



**PALESTINIAN SOCIETY**

**in Gaza, West Bank and  
Arab Jerusalem**

**Summary of a Survey of Living Conditions**

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# Palestinian Society: Summary of the FALCOT survey of living conditions in Gaza, West Bank and Arab Jerusalem

*FAFO conducted a comprehensive study of living conditions in the occupied territories in 1992 (FALCOT). The fieldwork was done in the space of two months, from June to July, and the baseline report was published and presented to the Working Group on Refugees in May 1993 (Heiberg and Øvnsen et al., 1993).<sup>1</sup> The study takes a broad view of living conditions, according to which an individual's living conditions is defined not so much by the economic goods he or she possesses as by the ability to influence the course of his or her own life. The study, therefore, employs a host of variables, including demographics, health, education, work, income and consumption, housing and opinions and attitudes.*

*The FALCOT study is comprehensive also in terms of coverage. All in all 2.500 households were interviewed, the sample covering Gaza and the West Bank including Arab Jerusalem.*

*The present paper provides an executive summary of the baseline report. The summary outlines major results from the FALCOT study but should not, although all thematic dimensions are covered, be seen as exhaustive. Rather, it gives an overview of important findings in the following areas: demographics, housing, health, education, economic resources, employment, social status, opinions and attitudes, and the specific conditions of women. This overview is preceded by an introduction explaining the conceptual and methodological framework of FALCOT, and by a discussion of the transformation of Palestinian society.*

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FALCOT is the first level of living conditions study ever conducted among Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Arab Jerusalem. A carefully designed probability sample of 2 500 Palestinian households were interviewed by some 100 specially trained Palestinian data collectors in the summer of 1992.

Traditionally the most commonly accepted indicators of individual and social welfare have been economic ones. Over time the assumption that there is an immediate link between economic indicators like GNP per capita and human welfare has been increasingly challenged.

The starting point for FAFO has been to establish indicators in two critical areas. First, indicators to measure the *degree of equality* in important aspects of life between individuals and groups in a society at a specific point in time. Second, indicators dealing with *equality of opportunity*, the possibility for individuals and groups to change their relative social position over time.

The key conceptual question concerns what is meant by "welfare" or "level of living". In FALCOT, an individual's level of living is defined not so much by the economic goods he or she possesses as by the ability of the individual to exercise choice and to affect the course of his or her own life.

In living conditions studies in modern Western societies, analysis of results can usually be based on comprehensive social models of the essential relationships and dynamics of the societies involved. Thus survey results can be used to confirm, modify or challenge pre-existing policies and/or models.

This is not the case with Palestinian society. The holistic models required for analysis have not been developed so far and appropriate comparative data is difficult to obtain. Analysing Palestinian society represents, therefore, an exceptional analytical challenge.

In addition, a combination of four specific factors are critical to an understanding of Palestinian living conditions in the occupied territories:

1. It is a society under prolonged occupation;
2. A significant portion of Palestinians resident in the area are displaced or refugees with the consequent disruption of traditional social structures;
3. For over four years this society has experienced low intensity warfare, the intifada;
4. Culturally, Palestinian society is an integral part of Middle Eastern society.

It is the convergence of these central parameters that bestows a distinctive quality upon Palestinian society, and which creates the particular challenges faced by the FALCOT study.

FALCOT is the only survey of its type ever conducted among a people living under occupation. Occupation forms a rigid frame within which daily life is conducted and a critical perspective shaping all the issues this report examines. The capacity of an individual to execute control and to exercise meaningful choice over his daily life is in many respects simply incompatible with the fact of occupation.

FALCOT 1992 aims at providing quantitative reliable and representative information on Palestinian society. The specific objectives of the survey are:

1. To contribute needed, comprehensive, reliable statistical information on the occupied territories.

2. To aid governments and international organizations in designing appropriate development and humanitarian aid programmes for the region.
3. To assist Palestinians in planning and measuring the course of their own social and economic development.

The limitations of the present survey are similar to those of all surveys of this nature. Surveys will always contain so-called sampling errors, and these have been estimated and controlled so far as is practically feasible. An important limitation has been the lack of reliable population information, as the last census was conducted in 1967 and updating since then has been inadequate. Further, through careful training of the field staff and manual control procedures in the field, measurement or non-sampling errors have been kept at an absolute minimum.

