

Exploring Teachers' Professional Identity in the Context of War Zone: A Case Study from Palestine

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Abstract In many areas of the world there are violent political conflicts the consequences of which have an inevitable impact on the educational system. Palestine is one such country where the experience of violent political conflict, going back several decades, has had a devastating effect on the development and maintenance of a stable educational environment for children and their teachers. Up to now there have been few studies that have focused on the effects of living and working in a war zone on the professional identity of teachers. This paper aims to explore how the formation of Palestinian teachers' professional identity was affected by their experiences during the violent conflict known as the Second Intifada (2000-2005) and its impact on the school social culture. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of political violence on the formation of the professional identity of Palestinian teachers, a qualitative multiple case-study approach was adopted which draws on sociocultural theories of identity formation. Data sources included observations inside schools and classrooms, field notes, a research diary, and both semi-structured group and individual interviews with teachers. The method of constant comparison used in Grounded Theory, plus the use of discourse analysis, provided the main approaches for the analysis and interpretation of the data. The findings suggest that Palestinian primary school teachers negotiate multiple conflicting identities through their everyday exposure to violent conflict and its impact on the schools' social culture. This tension emerges as a result of the historical and cultural meanings that teachers use in constructing professional identity in the unstable and unsettling conditions that exist in their country. In addition, the data indicate that the proximity of a school's geographical location in relation to violent conflict also influenced the degree of tension inherent in teachers' professional identity. The study makes significant theoretical, practical and methodical contributions to the study of the formation of teachers' professional identity in countries affected by violent political conflict.

Keywords: *violent political conflict, education, professional identity, teachers, Palestine*

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1. Introduction

Palestine is a country which has always been associated with historical and political instability. For more than ninety years, the Middle East has experienced—and continues to experience—a state of hostility and war, with devastating effects for the Palestinians, especially following the 1967 war, when Israeli troops occupied all of Palestine. The situation created by the Israeli Occupation has brought more suffering for Palestinians, and it is the main cause for the outbreak of several popular uprisings (*intifada* in Arabic). These include the First Intifada from 1987 to 1991, and the Second Intifada, during which this study was undertaken, that lasted from September 2000 to February 2005.

This ongoing crisis has had an extremely serious impact on all aspects of Palestinian life, including the education system. According to the Special Rapporteur on the right to education for the UN High Commission on Human Rights, "military occupations are another appreciable curb on the human right to education, the most egregious

example being the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" ([1], p.1). A report by Nicolai [2] states that the "Israeli response to the Intifada has led to immeasurable cost to the entire education sector – both human and structural" (p.22).

In the context of teaching and learning, several recent studies recognize that the current political conflict has created a climate of instability and chaos [3] and [4]. This assessment is affirmed by my own experiences as a Palestinian teacher. Many Palestinian schools have experienced invasion, been occupied, destroyed or forced to close. In addition to the chaotic classroom environment, there are large class sizes with limited physical and educational resources. In such conditions, both students and teachers show symptoms of the trauma of war, such as students' aggressiveness, hyperactivity and lagging academic progress [5]. In other words, the teaching profession is conducted under extremely stressful circumstances [6] and [7].

2. Research Problem

Despite growing concerns for education in countries experiencing war and the process of recovery, few studies

are currently available that delve into the experience and perceptions of teachers in situations of political conflict. This study thus contributes to bridging a gap in the knowledge base. A review of the work of researchers who have investigated the topic of education in war zones (e.g., [8,9,10]) indicates that there is a dearth of published material on this aspect in the research literature.

Several studies (e.g., [11,12,13,14]) found that the Second Intifada severely affected the Palestinian school culture, creating chaos in teaching and learning contexts. Details from a report by Palestine's Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) reviewing the disruption

and damages to in Palestinian schools from September 2000 to October 2005 are set out in Table 1, below [15].

This study thus seeks to explore from the teacher's perspective how the formation of their professional identity was affected by their experience of violent political conflict and its impact on the school social culture. The following two questions guided this research:

Question 1: What are the experiences of primary school teachers in Palestine in the context of the Second Intifada?

Question 2: How do the changes impacting the school social culture influence teachers' professional identity?

