who in the name of the right to education as guaranteed by international legal instruments, fought to keep Birzeit's educational but also national mission alive.

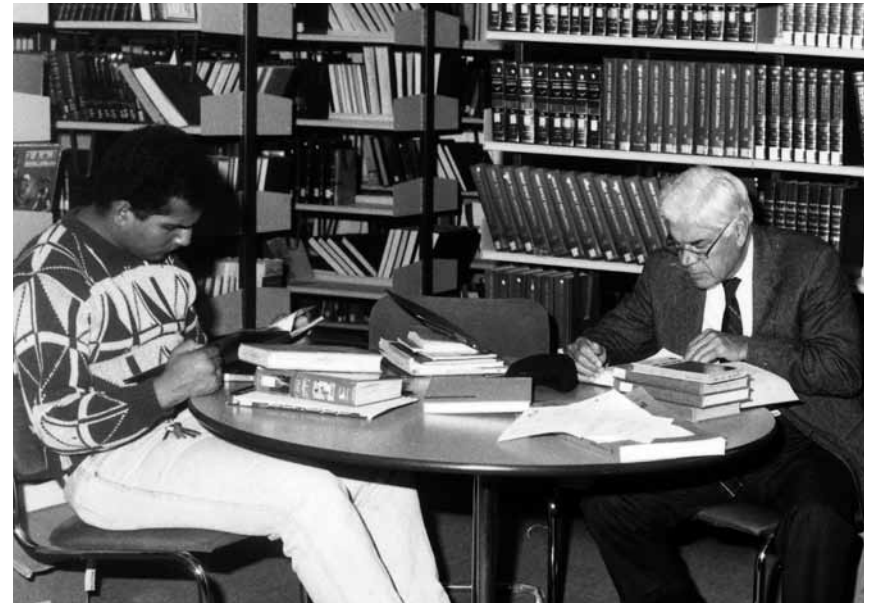
Following the 1991 Gulf War, public and academic relations came to be separated. In this new phase, military-ordered closures became rare (although arrests, curfews, and roadblocks have continued to dog

the University to the present time). This fact, as well as a gradually relaxing political climate and environment (in which the frustrations of occupation have never ceased to be the major issue confronting society and its institutions), brought about structural changes in Birzeit's international relations. These changes were also caused in no small part by the broad international support that Birzeit had acquired and its growing academic reputation. Finally, the new orientations were due to reflections on what had gone before and a determination not to allow a new regime of closures and strikes to overshadow the educational process again.

## From Solidarity to Academic Cooperation

International scientific cooperation had originally been linked and perforce subordinated to considerations of solidarity. Now there was a gradual shift, even before the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993, one that included the role played by Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, who returned to join the Political Science Department in 1991. His close friend and colleague Edward Said became a frequent guest, lecturing and taking part in conferences. The first intifada and its violent repression (1987-93) had, because of the global support it generated for the Palestinian cause, and through the various links established over time, paradoxically occasioned a marked increase in international academic ties. One signal example was the Palestinian-European Academic Cooperation for Education (PEACE) program launched in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War, a shared initiative originating in contacts between Birzeit and the Coimbra Group, made up of the oldest and most distinguished universities in Europe. UNESCO became this consortium's sponsor, thus creating a model triangular partnership. Thereafter, mere survival was increasingly trumped by quantitative and especially qualitative agreements and events in the fields of teaching, research, and the exchange of students, staff, and ideas.

Beginning in 1992, yearly University-wide international academic conferences in the sciences and the humanities were organized; they



Dr. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod (right) in the main library. Edward Said on Abu-Lughod: "Nearly every Arab American who fights against racial stereotyping, the ideological racism suffered by Palestinians, and the perennial antagonism to Islam, owes Ibrahim a tremendous debt. He began the fight, and for most of us, he made fight possible in the first place. ... In the unfolding story of Palestine, Ibrahim, I believe, will remain a model of what it is to have been dedicated to an idea—not as something to bow down to, but to live, and to re-examine constantly." Photo: Yasser Darwish.



MIT Professor Noam Chomsky addresses Birzeit students, 1997. Dr. Muhsin Yousef (Department of History and Archeology) is on the left; University President Hanna Nasir is on the right. Photo: Yasser Darwish.





Thanks to its maturing links to the world academy, Birzeit has published journals, monographs, and books, in Arabic and English, with contributions by local scholars as well as leading international scholars. Examples of these works include *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads* (1990); *The Frankish Wars and their Influence on Palestine* (1994); *Equivocal Poetry: Landscape Perspectives on Palestine* (1999); *The Becoming of Returnee States: Palestine, Armenia, Bosnia* (2000); *Political Transitions in the Arab World* (2001-2002); and *The Palestinian Refugees in Comparative Perspective* (2008). Photo: Yasser Darwish.

had a broad variety of themes and were intended to advance knowledge while remaining relevant to Palestine's particular situation and long-term needs. These became international events, with the participation of researchers from all over the country and the world, alongside Birzeit faculty. On the one hand, they gave rise to an impressive set of publications, and on the other, they cemented Birzeit's international ties. The University became a privileged destination for students and professors from abroad seeking places and partners for their research across faculties and disciplines. These regular international academic

and scientific events and ensuing publications continued throughout the second intifada (2000-2004), even when the road to the campus was pockmarked by military roadblocks: many foreign professors, researchers and authors, including for example the Nobel prize-winning novelist José Saramago, participated in conferences or workshops.

Today, Birzeit is ever more deeply involved with the international community. There is no need to recite the list of universities throughout the world with which we entertain ongoing academic relations. The University President, the Vice-President for Academic Affairs (Office of Academic Development), the deans, the departments, and the students themselves are all involved in building international ties. Their number is growing, greatly facilitating mobility, research, and publication for staff and students alike. Notable among the bilateral and multilateral programs in which the University participates are the multinational, multi-institutional Tempus academic networks involving European universities sponsored by the European Union, as well as agreements with Norway, Switzerland, and Canada among others, and with a consortium of French universities. Birzeit's ties to universities in the global South have also been on the rise in the past few years, and there is ongoing cooperation with scholars in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. This is a purposefully non-exhaustive list, an impressionistic overview of the remarkable contemporary development of the University's international academic relations.

## Opportunities and Threats

The current situation, characterized by the globalized network of ties in which Birzeit has become involved, poses both a series of opportunities and a number of challenges or even threats. The advantages are there for all to see, by way of the proliferation of programs, centers, and institutes dealing with essential questions in the general field of rights such as law, gender, and democracy, but also physics, information technology, water, and nursing in the area of science, and international studies, public health, and media studies in the social sciences. The challenges, interestingly

enough, are closely related to the opportunities and have to do with the lure of foreign funding and international agendas that do not always coincide with those of the Palestinian people at a given historical moment. Material temptations make the offers of the well-meaning members of the world academy and its various private and governmental backers difficult to resist under the best of circumstances (and this is notoriously true in universities everywhere). The threat is that of increasing dependence on international benefactors and even potential alienation from the indigenous social base. It is a complicated formula for the faculty and the administration to gauge, in deciding whether or not to move forward with a given project. The record, thus far, is largely positive, and Birzeit's policy is clear: international support is actively sought and welcomed insofar as it can be reconciled with our own priorities.

In the field of academic exchange and scientific cooperation, the same general principle applies, and here it is clearly expressed in terms of reciprocity: Birzeit will underwrite projects in which it can give as well (and in some intangible ways, as much) as it takes. We work as members of transnational teams or networks, where movement goes in all directions. The days when Birzeit was the mere recipient of international assistance by way of solidarity or academic support are now behind us. Solidarity is not dead (the British Friends of Birzeit University organization is a good example), and given the likely length of the path ahead on the road to self-determination for Palestine, its people, and



South Africa Minister of Intelligence Ronald Kasrils addresses the Birzeit University community, 2007. Mr. Kasrils has been outspoken about the similarities between Israeli policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and South African apartheid. Photo: Muhammad Awad.

its educational institutions, it is not likely to fade away soon. However, Birzeit University has also always asserted its own agency, and through its long and painful struggle over the past four decades, including a determination to strengthening and diversifying ties with members of the academic community worldwide, it has become a vibrant and coequal member of the international academy.



Acting President Gabi Baramki denounces the closure of the University at a press conference in 1984. Public Relations Office Director Albert Aghazarian is on the right.

## *Early Supporters*

When Hanna Nasir was expelled in 1974, a very prominent Israeli physics professor, Daniel Amit, offered to teach in his place as a gesture of solidarity. Birzeit became a sort of polarizing beacon in Israel; the Left was very divided as is the case usually but it found in Birzeit a kind of common denominator. I think that the role of Jews who stood up for Birzeit must be part of the record. [The Israeli Committee for Solidarity with Birzeit University was formed as a response to the 1980 Military Order 854, and Amit was “absolutely critical” to its establishment, according to a fellow committee member. - Editor’s note.]

In 1982, after the second Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Paul Kessler, a physics professor from College de France, and Sonya Dayan, a sociologist from the University of Paris, visited us. Kessler had been working for the freedom of Soviet academics and Jews, and by 1982 he realized that he couldn’t support freedom of education for the Soviets and not do the same for the Palestinians. So he established Association de solidarite avec Birzeit. He had been told by the Israeli minister of science at the time, Yuval Neeman (who was also one of the founders of the Tehiya party and an opponent of the Camp David Accords), that although the two could not agree politically, he would look into specific incidents that were brought to his attention. And Kessler did just that, writing with meticulous precision about specific violations of Palestinian education and presenting them to Neeman for consideration.

*Albert Aghazarian (Class of 1970) was the director of the Birzeit University Public Relations Office between 1979 and 2002.*



## *A Society Making Its Own Destiny*

The idea of going to Birzeit University started after my wife, Nancy, returned from the 8th International Volunteer Work Camp held in Nazareth, with tales of active international solidarity with the Palestinian people. Teaching at Birzeit University would give me the chance to express my own solidarity and contribute concretely to the well-being of a people chaffing under an illegal and brutal occupation. My family and I arrived in the fall of 1985 and stayed for four years, a period that I consider, despite the ever present hardship, as one of the most exciting and satisfying periods of my life.

Birzeit University had become the premiere national institution of higher learning. The quality of its faculty was outstanding despite the ever present obstacles that Israel hurls in its path. Its solid reputation was instrumental in cementing agreements with several universities, such as the University of Amsterdam. Toward the end of November 1987, I came to the United States to attend the Middle Eastern Studies Association (MESA) conference where I presented research I had just completed. On the way back, I had a layover in Amsterdam, where I delivered a lecture to a gathering of students and faculty at the University of Amsterdam. Later that evening I had another meeting with a smaller group of faculty. Later that night still, I met with a student group that had gathered for one of their planned activities. One of them informed me then that a hang-glider successfully penetrated the northern borders, the very incident that led to a series of tragic events in early December that became the timeline to the rise of the intifada.

The Israeli military authorities closed Birzeit University not long after that. The University administration, the faculty, and the students had to deal with yet another closure and the consequent challenge of how to minimize the effects of this latest disruption on higher education. Eventually, houses and apartments were rented around Ramallah. Bedrooms became classrooms, kitchens were transformed into laboratories, living rooms became seminar halls. Dynamic and flexible solutions were called for and Birzeit delivered. The creative and self-



Israeli roadblocks make it necessary for University students, faculty, and staff to find alternate routes to campus. Photo: Yasser Darwish.



"A cell of illegal education," one of many improvised during the fifty-one-month closure of Birzeit University.

### **Two Decades of Occupation: From Resistance to Uprising**

March 25-26, 1988

The conference program was put together by Jamal Nassar (program committee chair), Musa Budeiri (former chair), Mahmoud Ibrahim, Ziad Abu Amr, Isa Masrieh, Albert Aghazarian, Penny Johnson, and George Giacaman. International participants included John Bunzl, Austrian Institute for Strategic Studies; Niels Butenschon, University of Oslo; Jean-Paul Chagnollaud, University of Nancy; Richard Falk, Princeton University; Pandalis Glavanis, Durham University; Peter Gran, Temple University; Alain Gresh, *Le Monde Diplomatique*; Herb Kellman, Harvard University; Cheryl Rubenberg, Florida International University; Edward Said, Columbia University; Elia Zureik, Queens College.

confident potential unleashed by the intifada, in fact, challenged long held assumptions about Palestinian society. It was simply incredible for a historian like me to witness (and to participate in) a society making its own destiny. This very idea became the basis of research that I began by the summer of 1988, which was to gather the thoughts, impressions, and ideas of young people who “led the Palestinian street.” Hundreds of hours of oral interviews with Palestinian youth, with all the attendant risks, were conducted that eventually became the basis for an international conference and a book (written with Tom Ricks and Adel Yahya) on the oral history of the intifada (*Who Makes History: Palestinian Experience in Oral History*).

Education and literacy usually suffer under colonial rule. History shows that British and French colonialists shut down or forcibly retarded indigenous educational institutions. In fact, an educated population is contrary to the interest of the occupation. Birzeit University, by its very presence, is a challenge to the Israeli occupation. Part of its mission is to offer quality education to its students. This we endeavored to

deliver despite the closures, curfews, roadblocks, and checkpoints that were thrown our way, in addition to other risks of living under a military occupation. (Participation in popular education committees, for example, was punishable by a ten-year jail sentence.) But Birzeit University had a responsibility to educate the larger society as well. It was in this spirit that Dr. Nabeel Kassis called on me and a few other faculty members to discuss the possibility of holding a conference on the intifada and its historic implications. As a social movement and a nonviolent form of resistance to Israel’s occupation, the intifada has become an important juncture in the history of modern Palestine, and the success of the conference was important not only for the university but also for the intifada. Organizing this conference under the auspices of Birzeit University and ensuring its success was a serious undertaking given the hostility of the Israeli occupation authorities to Birzeit University and its educational mission, among other things Palestinian.