Despite these limitations, however, it is hoped that the analysis in the survey report will contribute new and useful insights into Palestinian society, into its vulnerabilities and strengths, its constraints and opportunities and into the concerns and aspirations of its people.

### *The transformation of Palestinian society*

Data for 1991 indicate that 31% of all Palestinians live in the occupied territories (18.6% in the West Bank and Jerusalem, 10.8% in Gaza).<sup>1</sup> The society FALCOT 1992 describes is thus one that is dispersed over several social formations and communities, its fragmentation being the result of successive wars (most notably the war of 1948 and the June war of 1967) with the Israelis. The condition of exile, which has affected more than one half of Palestinians, has stamped the collective

consciousness, cultural trends, as well as the political behaviour of Palestinians throughout the Middle East and in the diaspora.

One major consequence of the 1948 war was that those areas of Palestine that were not incorporated into the state of Israel, were absorbed by new political formations: Jordan and Egypt. That integration still affects the administrative apparatus, the educational system, the economy, and the social structure of the two regions.

There is considerable urbanization among Palestinians by third world standards. FALCOT 1992 suggests that 60% of the Palestinians live in urban areas. 62% of West Bankers are 'rural', while Gaza is overwhelmingly urban, with 75-80% of the population living in the Gaza-Khan Yunis-Rafah conurbations.

The social and economic trends which emerge from this survey could suggest both a higher rate of social homogeneity and a lower rate of social mobility than has been perceived in the existing literature on Palestinians. Loss of land and property as a result of war conditions enhanced the value of education and emigration as sources of social mobility. The vehicle of that mobility was the extended family, which invested heavily (proportional to its income) in the education of its younger members, especially sons.

The occupation has implied the dependence of the occupied territories on Israeli economy through an elaborate system of political and juridical control. The net effect has been to create two legal systems, one applying to Israeli Jews, and the other to native Palestinians. Gradual transformation of zoning laws, regional planning, the transfer of land, acquisitions, etc., have benefitted the former group, to the detriment of the latter, leading to a systematic annexation of the territories.

Israeli political control has affected the daily life of Palestinians in several ways, most importantly, perhaps, through the restrictions on

movement and forcible changes in the housing situation of families. The overall impact is the prevalence of a sense of *arbitrariness* and *uncertainty* permeating daily life. At the individual level such an experience creates a sense of powerlessness; at the family level, it weakens the ability of households to provide members with an appropriate platform in life; and at the community and national levels, it prevents systematic planning for the future.

The authors of FALCOT 1992 did not plan the survey to be a 'demonstration of grievances'. Rather, grievances voiced through the study are derivative of conditions of daily existence which elsewhere might be 'normal'. The main purpose of the study was to create an empirical foundation for the examination of the quality of social life, and to monitor the critical components of social and economic life as they appeared at one point in time.

### *Population*

The population of the FAFO living conditions survey has been defined as "Palestinians" living in the "occupied territories". "Occupied territories" in this connection refers to the areas belonging to the pre-1948 British Mandate of Palestine which were occupied by Israel in 1967, i.e. the Gaza Strip (30% of total population), the West Bank (60% of total) and East Jerusalem (10% of total).<sup>2</sup> Israeli settlement in the three regions has not been covered by the survey.

It should be emphasized that being a sample survey and not a census, FALCOT 1992 is only able to draw a picture of the *relative distribution* of population groups and variables. It cannot give absolute numbers for variables like population, labour force, unemployment, etc.

40% of the population are UNRWA registered refugees of whom almost half still live in refugee camps. In Gaza 2/3 of the population are refugees and 1/3 of the total population live in refugee camps. In the West Bank a little more than 1/4 are refugees and 1/10 of the total population live in refugee camps. Because of the differences between Gaza and the West Bank with regard to refugee status of the population it should be noted that differences between these regions to a large extent correspond to differences between refugees and non-refugees.

The present demographic situation in the occupied territories is characterized by high fertility rates, leading to high population growth and a young age structure. The total fertility rate is 6.2 children per woman. Survey results even indicate increased birth rates since the outbreak of the intifada (1987).