Table 1. Disruption and damage to schools from Sept. 1, 2000 to October 9, 2005*

District	Number of schools	Number of schools disrupted/damaged	Number of teachers	Number of teachers impacted	Number of students	Number of students impacted
S. Hebron	170	55	2990	694	64920	18280
Hebron	246	101	4332	147	98275	11294
Nablus	228	94	4156	1566	90513	34784
Ramallah	200	37	4201	1187	76107	23148
Qabatia	114	28	2015	253	42755	6018
Jerusalem Suburbs	91	13	1565	79	27787	3040
Jenin	127	47	2122	414	42533	17990
Bethlehem	129	33	2505	411	47998	19019
Salfeet	57	17	995	153.5	17980	4525
Jericho	23	3	487	30	10334	562
Qalqilya	114	35	1389	1672	27705	13228
KhanYounes	166	17	5121	304	142545	12313
N. Gaza	112	18	3421	0	94341	11768
Gaza	187	20	5274	560	140079	13433
Rafah	63	30	1911	717	53345	18061
Total	2190	416	46417	8188.5	1050327	197527

* Source: Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2007.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this paper I set out to learn more about how Palestinian teachers' perceive themselves as professionals in the context of violent political conflict in Palestine and its impact on the school social culture. By teacher professional identity, contributors to this body of work mean the teacher's sense of self as it is constructed through her/his knowledge, beliefs, values, emotions, judgments and dispositions in experiencing the school and the classroom contexts (e.g., [16,17,18,19]). It addresses these questions: Who am I as a teacher? And, What kind of teacher do I want to be? According to Eick and Reed [21], Nespor [22], and Wenger [23], beliefs and values are developed from teachers' personal life histories and from cultural socialization, and these play an important role in shaping teachers' practice.

My standpoint on identity in this paper stems from a sociocultural perspective in which a person's identity is shaped and negotiated through everyday activities. The assumption is that a teacher's identity is shaped and negotiated through their engagement in practice, or 'self-in-practice,' in line with the views of Holland et al [24] and [25], who suggest that cultural practices with respect to community norms and values play a significant role in teachers' identity formation. This standpoint assumes that the formation of identity happens through the interface between, on one hand, intimate discourses, inner speaking and bodily practices formed in the past, and on the other,

in discourses and practice to which people are exposed, willingly or not, in the present [26]. Similarly, Holland and Lachicotte [27] contend:

"A person engaged in social life, a person involved in an activity or practice, is presumed to have a perspective; one looks at the world from the angle of what one is trying to do....Identities are social and cultural products through which a person identifies self-in-activity and learns, through the mediation of cultural resources, to manage and organize him- or herself to act in the name of an identity" (p.123).

The point these authors are making, then, is that to understand an individual's identity it is important to look closely at the social setting of the person and this requires exploring cultural meanings from the personal perspective.

4. Research Methods

4.1. Design

In light of my research questions and their link to sociocultural theories of identity formation, a qualitative multiple case-study design was adopted. Because of the nature of the data I wished to collect, I found that my research required fieldwork in a naturalistic setting, entering the world of teachers to listen to stories from their perspectives and to explore from their point of view how and why the current political conflict and its impact on the school social culture influenced their professional identity. For this reason, I visited schools to conduct participant observation and open-ended interviews. This ethnographic

approach provided me the opportunity not only to have teachers describe the way they experienced their professional lives but also to observe them as they lived this experience. The fact that I was able to gain a holistic view of teachers' experiences in the authentic cultural setting of their workplace, plus having been a former school teacher myself, allowed me to better understand the attitudes and feelings informing their tacit behaviors.

4.2. Sample and Methods of Data Collection

Three government primary schools were selected. The government primary sector was chosen because it was reported by MoEHE during the early study to have had more exposure to the political conflict than other sectors. A MoEHE survey [28] found that 88% of state schools had been exposed to attack and of these 40% were primary schools. One school was selected from each of the West Bank districts of Ramallah, Jenin and Bethlehem. This

geographical spread covers the northern, central and southern areas of Palestine, and the three schools chosen had been impacted in varying degrees of intensity and in different ways by the conflict. This geographic variation enabled me to explore in depth, using 'thick description' to explore the teachers' multiple perspectives, how each school's social culture was influenced by the conflict and how, in turn, this impacted teachers' professional identities [29].

The Directorate of Education (DoE) in each district chose the actual schools according to the schools' own records detailing their experience during the conflict. Seventeen classroom teachers (13 female and 4 male) were interviewed and observed in their classes. This number of participants was considered to be adequate for this study, since Palestinian primary schools have six classes each, with one teacher responsible for each class. This gave all schoolteachers a chance to participate in the study.

