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**The Disputed Role of a Traditional Intellectual Group:
The case of Arab women teachers in Israel**

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Abstract

Can Arab Women Teachers in Israel arguably ‘traditional intellectuals’ succumb to the transforming of state ideology (Zionism) and Patriarchal values, which each and jointly, negatively influence their status as Palestinian women? How does the intricate socio-political condition [being Palestinian women in the Israeli state] affect their role as intellectuals? How do they enact social and political roles within a profession – identified with the production and reproduction of social values and political ideology, paradoxically premised on their subordination?

Palestinian women in general are perceived to face triple challenge: living within a patriarchal society, being part of the subordinated Palestinian national minority, and, being women in Israel. Those employed in education, have also to cope with contradicting hegemonic forces: state’s ideology, which they are required to inculcate through schooling, as opposed to Palestinian cultural legacy which their communities expect them to transfer to the future generations, and some of them might aspire to alter.

The study draws on critical educational theory: its understanding of the relationship between schooling - through the curriculum, teaching practices - and the hegemonic public order -social, political, economic, cultural; its view of schools as an apparatus of ideological control and its reproduction, as well as a site for the production of knowledge, whereas competing socioeconomic and cultural interests contest; social, cultural and economic conditions influence peoples’ interactions and individuals’ and collectives’ construction of meaning; its recognition of the individual’s capacity to self critique and transformation, and thus reproduction, appropriation and construction of personal and social meanings and realities, all along its recognition of the power of structural determinant (ideological and material).

This study relies on the life stories of thirty Arab women teachers from various social settings and religious backgrounds I interviewed for an in progress research on ‘Arab Women teachers’ life stories’.

Keywords

Palestinian women teachers in Israel; Women teachers’ life-stories; Women teachers’ agency

Background*

Engaged in the furthering of the Zionist ideology, the Israeli educational system has been, since its inception, developing in line with the Zionist historiography, pursued by the Jewish – Ashkenazi elite, according to which Israel represents the culmination of Jewish aspiration worldwide. The main implication of this principle was the denial of the history and the aspirations of the Palestinians, all along the establishment of the melting pot educational policy for Jews (Yona, 2005, ch.3).¹ As regards the Palestinians, the ministry of education along with other state agencies (e.g. the internal security services – the *shin-beit*, the mass media) have been utilized as a means through which Zionism's interests and dominance are secured and reproduced, and hence, as state's mechanisms for social, economic and cultural marginalization of the Palestinian citizens of Israel. Evidently, this has been conducted systematically through educational policies and practices, right from the imposition of educational goals and curricula, and all through the inequity in budget allocation (Abu-Saad, 2006; Mazawi, 1999), but mainly through policies aiming at: destroying Palestinian identity (e.g. denoting them by different labels);² disempowering the Arab education (e.g. the intimidation of teachers from exerting political stands,³ the appointment of 'yes-men' or collaborators to teaching, supervision and directory posts);⁴ as well as the exclusion of Arab intellectuals from planning and management positions.⁵ Hence, state's control through the educational system has been ensuring the reproduction of the Israeli hegemonic discourse not only through the formal curricula,⁶ but also through the collaboration of appointed supervisors, headmasters as well as infiltration of informers among teachers themselves. The impact of such collaboration is also pronounced in extra-curriculum activities, especially, in schools' commemoration and celebration of Israeli Days,⁷ all of which produces dissent among pupils, let alone the Palestinian society at large, eliciting Palestinian narrative propagation as well as commemorative Palestinian days (Sa'di, 1996; Abu-Lughod & Sa'di, 2007).⁸

* A previous version of this paper was presented in Workshop 03 'The Social Role of Intellectuals in the Middle East' at the Ninth Mediterranean Research Meeting, Florence & Montecatini Terme, 12-15 March 2008, organised by the Mediterranean Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute.

- 1 In Yossi Yona's terms, these are two direct outcomes of the Eurocentric and ethno-republican regime of Israel, which does not allow full inclusion and equality of all its citizens. For further elaboration on this issue see Y. Yona, 2005:30-34.
- 2 Within this policy, alternative identities were created for the Palestinians. These include: Arabs; Israeli Arabs; Minorities; Non-Jewish population; Arabs, Druze and Christians; Moslems, Druze and Bedouins (Sa'di, 1996: 403).
- 3 To M. Al-Haj (1995:169-171), security checks extend to the political activity of teachers' families.
- 4 To A. Sa'di (2003:232), 60% of the local authorities he surveyed reported that the Ministry of Education intervened in the appointment and dismissal of teachers.
- 5 A lot has been written on this subject. For informative recent accounts see D. Golan-Agnon (2006)
- 6 Pinpointed as the State's convenient instrument for ideological control, the Educational goals and curriculum administered for the Arab population has been extensively researched by sociologists, educationalists and politicians. See e.g.: Y. Peres, A. Erlich, N. Yuval-Davis, 1970; I. Lustick, 1979; The National committee of Arab Mayors, 1984;1991; M. Al-Haj, 1995.
Not so, the extra-curriculum, through which pupils' values and national views have been shaped (Zerubavel, 1994; Geisler, 2005; Mayer, 2005).
- 7 The marking of Israeli National Days through stories, poems, plays, celebrations, monuments, etc., introduces children to national symbols at early age. Reinforced by the process of overdetermination [i.e. the recursive commemorations and redundant imposition of the symbols by state institutions, politicians, intellectuals, the media, etc. (Geisler, 2005:XIII-XLII.)], these activities are presumed to crucial impact on the formation of national sentiments ideas (Zerubavel, 1994:5-6; Mayer, 2005)
- 8 Relating to the Palestinian's response to the state's endeavour, Ahmad Sa'di (1996:403) writes: 'The state-manufactured Palestinian history and identity have been propagated through the state-run Arab educational system, official publications and the mass media. To counter that, the Palestinians have developed a reading to the pre-1948 Palestinian society, and the injustice inflicted upon them by the Zionist colonization. They have produced their viewpoint(s) through informal education, selective use of cultural symbols, and linguistic articulations such as proverbs and double meanings'.

Moreover, consisting, traditionally, part of the elite, the local Arab community expects teachers to function as organic intellectuals (in the Gramscian sense). Instead, they refrain from 'expressions' which could be interpreted as critical of the State, and as such would cost them their job (Al-Haj, 1995:162; Sadi, 2003). In addition to State's control, Arab teachers are also subjugated to local authorities' politics, whereas kinship and patronage relationships play their role too (Al-Haj, 1995: 189).