As of present 45% of the population is below 15 years of age, and 18% below 5 years of age. In Gaza these figures are 50% and 21% respectively. Assuming there is no net migration, Gaza population may double in 17 years if fertility and mortality stay unchanged at 1992 level.

The young age structure in the population leads to an unfavourable ratio between producers and consumer. Because less than half the population is in working age (15-65 years) and most women do not perform income generating work, less than 1/3 of the population is *potentially* available as producers. A large share of the economic resources available to Palestinians thus have to be used for providing new generations with food, clothing and education. These resources could alternatively have been used for productive investments. Declining birth rates in the future would lead to a more favourable situation with the majority of the population in the working ages, as in most East Asian newly industrialised countries.



In Gaza absolute population density is so high that any substantial population growth may be constrained by lack of natural resources like land and potable water.

Future population development depends on how fertility, mortality and migration evolve. Of the three factors, changes in future fertility is probably the most important. If fertility stays unchanged at the 1992 level, and migration remains unaltered, the total population in the occupied territories may reach 4.5 million in 20 years. Assuming sharp fertility decline and net emigration the population in the occupied territories may still reach 3.5 million persons in 20 years.

Infant mortality rates in the occupied territories are vulnerable to statistical errors due to the small sample size of FALCOT 1992. A decline in infant mortality which took place during the 1970s, now seems to have stopped. As of present, the infant mortality is approximately 45 per 1000 live births, roughly on the same level as neighbouring countries like Jordan and Syria. The infant mortality level is, however, far above that of the Jewish and Arab population in Israel.

### *Housing*

For cultural reasons, married women in particular are often confined to the house for large parts of the day. Moreover, many social activities traditionally enjoyed by Palestinians have ceased with the intifada. Therefore, the house has gained an uncommon importance in the occupied territories because people tend to spend a good deal more of their time within it.

Real estate has traditionally been a favoured form of investment throughout the Middle East. Moreover, in the occupied territories there is a lack of alternative targets for investment and uncertainties

about the future place an additional break on investment. Few credit institutions extend loans or mortgages for house building. Consequently, the extended family continues to be a principle financial base for construction although survey data suggests that loans from individuals who are not kin might be playing an increasing role in house financing, particularly in Arab Jerusalem. Nonetheless, because financial resources mobilized through kin groups or personal relations are usually fairly limited, this form of financing has clear implications for the quality of the housing stock and the size of units constructed. Except in large urban areas, it is relatively unusual to find multi-household buildings occupied by households that are not part of the same extended family.

Although the survey did not collect data on, for instance, rubbish disposal, the aspects the survey did consider indicate that infrastructural services are very good in relation to developing countries in general.

Perceptions concerning the physical safety provided by the house and its surroundings with regard to children tend to mirror attitudes concerning the relative safety of the world outside the home versus the world inside it. In all cases the inside of the house is reported to be safer than the outside environment, but differential perceptions concerning relative safety come into play.

The overwhelming majority of children reported to have been injured had experienced this inside the home. Respondents from overcrowded households seem to have less awareness of what happens to the household's children. Instead of overcrowding per se, children's accidents inside the house seem more closely related to poverty.

Some elements of relevance for housing conditions have been assembled into a single housing index to give an overall view of the variations of housing standards within the occupied territories.<sup>3</sup> The

results indicate that urban residents have better general housing standards than the rural population, and that camp residents have the poorest housing standards of all. The worst housing standards are found in Gaza. However, the single most important explanation is the substandard building materials that are widely used. If the quality of building materials were not included in the measurement of general housing standards, West Bank villages would rank as badly as the Gaza camps, and West Bank camps would emerge as the areas worst afflicted by unacceptable housing standards. In particular, the lack of a comprehensive sewage network, grid electricity, as well as generally poor internal amenities, combine to pull down general housing standards in the West Bank.

### *Health*

FALCOT presents data on patterns, prevalence and consequences of self-reported acute and chronic health problems, psychological and psychosomatic distress, as well as on utilization of health services and health insurance coverage.