The conference, “Two Decades of Occupation: From Resistance to Uprising,” was held in Jerusalem on March 25-26, 1988. Among the speakers was to be the late Dr. Edward Said. It was to be his first return home. In the end, he was told that the Israeli authorities would deny him a visa and he did not attend. Conference participants, however, listened to his talk on tape, a poignant reminder of the injustice of the occupation. A host of local and international scholars and intellectuals participated in two days of panel discussions capped by a roundtable assessment of the intifada. It was a successful and fruitful conference. It was, given the attending circumstances, an important accomplishment and another source of pride during those early months of the intifada. Despite the onslaught, Birzeit and the Palestinians persevered to chip away at the edifice of the occupation. Birzeit has given me the opportunity, and I was there to witness, to participate, and to contribute. The experiences my family and I had while at Birzeit have been formative in our lives. A bond was created and the bond is not likely to be broken.

*Mahmoud Ibrahim is a professor of history at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.*

## ***Friends of Birzeit in Britain: A Personal Memoir***

A chance encounter in the streets of Jerusalem led to an enduring friendship with Birzeit University. In 1981, I was attending the course “The Palestine of Jesus” at Saint George’s College in Jerusalem. Walking in the Muslim quarter of the Old City in the dizzy atmosphere that follows nightfall during Ramadan, I was invited first to take coffee with a shopkeeper and then to enter the home of the shopkeeper’s friend and neighbor Hazem Qutteneh, a student at Birzeit University who asked me if I would like to visit Birzeit.

Some days later I was brought to the old campus and introduced to Albert Aghazarian, who was responsible for public and international affairs. We talked about the possibility of bringing students from Saint Mary’s College (now Saint Mary’s University College) where I taught, to participate in a Birzeit international summer camp. I then asked if I could bring a group in January or February 1982.

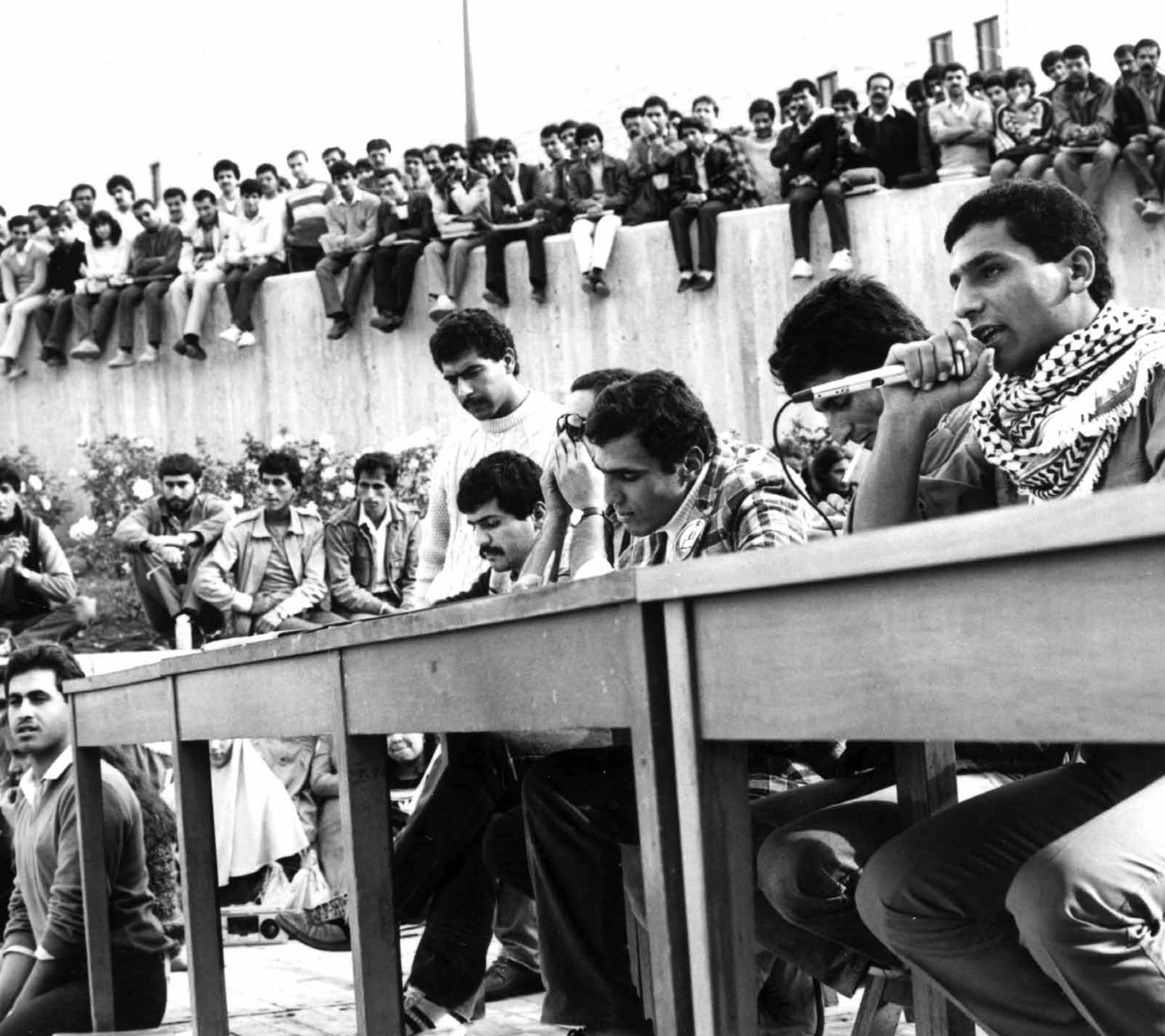
Helped by the generosity of a charitable trust, a group of thirty-three students and teachers eventually set off from Heathrow. But we learned the day before our departure that the University had experienced its third closure order. The ad hoc program that followed was an eye-opening experience, leading to several years of exchange visits between Saint Mary’s and the Birzeit students.

In 1983 and 1985, Albert and I organized tours by Birzeit dancers bringing dabkeh to universities throughout the length of England and Scotland and even across the North Sea to student audiences in Amsterdam and Bremen. My colleague and friend the late Father Michael Prior contributed his own unique dynamism to these expeditions, serenading us on the guitar with Palestinian patriotic songs freshly translated into Irish!

I was soon co-opted onto the committee of the Friends of Birzeit University (FOBZU), a British charity established in 1979 by the historian Elisabeth Monroe, who initially ran the new charity from her flat. The other founding trustees included journalists Keith Kyle and Roger Hardy, academic Mohammed Mehdi, and the writer and Arabist Peter Mansfield. In 1983, I was co-opted onto the committee and, for more than twenty years served as chair. Over these years, largely thanks to some superb coordinators, FOBZU went from strength to strength, successfully obtaining corporate funding for University projects, organizing visits, recruiting for work camps, and engaging in advocacy for academic freedom in Palestine. After twenty years I resigned as chair and have since become one of FOBZU’s academic patrons. I am delighted to still be associated with an organization based on genuine friendship and solidarity with a university which, alongside other Palestine universities, has preserved learning and national pride in the face of the relentless pressure of Israeli military occupation.

*Duncan Macpherson is a retired university teacher, a research fellow of the University of Wales at Lampeter, an academic patron of the Friends of Birzeit in the UK, and a permanent deacon in the Latin Church.*





## CHAPTER 9

# Snapshots of the Student Movement

*Ghassan Khatib*

The student movement at Birzeit University has always been an essential element in the University's success and its distinctiveness.

Birzeit became a university in the 1970s, during a period of vigorous popular political activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Popular, broad-based institutions came into being, accompanied by maturity in the understanding of ways to mobilize the community on a continual basis to resist occupation: by paying attention to social and economic development in order to bolster the community's steadfastness (*sumoud*); by instilling awareness of the importance of rejecting the occupation and collectively expressing the desire to be rid of it; and finally, by rallying around all effective initiatives whose goal is to resist the occupation.

The context, then, was one of intense popular struggle. Birzeit University had the largest concentration of young people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory at that time. The student body included the elite among young Palestinians who hailed from towns, rural areas, and refugee camps in the homeland—the rich, the poor, and those in between.

Student activism would not have been possible without an academic faculty and a University administration that were committed to serve the community and to interact with it and that believed in the maturity and awareness of the student body and their national commitment. Administration and faculty alike were convinced that giving students the freedom to work and organize gives free rein to their talents, ingenuity, and participation.



Commemorating Political Detainees Day, 2009. Photo: Lamia Youssef.



## National, Democratic, and Social Dimensions

Two features distinguish the role of the student movement at Birzeit. The first is related to the internal structure and the educational value that it entailed and its spirit of democratic pluralism and tolerance; the second is external and is related to the University and students' participation in the national struggle and in the Palestinian internal political system.

Since the early 1970s, students immersed themselves in organized union activism through the Student Council. The Council included various clubs (social, cultural, artistic, and voluntary work) plus five officers: a president, a vice president, a treasurer, an external relations officer, and a secretary.

To this day, and despite the change in internal and external conditions and in the disposition and trends among students, the University has persisted in holding annual democratic elections, which are a focus of interest of Palestinian society as a whole. The results are considered a reliable indicator of the society's democratic leanings and of the popular support the various political forces can claim to have.

The balance of forces in the student movement underwent changes in concert with the changes in the national political map. In the 1970s, the main forces within the PLO gave priority to military resistance as opposed to grassroots work and to the external front over the internal one; consequently, leftist forces prevailed during student elections. The presidency of the Student Council was assumed by student leaders who were mostly leftists—Iyad Barghouti, Abd al-Karim al-Fayid (al-Kahyan), Asad Sinocrut, Ilham Khouri, Salam al-Saleh, and Bassam Salhi.

In the 1980s, however, the political factions within the PLO moved toward grassroots work within the occupied homeland. Student Council elections during that time were won by students who belonged to the Fatah movement—Mufid Abed Rabbu, Nayif al-Suwaitat, Sameer Sbeihat, Marwan Barghouti, and Jamal Idris.

The 1990s witnessed a decline in the popularity of PLO forces as Islamist political forces competed for popular support. As a result, Student Council elections during that time brought either Fatah or Hamas supporters to leadership positions.

Despite these changes, the University preserved the integrity of the elections and held them regularly. The student movement, for its part, maintained an effective political role and a pioneering role in the struggle for national liberation, always willing to sacrifice and pay the price. Examples of this abound. During the uprising in the mid-1970s, the University initiated the organization of huge demonstrations, in which the wider public participated. This led to the arrest of the head of the Student Council, the deportation of the president of the University, and the University's closure for a period of time. Closure became common in subsequent years until the University was closed for several years during the first intifada.

The student movement's role in the national struggle was both politically conscious and avant garde. It took the political initiative to organize a national conference on campus rejecting the visit of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat to Israel; it takes pride in this move, which had widespread participation, and in its rejection of the Camp David agreement. This eventually settled the debate within the Palestinian national leadership; the grassroots popular actions it triggered showed a political consensus that influenced the leadership's position and contributed toward its adoption of the same position.

The student movement at Birzeit participated in the National Guidance Council as a member representing all the student councils of Palestinian universities. The Council consisted of elected mayors, heads of grassroots worker and women's organizations, and other groups that led popular and political resistance to the occupation in the second half of the 1970s.

Student activity was greatly affected by social realities, both positively and negatively. Factional strife sometimes took unhealthy twists. Rivalry between some student factions within the PLO became increasingly strident and led to confrontations in 1981 and 1985. Antagonism between



Student Council elections. Photos: Muhamad Awad (top); Amer Othman (middle); Samer Al-Sharif (bottom).

student factions within the PLO on one side and those supporting Islamist groups on the other led to fistfights in 1983. These episodes incurred material damage to the University, not to mention damage to the reputation of the student movement.

The struggle with the occupation took a more vicious turn in the 1980s. The occupation forces began to respond to peaceful student protests by arrests and beating and tear gas and rubber bullets and closing the university, and then using live ammunition with the intent to kill. By March 31, 2008, twenty-five students had been killed.

Contrary to what is commonly believed, the student movement at Birzeit is not so exclusively focused on political issues that it neglects other activities. Indeed, student activism has contributed to making Birzeit a cultural, intellectual, and artistic center, bustling with activities that attract the general public.

The most outstanding example of this is the annual Heritage Week, during which prominent experts in various social endeavors—cultural, artistic, literary, economic, political, and so on—are hosted. Producers of industrial and agricultural goods, artisans, and book publishers exhibit their offerings, and performances by leading theater and folklore troupes are held. During the poetry competition (*Suq Okaz*), prominent poets attend as judges. The week ends with the Palestinian wedding, which recreates the traditional rural wedding with all its colorful details and with students playing the roles of bride and groom. The goal is to preserve the heritage and acquaint new generations with it. These activities are attended by thousands of enthusiasts and present a venue for fostering relations between the student movement and various social sectors.

Such activities have a profound effect on the personalities of students even after they graduate and integrate within the broader community. After spending nearly four years in an environment that is organized along democratic principles and that cultivates leadership abilities, students are capable of assuming leadership positions in the society upon their graduation, be it in the various forms of struggle against occupation or in the general social, political, and cultural arenas.

Immersion in political activism and in resistance to the occupation while at the University transformed the institution into one that graduated national political leaders who contributed to grassroots national effort and raised its level. It is no accident that leadership positions in political organizations as well as in prisons are mostly assumed by Birzeit University graduates, and especially those who were student leaders.

## After Oslo

Like most public endeavors, the role and activities of the student movement changed qualitatively and quantitatively in the 1990s with the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and the return of Palestinian leadership to the homeland and the withdrawal of the occupation army from towns and village, consequently lessening direct contact with it.

On one hand, the student movement's social role diminished. Its role had been the result of efforts to fill the vacuum caused by the absence of a national authority or government. On the other hand, the direct friction and conflict between the student movement and the Israeli occupation eased.

Nevertheless, the student movement responded in various ways to the phase of authority establishment and assumed various roles. It participated in national discussion and debate, which sometimes led to protest against some practices that were criticized by the community, an issue that has led to the arrest of some student activists.



The representative of the People's Republic of China visiting a heritage exhibition at the University, 2009. Photo: Samer Al-Sharif.

Moreover, the student movement continued with community work, the most important of which is the Voluntary Work Program, and interacted with the nuclei of emerging PNA institutions. Undoubtedly, however, the political divisions that characterized this phase have been negatively reflected in the political activities of the student movement, less so in its social programs.





Remembering Palestinian villages destroyed in 1948. Photo: Samer Al-Sharif.