Subjected to these constrictions and contradiction, Arab teachers are presumed to have been turned into what Andre Mazawi (1994:505) terms 'bureaucrats', alluding to their lack of professional autonomy, their abstinence from social or political issues as opposed to their mere adherence to official instruction, in order to avoid not only state control mechanisms but also local social pressures. Accordingly, it is widely assumed among the Palestinians in Israel, that the pre 1948 organic intellectual teacher no longer exists; that he was transformed into a traditional intellectual, a 'bureaucrat', disarmed of his will and ability to affect the socio-political order. Hence his resort to 'instruction' rather than 'education', and his refrain from relating to current affairs even when his subject matter requires it.⁹

As regard Palestinian women, since the British Mandate, and increasingly so following the Israeli enactment of compulsory education law in 1949, teaching has been one of the most attractive jobs for the educated among them.¹⁰ This is usually referred to Arab women's preference for 'female type occupation',¹¹ cultural constraints regarding their participation in the public sphere,¹² the development of 'enclave economy' within Arab localities¹³ (Semyonov et al., 1999) and, State's oppressive policies, reflected in the absence of job opportunities for Arab academics in Israel, male as well as female (Al-Haj, 1988; Khattab, 2002).¹⁴ All the same, unlike the universal trend whereas women constitute the vast majority of teachers in all levels of education, and quite inconsistently with the cultural appeal of 'teaching' for Arab women, the participation of Palestinian women in the teaching force in Israel is barely restricted to the primary level.¹⁵ Apparently, in a 'male defined normative setting' whereas occupational opportunities open to Palestinians academics are scarce, positions in the educational system remain predominantly occupied by men (Mazawi, 1994:510; Al-Haj, 1995:160; Herzog, 2004:239), diminishing, thus, further women's occupational choices.

Schools' feminization, however, is not merely about percentages in the educational system, but mainly about women's ability to transcend their teaching professions, transform their achievements into socio - political assets, and affect their socio-political conditions. In this respect, Palestinian women in Israel are presumed to be challenged by a 'triple discrimination (Hermann, 2003; Espanioly, 1997): as part of the Arab minority;¹⁶ as women in a patriarchal traditional community fostered by

9 E.g., the program 'educating for democracy' - authorized by the ministry of education (Al Haj,1989).

10 Nowadays it is the first among three top professions (education, manufacturing and health services attracting women in Israel, especially Arab women (CBS, 1995).

11 Employment patterns matching the system of women's seclusion and confinement to the domestic sphere, in traditional societies (Semyonov et. al 1999).

12 A comparative analysis of occupational distribution between Arab women, Arab men and Jewish women indicates that along two decades (1974 - 1994) Arab women were overrepresented in the professional, semi-professional categories (with 47.7%, 50.5% and 40.5% at each of the three points of time: 1974, 1984, 1994 respectively) which encompass employment in education, considered suitable for women in conservative societies (Semyonov et al. 1999: p.121).

13 It has developed as a result of segregation between Arabs and Jews and the necessity to meet the growing needs of the Arab community. It consists of Arab workers in the segregated Arab localities or in firms that are active in the Jewish sector but owned by Arabs (Khattab 2002:94-95).

14 According to Al-Haj (1988), most Arab academics (40%) are employed in education.

15 According to CBS, 1999 (table 22.8), they consist 65% of elementary school teaching force, 42% of the intermediate schools, and 31% of the secondary schools.

16 On their discrimination on national basis see: The Working Group, 1997.

repressive policies¹⁷ (which renders them mainly ‘preservers’ and reproducers’ of traditional values’, and ‘producers’ of the coming generations),¹⁸ and as women in the Israeli state, whose civil rights (employment, health, legislation, participation in political life, etc.) are subjected to sexist policies.¹⁹ As such their perception of agency and their scope of activism are intricately determined by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, by Israeli policies concerning their civil rights, as well as by the strengthening effect both factors have on the national and traditional forces in their society. Nevertheless, Palestinian activist women have been for decades challenging their oppressive socio-political conditions, although tending to prioritize (mainly until the late 1980s, and more so in the last decade²⁰) issues relating to their national oppression over issues of woman emancipation and political discrimination, establishing throughout various Palestinian women’s associations and movements.²¹ Nowadays, their activism covers individual and organized work on feminist issues,²² as well as on political issues.²³

The literature concerning Palestinian woman’s activism in Israel concentrates mainly on the impact socio-political factors had on the emergence of women’s organizations and their evolvement,²⁴ paying little attention to its effect on women as individuals, their perception of agency, its drives and expressions in their everyday life experiences. Moreover, not much is known about the scope and the strata of activist Palestinian women, their spheres of manoeuvre and influence. Worth noting is that the socialization Arab women, experience through their academic studies are far from being homogeneous. For, freedom of expression and activism, let alone freedom from familial and social control resulting from living away from home, typify universities more than teacher training colleges (Mar’i, 1978:129; Al-Haj, 1995:192; Makkawi, 1999) and might vary from one institution to another. In this respect, a life story could provide insights into the ways a woman’s experience at university or teacher training college, has affected her senses of individual, social and political agency.

Research Method

The issue of agency, its perception and expressions among Arab women teachers was explored through life story interviews, conducted with 30 Palestinian women teachers from Israel. The life story method was used for its capacity to generate narratives ‘of self lived experiences’ (Hermann, 1987:47) provided within a real social context (Atkinson, 1998:13) with all what it entails of subjectivity as well as cultural and socio-political constructs in the organization of these experiences and in the assertion of their meaning (ibid; Rosenwald et. al, 1992). As such it is relevant to the study of Palestinian women teachers as individuals and as a strata engaged in socio-cultural and political systems of domination; Stimulating personal narratives, it highlights the challenges, the contradictions and the ruptures involved in each woman’s experience, as a unique individual, yet acting within a shared socio-political dynamic, enduring social and political conflicts and changes. Throughout, it also provides information about the reality existing outside the story, described by the story, as well as about the story itself as a social construct. Furthermore, it elucidates subjective understanding of social or political reality, the way the teacher perceives and interprets its relation to her personal experience.