Patterns and prevalence of self-reported health problems reflect both underlying diseases and cultural concepts of illness. This calls for caution when analyzing self-reported health problems. Utilization of health care services is measured more easily through interviews. 25% report that they have had an illness or an injury during the last month before the interview took place. 30% report that they have illnesses of a prolonged nature, or afflictions due to an injury or a handicap. Pain in the musculo-skeletal system is the most frequent reason for prolonged illness.

The strongest determinant of the prevalence of illness is increasing age. Women and men report the same rates of both acute and chronic

illness, but there are some differences when it comes to specific groups of prolonged illnesses. Frequency of acute and prolonged illness is higher when the wealth of the household is low, and when the educational level of the individual is low. Camp residency has an influence on rates of self-reported illness, and there is a higher prevalence of acute illness in West Bank than in Gaza.

More than 96% of those who have been ill consulted a physician (89%) and/or other health services. In other words, once people define themselves as ill, they do in fact consult health personnel. This is true for all subgroups, indicating that availability of health services is good. The apparent lack of an economic threshold for utilization of health services is unique in the context of a developing country. The quality and appropriateness of the health services offered cannot, however, be evaluated in this survey.

Utilization of maternal and child health care services shows the same pattern. The utilization increases along with the educational level of the mother, but is not dependent on the wealth of the household. Geographical accessibility seems to be the most important factor determining the use of these services.

UNRWA serves refugees both in- and outside camps, and appears to be an important factor in counteracting social inequality in health care. Low health insurance coverage does not prevent people from using health care services. The appropriateness and quality of the health care may, however, vary along social gradients.

Reported rates of symptoms of psychological distress are very high. Only 20% of the population report no symptoms of distress. 50% report 1-3 symptoms, and 30% report a high degree of distress (4-7 symptoms). Somatic illness is a strong determinant of psychological distress. When corrected for illness, the degree of distress increases slightly with age.

More symptoms of distress are reported by individuals who have somebody in the household that has been arrested during the intifada, or who have a child that has been seriously injured during the last two months. This may indicate that trauma is a possible reason for the very high numbers of symptoms reported.

### *Education*

Since their first mass dislocation in 1948, Palestinians have placed a special emphasis on the value of education. Education is seen as a durable, but moveable asset that can be used in whatever circumstances a person eventually finds him or herself in.

Although Palestinians generally assign uncommon value to the education of children, parents still place the greatest emphasis on the education of sons both as a source of family pride and identity and as an investment in economic security later on.<sup>4</sup>

Like in many other regions of the Middle East, the survey data indicates that educational attainment in the occupied territories has improved remarkably over the past decades. Men were the beneficiaries of the initial improvement in general educational levels. The gender gap, the average length of female education in per cent of male education, did not significantly begin to narrow until some 20 years ago.

In terms of general literacy rates Palestinians score in the middle ranges for developing countries. The differentials in the literacy rates between men and women in the current Palestinian population is almost entirely due to the high illiteracy rates among older women. Although male literacy rates over the past 30 to 40 years have doubled, women's literacy has grown some 8-fold in the same period.

The survey data also indicates that UNRWA refugees stay in school somewhat longer than non-refugees. Notably, the educational attainment of young camp refugees is as high as for Palestinians living in Arab Jerusalem.

Except with reference to literacy rates, the survey data cannot be used to make judgements on the quality, in contrast to the quantity, of education.

Education correlates with increased activity as to having hobbies, enjoying nature and, not surprisingly, reading books. The net increase is statistically somewhat greater for men than for women.

Increased propensity, associated with increased education, to view various relations (young/ old, rich/ poor, men/ women) as conflictive, suggests that education functions in the occupied territories, as elsewhere, to question and challenge established hierarchies and conventions and to provide a critical attitude to one's own society.

The effect of greatly improved educational levels on social mobility among Palestinians is open to debate. There are only very limited opportunities to transform education into middle class employment, especially for women. Although for men education seems to induce less fatalistic attitudes to life's tribulations, for neither men nor women do increased educational skills seem to diminish significantly the importance of social solidarities, especially those related to the family, in determining eventual individual success and achievement. Nor does educational attainment seem to counteract to any deeper degree organizational principles based on the ascribed attributes of gender and age in affecting a sense of empowerment and the distribution of authority.