Three former Student Council presidents sharing their experiences with students. Left to right: Hasan Shtaiwi, Bassam Salhi, and Ghassan Jarrar. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

## ***Birzeit in the Late 1970s***

During my first semester as a student [the second semester of the 1977-78 academic year], the University and its students were preparing to elect a Student Council. The cafeteria and the surrounding area were like a beehive, buzzing with students discussing and proposing election platforms and promises to achieve student demands and further their interests in all areas. That prompted the thinking of developing the charter of the Student Council and broadening it to meet student needs and defend their interests as the number of students admitted into the University was on the increase. One year later, we succeeded in introducing a revised charter that increased the number of Council members from five to nine, and introduced committees that included over fifty members and that covered all aspects of student life—academic, social, economic, and political—as well as their day-to-day needs.

Furthermore, 1978 was replete with political activism as it was the year in which Dalal Mughrabi and her commando group carried out an operation targeting the coast near Tel Aviv. The Israeli response followed swiftly. The Israeli army invaded southern Lebanon and was confronted by resistance forces that fought bravely. This is when the role of Birzeit University students became prominent. The University was the first Palestinian location of demonstrations against the invasion and of confrontations with the enemy soldiers. The demonstrations spread to include most of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and especially Dheisheh and Balata and Jenin refugee camps, and too many towns and villages to list here. These daily demonstrations became a dress rehearsal for what happened nine years later during the popular uprising in 1987, which became known as the intifada.

***Hasan Shtaiwi*** (*Birzeit University student, 1978-81*) was elected in 2009 to the *Fatah Revolutionary Council*.

## ***What Birzeit Represents***

In Birzeit University the general blends with the specific; the personal with the national; the social with the democratic; and the academic with community outreach. For me, and for generations who studied at and graduated from Birzeit, this is the University's most important feature.

Here is the way I view Birzeit University and what it represents:

- It was embraced by an entire community that gave it energy, strength, and dynamism that helped it always face difficulties and maintain a feeling of pride.
- It reciprocated the affection bestowed by the community by joining its battles and sharing its daily worries. Thus, it volunteered to work with the community during the agricultural seasons; provided support to its institutions; and helped in making education within reach of everyone through scholarships and finding innovative solutions to the problems of students who could not afford tuition fees.
- It was the place where creative thinking found fertile ground and where innovations in culture, folklore, and popular art found expression, especially during Heritage Week, the festival which it organized annually despite its banning by Israeli and in the face of closure of the University. This festival provided an opportunity for the promising beginners to mingle with the accomplished cultural figures.
- It preserved a distinctive academic flavor that defended freedom of thought and expression, holding and organizing bold, critical and unconventional lectures, seminars, and conferences.

The administration, faculty, and staff worked together, nurturing an extraordinary experiment, as they joined the national struggle with courage, while facing internal democratic strife with tolerance.

*Bassam Salhi (Class of 1983) chaired the Birzeit University Student Council between 1979 and 1981 and now serves as the General Secretary of the Palestinian People's Party.*

## ***Birzeit University, a Microcosm of the Palestinian People***

Birzeit stands out as the first university in Palestine. It constituted a prominent national and revolutionary center in the homeland and an exemplary oasis of Palestinian democracy. The University's influence on Palestinian society has by far exceeded its size and the number of faculty and students. Its graduates were and continue to be examples of success wherever they are.

For me, Birzeit University is a microcosm of the Palestinian people, the state and the society that I aspire to see in the future; and it is a great example and a living testimony to the abilities and energy and creativity of Palestinians when they get an administration and a leadership that possess a vision and a philosophy and enjoy integrity, transparency and devotion, working in a manner consistent with law, regulations and institutional values. I am proud to have received my bachelor's and master's degrees from this University.

I thank Birzeit, where I learned so much from its faculty and administration and students. I always miss it, and I thank God that my four children are Birzeit University students. They chose it and they chose well.

*Marwan Barghouti (Class of 1993), excerpts from a letter sent from Hadareem Prison, section 3, cell number 28.*





PALESTINE

Joma

JAKO

JAKO

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جامعة بيرزيت  
Birzeit University



## CHAPTER 10

# The Road Ahead

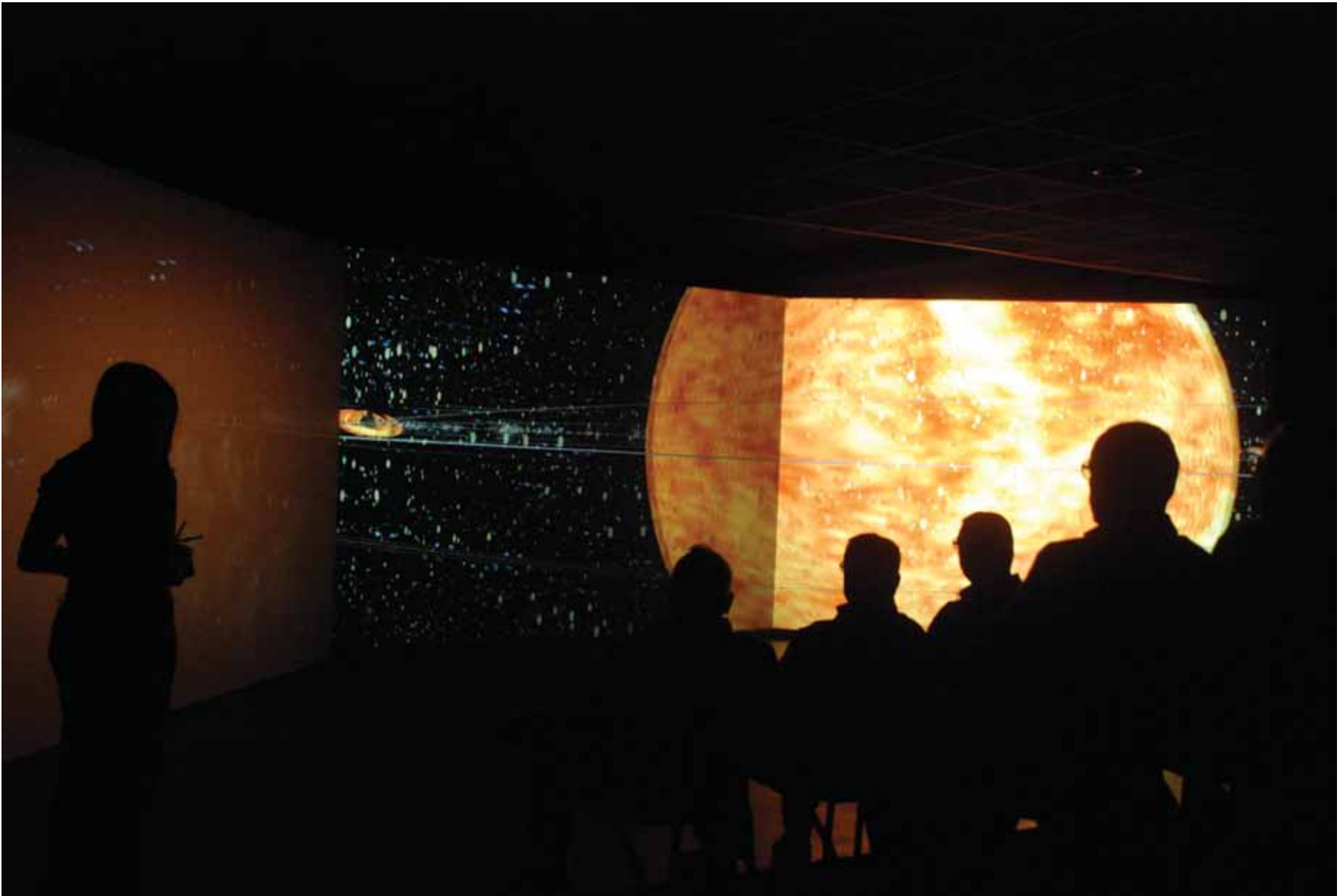
*Ramzi Rihan*

Since its beginnings in 1924 as a small school for girls in an undistinguished village, Birzeit University has undergone many changes that have been internally driven as well as in response to external circumstances. The story of Birzeit's survival—many schools established at the same time have long since shut down—and its phenomenal development contains elements that can help in charting the University's future course.

Birzeit has always had the challenge of developing plans for achieving institutional objectives in a thoroughly unpredictable environment, and over the years these plans have become more detailed and complex. In the summer of 1972, a short document summarized the necessary steps in the transition from college to University. In 1977 a more ambitious and comprehensive document was published that presented the development plan for the years 1977-86. In the past decade, strategy

planning workshops have been held to identify broad objectives and place detailed action plans for achieving them. The most recent workshop (held in 2007) resulted in a three-year plan to address nine broad goals—some are administrative (involving, for example, financial stability and administrative processes), others are academic (including such areas as staff retention and integration of academic research into academic activity), and still others focus on the student.

Creative strategies, put in place through the collective effort of senior management plus other staff, are underway to address the thorny issues facing the University. Rather than give a progress report in this chapter, however, I'd like to describe my sense of some of the ongoing challenges that we have been addressing or will find ourselves addressing in the years to come.



Virtual reality theater. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

Palestinian reality has been and is still dominated by politics, namely, the ongoing struggle to assert the national identity and attain national independence. Political changes in Palestine were inevitably accompanied by social developments. The establishment of Birzeit University in the early 1970s had a tremendous impact on Palestinian society by providing hitherto unavailable opportunities for higher education to all sectors of society; this was especially important for the rural population and for young women. The University initiated an unprecedented degree of social mobility, which changed Palestinian society dramatically and irreversibly. Birzeit University campus became and remains a unique microcosm of Palestine where all classes and sectors of the population are represented. Rural and urban, rich and poor, male and female, modern and traditional mingle in a fruitful—albeit sometimes precarious—interaction. This characteristic distinguishes Birzeit from other institutions and is a source of strength that should be fostered.

Furthermore, as students from all regions of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Galilee, and abroad enrolled in the University, it played a leading role for three decades in re-uniting Palestinians from previously separate areas until barriers were re-imposed. Birzeit University remains in a position to play this unifying role again when the barriers fall again, as they inevitably must. Students from the Arab world would further enrich the University.

These positive aspects are not unchallenged. Palestinian society has undergone changes that are still only partially understood. Foremost among these are the ones that occurred in the young generation. Youth culture emerged in the West after the Second World War and has since become a global phenomenon. Various youth sub-cultures can now be seen in Palestine. There are those who seek assurance from centuries-old guidelines, those who fling themselves headlong into the western youth culture, those who attempt a balance between the traditional and the modern, and those who are lost in limbo among these conflicting sub-cultures. The emergence of youth culture and the competition among various sub-cultures in the Birzeit University student body is a highly

visible feature of campus life and is compounded by political diversity. The University has responded to this complex reality with a degree of success. Developing a coordinated, broad, and continuing range of responses is needed as a top priority now and for the foreseeable future.



Although the University pays more attention to the difficulties of new students than it had in the past, more effort in this direction is needed. Orientation, guidance, and counseling of new students have to continue for at least the first year of study and include social, academic, and psychological components. This would then be followed by career counselling and guidance for graduate studies.

The alumni of any university are its foremost gift to its society and, indeed, the world. Birzeit University has made efforts to maintain contact with its alumni, many of whom have achieved prominence locally and internationally. Collectively, the alumni of Birzeit University have had a notable positive impact on Palestinian cultural, social, economic, and political life. A more determined and organized effort has to be made to reach most, if not all, graduates. Birzeit University graduates have an exceptional attachment to their institution; this attachment deserves to be reciprocated.

Birzeit University has diversified its academic programs significantly at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. While still attracting some of the most qualified students, it faces questions about academic quality. This is a national problem associated with the rapid increase in enrollment rates at all educational levels and is also acknowledged to be a regional problem. Avenues to address this problem include the curriculum, the faculty, teaching methods, learning resources, and recapturing the “culture of scholarship.” The academic challenges that Birzeit University faces are not unique; higher education is undergoing a period of intense worldwide ferment. Arab and Palestinian universities share these challenges in addition to some specific features.





Photos: Yasser Darwish.

Current trends present both an opportunity and a challenge to Birzeit University. Higher education has been undergoing many significant changes during the past few decades. New specialties are being created continuously; novel teaching methods have been devised. The number of higher education institutions in Palestine has increased. Important developments have taken place in the Arab world. New forms of institutional governance have emerged. Birzeit University needs to acknowledge and comprehend all these factors in order to chart its new course.

The University has made great strides in providing electronic resources to its students. However, the school system that shapes our students relies on lecturing as the dominant mode of teaching and rote memorization as the dominant mode of learning. Birzeit University has to overcome this entrenched cultural legacy so that students derive the full benefit of the resources available to them at the University. One of the consequences of the provision of electronic learning resources is that teachers have receded into the background. In fact, the availability of impersonal resources has to be coupled with a greater personal impact of faculty on students that goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills and includes the inculcation of values and attitudes.

The curriculum and its implementation and the teaching methods associated with it are still defined in a largely traditional manner. They can be broadened to focus on generic skills, which include personal and group initiative, sense of responsibility, creative thinking, language skills, social skills, and the motivation and ability to seek, generalize, and transfer knowledge. This is all the more important in this age of rapidly changing workplace requirements and requires a major shift in the direction of the University.

Arab universities, including Birzeit University, adopted the objective of Arabizing higher education three decades ago. The almost total dependence on foreign languages of instruction and on foreign textbooks was deemed to be an impediment to the development of Arab culture. The Arabization movement sought to make the Arabic language the language of textbooks and learning. Although there



Ramzi Rihan acknowledging the University's public tribute for his many years of service. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

was much justification to this movement, there were some negative consequences. Some students lost their facility with foreign languages. A deeper consequence was the limiting of their cultural horizons at a time when cultural inter-connectedness has become a basic condition for advancement. Birzeit University should affirm the acquisition of good language skills—both in Arabic and in English—as among its foremost educational goals.

As its fields of study and curriculum expanded, the University has moved from the liberal definition of education to one that emphasizes professional knowledge. This was seen by many as necessary for the education of graduates who are competent in their fields. Advanced courses in the various disciplines proliferated while introductory and general courses were not given sufficient attention. However, it can be argued that the opposite approach would be more fruitful. A strong emphasis on languages and a solid foundation in introductory courses





Photo: Samer Al-Sharif.