17 For elaboration on this matter, see M. Hassan (1999) ‘The Politics of Honour’.

18 On the ‘physical reproduction’ of Palestinian women, see R. Kanaaneh (2002) *Birthing the Nation*.

19 For more details see: ‘The Working Group on the status of Palestinian Women in Israel’, (1997)

20 See K. Hermann, 2003.

21 E.g.: M. Al-Haj, 1988; S. Mar’i & M. Mar’i, 1993; N. Espanioli, 1994).

22 E.g. gender inequality and inequity, violence against women, equality in personal status laws

23 E.g. issues of human rights, legal advocacy and involvement decision making bodies.

24 See for example: M. Mar’i & S. Mar’i, 1993; N. Espanioli, 1994; K. Hermann, 2003.

In line with the narrative method,²⁵ the interview consists of: a background enquiry form; the main life story narrative; an elaboration on issues mentioned in the main narrative and on issues of direct relevance to the research. Tape-recorded, fully transcribed and subjected to qualitative analysis,²⁶ mainly thematic analysis, the narratives were used to explore each woman's notion and practices of agency; the way these are interwoven in her teaching experience, affect her functioning as an educator and a member in her society, and give meaning and purpose for her work and life. The observation notes taken prior, during and following the interviews were also taken into consideration.

The interviewees are Palestinian women teachers, citizens of Israel, from various social settings (i.e. mixed Jewish Arab cities, multi-religious Arab villages, exclusively Moslem villages, and an unrecognized village) - except for the Negev; from different religious groups (Islam, Christianity and Druze). They vary in terms of their course of qualification (i.e. Israeli Universities, Arab or Israeli Teacher training colleges); their specialization (i.e. subject matters and layers: kindergarten, elementary, intermediary and secondary classes), their professional status and years of service (between 7 – 36 years) and their personal status (single, married, divorced, widow). They are employed in different types of schools (missionary schools, public, vocational or elementary schools). Half of the interviewees are from the same public elementary school, situated in a multi-religious village in the Galilee, some of its teachers commute from adjacent villages. The rest of the interviewees were coincidentally recruited. The interviews were conducted in Arabic in 2005, after teaching hours, mostly at the participants' houses, according to their preference. All the names used in this paper are fictitious.

Expressions of Social and Political Agency

The narratives displayed in this paper unfold a variety of practices, which reflect the diversity in women's action vis-à-vis the socio-political order, the contradictions it generates and its repercussions on their life as individuals. In this paper, I choose to display some of the prevalent accounts of agency through four thematic titles, each representing actually a mode of action adopted by different women teachers, although displayed through a single case. The first theme - *'The plea for peace of mind'* embodies life narratives consciously reconstructed away from political controversies encircling one's life and work. The theme is unsurprisingly common in teachers' narratives: some express it plainly, others insinuate to it and few utter it as if by slip of tongue. The second theme - *'The lure of culture'* depicts stories of non-ideological agency, whereas the act of agency reveals itself through actions rather than through self-conscious formulation. The third theme - *'The limits of sterilized knowledge'* incorporates accounts which capture teachers' tendency to concentrate on instructional goals, ignoring current affairs unless and in as much as these relate to their own community. The fourth theme is titled *'A chance to make a change'*. Although few, the narratives embodying this theme are quite blaring in terms of teachers' conscious involvement in teaching - not only as a means to impart knowledge, but also to influence the prevailing social and cultural order (through the subject matter, personal interaction with pupils, consideration of current affairs, etc.). Worth noting is that among the narratives incorporated within this theme are also of women who drifted into teaching, for cultural and socio-economic reasons.

In plea for peace of mind - through the story of Rula

Rula, a teacher in her mid thirties, married and a mother of three children who lives in the Galilee, in a multi-religious town and works in a neighbouring multi-religious town as well. Her initial intent and

25 As developed by H. Hermann (1987) and employed by G. Rosenthal (1993) & J. Chaitin (2002).

26 The analysis method is an integration of the life story analysis developed by J. Chaitin (following G Rosenthal) and thematic analysis developed by A. Georgi (1975)

her parents aspiration was that she qualifies in biology. However, she was easily persuaded by the Teaching Training College to shift to 'early education' (preparatory, 1st & 2nd grades), a shift, which she emphasises, to have never regretted, but rather to increasingly appreciate as she became mother, and more so as her friends and relatives seek her advice in matters related to early-education.²⁷ Evidently, her consent to specialize in early childhood, a domain allotted to women in a patriarchal society, upon biology, a domain open to men as well in the restricted labour conditions of the Arabs in Israel, proves unsurprisingly rewarding. It empowers her as a parent and a community member, granting her 'recognition', 'respectability', and consequently a sense of worthiness.

As a teacher, her narrative unveils a certain tendency to adhere to prescribed instructions regarding the curriculum and children's conduct. In her words:

My responsibility (involves) educating and teaching. (Meaning) to talk to children as I talk to my (own) children, what is allowed and what is prohibited (socially). I had hard time teaching children not to interfere when the teacher talks, to respect and implement what the teacher says. ... (At the end of the year), each teacher has to hand in a mapping report about her class... I am interested in seeing what the teacher who took my class writes about her class which used to be mine. It was satisfying to hear that she went on doing the things the way I did them, and to see that the mapping I did for my class reflects my work with the children. That there is discipline in the class... that the children have reached the appropriate level (reading and writing) in Arabic.

Apparently, here too, the tendency to adhere proves rewarding – the instructional aims are achieved and her educational efforts are acknowledged. However her tendency 'to assent' seems to encompass other aspects of her professional practices: the choice of educational contents, the priority she gives to religious feasts and Israeli Days²⁸ upon engagement in current affairs, as well as, the emphasis she allots to the ritual aspects of religious feast [such as the Christmas tree and Sancta Claus for Christmas] and national commemoration days [e.g. the observation of the sirens] upon the moral or the political dimensions of the occasions. Moreover, it seems to affect her socio-political comportment - as conspicuous in her constant verbal and non verbal rebuffing responses wherever relating to current affairs,²⁹ and, not least in her refrain from any social, political or professional activism [i.e. reading political columns, joining a protest or a demonstration, attending political commemoration events], noting that her husband might do so, her parents too: '*but, I don't*'.

Most astonishing, in Rula's accounts is her declaration to have never heard about the *Nakba Remembrance Day*, while feeling strongly about *The Land Day*, as evident in her assertion: '*This is a day in which the Arabs must strike*'. Still, and despite the significance she allots it, she would abide by the official regulations and attend school, although unwillingly, lamenting that: '*The Druze, although Arabs do not observe the strike.*' All the same, the limit of her protest wouldn't exceed not attending school, as she wouldn't take part in any further act of protest. Rula simply pleads for peace of mind: '*I want to adjust myself to the circumstances I am in. In the situation we are in, there is no place for such*

27 In her words: '*Everybody appreciates (me), I meet a lot of appreciation for my work and my opinion, for instance, my friends - any problem they encounter with regard their kids they call to ask me what to do..., they all ask me. ... I have such ... a problem ... I go to them, we discuss and talk, I work with the kid and I help them. ... They listen to my opinion, and I like it ...*'

28 'Remembrance Days' in memory of soldiers dead on Israel's wars & 'Holocaust Day' – according to the general guidelines of the ministry of education.