Table 2. Timeline of data collection for the main study

School Name*	Area	Sample Number	Date and Number of Visits	Classroom Observation	Group Interviews	Individual Interviews
Al-Mghayer	Jenin	6 female teachers	September 2004 15 days	12 classroom observations of each class – 2 days	One	Interview each classroom teacher
Al-Nabesalh	Ramallah	6 teachers: 4 male 2 female	October 2004 15 days	12 classroom observations of each class – 2 days	One	Interview each classroom teacher
Al-Khader	Bethlehem	5 female teachers	November 2004 15 days	10 classroom observations of each class – 2 days	One	Interview each classroom teacher

* The names of the schools are fictitious to protect the confidentiality of the research participants.

I spent 15 days at each school. This duration afforded me ample opportunity to gain a deep understanding of the culture of the schools. I was able to explore how teachers experienced the school culture and how it influenced their professional selves. During my visits I interviewed the teachers, observed them at work and made notes of the ongoing incidents and experiences in the school and in the classrooms in particular.

I combined the use of the constant comparative approach in grounded theory research and discourse analysis to analyze the data from observations and interviews. This approach allowed me to systematically compare data from one observation or interview with data from subsequent observations and interviews. In this way, I was able to deduce and interpret the meanings of patterns, similarities and differences that emerged from the analysis [30].

5. Findings and Discussion

The purpose of this paper is to explore Palestinian primary school teachers' professional identity formation in the context of a violent political conflict, known as the Second Intifada, and its impact on the school social culture.

From the analysis of data obtained from group interviews, individual interviews, observation and a research diary, four major interconnecting themes emerged as key factors in changes to the teachers' professional identity. The first three concern teachers' professional identity in relation to the conflict, to emergency educational policy and to the geographical location of school, while the final theme refers to a

smaller group of teachers who perceived themselves in a positive manner in the context of the crisis.

5.1. Teachers' Professional Identity and Practice in the Context of Violent Conflict

It emerged from the interviews that the participating teachers considered that being a professional educator implied the belief that a teacher should be a person who has authority, who commands respect, and who should control the class while providing care and protection to the students in order to teach them effectively. This is very much in keeping with the traditional societal view of the Palestinian school. Traditionally, teachers are perceived as highly respected members of Palestinian society, which values education as a means of obtaining employment and conferring social status [31].

As Hiba from Al-Mghayer school states in the following excerpt,

B: A typical teacher? What is typical teacher?

H: I don't know [laughter] ... Well, I mean compared to where I used to work, I have lost my professionalism. I can't teach the lessons adequately and successfully."

B: And you do not see yourself in that way?

H: Not exactly. You know, what is the most important thing to do as a teacher, is to be caring and kind to the students. Help them to develop and also to see them develop.

At Al-Khader school, Fayezh put it this way:

B: But when you say a good teacher...what is a good teacher?

F: To me, I see the ones I define as good teachers as someone in control, protective and feeling close to the students, who is creative and always active. I think that's

really important. That is a good teacher. Yes, I really think so!

The excerpts above illustrate factors considered important for Palestinian teachers when they present themselves as professionals.

The following paragraphs reveal how current pedagogic practices, as described by the teachers, are misaligned with their historically held cultural norms of teacher practice.

In the case of Al-Nabesalh which is located in more dangerous zone, Hourey, for example, noted:

Yesterday I was upset because my class wouldn't do anything I asked them to do. As a result I lost control ...I never approved of that kind of behavior for a teacher and never used to do it before. I am a teacher who does not believe that you have to behave badly to get the students' respect, practically within this situation.

Hourey summed it up this way:

Teaching and productivity today are not like they were in the past. Once when the army came to the village, students became disorderly. The teacher had to repeat a point twice before the students would respond ...How could a teacher be satisfied with this kind of teaching? This results in anger and frustration.

Fayezh is from Al-Khader, a school which is also located in a conflict area. She strongly expressed her discomfort about the style she adopted in managing her classroom:

The political conflict has produced new responses from students. They are more disobedient in the class, uncontrollable and less motivated to learn. This greatly affects me as I become more nervous and angry, especially when I see no response to my instructions. Sometimes I have to resort to physical punishment in order to manage the class and help the students to recreate their energy... I am sorry to have used it. I never did so before! I was really shocked and I asked myself what I was doing.