Students celebrate the designation of Jerusalem as the capital of Arab culture, 2009. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

that develops generic skills would enable students to pursue their more advanced education more effectively.

The teaching mission of a university is buttressed by its research activities. Birzeit University has been moving from a teaching institution into one that combines teaching and research. The research done at the University is not negligible and is growing in quantity and diversity. However, the culture of scholarship has not adapted to the growth of the University; scholarship should inform all University activities and have an impact on the whole student body and define the institution. Isolated research activities, no matter how significant, do not have this impact. Buttressing this culture is a major factor that would determine the future course of the University and its success.

With its accumulated expertise, Birzeit University can expand its activities in various fields of applied research. These include high technology, environment, education, and relevant aspects of the social sciences. This would not preclude research in academic disciplines, which forms the foundation for much applied research. The University has taken significant steps in both areas, which lay the foundations for more involvement in research activities.

The achievement of the preceding aims requires that the University move from its current path of expansion into one of consolidation and innovation—despite the obvious fact that these two considerations frequently are in opposition. Future growth can be directed toward broad consolidation and selective diversification. The University has the ability and credibility to chart a courageous new course that would continue to distinguish it from other local and regional institutions.

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Birzeit University was unique among Arab universities by pioneering the establishment of a number of community-oriented institutes and centers. These units were at the forefront of Palestinian involvement in a number of important areas such as public health and literacy programs.



The University has much to gain by strengthening its community involvement. This involvement has been beneficial not only for its impact, but also because it obliterates the arbitrary separation between academic and applied research. It also has become a distinguishing feature of the University.

Birzeit University is a major contributor to cultural life in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, a role that can be expanded tremendously. The University lies in a central location within the Palestinian territory and has a large campus. It is therefore ideally placed to aim to become a major cultural center in Palestine and perhaps even the single major cultural center. No other institution or organization in Palestine can fulfill this mission better than Birzeit University. In furthering this aim, the University would not only advance its stature, profile, and image, but it would also be rendering a badly needed national service.

Birzeit University can also count among its strong points its wide network of international connections. These connections include joint research projects and exchange programs. Visits by international and expatriate Palestinian scholars in many fields are frequent events at the University. Special effort is needed to maintain and extend these connections under present circumstances.



The road ahead for Birzeit University is not without hurdles. Foremost among these is the fragmentation of the Palestinian territory. This has had a tremendous deleterious effect on the University. Two decades ago the student body came from the Gaza Strip and the northern, central, and southern regions of the West Bank. At present the majority of students come from the central region of the West Bank, although the University still

attracts students from other areas. A national institution is being restricted to a local one. While it might be difficult to overcome this limitation in the immediate future, Birzeit University should continue to see its role as a national institution with regional and international connections.

Another difficulty is the scarcity of human resources. The availability of qualified personnel has not kept pace with the growth of the student body. Political instability and economic depression deter many people from seeking work at Birzeit University despite their desire to do so. External funding can be sought for a faculty development program and for the support of selected activities and projects.

The insufficiency of financial resources is an obvious constraint on realizing many aims. Higher education has become a global enterprise, and its cost factors are at the level of the international economy. However, the revenue sources are at the level of the local economy, which is much lower. It is thus impossible to maintain high quality and at the same time cover operational expenditures from operational revenue. The only solution is to extend the fundraising net of the University and embark on a long-term drive to secure an endowment that would assure the financial viability of the institution.

The road ahead for Birzeit University is promising but fraught with difficulties. The problems are frustrating but they have to be addressed as best as they can; they should not prevent the University from contemplating a better future in the long term and keep it from striving to attain it. A double approach is needed: dealing with the present problems while maintaining the vision of the future as a guiding light. The lesson of more than eight decades in the life of the institution is that every hurdle can be overcome with a determined will and sound judgment.





3

Outreach







## CHAPTER 11

# Community and Public Health

*Rita Giacaman*

**W**hen I returned to Palestine in September 1978 to join the Biology Department faculty at Birzeit University, I found that the faculty, staff, and students were involved in community development and outreach activities. Community service was and is an integral part of the University's mission (as central to its mission as a commitment to academic excellence); and faculty members had initiated the Voluntary Work Program (Munir Fasheh), the Archeology Program (Albert Glock), the Literacy and Adult Education Program (Khalil Mahshi and later, Hiyam Abu Ghazaleh), and the Research Center (Khalil Mahshi and Kamal Abdulfattah). This was one of the features of nonviolent resistance to Israeli military occupation in the form of community service and the building of Palestinian institutions independent of the Israeli military.

### Laying the Groundwork for Palestinian Community and Public Health

One of my students, Mohammad Said al-Hmeidi, and I began to develop a community and public health program from a garage/storage "office." Because Birzeit University was small, faculty and students had close, informal, and cooperative relationships, which facilitated the development of multidisciplinary teams of researchers/activists. This proved to be crucial for our approach to public health, which combines biomedical knowledge with an understanding of societal phenomena and the context in which people live.



Youth consult in the village of Faqu'a, 2004. ICPH staff met with a group of young adults to discuss the findings of a youth mental health research project in the north of the West Bank, close to the Apartheid Wall. Group members identified what they considered the most important psychosocial mental health problems that they encounter in preparation for an intervention. Photo: ICPH staff.

Early on, we set out to generate the data needed for the planning and implementation of health services. At the time, most Palestinian health service planning was based on assumptions regarding people's health needs. (We called it "planning behind the desk.") Our first study was led by Birzeit University social scientist Salim Tamari and was completed in Zbeidat in the Jordan Valley. He assessed the social impact of the introduction of drip irrigation techniques in this peasant community, and we investigated health conditions. The study demonstrated that health is a social construction; that housing, water, sanitation, and nutrition are key elements producing health or disease; and that clinics and hospitals addressed disease only after it set in. We concluded that work was needed both inside and outside health services, and with communities, in order to prevent disease and to promote and protect health.

The results of this study were used to set up a clinic in Zbeidat and to train a village health worker from Zbeidat at Bethlehem University (which was at the time training male village health workers) in order to work on issues such as sanitation, health education, and nutrition. Unfortunately, the clinic did not survive long, because we did not provide the necessary follow up and support to the isolated village health worker. The experience taught us that conducting research was not enough; we had to maintain ongoing involvement through training and supervising workers and monitoring and evaluating health projects that we helped initiate. Indeed, this has been the work cycle and cardinal rule we implemented at Birzeit University's Institute of Community and Public Health (ICPH).

We also learned from the mistakes of others. When we began our second health survey in 1981 in three villages near Birzeit, we knew from the Bethlehem University experience that we should train female and not male health workers, because only women are able to enter homes and gather information on context, environment, nutrition, and so on, all of which are essential for effective primary health care work.

Our experiences gave us an understanding of primary health care before knowing how the World Health Organization defined the term in the Alma Ata Declaration of 1978 and especially the three pillars that support it: community participation, intersectoral collaboration, and equity. Our knowledge and understanding of health was gained in practice first, with theory later supporting the evidence that we generated from lived experience and from research. This reliance on data drawn from both research and practice continues to characterize the approach of ICPH.

The Birzeit villages study turned into one of the most important ICPH programs because it built on previous failures and succeeded; because it taught us to continually assess before moving forward; and because it helped us appreciate the importance of collaboration with other local institutions. This program was conducted jointly with Birzeit Women's Charitable Society, which was already operating a clinic in Birzeit village under the leadership of a powerful nurse, Georgette Abed. The



clinic was attended a few hours a week by a physician who offered growth monitoring and immunization services to the children of Birzeit and surrounding villages.

We built on what existed. We set up a clinical laboratory, needed for quality diagnoses; increased the number of hours that the physician attended the clinic; developed curricula and trained women village health workers from seven villages near Birzeit; employed a midwife for clinic work and home visiting; supervised and supported village health workers; and focused on home visits, health education, and community mobilization for the solution of selected problems, such as sanitation and housing problems, among other activities. We worked closely with all relevant parties to operate a comprehensive primary health care program, including working with the villagers to install tube/potable water supplies to improve sanitation, and to bring the University's Literacy and Adult Education Program into our catchment villages. We also combined the village health program with student health care. That was the beginning of student health services at the University.

## Development of a Skilled Public Health Workforce

The successful Birzeit clinic program became a model for other primary health care programs that are still running today. The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education accredited the community health worker training as a post-high school middle diploma in the late 1990s. Given that community health workers are at the core of primary health care principles and that such an accreditation is unique to Palestine and exists in no other Arab country, the establishment of a diploma program is a testimony to how collective action and the struggle for liberation could bring about fundamental advancement in the nature and practice of public health. And that is the paradoxical nature of our context of continued Israeli military occupation: it can bring about major changes in structures that otherwise would have been difficult to change.



Midwifery program. Top: Workshop held as part of the midwifery training and mentorship program in Salfit, 2009. Salfit hospital is one of three hospitals that receives ICPH assistance to improve the quality of childbirth care. Bottom: Mother and child care. Photo: ICPH staff.

### **Palestinian Health Issues in *The Lancet***

In 1997, Dr. Richard Horton, the chief editor of the prestigious international medical and public health journal *The Lancet*, commissioned Institute of Community and Public Health faculty and researchers to write five articles on Palestinian health conditions and services. The process entailed the intensive gathering of global and local evidence, accessing local databases, and assessing the quality of the compiled material. Thirty-eight authors participated in writing the five articles: nineteen Palestinian academics and researchers from Birzeit University and other local institutions, and nineteen international academics and researchers from Lebanon, Europe, the United States, and Canada. The articles were published as a series beginning March 4, 2009, and included articles on health condition and services; maternal and child health; cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancer; health and human security; and the future of the health care system.

*The Lancet* Palestinian Health Alliance arose from the work leading to the series and expresses a shared determination of Palestinian and international scientists and researchers to conduct research and report on the health of Palestinians by framing health in ways that are compatible with Palestinian social and political realities, and not only medical terms; and by elaborating and validating measures to assess health under chronic warlike conditions.

The mid-1990s required a major shift in ICPH's operations. In line with our commitment to define our activities in terms of societal needs, it became necessary to help train Palestinians to take charge of health services, an area that was handed over to the nascent Palestinian National Authority at the time. We thus conducted a survey of all clinics in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1994, in preparation for setting up programs that would offer a post-graduate Diploma in Primary Health Care and a Master's in Public Health (MPH) degree. The results were used to develop curricula, which were endorsed by local and international public health experts and practitioners, including those from the World Health Organization. As of June 2009, we have awarded MPH degrees to 235 graduates, half of whom are women, and about a third of whom have been promoted to key positions in the various sub-sectors of health. We continue to solicit doctoral level scholarships for our research assistants and students, after mentoring them for a period at ICPH.

Our teaching follows similar principles to those of our research orientation: we bring in results from field research to students, and our discussion and their comments help give meaning to the findings. We also visit students and alumni regularly in their workplaces under our ongoing field visits program. Our exchanges during these visits help them deal with some of the constraints of practical work; they help us learn about systemic changes, which can be quick at times; and they enable us to incorporate this back and forth research and practice knowledge into teaching. This approach is necessary for the continued relevance of our teaching programs to population health needs.

## **Communities under Siege**

Throughout the 1980s, we combined research, capacity building, planning, and model building with emergency work, such as providing first aid to students who were shot or attacked by the Israeli military. Later, during the first intifada, we launched initiatives such as testing the cistern water of the twin cities Ramallah/al-Bireh for bacterial contamination and chlorinating just in case the Israeli military government retaliated

During the 1980s, we sought to obtain scholarships for our students to get their masters degrees abroad, because local universities did not offer such degrees. Institution building as a mode of resistance to occupation entailed first and foremost the capacity building of specialists in research and in the practices needed locally. The first parasitologist, nutritionist, health educator, and sanitation specialist in the country were biology students I taught. Teaching at the Biology Department provided the opportunity to influence students and help them realize the importance of these public health specialties, which were absent from the country at the time, except for medicine and nursing following the biomedical model—necessary but not sufficient.

by withholding tubed water supplies from the area. When the Israeli army closed our schools, we taught in our homes, in defiance of the closure orders, and our kitchens turned into labs, with microscopes and other equipment transported from the University.

During the second intifada, we followed the combined development/emergency imperatives. We did emergency first aid work and offered online and telephone support to those who needed help—patients waiting for ambulances during curfews, families with a woman in labor who had to wait out a curfew to go to the hospital, and ambulance drivers and health care providers to get medications and other essential items such as baby foods to isolated and needy villages with which we had contact.

And we continued to teach our students, even though we were operating out of a garage, as we had when we started out (only this time the garage was in Ramallah). However, unlike our situation during the first intifada, we were supported by the excellent Birzeit University Web portal RITAJ and the Internet and mobile phones in reaching students. We also sought to document people's experiences with Israeli army violations such as pilfering, destruction of property, and the seizure of homes to use as

resting or observation stations after having locked up the families in one of the rooms. We documented the consequences of the Israeli army's wanton destruction of infrastructure and institutions and the death, injury, disability, and other health problems facing people living under severe political violence since 2000. In fact, some of our most cited articles focused on the consequences of the 2002 invasions of West Bank towns on population health and on the health status and health services of Palestinians under Israeli military occupation (the latter published in 2009 in *The Lancet*)—science but also advocacy.

By spring 2010, we completed a study on the consequences of Israel's December 2008 – January 2009 onslaught on the Gaza Strip, and we presented the initial findings in the second Lancet Palestinian Health Alliance conference, which convened in early March at ICPH. We continue to document the social suffering of the Palestinian population caused by war. We provide evidence of what it means to live under such difficult and unjust conditions, and elaborate on the consequences of war on health. We do this for policy and planning purposes to assist health services in accommodating people's needs. But there is another purpose for our research: the world must know.





## CHAPTER 12

# A Vibrant Breeze of Living Culture

*Vera Tamari*

**B**irzeit University's campus is perched on a hill overlooking a stretch of hills that roll down to the Mediterranean. The campus looms over Khirbet Birzeit, the ancient site of "Berzotho" mentioned by Roman historian Josephus. The University's massive clusters of buildings and imposing stone cut facades follow a contemporary model of construction, contrasting greatly with the surrounding rocky terraced olive groves and small villages that huddle in the bosom of the Palestinian landscape.