29 In her words: '*Politics for me is a neutral subject, I do not intervene in it ... no matter what ... I do not say anything... I do not enter into such discussions... I never intervene... the school also wouldn't allow (a situation in which) teachers enter and talk. ... Also nowadays, whereas so many things happen around [referring to the 2nd Intifida's events and the severe economic situation in local Arab councils] for my peace of mind I do not talk, nor argue nor anything... I have many other things to think about. ... Even if I have what to say, or am somewhere and people start talking, I get out of the subject, for there are far more important things than this. ... See, I am the kind (of person) who do not know much. I don't ask much, I don't know much. I go to school, do my job, nothing more...*'

things.' Her plea seems to loudly utter the monkeys' wisdom: 'eyes grasp no form, free away from prejudices. Ears make no distinction, spared futile chasing. Mouth keeps silent, no contending pro and con'³⁰.

However significant segments of Rula's narrative which evolve around the education of her own children tell a different story, one of a conscientious social actor. As a mother, she chose for her kids a public multi-religious Arab school, and not a sectarian Christian school, stating that this: '*forms a natural extension to the social reality they live in*', arguing for the vitality of multi-religious classrooms, and against dividing classes according to 'religious' or 'social-class' lines.³¹ Her stand in this respect and her contemplation upon discriminative practices within the classroom are quite revealing in terms of her engagement in power politics analysis as well as in terms of her awareness to state's manipulation of Palestinians' sub-national identities (religious and social identities). As a mother, her senses, her stands and will to act come into life. Aware of the increasing trend of segmentation on religious and class basis in her community, she actively refuses it, voices against it and proposes an alternative, an educational purpose for the benefit of all the community: '*(the school) should concentrate on (the issue of) violence. They have to minimize violence ...*'.

Educating for tolerance is the only thing Rula mentions in her accounts on both: her educational practices as well as her parental concern. In the former she attests to aim at it through the celebration of the different religious' feasts (namely: Christian, Moslem and Druze occasions) in her classroom.

Nonetheless, the discrepancy between Rula's expressions of agency in her personal life, as a mother and a woman in her community, as opposed to her reticence as a teacher is noteworthy. It raises questions regarding the way she perceives her role as a teacher as opposed to her role as a mother and as a citizen. Arguably, in both spheres, the professional (education) and the social (motherhood and member in a community), Rula's action is deliberate. Embedded in a defined socio-political reality, whereas she has to secure herself a job all along preserving a community under socio-political pressures, Rula chooses a strategy which seems to best serve her; Hence, the plea for peace of mind, whereas her utmost meaningful social action is the use of a school tradition (the celebration of the different religious' feasts) to promote values of multi-religious' tolerance within the Arab society, an issue of personal significance to her, all along, the conscientious decisions and actions within her own family and community.

Similar to Rula, other teachers too, from different social background, and paths into teaching express satisfaction with being teachers, but convey a sense of inhibition with regard their role as educators. Apparently, these teachers strive to fulfil their 'duties' without expressing personal stands on current affairs. All the same, each has her own site of significance, in which her sense of agency comes to life, usually in the communal sphere (e.g. inter-communal tolerance which they endeavour to promote through classroom practices; their claim for common religious classes for all pupils regardless of their religious affiliation). Given the policy of division and segmentation threatening the Palestinian society in Israel, Rula's and her colleagues' seemingly unpretentious attempts - receives social and political import.

The Limits of Sterilized Knowledge - through the stories of Basma, Iman and Rajaa.

Basma, Iman and Rajaa, are three compatriot young Druze teachers from a multi-religious Arab village in the Galilee. Although each one has her distinct life account, especially regarding her personal status (the first two are married and each has two kids, the latest is divorced with one kid), many factors justify their melange in one story. To their accounts, all three were encouraged by their fathers, teachers themselves - to attend a Teacher Training College for the convenience of the job for

30 www.yogichen.org/efiles/poem731.html

31 In her words: '*The division (along religious affiliation and others) is not right. Singling out the son of this and ... that and putting them in the class of the best teacher, means inequality. I work and voice (against it)...*'

their future prospects as wives and mothers. Like most of their Druze colleagues, they attended a college to which they could commute daily by an organised transportation forth and back. Likewise, they were appointed part time teachers in their village right upon graduation, and hence, secured teaching positions, and spared the effort of travelling outside the village. Moreover, they seem to share a similar perspective on their roles as women, teachers and citizens. All three account to be proud being teacher and enjoy the social recognition the job brings about. They all claim they would teach anywhere (in Arab or Jewish schools), any pupil (Jewish, Druze, Cristian, Moslem), for the educational challenges are the same and the system is the same. Although, by challenges they refer to different issues: Basma to teachers' professional concerns (e.g. securing themselves the job, attending courses), while Iman to educational concerns (e.g. reaching the child³²). Moreover, all three take pride in their instructional capacities (e.g. Basma accounts about her exemplary lessons, Iman about her ability to scrutinize experimental programs and all three about their achievements in instructing basic reading and writing skills). In addition, all three attest to be concerned in imparting 'appropriate conduct' and 'values' – before the knowledge specific to their subject matter (Hebrew, Mathematics and Arabic, respectively). By 'appropriate conduct' and 'values' they refer to local Arab norms of respect and tolerance, mainly to the elderly and towards the other communities in town. Evidently, they invest much of their time and effort, namely at the beginning of the year (preaching norms of desired behaviours in the classroom), at religious' feasts (celebrating Moslem, Druze and Christian) and on special days (e.g. Mother's Day, Family Day, the Tree Day)- to reproduce the desired communal norms,³³ as well as preserve their distinctiveness. As Iman argues:

Most important is tolerance, how to accept the other, how to live in this society, especially our society, what change to bring in the norms, conduct.

Also it's good that the child knows what the norms of other religions. ... what characterizes me in comparison to the other religion, learn to respect the difference and accept it.

Jewish feasts, however, are merely mentioned, and only for the need to know about Jewish tradition. For as Rajaa, a teacher of Hebrew argues: *the child lives in this country, and should have information about it*'.