In relation to attitudes towards women, the attitudes of women themselves seem forcefully to contest prevailing norms which operate to limit their independence of choice and which are adhered to by a

large majority of men. Education seems to function mainly to reinforce this opposition. With regard to men's attitudes, in all areas the survey explores, the acceptability of women working, of dress style, of the right to choose their own husband and so forth, it is education rather than age that shifts men's attitudes in a more liberal direction.

One conclusion that might be drawn from this data could be that measures to affect improvements in the status of women and attitudes toward them, should be chiefly directed toward men. The aspiration among women of all age groups and educational levels to a life style which is less subservient and more under their own control seems already to exist.

#### *Economic resources*

The main indicator for measuring differences in household economic resources in the survey was a wealth index especially constructed for this purpose. Household wealth, rather than household income, was used for reasons of reliability (most items included in the index could be observed by the interviewer) and stability. The household wealth index shows relative but not absolute differences in the level of household economic resources.

The household wealth index clearly demonstrates that Gaza is the region worst off in the occupied territories. The deprivation of Gaza as a region is, however, closely related to its high share of economically deprived refugees. In particular, refugees living in camps are at a disadvantage compared to other groups, both in Gaza and the West Bank.

Analyzing results on a *household* level, there is no clear indication that poverty increases with the size of families. Household wealth, as expected, clearly increases with Head of Household education.

The survey was aimed at measuring *types* rather than level of household income. Income from (non-agricultural) labour activity is by a wide margin the most important type of household income. It is frequently also the only income type received by the households. Gaza has the lowest regional share of households receiving income from labour activity. It is reasonable to believe that lower labour activity in Gaza than in the West Bank and Arab Jerusalem is one of the major explanations of Gaza's low score on the household wealth index. Taking the importance of employment as a source of household income into consideration, providing employment for deprived groups is probably the most cost-effective remedy available if one wishes to correct the present economic inequalities in the occupied territories.

Only 15% of the labour force in the occupied territories had their main employment in primary industries (agriculture and in Gaza, fishing). This is a very low share, making the population of the occupied territories particularly dependent on wage labour. Agricultural income is rarely the only source of household income, which goes to show that agricultural income generally plays a supplementary role in the household economy.

As to recent developments in household economic resources in the occupied territories, two out of three households report a decline in their income since the Gulf war. The share of households that report a reduction is highest among the groups already worst off (Gaza and refugee camps). After survey field work was completed the closure of the border to Israel in April 1993 has probably further reduced household income. 26% of the labour force members residing in the occupied territories (38% in Gaza) reported that they mainly



worked in Israel the year prior to the FALCOT study. It is reasonable to believe that Gaza is the region most affected because of its high dependency on employment in Israel.

As a concluding remark it may be stressed the extent to which political events outside the direct influence of household members may have an impact on the economy of households in the occupied territories. The most important type of household income, earnings from labour activity, is rendered unstable by curfews, strikes and restrictions on employment in Israel. The lack of state-directed economic security arrangements as well as prevailing political uncertainties, have thus apparently enhanced the importance of the economic network constituted by the family.

### *Employment*

For measurement and international comparison of supply and utilization of labour, a somewhat adapted version of the ILO endorsed "labour force framework" was used by FAFO.<sup>5</sup>

The labour force framework divides the population, 15 years or older, into three exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories, namely "employed", "unemployed" and persons "outside the labour force". Employed and unemployed persons together make up the "labour force".

The ILO defined (formal) unemployment ratio in the occupied territories is relatively low. Many so-called "employed" persons, however, are in reality *underemployed*. Male labour force participation is especially low for young and old men, and among Gaza refugees. The non-activity of the two former groups is primarily caused by education and sickness/old age respectively. The low recorded labour activity for Gaza refugees can, however, most probably be explained

by constraints on the labour market caused by political and economic circumstances.

Lack of full-time employment among adult men is prevalent in Gaza, notably in the southern part. Both in Gaza and in the West Bank the share of full-time workers decreases with decreasing household wealth and education. Because adult Palestinian men are expected to work full-time to provide for their families, it is reasonable to assume that the low prevalence of full-time work in Gaza is a reflection of the generally difficult labour market situation in Gaza, rather than of a smaller need for such work here than in other regions.