For those who attended the University before 1980 or so, this is the "new" campus; the "old" campus is the intimate setting of the Nasir family home and the neighboring buildings that formed the campus of the elementary school in 1924 and later, the community college and university.

### At the Heart of Culture

Built at the end of the Ottoman rule, the Nasir house still stands as testimony to the beauty of indigenous Palestinian architecture, both in structure and style. The house is typical of traditional large family mansions in Palestinian towns and villages in the late nineteenth century. From a spacious garden courtyard, a large arched wooden door leads to a long cross-vaulted hall, floors tiled with huge polished flagstones. The



Ethnographic and Art Museum Director Vera Tamari talks to students at the exhibition "Cycle" featuring the works of five Palestinian women artists, 2007.

*Opposite page:* Visit of the National Jordanian Women's Football Team in 2009. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

Tania Tamari Nasir, wife of former University President Hanna Nasir and member of the Committee, played an active role in the cultural development at the University and was instrumental in procuring seventy-five art works donated by Syrian-born Berlin artist Marwan Qassab Bashi to the University. She helped organize “For the Children of Palestine,” an exhibition of those works that also toured eight Palestinian towns in addition to Majdal Shams in the occupied Golan Heights. Several other exhibitions have taken place in the two University galleries. “Ya Kafi Ya Shafi” was the first important ethnographic exhibition from The Tawfiq Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets. Hosted exhibitions included solo shows by prominent Palestinian plastic artists, including Sliman Mansur, Nabil Anani, and Tayseer Barakat.

## Defying Isolation

Since its establishment as a girls’ school in 1924, Birzeit has always placed a premium on cultural activities and viewed them as essential in the development of creative, dynamic, and imaginative individuals. Over the years, Birzeit University has assumed a role both as an organizer of cultural events and as a venue for major cultural activities. The University’s amateur student music, dance, and theater groups (*Sanabel*, *Juthoor*, and *Mawasim*, respectively) performed locally and internationally and played an important role in enhancing the cultural spirit of Birzeit and Palestine and defying the cultural isolation imposed on Palestinian society by the occupation. For Palestinians, the act of *sumoud* (steadfastness) and the protection and promotion of Palestinian cultural heritage have become forms of resistance, essential in confronting the escalating threat of the loss of the land, house demolitions, the uprooting of olive trees, and the appropriation of Palestinian material culture.

This spirit of *sumoud* prompted the hosting of the Palestinian International Summer Festival of Music and Dance, in partnership with the Popular Arts Center, throughout the 1980s. The Festival was a landmark in Palestine’s cultural activities, drawing thousands of spectators every year. Performers have included world-renowned dancing troupes and singers, such as the Chilean folk music group Quilapaun; the United Kingdom percussion, movement, and visual comedy troupe Stomp; and the popular French-Algerian singer Racheed Taha. Audiences enthusiastically responded to these performers by singing and dancing with them. During one summer festival, a prototype of a Palestinian village was built of painted Styrofoam, recreating meandering streets, courtyards, traditional cafés, and craft shops. Artisans, including glass blowers and potters from Hebron, women rug weavers from Samou’, and the mother of pearl and wood carving artisans from Bethlehem, proudly demonstrated their traditional skills in makeshift stands. These festivals and activities were in a sense a purging experience in the face of extreme repression by the Israeli military occupation.

two narrow windows symmetrically placed on each side of the doorway bring a dim light into the room and a soft coolness. The student lockers are still there, vivid reminders of earlier days. Doors from that hallway also lead to a complex extension of other rooms and halls that once functioned as the student and teachers’ refectory, the kitchen, and the registration and finance offices.

As Birzeit School expanded into a two-year college and eventually a full-fledged university, so did its physical space. The faculties, classrooms, and offices were scattered here and there in small rented buildings and traditional domed houses in the depth of what was then Birzeit village. The “old campus” was friendly and picturesque, with classrooms surrounded by fruit gardens and vines. It wasn’t uncommon for lectures to be interrupted by the sound of a donkey braying outdoors or a peddler listing his goods; nor was it unusual to see a goat’s face suddenly appearing between the bars of a wrought iron window or to smell freshly baked bread in a traditional *taboun* (communal bakery, where bread is baked on an open flame) or a meal being cooked in a nearby house. It was that particular intimate setting, rooted in history and culture, which gave the old campus its charm and character and is most remembered by its alumni.



The annual Heritage Week is designed to combat the threat of cultural isolation, as well as to raise awareness and involvement in the protection of culture heritage. Organized by the Student Council, Heritage Week attracts visitors from the local community, who attend the cultural exhibits, musical performances, dances, and educational programs held over the course of a week. Displays include ethnographic collections and artifacts ranging from farmers' tools and domestic pottery ware to straw objects and embroidered costumes.

Another much-acclaimed public cultural event is the annual *Suk Okaz* poetry competition that has been a feature of Birzeit's life since the founding of the elementary school. The event gives competitors an opportunity to demonstrate their skill in memorizing and reciting classical Arabic poetry.

## Cultural Solidarity

Because of its celebrated role as an important national academic institution, Birzeit University has been a main attraction for highly acclaimed international intellectuals, writers, artists, poets, musicians, and cultural figures who visit Palestine: some come on a specific program, whereas others travel in solidarity or perhaps just to get acquainted with the institution and its important academic mission. The list of distinguished guests includes South African novelist and professor of literature Andre Brink; British art critic, novelist, painter, and author John Berger; British fashion designer Bella Freud; French painter Ernest Pignon-Ernest; and Egyptian novelist and cultural activist Ahdaf Soueif.

Award-winning Palestinian artists have developed strong relations with the University. In 1981, Nazareth born filmmaker Michel Khleifi premiered *Fertile Memory* on campus and led a discussion with students. Palestinian filmmaker Elia Suleiman (*Divine Intervention*, *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, *The Time that Remains*) and visual artist Emily Jacir have also come to Birzeit, teaching courses and engaging in the



University President Hanna Nasir (left) welcomes Mrs. Leila Mantoura, daughter of Dr. Tawfiq Canaan, and her children on the occasion of the inaugural exhibition of the Tawfiq Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets, 1996. Minister of Culture Yasser Abed Rabbo stands next to Dr. Nasir. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

### Developing the University's Art Collection

Bethlehem-born Emily Jacir, working in a variety of media (including film, photography, painting, and installation), contributed to a growing University video archive by donating more than 100 art videos that she collected from international video artists from twenty-eight countries; together with John Menick, she co-curated in 2002 the University's Palestine's International Video Festival.

Samia Halaby spearheaded a campaign in the United States to collect works from artists as gifts to the University's Ethnographic and Art Museum; she donated some of her own paintings and secured original works from the Palestinian American artist Sari Khoury, who shortly thereafter passed away. Kamal Boullata, Vladimir Tamari, Vera Tamari, Nasser Soumi, Inass Yassin, and Samira Badran also donated some of their works to the Museum.



Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soueif giving a lecture at Birzeit University in October 2003 during her first visit to Palestine. Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Dr. Ahmad Harb, is on the left. Photo: Yasser Darwish.



Poet Samih al-Qasim. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

cultural life of the University. Palestinian American artist Samia Halaby spent a month in 1996 working on an art project with Birzeit University architecture students. Both Jacir and Halaby were instrumental in building up the University's art collection.

Others have bequeathed precious gifts to the University, acting in solidarity with Birzeit and Palestine and in appreciation of the institution's national, academic, and cultural role. The family of Dr. Tawfiq Canaan, a pioneering physician and a scholar, donated in 1996 his unique collection of 1,400 Palestinian amulets, all documented by Canaan himself. In 1994, Swiss painter Rene Feurer presented the University with six monumental paintings, all inspired by the writings of the ninth century Sufi philosopher and poet Abu Yazid al-Bustami. Staff members and students vividly remember how difficult it was to bring these huge minimalist paintings through the relatively narrow University doorways. Feurer was obliged to unmount the works, spread them in the middle of one of the University streets, and reframe them inside the buildings. They grace the Library and the lobby of the Kamal Nasir Hall.

Perhaps a historical landmark for Birzeit University was the first public poetry recital given by world-famous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish upon his return from exile in 1995. He chose Birzeit University as a venue for that unforgettable event, attended by thousands of enthusiastic people who came to give Palestine's native son a hero's welcome. On another memorable visit, Darwish led a delegation of world writers and Nobel laureates from the International Parliament of Writers to Birzeit University: from Africa, the Nigerian Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka and the South African poet and memoirist Breyten Breytenbach; from China, the dissident poet Bei Dao; from Europe, Spanish novelist Juan Goytisolo, Portuguese Nobel Laureate José Saramago, Italian novelist Vincenzo Consolo, and French writer and secretary general of the International Parliament of Writers, Christian Salmon; and from the United States, novelist Russel Banks. They had come to stand in solidarity with Mahmoud Darwish and to honor the steadfastness and resilience of Palestinians during the ruthless incursion and siege imposed by Israel. Darwish had this to say in a manifesto attesting to the visit and signed by all the writers:

“Remember this day the 25th of March 2002. This is an historical day during which the greatest of world writers visited Birzeit University. I am honored to have been in their company.”

Darwish and Edward Said, the renowned Palestinian intellectual and Columbia University professor, were both frequent visitors with special links to Birzeit University; both were the recipients of honorary doctorate degrees. Said jokingly stated to friends that this probably was the only honorary doctorate degree he had ever received; he was proud that a Palestinian institution recognized his writings and literary contributions.

The University also honored Said by naming the affiliated music conservatory “The Edward Said National Conservatory of Music.” Said was the keynote speaker in the 1998 international conference, “Landscape Perspectives on Palestine,” organized by the University to call attention to the changes affecting the Palestinian landscape; he presented a paper entitled “Palestine: Memory, Invention and Space.” In addition to Said, the list of international intellectuals and scholars who participated in the conference included Birzeit’s Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, University of Southampton Professor Malcolm Wagstaff, and University of Chicago Professor W.J.T. Mitchell.

## Contemporary Outlooks on Culture and Art

Palestinians living under Israeli occupation care deeply about raising public interest, advancing awareness, and encouraging participation in culture and in creative activities. Birzeit University has always been at the forefront of this endeavor; in 1997 the University established the Founding Committee for the Promotion of Cultural Heritage, which led to the opening of The Ethnographic Gallery in the Yusuf Ahmed Alghanem Library in 1998 and al-Qamariah Art Gallery in the Diana Tamari Sabbagh Center for Cultural Heritage in 2002.

These gallery spaces became the precursors for the establishment in 2005 of The Ethnographic and Art Museum, whose role is the



Poet Mahmoud Darwish being welcomed by University students and guests at his first poetry recital in Palestine after his return from exile in 1995. Photo: Yasser Darwish.



Edward Said, upon receiving an honorary doctorate degree from Birzeit University (the first such degree bestowed by the University), July 7, 1993. Photo: Yasser Darwish.





Installation work by architecture students (a parody on world leaders conferences), at The Ethnographic and Art Museum. The wall pieces are from the art installation "Home 195," by Jawad al-Malhi, 2009.

#### **Partial List of Exhibitions**

"Stateless Nation," by Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, the Museum's inaugural exhibition in 2005

"Hassan Everywhere," by Hassan Hourani

"The Green(er) Side of the Line," by Alban Biassaut

"The Olive Project," an international collective exhibition curated by Mizuko Yakuwa

"The Badran Family: A Century of Tradition and Innovation," curated by Salwa Mikdadi

"Jerusalem: Lexicon of Color," curated by Vera Tamari and Tina Sherwell

"Jerusalem Our Home," curated by Vera Tamari and Baha' Jubeh. This is the first in a series of exhibitions of Palestinian cities that the Museum intends to host between 2009 and 2011.

"Crafted by Her Own Hands," curated by Vera Tamari, Baha' Jubeh, and Maissoun Sharqawi.

maintenance, registration, and promotion of the University's important ethnographic and art collections. Those collections include The Tawfiq Canaan Amulet Collection (1,400 objects), The Traditional Palestinian Costume Collection (250 items of embroidered dresses, accessories, and jewelry), and the Art Collection (about 200 art works by Palestinian, Arab, and international artists). The Ethnographic and Art Museum is perhaps one of the first such specialized cultural spaces in any Palestinian academic institution; it has become a principal cultural venue in Palestine. Its main mission is to cultivate public and scholarly interest in the preservation and revival of Palestinian cultural heritage, as well as to encourage dynamic interest and involvement in contemporary art and culture on campus. It thus opens its exhibitions and activities to students and staff, as well as diverse community audiences. One group of special interest is school children; activities and art workshops are designed to enhance their appreciation and involvement in visual arts and Palestinian heritage.

Since it was launched in 2005, the Museum has hosted and curated scores of ethnographic and visual art exhibitions, drawing thousands of visitors, often coordinating these exhibitions with both local and international cultural organizations.

It is precisely the link with the community and concerns with the propagation of art and culture that prompted in 2004 the creation of the Virtual Gallery, a specialized Web site for Palestinian contemporary visual arts. This came as a consequence of the siege of recent years and it was one way of combating the severe isolation of Palestinians from one another and the rest of the world and their confinement to their towns and villages, now more intensified with the building of the Apartheid Wall.

As the University's role as a true cultural center develops in the face of changing times and new challenges, the spirit of its beginnings continue to guide it, animating the institution with a vibrant breeze of living culture.

## Making Art

When the taxi first rounded the bend and I saw the campus of Birzeit University across the small valley, I felt pride and I felt Palestine. I wanted with all my heart to support the University. I was very happy when Vera Tamari invited me to teach with her and to work with her students on a special project.

I thought of ways to introduce the students to the idea of extracting from reality and their experiences to create something abstract. I decided that the materials had to be plentiful and delightful and cheap, because the assignment was rather difficult. I decided to have them work with papier-maché.

Compared to American students, my students at Birzeit seemed innocent, sincere, and real. They loved the project mostly because the papier-maché was a delight to work with. They gathered in social groups to tear paper and mash it, chatting and laughing as they worked. One student went to his grandmother in the village and came back with dried circles of papier-maché influenced by her baking techniques.