Apparently, national occasions, Israeli and Palestinian are also commemorated in as much as they serve the communal interest. Hence, the Palestinian Nakba is mentioned as part of the story of Israeli Independence Day. To Iman's account: *'I tell the whole story - how things happened... the events which preceded the Independence.'* Land Day however, is merely a day in which demonstrations take place. To Basma's account: *'we just mention it, merely that some people demonstrate, they need to know even from young age, that there is such a day.'* As to Israeli Days, Shoah Day is not mentioned at all, for as Iman explains: *'we have no hand in it'*, unlike it the Remembrance Day which is commemorated, for: *'we have part in it'*. All three pointed these two occasions using almost the same words: *'The Shoah Day isn't mentioned, but the Zikaron (Remembrance) day is mentioned, in memory of the Druze martyrs who fell in the wars'* (i.e. Druze soldiers killed during their service in the Israeli army). Basma whose own brother was killed during his service in the Israeli army argues: *'this also approaches pupils to the state, creates a feeling of togetherness'*.

Noteworthy is the need of these teachers - to mark both the Israeli Remembrance Day as well as the Palestinian Nakba, the former for their share in the Israeli soldiers killed while serving in the Israeli

32 In her words: *'All teachers have the same aims, never mind his/her religious affiliation ... his/her circumstances. The child is the aim, what to give him/her, how to reach him/her.'*

33 As Basma explains: *'although we don't have Christian children in the school, we do mention it We've put a [Christmas] tree in the classroom. I told them the story of the feast and had father Noel distributing gift at the end of the day. Also on Eid-el-Fitr, the same, the whole month of Ramadan we set up [activity] corners, had a collective 'Futour' [breakfasting], we did many things, greeting cards... For the Druze, the Adha is coming, evidently with the Moslems...'* *'Children should know about the feast. This brings them closer... the Druze pupils greet the Moslem pupils, and the Moslems pupils greet the Druze pupils ... we all celebrate together and get to know each other feasts.'*

Army, the later for the need to pass on their share in the stories of Palestinians' resistance. To Rajaa's: *'The child should know that his people had resisted... he shouldn't be ignorant of what his grandparents went through.'*

This illuminates the Druze's position within the Israeli constructed categorization of the Palestinian, whereas they occupy the position of Arabs and non-Arabs simultaneously (Oppenheimer, 1979).

The Lure of Culture –Through the story of Zahra

Zahra has been teaching Arabic at a private school (belonging to a catholic order) which recruits local and foreign pupils from all nationalities and religions, for almost 28 years. In the last few years she was also appointed assistant director for the secondary classes.³⁴ Although unique, her course into teaching has much in common with other teachers' paths. To her accounts, she had never thought of becoming teacher. Belonging to a working class family who lives in a mixed Jewish Arab city, she would take any available seasonal work. Actually she did so until she was offered few teaching hours, to which she simply agreed, for she just had a baby and her mother-in-law convinced her that it was convenient - for its vicinity to home and its schedule. Nevertheless, like most teachers she attests to have come to love her work and to feel committed, in her terms: a sense of *'mission'*, accompanied by a desire *'to improve herself'*. Hence, alongside raising three children, attending to the needs of a partner with a certain disability, she attended University, and within few years, got a degree in Arabic language and qualified as *'teacher'*. Few years latter, she became coordinator of the Arabic language and got an administrative position too.

Similar to other teachers, Zahra does not accord school a central role in education, arguing that more effective in this respect are *'the family, the neighbourhood, and (the) religion - through the homes and churches or mosques'*. To her, school provides merely the appropriate environment which assist pupils in the processes of learning and increasing self-consciousness. Nevertheless all through her narrative, she refers to herself as first and foremost *'an educator'* whose major concern is *'to be there for the pupils'*, to listen to what they need to communicate. Her accounts too evolve around *'caring for them'*, *'raising their consciousness'* but also include *'introducing them to the Arabic culture'*, not through specific contents or occasions, but rather through friendly candid communication which relate to their personal interests as well as current affairs. In this respect she argues:

I feel more an educator then a teacher, I feel connected to them (the pupils), a commitment to them. ... I worry about them ..., it bothers me that [a teacher] does not understand them, I (interfere) ... I wasn't like that in the beginning of my way ... but certain things happened ... (and) I came to realize that a pupil has the right to have an educator and a teacher at the same time. ... the right to get as much as s/he needs from her/him. And that this s/he cannot get everywhere, but at school. ...

In any conversation between me and the pupils I feel I'm educating. Any event which takes place in the city, which is relevant to us as inhabitants (in the city) or as Arabs, I refer to it... I mention it ... discuss with the pupils about its implication ... Also when dealing with difficult events, involving killing, I explain how we should be above ... whatever brings us to such situations. Also when a positive thing happens, such as unification between two opposite (political) groups, I also bring it for discussion.

Her motto is to be truthful to one's self, in her case, to enact her Christian belief along with her Arab culture, stating:

34 Twenty eight years ago, when she was first employed, the school had a majority of Jewish and foreign pupils, hence Arabic was an optional subject for the minority of local Arab pupils [Christians and Moslems]. Gradually, however, the trend reversed, rendering Arabic a compulsory subject taught from kindergarten all through the intermediary to the secondary grades, but only to Arab students.

(A)s a teacher, I love to offer (the pupils, the school, etc) what I love. I like to feel that I'm giving something (which is significant for me).

(...)

In order to succeed, a teacher has got to feel that s/he has a mission, that s/he has a project, which s/he has to transfer it to the new generation wholeheartedly. Your pupil has the right to get from you apart from knowledge, all what you have to give, yes, education, consciousness (regarding the place) where s/he lives... as much as you can. i.e. all your culture, all what you know should be displayed in front of her/him... you mustn't hide anything from her/him, good or bad, for (if you do) you deceive her/him. ... Let the pupil know what you are, this renders her/him more honest with you.

To her opinion, this opportunity 'to give' sustains her as a teacher: *'As long as I can give, I'll continue to be a teacher. The moment I feel that I do not contribute, I'll leave'*.

Hence, being fond of the Arabic language, she would do anything to endear it upon her pupils' hearts and bring them to enjoy it, through poetry, songs, music and Arabic films. In this respect, she prides herself for not focusing on instructing reading, writing and grammar, or on achievements in exams, arguing for the need to communicate with pupils, provoke their interest in the school, its unique environment and in the Arab culture. For, she believes - once their interest is fuelled, the technical abilities will develop. Her desire to transmit her Arabic culture does not exclude foreign pupils, but rather the opposite, as she confirms:

Foreigners amount to 30% of our pupils, I'd like them to integrate with us, to see our customs and traditions... learn a bit about who we are, this... is good for both sides, they profit and I spread my heritage, my culture and language.

