From Where Do I Come: The Identity of Younger Generations in the '48 Area

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Due to political conditions and conflict within the state of Israel, the younger generations of Palestinians are growing up with a lack of identity. This lack of identity as well as other socio-economic factors plays a role in distorting the sense of belonging which often leads to an increase in frustrations and violence among youth. Generations today are caught in the midst of a weakening of their identity as Palestinians and the empowerment which having such an identity affords a person.

The objective of the research is to explore the relationship between the various levels of identity, the self-confidence identity brings to youth and how these two factors contribute to the overall development of the younger generations. The main question in the search is finding whether a relationship exists between the personal self-confidence of a young person and the overall development of that person? If such a connection does exist, what is the nature of the relationship between the methods of teaching in schools in regards to the development of the youth sector?

In this paper, a comparison between a system which supports the Palestinian identity and one which deconstructs the identity of the next generation of Palestinians’ within the ‘48 Area will be examined through the a variety of lens of identity. The research has adopted ideas from Professor Sereef Talnani’s (Narrative Psychology and Anthropology at Iowa University and Birzeit University) theory of psychology and the role of language in the construction of identity and from Professor Ismail Abusad on pluralism and how to protect the right of Palestinian minorities.

First, a Palestinian’s identity through language: The language spoken contributes to the way Palestinians identify themselves. The words which the older generations use have many nuances which connect the people to the land thus assisting in the formation of a young person’s identity.

Second, identity through the land: Connecting to the land is how a Palestinian recognizes his/her position in society and forms a sense of belonging within society and with the land.

Thirdly, identity through history: A historical dimension to a Palestinian’s identity is established through the passing on of stories from older generations to younger as well as the understanding of current events which relate to the local community’s struggle. For example, how does the Naqba and displacement of Palestinian people relate to the shaping of the next generations’ identity?

Finally, identity through society: Identity should be supported by the state through programs which strengthen the social identity of the people. However, not only does the state of Israel not offer Palestinians a social identity due to the fact that Palestinians are not Jewish and Israel is for the Jews, but the state of Israel works to further weaken the identity of Palestinians.

To begin the study, statistics from various Palestinian research centers regarding employment, socio-economic levels, education, etc. was gathered about youth ages 15-25. Research was also gathered about the governmental policies of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of the Youth. After researching, youth groups were organized to meet and discuss with the youth their feelings and ideas. In order to gain a wide breadth of opinion, one group of Arab youth came from a mixed city (a city that has both Arab and Jewish Israelis living in it), one group came from an all Arab urban setting, and two groups came from villages. One of the villages is quite pro-Islam and the other more tolerant of accepting people of various religious backgrounds. As well as listening to the young people, stories, poems and other forms of art were gathered to put into a publication of creativity from which understanding could be gathered as to what they were thinking and feeling.
When one looks at history, it can be seen how the youth of the 1920s and ‘30s were encouraged in order to build national identity. Then through the 1950s-’70s youth were encouraged to build families in order to build social identity. The creation of mega markets and other industrial zones began thus creating urban life and steering away from the idea of connection to a national identity. Now we see individualism is what is being established as your identity; you are a part of humanity but it is all about you – deconstructing the state, the community and all levels of society so that only what the individual wants it important.

From this study, it can be clearly seen that the integration of all levels of identity is important for not only the individual but also the society, environment and the national identity of Palestinians. To buy into the tendency of simply focusing on individual for identity will not be sustainable for the development of younger generations. Creativity is an important value for youth and the younger generation to strengthen their identity on all levels. Without connecting to all levels of identity through creativity, young people do not feel completed and thus cannot hope to have a full identity.