I had suggested that they might use stones as support for drying paper, and one day a group of them walked into class with a wheelbarrow full of stones. One of them explained: “Miss, these are the stones of our country.” This simple statement moved me and became the title of one of my works.

Vera Tamari was a consummate teacher. Her great strength was in supporting the students one by one and talking to them seriously about each piece they were making. After my active work with the students, Vera completed the project and they invited me back for an exhibition. She had pulled the project together, and the results were magnificent.

Birzeit students, like Palestinian students in general, apply themselves very seriously to learning. Perhaps the most compelling experience I had was being asked by one student to visit another one in a Palestinian



Photo: Yasser Darwish.



Museum visitors. Photo: Samer Al-Sharif.

National Authority prison so that he would be able to finish his project. I did and what I saw was a lesson for me. I am sure that Israel will not last and Palestine will be free and our students will experience learning without the agony of occupation and oppression.

*Samia Halaby is a Palestinian artist and writer.*







## CHAPTER 13

# Community-Oriented Programs and Initiatives

Community service, together with teaching and research, form the three pillars on which Birzeit University's mission rests, ensuring a level and balanced offer. Indeed, a university that does not reach out to the community that it is supposed to serve is bound to fall short. To affirm its commitment to outreach, the University created the post of Vice-President for Community Outreach to supervise, develop, and foster outreach programs and activities.

This chapter provides snapshots of the institutes, centers, and programs created by the University, often through staff initiatives, to serve the community and to instill awareness about issues of public concern. Birzeit's institutes and centers undertake training, consultation, continuing education, and applied research; in addition, the institutes offer degree programs, mostly on the graduate level. Two initiatives that were launched in the 1970s, the Research Center and the Literacy Program, were discontinued years ago; however, they performed a vital community service at a time when the service was most needed, and so they must be part of the record. Two other programs from that period, the Voluntary Work Program and Community Health, continue to this day.



Institute of Environmental and Water Studies publications. Photo: Yasser Darwish.



Panel discussion. Left to right: Dr. Mudar Kassis (Democracy and Human Rights); author and political analyst Mamdouh Noufal; and Dr. Salim Tamari (Department of Sociology and Anthropology). Photo: Yasser Darwish.

Former faculty member and dean of students Munir Fasheh describes the spirit that gave rise to the early initiatives as follows: “Groups of friends started doing what they were convinced needed to be done. What helped that attitude to flourish was the fact that the reference of people was from within rather than from authority or funding organizations; the word “proposal” was alien. The only authority in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was the occupying Israeli army, which was illegitimate in the eyes of people. The lack of a legitimate authority motivated people to do what they felt was needed, regardless of the price they might pay for doing it. One surprising aspect was the unplanned harmony in people’s activities.”

The last program described in this chapter, the Right to Education Campaign, was launched to defend the rights of Palestinian students and teachers and the free functioning of educational institutions and to voice the concerns of the Palestinian academic community locally and internationally.

Many individuals—too many to be included here—were involved in developing programs that extended the reach of Birzeit University in the community. What follows are brief descriptions of a selection of programs, written by former and current faculty and staff members who contributed to launching or developing them.

## Institutes and Centers

Birzeit University institutes and centers were established to address specific needs within the community. They offer community-oriented programs, facilitate discussion, and conduct policy-oriented research, all of which are instrumental in the overall development of Palestinian society.

- Institute of Community and Public Health (1978): pioneering a broad multidisciplinary approach to health, one that draws on medical, epidemiological, political, social, and other disciplines.



Dr. Islah Jad speaking at a panel sponsored by the Institute of Women’s Studies (IWS). Left to right: Nida Abu Awwad and Islah Jad, IWS; author Fayha Abdul Hadi; Rema Tarazi, General Union of Palestinian Women; activist and researcher Janan Abdo; and Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, senior lecturer at the Faculty of Law, Institute of Criminology and the School of Social Work and Public Welfare at the Hebrew University.

- Center for Continuing Education (1991): building institutional and community capacity through the design, development, and implementation of innovative programs in organizational development, educational reform, and other areas.
- Institute of Law (1993): updating and development of Palestinian legal structures and systems.
- Institute of Women's Studies (1994): working to institutionalize gender studies as an academic field.
- Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies (1994): developing Palestinian political and diplomatic work through teaching, training, research, community awareness programs, and regional and international cooperation.
- Media Development Center (1996): specialized training for Palestinian media professionals.
- Center for Development Studies (1997): contributing to the achievement of sustainable and participatory development through multidisciplinary research, provision of scientific resources, and community-oriented activity.
- Institute of Environmental and Water Studies (2007, replacing the Water Studies Institute, 2001): maintaining the environment and improving optimal practices of water usage.
- Birzeit University Testing Laboratories (2007, replacing the Center for Environment and Occupational Health, 1982): testing and improving the quality of food production and pharmaceutical drugs and contributing to environmental protection.



Law and History Conference, 2008. Left to right: Dr. N Robert Rouland, Institut Universitaire de France and Paul Cezanne University; Dr. Camille Mansour, Dean of the Faculty of Law & Public Administration; Dr. Muhsin Yousef, History Department, Birzeit University; and Dr. Abed Tayara, Cleveland State University.

- Najjad Zeenni Information Technology Center of Excellence (2008): stimulating creativity in the information technology and communications sector.
- Virtual Gallery (2004): providing access to information on contemporary and Palestinian visual arts and culture. The Web site hosts exhibits and makes available to visitors an extensive archive of Palestinian contemporary art; it provides art exposure in an environment impoverished in cultural opportunities and where mobility is severely curtailed.
- The Ethnographic and Art Museum: promoting, developing, and raising awareness of Palestinian cultural heritage and visual arts through documentation, exhibitions, cultural activities, and exchange.





Research Center publications. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

## ***The Research Center***

For Birzeit staff and students in the mid-1970s, establishing a state necessitated preparing the ground and creating the construction blocks: building strong national institutions. Birzeit University was one. For us, maybe it was the most important institution in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Other than producing the qualified and committed human resources needed for building and successfully managing the future state, we believed that the University could contribute to state building in numerous other ways. One major contribution was to provide the information and research needed by the national leadership, the PLO, for policy formulation and decision-making. Clearly we needed a center to collect information, to process it, to analyze it, to draw conclusions, and to propose action in various sectors; such a center would encourage and support researchers on Palestinian issues under occupation, both from the Occupied Palestinian Territory and from abroad. Thus came into existence the idea of establishing the Research Center within the University, in 1976.

I proposed this idea to Acting President Gabi Baramki (who was the chair of the University Council, of which I was a member); he asked me to present it in writing to the Council. I presented it to my fellow Council members (deans and chairpersons of various University departments), and they quickly approved the proposal. The proposal required a little outside funding, which was not difficult to secure.

The Center funded and published a number of studies during its first two years of operation on important topics such as housing needs in Palestine and Palestinian villages destroyed by Israel since 1948. To support researchers and students wishing to conduct studies, the Center filed local newspaper article clippings on topics ranging from the confiscation of Palestinian land, the demolition of Palestinian houses, and the creation of Israeli settlements, to school education and health services in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The article clippings were filed and archived, and a quarterly subject index was published. These quarterly reports were rich with chronological information on important subjects and were distributed to interested organizations and individuals free of charge. These were the early beginnings of a systematic approach to collecting information about Palestinian society under occupation and encouraging policy-oriented studies and research to document and analyze important aspects of Palestinian history and life.

In September 1978, I left Birzeit University and went to the UK, where I enrolled in a doctoral program on a scholarship from the British Council with the support of Birzeit University. In the years that followed, the activities of the Research Center were directed by distinguished University professors, the late Baker Abu Kishek and Kamal Abdelfattah, among others, all of whom contributed to the improvement of the quality of its activities.

I believe that the Research Center made a significant contribution to encouraging research at Birzeit University, research whose purpose was to address societal and developmental issues, motivated by the general mood of working for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Together with the Literacy and Adult Education Program,

which Hiyam Abu Ghazaleh and I established during the same period, the Research Center laid the basis for establishing later University centers and institutes for community services and development. It also strengthened the tradition and the culture that a University under conditions of foreign occupation and within a society that is struggling for its liberation and independence has to play an active role in the service of society, in development, and in state building.

*Khalil Mahshi (Class of 1971) was a faculty member from 1975 to 1986.*

## ***The Literacy and Adult Education Program***

In 1976, Birzeit University launched the Literacy and Adult Education Program, which was designed to offer technical expertise to nongovernmental organizations that were running literacy programs and to assist them in addressing the obstacles they were facing.

The Program developed a range of resources:

- Experimental centers in villages in the Birzeit area (functional literacy).
- Developmental programs in tandem with reading and writing classes— Family Life Development; agriculture; machine-knitting, cutting, and sewing classes (used as an incentive for illiterate women who were reluctant to attend literacy classes); and basic computer skills training for the newly literate.
- Textbooks and reading materials for the newly literate (on health education, child psychology, and agriculture-related topics)
- Educational studies and research.

In addition, the Program trained facilitators to work in community betterment projects (literacy skills, agriculture, Family Life Development) throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory.



Literacy Program Coordinator Hiyam Abu Ghazaleh receives an award from Dr. Darwish Nazzal, chairman of the Board of Trustees. (University President Hanna Nasir is on the left.) Photo: Yasser Darwish.

Some University students who were interested in the Literacy Program activities were encouraged to participate and were trained by Program staff. Their involvement was facilitated through the Voluntary Work Program, which coordinated the community service every student performed to meet a University requirement for graduation. Many reported that these experiences had a positive impact on them, especially those who never went to rural areas. Hundreds of trainers helped to train others within the community, either working through local societies or by working as volunteers during their free time.

In 1997, the Program was honored in a special ceremony by the Arab League for Education, Science and Culture Organization (ALESCO) for excellence in its Adult Education activities. The Program ended in 1999, when its role was taken over by the Palestinian National Authority Ministry of Education. I now represent Palestine on a regional network for literacy and education, headquartered in Cairo.

On a personal note, I must add that my enrollment as a student at Birzeit University changed my life. Although those of us who worked in the Literacy Program worked hard, the real credit for the program goes to the University, which took the initiative to address a real social problem.

*Hiyam Abu Ghazaleh (Class of 1976) was the director of the Literacy Program.*

## **Voluntary Work Program**

Birzeit University students must complete 120 hours of community service as a graduation requirement. When I graduated, I had officially logged 500 hours. I am perhaps more proud of this fact than I am of my academic achievement.

Through the Voluntary Work Program, I got to know Palestine. Through my friend Ali Hassoonah, the coordinator of the Program in the Student Affairs Office, I was able to get to know Tiberias and Upper Galilee and the Triangle and also southern Palestine and Beer Saba'. I got to know the Naqab desert as a Birzeit University volunteer and not as a blindfolded prisoner. I also saw the occupied Syrian Golan Heights.

I was introduced to the Jordan Valley and to the rhythms of life of the residents there and the harshness of their lives, not only due to the temperature but also to the occupation policies, which targeted their livelihood on a daily basis.

My friend Ali merged the Voluntary Work Program requirement with political geography, which the occupation had deprived us of. The University deserves credit for providing the opportunity for me to get acquainted with geographic Palestine and political Palestine and Palestine's people and ways of life and cultural Palestine.

*Khalid Farraj (Class of 1996) is the associate director of the Institute for Palestine Studies, Palestine.*

## **Al-Hal**

The Media Development Center was established in 1996 to train professional journalists; within 10 years, it had trained more than 60% of all media professionals in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, according to a 2005 survey by a Swedish organization. Birzeit got a local radio station (whose reach extended only a few kilometers) and more important, it pioneered the production of radio and TV programs that were aired on many stations in Palestine. Under the supervision of professionals, media students produced hundreds of hours for radio and TV that had an impact on the media in the country.

In the print media, the publication *al-Hal* was a unique case.

The first issue of *al-Hal* was published in February 2004, and it created an immediate buzz in the Palestinian press. A monthly paper that resembles a daily newspaper, it has a major political story on the front page, political and social reports inside, and the usual light stories on the last page. Unlike typical newspaper articles, *al-Hal* articles are short (300 words maximum; reports do not exceed 700 words) and cover a variety of subjects that are of concern to general readers.

Now in its 6th year, *al-Hal* continues as a nonpartisan, very local paper. Articles by opinion leaders are printed side by side with articles by novice journalists. It keeps the tradition of publishing lots of cartoons and color pictures. It tackles subjects ranging from "The War at Gaza" to "Why Wear a Necktie." It took from radio the vox pop style: short interviews with people on the street, office, or shop on a certain (usually social) matter, accompanied by photos.

Many observers believe that *al-Hal* represents a special school in journalism. Its influence on journalists is already felt, although it has yet to make well-established newspapers change their ways. Readers claim to read every page. Reasons for this popularity might be that it is



daring, it doesn't mince words, it says things in a simple manner, it is full of pictures and cartoons, and it has its readers—and nobody else—in mind.

*Aref Hijjawi (Class of 1982), the director of Programs at Aljazeera TV, was the editor of al-Hal in 2005-2006.*

## ***Right to Education Campaign***

The Right to Education Campaign is the product of a long history of activism at Birzeit University in response to ongoing repression of Palestinian educational institutions by Israeli occupation forces. The aim of the Campaign is to demand the right to education for all Palestinians, including unimpeded access to their places of study. It works to inform the international community about Israel's continuing violations of Palestinians' right to education (for example, by denying access to campuses through roadblocks and closures).

The Campaign operates on various levels to defend both school and university education in Palestine. It provides legal assistance to detained students and staff and issues calls to action on their behalf. The Campaign also documents human rights abuses at Palestinian universities, issuing legal reports and supplying them to UN bodies. It heads campaigns on specific issues, such as the denial of foreign passport-holding staff to enter the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the restrictions placed on university students from Gaza.

The Campaign raises awareness about obstacles to Palestinian education through its Web site, bimonthly news bulletins and publicity materials, and its contacts with international solidarity groups.

The Campaign evolved from two initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1977, faculty members (including Tayseer Arouri, Hanan Ashrawi, Rita Giacaman, and Lisa Taraki, and, later, Hugh Harcourt, Penny Johnson, and Anne Scott) formed the Prisoners Committee to support detained students and staff. It secured legal representation for those arrested,



Media student-trainees in a television studio. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

attended military trials, and accompanied those summoned to the military headquarters. Later, the Committee went on to resist and document the effects of Military Order 854, which allowed Israel to dictate Palestinian educational curricula, student admissions, and the hiring and firing of faculty.