Therefore, her pupils carry out a yearly project on the Arab heritage of the city [in which the school is situated], through which they share their research [concerning aspects of local Palestinian life in the past and the present, monuments and sites], visit churches and mosques, meet local activists and interview them, make comparisons with other peoples in the world, and draw conclusions.

Although a devoted Christian, Zahra does not show any preference for Christian religious feast. Rather, she agrees that having pupils from different nationalities and religions, the school does right celebrating feasts belonging to the three monotheistic religions, one for each. In this case: Christmas, Eid al-Fitr and Purim. To her opinion, apart from its social effect, this introduces the pupils to each other's heritage and assists in raising their consciousness with regard the world they live in.

Regarding national events, however, she attests not to feel obliged to relate to any Israeli day. Hence, *'she wouldn't stand still if she is sitting in class or in the teachers' room'* at the siren minute on Remembrance day, regardless of the presence of a Jewish colleague in her vicinity. Nevertheless, she would abide by the school's instructions concerning the occasion, such as announcing to pupils the expected timing of the sirens and allowing those willing to observe it - to do so. As to Palestinian days, although not indicated in her school, she feels compelled to inform her pupils about the commemorative events taking place in the city, and attends school in order to be with her pupils and answer their queries with regard the occasion.

Concluding from her life account, Zahra's action is all along motivated by her love to her Arab culture but not least to her pupils too. Hence her discourse evolves around 'being truthful' to herself all along being there for them, rather than 'affecting' or 'preserving' the social order; sharing with them what she likes and what she experiences as a fellow compatriot in the city, giving them the opportunity to share each others cultural heritages.

A chance to make a change – through the story of Wissal.

Wissal is a single young woman, who at the time of the interview was preparing her PhD research proposal in literature, taught at the Open University in an adjacent Jewish city, and at her village

secondary school in a village in the Triangle. She reached teaching for lack of job opportunities. And unlike most of her colleagues (whose families support their entrance into the teaching profession), she is often reproached by her family and friends for *'ending up teacher'*. However she attests to increasingly love her job for the opportunities it offers her *'to make a change'*. In her words:

I discovered I had a bigger role, for you have autonomy what to bring to class, what content to choose. Everyone can teach English – as a language, but the question is how you do it. I loved introducing pupils to Naji Al-Ali. I taught them ... and then brought them an unseen text about him. About Ilan Ramon, I brought them an article from the CNN, apart from learning through his story the vocabulary related to space missions, we discussed his relevance to us, from there we got to the issue of our identity.

At the Open University, however, whereas she teaches Israeli Jewish students, she attests to confine herself *'to teaching only'*, arguing that she is aware of the impact she as an 'Arab woman teacher' – has on Israeli students. Hence, rather than engaging into endless argumentations, she refrains from expressing herself and avoids ending up talking about the Palestinian - Israeli conflict, upon which her stand is prejudiced from the start.

Relating to her work as English teacher in the village's secondary school, she claims to face a major dilemma of whether to lay the emphasis on increasing pupil's proficiency in the language - assist them overpass 'the phobia' of English, or on widening their horizons – introducing them to new ideas and knowledge. Eventually she tries to do both. In her words: *Teach English in a way that assists them (the pupils) discover the world and themselves*,³⁵ taking advantage of *'what differentiates teaching from other professions – (i.e.) the ability to directly influence people's life.'* In this respect, she wishes she has 'really' been able to inspire pupils' decision making, through her stands and talks.³⁶ Moreover, she declares that sometimes she expresses her opinion on cultural norms (e.g. girls' marriage at early age; girls' attendance of a near-by Teacher Training College instead of University) as well as social and political issues in her classroom, knowing that this *'will leak out and willing that the message reaches the community.'*

As a teacher, she accounts to realise the frustration her teacher at secondary school should had felt - trying to convey them (the pupils then) a message whereas they were not interested, concluding: *'also nowadays pupils aren't content to listen but it is a national duty to give'*. To her argument, it is this sense of duty which prompts her every time anew to take the challenge and overcome the difficulties (the lack of a support system, the non-existence of essential services and indispensable materials at school) entailed in the job. As to the message she strives to convey, she formulates it in a well known proverb stating 'العلم نور' meaning – learning³⁷ is enlightenment, explaining: *'I want them to believe in learning, to strive to it'*, attesting to feel *'personal failure'* when capable young people, whom she taught and who got the financial means - do not attend University. Moreover, she emphasises that *'it is a national duty to teach'* for as *'a Palestinian national minority in this country, education is our only mechanism'*. Within her 'national duty' endeavour, Wissal encourages her students to attend University, arguing: *'it is the only place,³⁸ where the awareness to national discrimination develops your personality, where you get to understand what it means to be a Palestinian ...'*, concluding:

35 In this respect, she claims to be lucky to teach English for the freedom and autonomy its curriculum allows. Within this autonomy she chooses to advance language skills through texts on subject she believes pupils should know about (such as national occasion, like the commemoration of Kfar Kasseem massacre).

36 In her words: *'I do not mean that they imitate me, not necessarily, but to take decisions and make things differently, in a way that give expression to themselves.'*

37 The Arabic term 'علم' comprises all the following terms: science, knowledge, learning, information, scholarship, cognizance, awareness etc. (Al-Mawred Al Waseet, Concise Dictionary: English-Arabic, Arabic-English).

38 In other instance in her narrative, she strongly speaks for attending University upon Teacher Training colleges, arguing that the former opens horizons while the latter limits them.

it is our duty as teachers to raise (pupils') awareness to that ... to raise up generations which are aware that education is their arm, their arm not only in order to survive, but also to liberate themselves from their existing condition, from our modes of thinking ...--to resist.

On the local level, Wissal's major challenge is not succumb to prevailing power relations in the village, and prevent them from affecting schooling processes and practices. As such, she consciously resist the pressure 'powerful' families employ on her as a teacher to get their son or daughter unduly high marks for the school's share in matriculation's (Bagrut) final scores. To her account, she constantly rebuff all pressures not only to retain her integrity in pupils' eyes, safeguard her pupils' sense of morality and dedication, but also to fight prevailing social norms of favouritism,³⁹ concluding that for her it is an essential personal and professional matter; it is about *'to be or not to be'*.