While labour force participation is especially low for women in all three survey areas, it is hard to assess precisely to what extent this lack of recorded formalized labour activity can be ascribed to, respectively, measurement methods and definitions of "work", and the possible involuntary nature of such work. Thus, it would not be justifiable to conclude that the small prevalence of female formalized labour necessarily reflects widespread underemployment and underutilization of labour among women. On the contrary, the results for women's use of time show that women, on average spend almost 60 hours a week on housework and income generating activities. The majority of women are thus "occupied" more than full-time with productive and reproductive activities.

Investigation of Palestinian employment in Israel (in the summer 1992) reveals that particularly individuals in Gaza, persons from poor households, and citizens of West Bank villages tend to work there. Employment in Israel seems to be the last expedient for groups of workers in the occupied territories unable to find employment locally.

In conclusion the pattern of employment problems show strong similarity with that of economic deprivation. In Arab Jerusalem 1 out of 5 persons of the *total* population were full-time employed (defined as 6 weeks or more the two last months prior to the survey). In the West Bank this ratio was 1 out of 7, and in Gaza 1 out of 20. Southern Gaza (which was the geographical region economically worst off) the ratio was as low as 1 out of 30. The reasons for the particularly low number of full-time workers in Gaza are probably constraints on the labour market caused by political and economic circumstances, a very young population and particularly low female labour activity.

The indicators used by FAFO for under-utilization of labour clearly identify Gaza refugees, in particular refugees in camps, as the group worst off in terms of employment.

### *Women*

In terms of the degree of access to and control over economic resources, women have relatively few independent economic resources. Further, their access to such resources is overwhelmingly tied to the mechanism of marriage.

In light of the low participation of women in the labour force, the overall economic picture for women is bleak if analyzed as separate from spouses or families. What this means is that women's standard of living seems largely to be determined by either the spouse or the family - they are, in other words, overwhelmingly economic dependents. Because divorce is very uncommon, this dependence is mitigated by the apparent strong social rejection of divorce. Thus, despite economic dependence, there is a strong degree of security for women within the structure of marriage, based on social taboos

against divorce. However, this overall structure means that women rarely have the financial independence that allows for independence in decision making.

The data suggests that women on the whole do not have a radical critique of this connection of marriage and economic resources, but would like a certain degree of change. Women would like to get married later (perhaps so as to finish various levels of higher education), and would also like greater access for women to particular, professional work. In other words, they would like more access to some of the resources (higher education and professional work) that would empower them within the context of marriage.

On the social level, it is apparent that there is a range of constraints on women's lives. Although there has been an overall steady growth in women's age at marriage, women would still prefer to marry at ages later than what seems to be the current social norm. The vast majority of women do not find their own marriage ages acceptable, but would prefer their daughters to marry at ages substantially higher than the current mean.

Simultaneously, the majority of women feel constrained in their ability to move freely in their community. It is clear that young unmarried women are the most constrained in their mobility. While there is a lot of unity in the overall social and economic dimensions of women's lives, factors such as age, regional residence, education and marital status show that there are often differences in how these dimensions are experienced and assessed.

Perhaps the greatest differences between women's experiences and perceptions seem to be a product of age difference. In general, older women are allowed more social freedom than are younger and, perhaps as a consequence, older women are equally open to criticism of the present and desirous of change when compared to women in

their thirties and forties. Women in the youngest age categories seem to have suffered the most serious social constraints. This young age group seems to have a generally more conservative stance to a range of issues related to women's freedom and choice. Women in their twenties have had relatively better access to education and relatively less experience of social constraints than any other age group of women. They seem to make up the age group with the most liberal social views towards the range of women's issues addressed.

Married women fare better in terms of independent economic resources, and in their ability to be mobile, than unmarried women of all ages.

There is no systematic evidence that women living in urban environments enjoy higher degrees of social freedom or access to resources than women living in rural or camp environments. The data suggests, however, that while women living in Arab Jerusalem and West Bank towns may fare better, in Gaza women living in Gaza City and other Gaza towns tend to fare worse, especially on the social indicators, than their counterparts living in camps.