Out of this work grew the Human Rights Action Project, which documented obstructions imposed on University students and staff in the 1980s and 1990s, including restriction orders, house and campus raids, student deportations, campus closures, and the denial of their freedom of movement. In 1998, the Project hired a lawyer to provide legal assistance to imprisoned students and staff.

In 2002, the Human Rights Action Project developed into the Right to Education Campaign. It now has branches in the UK and Italy and more than fifteen affiliated student unions across the world.

*Anan Quzmar is the Right to Education Campaign coordinator.*



## CHAPTER 14

# Making a Difference

*Nabeel Kassis*

On the eve of the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in 1994, Palestinian civil institutions were in shambles, destroyed or weakened by twenty-seven years of Israeli military occupation. Amidst the institutional ruin, Palestinian universities had continued to function, a testimony to Palestinian resilience in the face of very adverse conditions. The role played by the universities in fostering steadfastness and in preparing for eventual state-building cannot be over-emphasized, and among the universities, Birzeit stands out. As the first Palestinian university to be established, it blazed a trail in uncharted territory, setting the standard and leading the way in turbulent times. It made higher education in Palestine a fact of life. In short, Birzeit University rose to the challenges of the times and continues to be a key player in Palestinian educational, social, cultural, and political life.

The role of Birzeit University since its inception must be seen within the context of a nation trying to rid itself of a prolonged Israeli military occupation and policy whose ultimate aim is the dispossession of the indigenous population. Under such circumstances, the academy is



Guiding Birzeit through troubled times and to national prominence. Left to right, President Hanna Nasir, 1972-2004; Acting President Gabi Baramki, 1974-93; President Nabeel Kassis (since 2004). Photo: Yasser Darwish.



... if there is any hope for the future it is in such national institutions as Birzeit which, under tremendous pressures and remarkable odds, still functions, often brilliantly and always sensibly. ...

... what is very impressive is that on campus at Birzeit there is an open and free exchange of ideas and opinions that simply doesn't exist anywhere else in the Arab world. Nasir and his colleagues are understandably proud of this, and very anxious to preserve it. Criticism of individuals and policies thrives, as does a boisterous debate between the adherents of different political parties.

... One hears a lot of complaining at the university, but the amazing thing from my point of view is that as an institution it thrives despite a large number of odds and innumerable obstacles.

One reason why this is so, I think, is that ... Birzeit is not a family institution but in the minds of everyone associated with it as student, administrator or faculty, it is a public, national one. ...

Without Birzeit University and institutions like it, our political life and survival would be virtually non-existent.

—*Palestinian American professor of comparative literature Edward Said*

obviously crucial in providing education to the youth, which in turn is crucial for liberation. However, Birzeit University's societal function goes beyond education. Palestinian universities in general have been effective agents of social mobility since the mid-1970s, reaching young men and women from all social origins. Many of our current political and community leaders are Birzeit University graduates, and University scholars are not only engaged in the state-building enterprise even while we suffer under a regime of occupation; they are also important contributors to the national debate on democracy, accountability, good governance, social justice, and social responsibility.

Reading through the chapters and first-person accounts in this book, one cannot fail to notice how and where Birzeit made a difference in the lives of individual Palestinians over the years. Indeed, most people understand the value of higher education almost exclusively in terms of individual social mobility or status. Although one can point to the

importance of education in stimulating the economy, or in state-building in the case of many nations in the third world, the academy is not only an engine of economic growth; it is also—I would even say primarily—an engine of cultural and intellectual development. It is in this larger context that Birzeit University has made a profound difference to Palestinian life, especially since 1972, a phase in the University's history that I view as singular and unique. This is the phase that I want to take up in this chapter.

Birzeit addressed a dilemma faced by high school graduates who wanted to continue their education but did not want to risk being permanently exiled from the country. When the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip fell under Israeli occupation in 1967, there were no universities in what became the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). Students who left the country to study risked not being able to return. The Israeli occupation authorities considered all Palestinians to be residents with no citizenship rights; their residency rights could be revoked for any number of reasons, including failure to return during the limited window defined by an Israeli-issued permit. Those who ventured back into the OPT stood a good chance of being harassed or arrested for contacts with the PLO, which was severely punishable according to Israeli military orders. Because it was hard to define what constituted a contact, many opted to play it safe and to stay abroad, waiting for a resolution of the bigger problem. This, and economic hardships, resulted in brain drain, as well as a drain of the young population.

When Birzeit College began the transition that would make it the first university in the OPT, it attracted many able faculty and staff with a passion for academic excellence and a commitment to high work values. Building on a tradition of liberal arts education and a reputation of good scholarship over two decades as a junior college, the nascent University quickly became a local center of academic excellence. Students from all over the area flocked to Birzeit, making it a melting pot of Palestinians from all social backgrounds and all affiliations in fulfillment of the University's mission of reaching the widest possible circle of Palestinian youth, giving them good education

and instilling in them good citizenship, democratic values, and the pursuit of excellence. Birzeit University's well-rounded graduates were sought after at home and abroad as properly trained young men and women with a sound outlook on life and a healthy attitude to society. Birzeit University staff were equally in demand by institutions seeking well-trained personnel.

Birzeit opened the way for the establishment of other universities in the OPT. By the mid-1980s, half a dozen universities and several community colleges were offering degrees and training beyond the secondary level. The number of students enrolled in higher education institutions has been growing steadily, and the increasingly younger population is now better educated. Birzeit alone has graduated around 20,000 students since 1976. The collective impact that Palestinian institutions of higher education have had on training qualified human resources to carry out the functions needed by the society is phenomenal.

Birzeit University committed itself to principles that contributed to the larger community beyond the confines of the campus grounds. Birzeit's statutes, for example, stipulated that students and employees can organize themselves in representative bodies (for example, Student Council and Union of Employees). The Student Council became the staging ground for many future leaders in politics, culture and arts, business, and civil society organizations; Palestinian civil society would be much less vibrant were it not for the influence of Birzeit student activism. The yearly Student Council elections have become an institution in itself; the example they provide of democratic practice that involves heated but civilized debates is watched closely with admiration by the larger community.

One of the mainstays of Birzeit's mission is community outreach. Even before it had awarded its first bachelors degrees, the University was introducing programs that address societal needs. Public Health, Literacy, and Environmental Health and Occupational Safety are three early programs whose effects were felt throughout the OPT. The Institute of Archaeology and the Research Center were unique in their scope of interest; they trained professionals who went on to become leading



President Nabeel Kassis addresses the graduates, faculty, and audience at the 2008 graduation ceremony. Photo: Eyad Jadallah.

archeologists and researchers. In the 1990s, Birzeit established institutes and centers that were not part of the academic faculties. The Institute of Women's Studies, the Institute of Environmental and Water Studies, and the Institute of Law are examples of outreach units that profoundly influenced their respective areas of specialty. Thanks to the efforts of the Institute of Law, for example, lawyers and legal researchers have electronic access to all legislation promulgated in Palestine, compiled and archived by the Institute, dating to the period when Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire. The Conservatory of Music, which was started in the University and evolved into the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music, has been able to change the musical scene in the OPT, training and teaching hundreds of talented young people in the art of music and playing musical instruments, and bringing Palestinian and Arabic music to the world as well as the music of the world to Palestine. The Center for Continuing Education makes its services available to an increasingly wider circle of beneficiaries and offers



On a visit to the Institute of Law. Left to right: Ms. Laila Shaheed, Palestinian representative to France; Dr. Hanna Nasir; M. H. Vedrine, Foreign Minister of France; and Dr. Camille Mansour, Director of the Institute of Law. Nabeel Shaath (minister of foreign affairs at the time) and French consul Stanislas de Laboulaye are in the background. Photo: Yasser Darwish.

training and consulting services in a variety of fields. Birzeit University Library offered its assistance to other libraries in the country that were just getting started. The Birzeit University Computer Center also offers other universities and institutions its services in areas it has pioneered or in which it has acquired valuable experience.

Birzeit has been able to offer assistance on matters of governance to more recently established institutions of higher education either directly or through its involvement in the Council of Higher Education, which it helped establish. A university is a complex structure with many units that have to operate in harmony and run in tandem in order to deliver the required service. Over the years, Birzeit has offered unstinting assistance to other Palestinian universities that needed help in tackling academic, financial, or administrative issues. One area in which Birzeit gathered experience the hard way was in functioning despite the

frequent Israeli military closure orders in the 1980s. The University had to devise alternative methods of teaching while maintaining specific academic standards. During the long closure in the first intifada, Birzeit introduced a program of teaching that minimized the need for contact between faculty and students. This program was adopted by other universities, which enabled them to continue to teach under the very difficult conditions of that period.

Birzeit is not the largest university in the OPT now, but for a long period before the establishment of the PNA it was the largest local employer. Hundreds of jobs were created around the University and the services that it provides. The towns and villages around Birzeit were able to benefit directly from the presence of a stable employer. The commitment between employer and employee was mutual and resulted in a generally tight-knit community with a strong sense of loyalty to the institution and its mission.

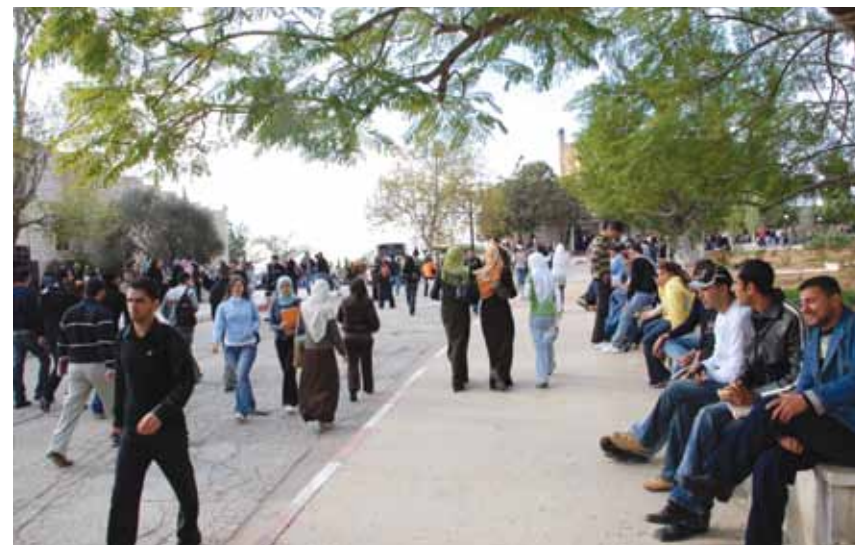
Although Birzeit has never been able to compete with organizations that can offer better pay, either in the Gulf or by the private sector and by well-funded NGOs here at home, it remains an attractive employer, with a transparent, nondiscriminatory hiring and student acceptance policy that is based exclusively on merit. Many well-trained graduates stayed in the country and helped in building civil institutions and, in due time, making themselves available to a wider variety of jobs in the public and private sectors as well as in civil society organizations. There is now hardly an institution, be it governmental, civil, cultural, educational, financial, or industrial, that is not led by Birzeit University graduates. The impact that Birzeit has had in this respect is remarkable.

Assessing the impact that Birzeit had on its surroundings would not be complete without alluding to some of the less tangible but no less important roles that it played that spring from that intangible quality referred to as the “spirit of Birzeit.” The Birzeit community has always fostered a sense of national identity and responsible citizenship and encouraged debate around controversial issues in a free and tolerant environment. Many Birzeit faculty members take to heart their public role and have assumed the dual responsibility of fostering national



consciousness and identities alongside their role as educators and researchers. By further providing an environment that is conducive to the pursuit of competitive initiatives without neglecting social responsibility, Birzeit became the incubator of many successful enterprises that left their mark on the Palestinian educational, cultural, and economic scenes. Furthermore, the commitment to the patriotic and adherence to the national within the Birzeit University community has always been very strong and broadly recognized. No wonder that when the Madrid Peace Conference was launched in 1991, Birzeit University provided by far the largest contingent of leaders, negotiators, analysts, supporting staff, and media experts. These were all big challenges, and no institution is better suited to carry out this role than a university that takes its role seriously.

In societies in which conflicting sentiments and identities run high, the academy must lead by creating a space for rational discourse. Governments, corporate interests, and political parties all have a stake in many of the struggles that generate these debates; they cannot be expected to introduce rationality into the public debate. Many of the renowned public intellectuals on the Palestinian scene are or have been Birzeit University professors who act as catalysts for the debate of issues in the public interest and for the public good. They command moral authority by virtue of their position in the academy rather than in government or in the corporate world. They perform a vital societal function, a particularly critical one, in view of the many conformist and traditional forces that prevail in Palestinian society. Aware that it is the duty of academics to examine these passions and sentiments, analyze their roots and consequences, and alert society to their dangers, Birzeit University faculty have remained true to this role.



Photos: Yasser Darwish.

***Mahmoud Darwish, Excerpt from His Speech upon Receipt of an Honorary Doctorate Degree from Birzeit University, July 7, 1996***

Regardless of the extent of our perplexity in the face of this reality [that we have turned the enemy into an opponent and we are unable to make it a partner to go ahead with], which see-saws between seeing the glass as half-empty and half-full, it is not within the capacity of culture to spontaneously reexamine its own nature and its role. But inasmuch as culture is knowledge, it is a fundamental factor in the formation of awareness. From this it derives its power to deal with reality, not to gloss over nor to consecrate, but to contribute to the spreading of collective awareness of the necessity of changing this reality.

I am not here to praise the role of our intellectuals and our universities, not even the role of Birzeit University, in defending our national culture and in fortifying it against the dangers of self-doubt. But I would like to point out the breadth of the historical space that our cultural endeavor moves within. Our cultural endeavor much range over vast areas of knowledge, at the forefront of which is the protection of our collective memory, and our right to tell our historical narrative, and to defend our historical consciousness, and developing mechanisms

through which to express our national and human belonging; and deepening our culture of democracy and freedom and dignity, and concepts of human rights.