Although not as unwaveringly, she points to other significant bearings which communal politics have on school, namely the prevalence of favouritism in the appointment of class educators and the in charge of social activities. To her estimation, the unprofessional appointments deny pupils the right for appropriate education. Moreover, in the case of the in-charge of social activities, it affects the way national and special days are marked, and hence pupils' norms of political involvement.⁴⁰ However, despite her dissatisfaction with the way her school marks Palestinian days, she, herself, does not seem to relate to them; Apart from Kafr Kassem massacre commemoration day, to which she relates through an English text within her lessons, she expresses doubts as to her capability to relate to other days, explaining that she herself is *'going through a phase of identity formation'* and is learning about Palestinian history. All the same she asserts: *'There surely is place for them'*.

Regarding, Israeli Days, she sounds to be through a transitive period too. Apparently in her early years at University, she used to respect Israeli national symbols and rituals, however she attests to become increasingly less convinced she should:

I don't know if we should stand still at all, at least not to mark the Independence Day. But may be out of respect, when you're at the University ... for you may be embarrassed. On Shoah, I stand still (at the siren) much more at ease. But on Independence Day, I was ashamed to keep on walking. However, recently, I started to think between me and myself, if the siren happens while I'm walking, to keep on walking never minding it, but I do not know.

As to its bearing on her teaching, she claims that Israeli Days are not marked at all, noting that: *'At our school there isn't even a flag. May be there was, but was dropped down'*.

Like Wissal, there are many teachers who articulate their educational vision in terms of 'a national mission' and view education as the only means for Palestinians, not only to preserve their national identity within Israel but also to challenge socio-cultural norms and order.

Discussion and Conclusion

The perceptions of agency displayed through the themes in the present paper are apparently dissimilar, ranging from a deliberate denial of the relevance of anything beyond teaching basic reading and writing skills, to a premeditated involvement in certain aspects, to a spontaneous uncritical kind of involvement and to a conscientious engagement in social and political socialization. This variety of perceptions among a stratum of women who face the same socio-political challenges raises different

39 To her accounts, she is constantly approached by parents and their relatives, directly and indirectly (through her own parents) – to favour their kids, all of which she resists, - taking the risk of being sidelined by the school's director who might collude with parents, but preferring this upon the infringement of her professional autonomy and moral integrity, which she consider a matter of *'to be or not to be'*.

40 In this respect she notes that instead of meeting pupils' right to know about an occasion (e.g. its significance and the facts related to it beforehand), the 'inappropriate' in-charge of social activities merely instantaneously briefs the pupils that: *'there is a demonstration, (but) do not burn tires!'*

queries as to the reasons at its basis and the significance of such disparity. Is the difference among the women a matter of positional politics, or a reflection of one's social and political consciousness? Are these teachers' perceptions really as dissimilar as they seem? Are Arab teachers in general and women teachers in particular, to begin with, autonomous at all so as to exert their agency, or engage in any social or political project? Evidently, far from attempting to deduce from the present accounts as to Arab women teachers' agency in general, one cannot disregard the concordance between teachers' positioning (i.e. their professional status and their communal affiliation) and the sites of agency displayed in the life-accounts.

The narratives at hand reflect a certain trend: the more senior and qualified, the more the teacher is prone to enlarge the scope of her action, and relate to current affairs. Less senior teachers seem to be more restricted to issues which are of direct relevance and significance to the here and now of their communal life. However, what seems to account most to the difference between the various modes of 'agency' is the interplay between a woman's sense of social involvement and the socio-political matrix of power ensnaring her. Evidently, among the participants in the present research, those who qualified through a University degree (as opposed to those who qualified through Teaching Training Colleges) are more prone to be incorporated within themes which allude to a certain involvement in the promotion of ideas or values - beyond proper instruction of their subject matter. However, among those who qualified at Teaching Training Colleges, other factors, which are related more to teachers' position vis-à-vis school (i.e. the kind of school the teacher works in, her sense of affiliation to it, the post she fills), as well as, the cultural and socio-economic pressures she is subjected to, seem to account for the mode of the agency exerted. This is not to conclude that the more senior a teacher is the more power she possesses and consequently employs it. For in Foucauldian feminist terms, the woman teacher as all individuals 'do not simply possess power, but is constituted by a set of power relations cast like a net over how she ... sees or thinks' (Razack, 1998:34). In other words, the modes of agency a woman exerts - attests to the way 'the net of power' affects her perception regarding her different roles.

As to senior teachers, the accounts of Zahra and Wissal, brought in the present paper, provide an example in that regard. The two accounts are dissimilar as reflected in the themes within which they are incorporated: 'The lure of culture' as opposed to 'A chance to make a change'. The former is an account of resort to the display of one's cultural-national heritage, while the latter is an account of enterprise aiming at the socio-political order. However, eventually both are about enacting the role of the organic intellectual who has a stand regarding his surrounding and embodies it, each from her position, her personal circumstances as well as her status at school, and her affinity to the school. Zahra, for example, is a devoted Christian and a patriotic Arab woman who works in a school belonging to an international religious order. Her subject matter - 'Arabic language' is not compulsory for almost one third of the students at school, however she also fills an administrative post. Evidently, her situation is unique in terms of the kind of action she could endorse, the social and political stands she could integrate in her educational work. Hence her adoption of the cultural appeal appears to be her resort to enact personal meaning to her work and a viable means to reach her pupils, as she actually does through the field projects in which local and foreign students, from all nationalities participate. However, her capacity to act and express her stands, attests to the way she perceives her status, within the matrix of power at school. The effect of this perception becomes especially tangible, when compared to Wissal's deliberate resort to restrict herself to instruction in the Israeli-Jewish setting of the Open University, whereas she did not feel liable to express political views, nor affinity to the institution so as to seek ways to act. Another example along this line is Zahra's unwavering disregard of Israeli Days, compared to Wissal's hesitation in similar scenery.

Wissal accounts to have reached teaching for lack of job alternatives, but have decided to stay once she realised the opportunities it offers 'to make a change', not only within her community, but also on national level, and not to merely impart academic skills and knowledge, but mainly to ensue a liberating educative process. Evidently, her endeavour required her to get through a transformation

herself, to critically reconsider existing norms and personal stands and conducts (e.g. her comments regarding the absence of amicable relationships between young men-women relations⁴¹) and develop her ways in advancing alternative values and norms (e.g. her fights against early marriage and favouritism in her village), as well as nurturing her knowledge about Palestinian historical events and personalities, all along attending to the relevance of current affairs and ideologies to the socio-political particularities of her pupils (e.g. relating to the story of the Israeli astronaut and its relevance to her pupils as Palestinians in Israel). In this regard, she seems to have been herself going through the Freirian liberating educational process she strives to get her pupils through. It could be argued that in her case, her growing awareness to the 'matrix of power' at work on the local and national level, renders her more conscious to her role as organic intellectual, as expressed in her motto: 'A chance to make a change'.