### *Social stratification*

The chapter on social stratification gives a *broad and general* picture of socio-economic differences in the occupied territories by bringing together issues treated in the other chapters. An additive index comprising education and occupation of the Head of Household, and housing and household wealth has been constructed for FALCOT. The index yields the highest score for persons who have university education and who hold professional jobs, are living in a villa and enjoy great wealth. Inversely, persons who have no formal education,

no job training, are living in overcrowded households and have low wealth have the lowest index score.

For the occupied territories in total, few houses are very privileged or very underprivileged, but the distribution is biased towards lower scores on the index. There are, however, substantial differences between the three main geographical regions. The distribution of the index for Gaza is that of a typical developing country, strongly biased towards the low index values with few persons enjoying high socio-economic status. Arab Jerusalem on the contrary is skewed towards high index values. The West Bank comes out between Gaza and Arab Jerusalem with the majority of persons having a middle index score.

There is relatively small correlation between a persons refugee status and his score on the socio-economic index, even though camp refugees come out somewhat below non-refugees and refugees residing outside camps. The correlation between refugee status and the socio-economic index score is notably weaker than the strong correlation that was found between refugee status and economic resources. This result is due to the fact that the high education and occupational training of camp refugees to a substantial extent compensate for their low score on housing conditions and economic wealth. Place of residence, rather than refugee status in itself seem to be the vital determinant of a person's score on the socio-economic index.

In contrast to what could have been expected, lower social-strata do not seem to perceive more conflict between poor and rich people than higher strata. One possible explanation is that the occupation make Palestinians externalize rather than internalize feelings of tensions. Another explanation is an enduring acceptance of old hierarchical structures among Palestinians in the occupied territories.

Relatively few persons in the occupied territories regard the family's social background as decisive for one's achievements in life. Most people, however, consider one's achievements in life to be dependent on family solidarity. The rejection of the social background may reflect that most people today feel that it is one's personal ambitions or individual effort that decide one's position. Still, it is widely recognized that the individual does not operate in isolation but is dependent on the support and contributions of their family.

The agreement on the role of the family solidarity is practically unanimous across status categories. With regard to social background, more persons in the higher social strata, however, ascribe their status to their social background.

### *Opinions and attitudes*

Living conditions are not determined solely by objective evaluations of living standards. They also have to be assessed in conjunction with the individual's own evaluation of his or her life situation. Again the critical distinction is the degree to which individuals feel they have access to the resources required to gain influence over their own life and future.

The findings presented in this chapter represent only an initial analysis of the survey data. However, even a cursory look at the data suggests that Palestinian society is undergoing deep change and that some of its fundamental norms and assumptions are under rigorous challenge.

The data depicts a society that could be moving in two directions simultaneously. On one hand, it is moving toward more liberal attitudes concerning the status of women in society, toward a greater degree of secularisation and an enhanced emphasis on the value of

democracy. On the other, spearheaded especially by disaffected and frustrated sectors of the younger generation, Palestinian society also appears to be drifting toward a reinstatement of social conservatism and patriarchal values, a reinforcement of religiously defined identities and social codes and a drifting away from the acceptance of plurality.

Some of the stresses to which Palestinian society are subject are indicated by the very different views men and women seem to hold concerning the critical organising function of gender. The social roles prescribed by society for women appear to be under strong attack by women themselves, especially in Gaza, the region in which social conservatism has most hold. However, the data also suggests that particularly among the youngest age group the gender divisions in society seem under a process of redefinition and reinforcement.

One of women's strategies for dealing with this adversarial encounter seems to involve adopting the symbols and ideology of religious activism, providing them with more manoeuvrability and influence, not less.

The opposing directions of change in society combined with Palestinian perceptions of conflict suggest that some of its internal tensions might be growing. The degree of perceived conflict is highest in Arab Jerusalem, the region which also enjoys the best physical living conditions. This is also the region in which the process of change has been most profound, the competition between contending political and social ideas most enunciated and the degree of interaction with Israel most intense.