The nature of any genuine culture, being both national and humanistic simultaneously, makes it capable of preserving its uniqueness and its identity at the same time as it interacts and enters into dialogs with other cultures that collectively form the world culture.

Accordingly, a genuine culture is capable of distinguishing between what is humanitarian and what is racist in the culture of the Other and to discern the common humanity in which we must evolve the means of our living presence, from a position of uniqueness free from the dual complexes of inferiority and isolationism.

We do not wish to be more heroic, nor do we wish to be greater victims. We want simply to be ordinary mortals.

I thank Birzeit University, its administration, faculty, and students, for its previous and future roles in revitalizing our cultural and national life. I thank it now for this honor that I do not deserve, and I will strive very hard to be worthy of it.





## Sources and Credits

Most of the photographs used in this book are taken from the University photograph archive, which contains photographs from several private collections. Credits and dates are given when they are available. The photographs used in chapter 11 were provided by the chapter author. Some photographs were taken by Birzeit University photography students and are used with permission.

**Chronology.** The following sources were consulted in the compilation of the Chronology: the Historical Chronology section of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs Web site ([www.passia.org](http://www.passia.org), accessed on November 11, 2009); the booklet “Four Decades of a Divided Land: 1948-1989,” published by Palestine Aid Society (Washington, DC, 1990); Peter Mansfield, *A History of the Middle East* (New York: Viking, 1991); and the Chronology and Right to Educations sections of the Birzeit University Web site ([www.birzeit.edu](http://www.birzeit.edu), accessed on November 11, 2009).

**Chapter 1.** Ann Mosley Lesch notes the important role played by the six national secondary schools (Birzeit among them) “in fostering Arab and nationalist outlooks among their students.” *In Arab Politics in Palestine, 1917-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 66, fn 32. Regarding the political leanings of the faculty, author Tarazi states that Wadi Tarazi was a member of the Arab Higher Committee; Hassan Sabbah was killed in battle in 1948; Said El-Issa, Kamal Nasir, and Wadi Deeb were prominent nationalist poets; and Elia Khoury was a member of the PLO Executive Committee. Playbills in the possession of Rima Tarazi helped to construct the list of theater performances. Numbers of schools and schoolchildren during the British Mandate period are taken from A. L. Tibawi, *Arab Education in Mandatory Palestine* (London: Luzac & Co., 1956), pp. 20, 49, 57, and 66. Birzeit School enrollment figures during the 1940s were taken from school logs in the possession of Rima Tarazi. Names of staff members are taken from salary logs for 1945-48 and from the recollections of contributors and others who

attended Birzeit in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. The text of the speech delivered by Nabiha Nasir and the letter from Huda Shaarawi are in the possession of Rima Tarazi; Tarazi was also the source of the information about Musa Nasir, some of which appears in [www.webgaza.net](http://www.webgaza.net). The text was summarized from “The Palestinian National Song: A Personal Testimony,” by Rima Tarazi, published in *This Week in Palestine* (April 2007), no. 108; accessed September 22, 2009 at [www.thisweekinpalestine.com/details.php?id=2099&ed=139&edid=139](http://www.thisweekinpalestine.com/details.php?id=2099&ed=139&edid=139). Information about the graduation in April 1948 was communicated by one of the graduates, Arshalouse Adourian, who lives in Amman. *Remembering the Early Years*: Statements by alumni were collected by Rima Tarazi during the summer of 2009 and are excerpted here. Statements by Hafeez Musa Ghannam, Huda Farraj, and Samira Ghandour Haddad were submitted in Arabic and translated by Ida Audeh. Edward Karkar and Amy Aranki were interviewed by Ida Audeh on June 12, 2009 and August 25, 2009, respectively.

**Chapter 2.** Information about this period is available in Gabi Baramki, *Peaceful Resistance: Building a Palestinian University under Occupation* (London: Pluto Press, 2010). The transformation of Birzeit College into a junior college and the role of the Ford Foundation and AMIDEAST are touched on in Antony Thrall Sullivan, *Palestinian Universities under Occupation*. Cairo Papers in Social Science, Vol. 11, Monograph 2. Cairo: AUC Press, 1988. Judy Barsalou of the Ford Foundation provided useful information about the amount of assistance provided by the Ford Foundation during the 1950s and beyond. “A Student in the Late Sixties” is an edited version of a segment of an interview by Ida Audeh with Albert Aghazarian, August 22, 2009, Ramallah.

**Chapter 3.** Board of Trustee registration dates, dates of membership in the Association of Arab Universities and the International Association of Universities, and the names of vice-presidents were provided by the President’s Office.

**Chapter 4.** This chapter was submitted in Arabic and was translated by the President's Office. Some of the information in this chapter was taken from Birzeit University catalogs. Facts and figures and the list of undergraduate programs were taken from the University Web site. The quote used in the caption for Albert Glock is taken from Hamed Salem, "Late Bronze and Iron I Cooking Pots in Canaan: A Typological, Technological, and Functional Study," in *Archaeology, History, and Culture in Palestine and the Near East: Essays in Memory of Albert E. Glock*, edited by Tomis Kapitan (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999), p. 66.

**Chapter 5.** The list of graduate programs offered at Birzeit University was taken from the University Web site. Descriptions of specific graduate programs were provided by program directors and institute staff.

**Chapter 6.** For additional information, see Gabi Baramki, *Peaceful Resistance: Building a Palestinian University under Occupation* (London: Pluto Press, 2010). The Public Relations Office briefing paper, "Against the Closure of Palestinian Universities: The Case of Birzeit University," detailed the effects of 10 months of closure: loss of an entire academic year, restrictions on research, difficulties in meeting international cooperation agreements due to loss of facilities and laboratories, loss of millions of dollars of revenue, and human and academic cost to students. The Public Relations Office published briefing papers that provide more information about specific attacks on the student body: "No Mercy: A Report on Army Actions at Birzeit on November 21, 1984" (December 1984), on the killing of Sharaf al-Tibi; "Students Under Fire: A Report of Army Actions at Birzeit University on December 4, 1986" (on the killing of Jawad Abu Salmiyah and Saeb Dhahab); and "Battlefield Tactics at BZU: A Report of Army Actions at Birzeit University on April 13, 1987." Additional information is available from the quarterly reports "Palestinian Universities under Occupation" published by the *Journal of Palestine Studies* during the mid- to late 1980s. Population figures for the Occupied Palestinian Territory are taken from United Nations, Department of

Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Population Division, Population Estimates and Projections Section; World Population Prospects, the 2008 Revision, Population Database, accessed April 7, 2010, and available at <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp2008/index.htm>; figures for the number of Palestinians ages 19 years and younger for 1970 and 2010 are taken from Table DB3\_F1 (Quinquennial Population by Five-Year Age Groups – Both Sexes); accessed April 7, 2010, and available at [http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp2008/peps\\_population-by-age-and-sex\\_5x5.htm](http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp2008/peps_population-by-age-and-sex_5x5.htm). Data on arrests, imprisonments, and torture come from B'Tselem and is available on the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights Web site, accessed on July 8, 2009 at [www.pchrgaza.org/arrests\\_torture\\_stat.html](http://www.pchrgaza.org/arrests_torture_stat.html). The number of Birzeit University students and employees detained was provided by the Right to Education Campaign. Data on deportations is available on the B'Tselem Web site, accessed on July 8, 2009 at [www.btselem.org/English/Deportation/Statistics.asp](http://www.btselem.org/English/Deportation/Statistics.asp). Data on house demolitions come from the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, which bases its estimates on information from the Israeli Ministry of Interior, the Jerusalem Municipality, the Civil Administration, OCHA and other UN sources, Palestinian and Israeli human rights groups, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, field work, and other sources. Accessed on July 8, 2009 at [www.icahd.org](http://www.icahd.org). The numbers of Palestinians killed during the first intifada are from the B'Tselem Web site, accessed on July 18, 2009 at [www.btselem.org/english/statistics/first\\_Intifada\\_Tables.asp](http://www.btselem.org/english/statistics/first_Intifada_Tables.asp). Numbers killed between September 28, 2000, and September 28, 2004 are from "Resource File: The al-Aqsa Intifada: Military Operations, Suicide Attacks, Assassinations, and Losses in the First Four Years," *Journal for Palestine Studies*, Vol. 34, no. 2, p. 85. The Resource File gives a range of 2,859 (B'Tselem) and 3,659 (Miftah); the midrange (used here) was the figure provided by Palestine Red Crescent Society. The response of Secretary Shultz to the loyalty oath is described in Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1999), p. 134. Closure dates and student names and death dates were provided by the Public

Relations Office. First person accounts by Tayseer Arouri and Khalid Farraj were translated from the Arabic by Ida Audeh.

**Chapter 8.** The list of conference program member names and international participants was taken from a copy of the 1988 conference program. “Early Supporters” is an edited version of a segment of an interview by Ida Audeh with Albert Aghazarian, August 14, 2009, Jerusalem. The caption of the photo of Ibrahim Abu-Lughod is taken from an essay written by Edward Said, titled “My Guru,” published by the *London Review of Books*, December 13, 2001.

**Chapter 9.** The chapter text and first-person accounts were submitted in Arabic and translated by Ida Audeh.

**Chapter 10.** Information about previous strategy planning workshops was taken from an internal workshop report, provided by the Office of Planning, Development, & Quality Assurance in January 2010.

**Chapter 11.** The Lancet articles on Palestinian health are available on the Lancet Web site ([www.lancet.com](http://www.lancet.com)).

**Chapter 12.** Papers from the 1998 “International Conference on Palestinian Landscape” were published as Ibrahim Abu-Lughod,

Roger Heacock, and Khalid Nashef (Eds.), *The Landscape of Palestine: Equivocal Poetry* (Birzeit: Birzeit University Publications, 1999). Emily Jacir is profiled on the Institute for Middle East Understanding Web site, accessed on November 16, 2009, and available at <http://www.imeu.net/news/article003424.shtml>

**Chapter 13.** This chapter is a collection of short essays written by individuals who either developed or worked in programs and initiatives that were designed to have a broad social impact. Information about the institutes and centers was taken from their mission statements, provided by the President’s Office. The percentage of media professionals trained by the media program at Birzeit was taken from a SIDA report published in 2005 and sent to the author; information about the reach of the media center in training Palestinian journalists is also available on the Web site Fragile Contexts (<http://www.comminit.com/en/node/312584/3083>).

**Chapter 14.** The quote by Edward Said is taken from his 1998 article “Birzeit University: A Foundation Stone of a Palestinian Civil Society Under Siege,” reprinted by *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, January/February 1999; accessed on November 16, 2009, at <http://www.wrmea.com/backissues/0199/9901011.html>. The text of the remarks by Mahmoud Darwish was provided by the President’s Office and translated by Ida Audeh.



## Contributors

**Gabi Baramki** graduated from Birzeit College in 1946 and has held several key positions in the institution over the years—senior teacher, headmaster of the high school, dean of the junior college program, and later acting president of Birzeit University. He is now an educational consultant, a member of the Board of Trustees of Birzeit University, and a partner in the consulting firm Alternative Ways in Ramallah.

**George Giacaman** has served as chairperson of the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Studies, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and Founding Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies at Birzeit University. He teaches in the Master's Program in Democracy and Human Rights and the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Studies.

**Rita Giacaman** is a professor of public health at the Institute of Community and Public Health at Birzeit University.

**Roger Heacock** has been a professor of history at Birzeit University since 1985. He is a member of the Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies and was in charge of the Office of Academic Development. He is the coeditor (with Jamal Nassar) of *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads* (1990) and the editor of *Of Times and Spaces in Palestine: The Flows and Resistances of Identity* (2008), among other works.

**Nabeel Kassis** is professor of physics and has been the president of Birzeit University since 2004. He joined the University in 1980 and has served as chairman of the Department of Physics (1982-84) and vice-president for Academic Affairs (1984-89). In 1994 he left Birzeit and established the Palestine Institute for Economic Policy Research (MAS) and held several Palestinian Authority cabinet ministerial positions from 1998 to 2004.

**Ghassan Khatib** is a development economist and political analyst who teaches at the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Studies and was the vice-president for Community Outreach from 2007 to 2009. He held several cabinet ministerial positions between 2002 and 2006 and is currently director of the Government Press Office.

**Samia Khoury**, a member of Birzeit University's Board of Trustees, held a number of positions at Birzeit College between 1954 and 1960 and worked as a volunteer administrator from 1974 and 1979, during the development of the college into a university. More recently, she has served as national president of the YWCA and as president of Rawdat El-Zuhur organization, which runs an elementary school, and she is a founding member of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre.

**Hanna Nasir** taught physics and math at Birzeit College from 1955 to 1959 and was president of the College (and later University) from 1972 to 2004. He was deported by Israel to Lebanon in November 1974, charged with supporting the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO); he remained in exile until April 1993. He was a member of the PLO Executive Committee from 1978 to 1982, and he has been chairman of Birzeit's Board of Trustees since 2006 and chairman of the Central Elections Commission in Palestine since 2002.

**Ramzi Rihan** has been at Birzeit since 1970 as a faculty member of the physics department. He participated in the initial phases of the development of Birzeit University and was the first person to hold the posts of Dean of Student Affairs, Dean of the Faculty of Science, Vice-President for Planning and Development, and Vice-President for Community Outreach. He was a founding member of the Palestinian Council for Higher Education in 1977 and has worked on a number of projects with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

**Sami Sayrafi** is the vice-president for Administrative and Financial Affairs. He has served as the chair of Birzeit University's Department of Chemistry, the Dean of the Faculty of Science, and the Dean of Graduate Studies.

**Vera Tamari** is a visual artist, Islamic art historian, and art educator. She is a lecturer of Islamic Art and Architecture at Birzeit University, where she is also founder and director of the Ethnographic and Art Museum and the Virtual Gallery. She specializes in ceramic sculpture and conceptual art, and her work focuses on the issues of memory and identity.

**Rima Tarazi** is a pianist, composer, songwriter, and social activist. In addition to her involvement in Birzeit as a faculty member in the 1950s and later as a member of its Board of Trustees, she has had leadership positions with the General Union of Palestinian Women, the YWCA, and the Society of In'ash al-Usra. She is also a founding member of the National Conservatory of Music (now the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music) and the chairperson of its Supervisory Board.