As to the less senior teachers, the accounts of Rula, Basma, Iman and Rajaa, presented in this paper, do not represent all the modes of agency of the group but certain trends. Their accounts are on the face of it dissimilar, hence their incorporation under different themes: 'The plea for peace of mind' and 'The limits of sterilised knowledge'. For the intentional retreat of the teacher in the former theme from expressing any opinion regarding current affairs, and the premeditated selection of the teachers in the later to the very issues worth relating to in 'the impartial' schooling context. However, all four teachers seem to act from a similar position – which is dependent on how they perceive themselves within the local matrix of power.

In the case of Rula, a junior teacher from an adjacent village, working in a school which is becoming increasingly sectarian, her systematic instant rebuff of politically related issues would not attest to her apolitical stand as much as to the way the 'net of power' affects her perception of occupational survival. In this respect, her account of 'Land Day', the significance she attributes to it for the 'Arabs in Israel' and her wish to join the strike if it wouldn't contradict school's regulations, discloses her dilemma between political viewpoint and occupational anxiety. Moreover the dissonance between her expressions of agency outside school (e.g. her pride in being of help to fellow women in her community with regard their children) as opposed to inside it (her adoption of the three monkeys' wisdom with regard anything beyond imparting basic reading and writing skilled) - is but an indicator to her state of apprehensiveness at school. Yet, her concern in nurturing inter-communal affinity in the Arab society, and the usage she makes of a school's tradition (a residue of the past, whereas the school recruited pupils from all local religious groups, and consequently celebrated the various religious feasts) to achieve it, points to her ability to discern the opportunities to act.

Basma, Iman and Rajaa come from the local dominant community in the village. They pride themselves to be daughters of teachers, and express satisfaction in being teachers. Unsurprisingly, they hold a positivist view with regard education (claiming that teaching is teaching no matter where and whom), abiding willingly by the official instructions. However, their impartiality does not hold with regard issues of direct relevance to their own community, or personal lives (e.g. the commemoration of the Israeli Remembrance Day). Unlike Rula, these teachers belong to the dominant group, but as such they do not have the freedom to exert personal agency, they actually represent hegemonic stances, such as Druze-Jewish blood partnership - all along preserving the Arab cultural norms. Apparently they are ensnared within the web of power, playing the role of traditional intellectuals. Moreover, working in a public school which functions as a state apparatus, they seem to believe that they are advancing the community's interest, while in many aspects, they are in Gramsci's terms: 'exercising the subaltern function of social hegemony' (Gramsci, 1986:12).

Nevertheless, despite the apparent dissimilarity, the four accounts share one essential aspect. As all Arab teachers they are compelled to perform within a unique situation whereas, on the one hand, they

41 Talking about the challenges she faces as undergraduate student, Wissal speaks about the tension regarding relationships with male student colleagues. She attests to have to constantly consider expressing amicability as opposed to safeguarding her 'good-name' according to Arab norms.

are constantly required to counterbalance between their Arab (Palestinian) national affiliation (the preservation of their identity and cultural and historical heritage) and their Israeli citizenship (which nurtures on the denial of their Palestinian historical legacy), and on the other hand, they have to gain the approval of the local community. This may explain the tendency some teachers have to relate to events of direct relevance to the community, rather than the moral or political implications which stem from the role that organic intellectual entails. Their expression of political agency is often confined to the local level. This is conspicuously reflected in the Druze teachers' disregard of what is not directly connected to their community, such as Palestinian Land Day, and Israeli Shoah Day, while fully commemorating Israeli Remembrance Day. Likewise, it could be discerned in the tendency – some teachers from the Triangle have to commemorate Kafr Kassem Massacre, while ignoring other not less significant Palestinian National Days (e.g. the account of Wissal in the present paper).

This position affects furthermore teachers' ability and willingness to transcend certain norms and values pertaining to the patriarchal character of the society. As such it re-enforces patriarchal and sexist norms pertaining to women's sphere of action (e.g. in education, and preferably in early grades), while seemingly empowering women (provide them with knowledge and economic independence).

The reality and the conditions, Palestinian women teachers live and work within, the cultural, the social and the political forces governing their modes of living and functioning, raises a question as to the possibility - Palestinian women teachers' enact the role of 'organic intellectuals'. In this respect, I find Foucault's (1980) position stated over four decades ago, most illuminating. To his assertion: 'the classic organic intellectual', who 'speaks for truth and justice' who is meant to be 'the consciousness of all of us' no longer exist. Rather a new mode of connection between theory and practice is embodied in a new type, the 'specific intellectual' whereas each (intellectual) works within his own sphere. In his terms:

... Intellectuals have got used to working, not in the modality of the 'universal', the 'exemplary', the 'just and true for all', but within specific sectors, at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them. (p:126).

Following Foucault's insight embodied in the term 'specific intellectual', social agency and political activism could take place in very limited spheres. Hence, also teachers who traditionally belong to the 'State's apparatus', and in the case of the Arab society in Israel, and of women teachers in particular, whereas they are subjected to 'local social pressures' as well, teachers are likely to develop specific strategies of activism or descent. Accordingly, Rula's adoption of the three monkeys' wisdom along with exerting agency in 'conducive settings', as well as Zahra's resort to the cultural discourse could be illustrative of the specific intellectual type.

To conclude, the four themes account for different modes of social and political engagement, each displaying the constraints affecting teachers actions, the restrictions as well as 'loopholes' and the opportunities available. Indeed, apart from the promising account incorporated in 'A chance to make a change' the rest of the accounts - are far from resembling a grand 'story of social or political active engagement'. Rather, each theme exhibits a certain mode of 'agency' compiling to the diversity of social and political actions. Apparently, these fragmented experiences exemplify the new reality which Said (2004) in line with Foucault and Bourdieu characterized as marked by 'the absence of any master plan or a blueprint or grand theory of what intellectuals can do and the absence of any utopian teleology towards which human history can be described as moving'(p:140). Within such a reality, every individual's endeavour in her local setting has bearing on the overall shaping of social and political processes.

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