Gaza as well as the camps are located on the opposing end of the spectrum. In Gaza, life has been characterised not so much by rapid change as by prolonged stagnation. The contact that occur with Israeli society often takes the form of violent confrontation. It could well be that the intensity of this confrontation generates a special feeling of



solidarity which mutes Gazan perceptions of conflicts that are more internal to the Palestinian situation.

In general women perceive more conflict than men. The discrepancy between men and women among is particularly evident in their views concerning the degree of conflict between men and women. Arab Jerusalem where the discrepancy between men and women concerning the status of women is least is also the region in which conflict between men and women is viewed as most acute. Reversely, in Gaza where these discrepancies are most marked, the degree of reported conflict is lowest.

Significantly, economic position seems to have little, if any, impact on perceptions of conflict, a result quite different from that characteristic of Western class based societies. This would seem to indicate that class based attitudes and identifications remain relatively undeveloped in Palestinian society partly due, perhaps, to the continued primacy of family links and vertical clientele relationships with an impact on political processes.

Results from a FAFO constructed religiosity index seem to challenge some of the more common notions concerning Islamic activism in the occupied territories. Islamicism is not particularly associated with Gaza refugee camps, nor indeed with Gaza at all. On the contrary, Gaza camps, along with Arab Jerusalem, seem to be the most secular. To the extent there is a regional concentration of Islamicist activism, it appears to be more associated with the towns and camps of the West Bank. Moreover, the general percentage of Palestinians who are secular, observant or activist does not vary with their refugee status.

While education seems to produce a decline in religious observance, the most educated male sectors of Palestinian society are being to some extent polarised. On the one hand increased education

produces a steady drive toward secularization. On the other, among the most educated a certain shift toward militancy is also noticeable. For men religious radicalism seems to reinforce social conservatism. Among women, however, the attitudes of secular women and activists concerning women's roles share somewhat the same profile.

Broadly speaking more Palestinians assess their lives in positive terms than in negative ones. However, the responses reveal a clear gender difference. Women tend to assess their lives as either positive, almost a majority, or stagnant. Men are much more negative in their appraisal in particular men living in Gaza refugee camps.

Palestinians have a general sense of hope and belief in the future independent of the family's wealth or the individual's political or religious convictions. As women are more positive in the assessment of their own lives, they are also more hopeful concerning the lives of their children. While education has only marginal effect on the assessment of ones own life, it does affect faith in the future. The most pessimistic sectors of the population are also the best educated.

1. Heiberg, Marianne & Geir Øvensen (et.al), *Palestinian Society in Gaza, West Bank and Arab Jerusalem. A survey of Living Conditions*. FAFO-report 151, Oslo 1993. The report is authored by Marianne Heiberg, Geir Øvensen, Helge Brunborg, Rita Giacaman, Réma Hammami, Neil Hawkins, Hasan Abu Libdeh, Camilla Stoltenberg, Salim Tamari, Steinar Tamsfoss, Ole Fr. Ugland and Lars Weiseth.

1. The Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine, Facts and Figures About the Palestinians, (Washington, DC, 1992), p. 5.

2. The survey uses Arab Jerusalem as a designation of neighbourhoods with compact Palestinian settlements in the geographical area of East Jerusalem.

3. The index includes main building material, density of dwelling, external infrastructure and internal amenities. In this index building materials, household density and infrastructural facilities have been given more weight than the internal comfort and protection offered by the home. It should be stressed, however, that the nature and human density of the surrounding environment and certain municipal services, such as rubbish disposal and roads - both of which indirectly impact on housing standards and the general welfare of residents - are not included in the index.

4. Education in the occupied territories is provided by three principal sectors: government schools, private schools and UNRWA schools. Government schools, which were established after 1967, are by far the largest sector of the school system. Students pay a nominal tuition and both financial control and the curriculum are entirely under the auspices of the Israeli government. Private schools are operated by various local and foreign institutions, most of which are of a religious nature. UNRWA, which is particularly important in the Gaza Strip, provides education only through primary and preparatory levels and tuition is free. All further education has to be provided by either the private or governmental sectors. Since the beginning of the intifada the five main universities of the West Bank and Gaza and most of the preparatory and secondary schools and even primary schools have been subject to frequent and prolonged closures.

5. The labour force framework system is also used in the annual Israeli labour force surveys in the occupied territories.