Linda, from the same school, reported similar feelings:

Currently, I put too much pressure on students in order to achieve the lesson objectives, or I become bad-tempered in class...this makes me feel guilty as I know that at a time like this students need a teacher who is caring and friendly to them, so they can feel more at ease.

She went on to say:

Under these circumstances I don't feel that I am teaching effectively, as I often find myself looking through the window to see if something will happen.

The above quotations show how the teachers were engaging in certain kinds of practices they had rarely found necessary before, but which now were commonplace. By thinking about how they used to behave compared to now, the teachers were acknowledging how conflicted their identities had become about themselves as teachers and their actions in response to students' behavior.

Indeed, the teachers often talked in confused voices about their current practices in contrast to how it once was or should be. I interpret their actions or *identity-in-practice* as sometimes contradicting their own beliefs or *self-identity* with an essentialist understanding of identity as embedded in their professional selves. The following annotated extracts from the previous interview quotations illustrate this:

- *I was upset because my class wouldn't do anything I asked them to do; I lost control (**identity-in-practice**). I am a teacher who does not believe that you have to behave badly to get the students' respect, practically within this situation (**self-identity**).*
- *Sometimes I have to resort to physical punishment in order to manage the class and help the students to rekindle their energy (**identity-in-practice**).*
- *I am sorry to have used it, I never did so before! I was really shocked when I realized and I asked myself what I was doing (**self-identity**).*
- *I put too much pressure on students in order to achieve the lesson objective (**identity-in-practice**). This makes me feel guilty (**self-identity**).*

We can also see these conflicted identities in the cases of Muhammad and Eman, whose stories are included here in the form of short vignettes. Their stories show how the wider sociocultural circumstances impact the culture of teaching and learning and on the teachers' sense of professionalism.

Muhammad teaches at a school located in the war zone of the conflict. Once while I was observing Muhammad's class in Al-Nabesalh school, Israeli soldiers stormed the school and entered his classroom. In that instant, Muhammad's positionality as a teacher—his status and authority—was reversed. He was no longer in control, no longer able to guarantee his students' safety and well-being. He was powerless, vulnerable. After the incident, Muhammad said he felt ashamed:

A good teacher for me is someone who should protect and support his students in such situations, not hide among the students as if to protect himself and seek help.

This experience dramatically altered Muhammad's perception of his professional identity. It had shaken his belief in the traditional cultural construct of the Palestinian teacher, leaving him confused and unable to reconcile the traditional status of the teacher as a respected authority with the reality of a violent conflict and circumstances he was powerless to change, even in his own classroom. In other words, the conflict had disrupted his former *identity-in-practice*, leaving him confused and guilt-ridden.

Eman's school by contrast was located in a less dangerous district. But still, the teachers of Al-Mghayer school reported having extremely troubling experiences during their daily commute to school. This was because the city of Jenin and its surrounding municipality had been seriously affected by the conflict.

The following examples illustrate the way that Eman—and some of her fellow teachers—questioned her professional identity as a result of personal experiences during the Second Intifada, traumatic experiences outside the school that changed her practices inside the classroom in unexpected ways. For example, Eman stated:

Currently the main difficulty is the daily commute to and from school. It is really hard and risky. I have a long way to travel, causing me a lot of effort and expense. I arrive at school exhausted and I need a rest. Moreover, when I encounter Israeli soldiers along the way, the problem is twice as bad. Most of the time the military behave rudely towards us, asking for our identity cards, searching our bags, books and papers, even sometimes throwing them on the ground. The same thing happens every day. Yesterday, we faced tear gas and stun grenades

thrown from all directions. We had to look for some safe place to hide...

Then Eman reflected on the changing perception of her professional identity:

Every day I leave home at five in the morning and...I arrive at school late even when I get up early in the morning, and I feel exhausted and under pressure. I believe that this has caused a big change in myself as a teacher, and in my attitude and my behavior toward students and my teaching practice. Most of the time I feel myself as a teacher becoming more and more powerless and I have less energy to teach... I can't give as expected, which makes me feel annoyed and angry...It is not the right way to be a teacher as I believe.

Maha, a fellow teacher at Al-Mghayer, also attributed the trauma of the conflict to her changing professional attitude and behavior:

I am unhappy about the way I am doing my teaching at this time. It is not as enjoyable as it was before! I wish I could have a rest and sleep at night without the sound of bombs or shooting; that would make me more productive and effective in my teaching, as I should be.

Hiba, from the same school, also commented:

Currently our journey to school is hard and full of obstacles. I really feel tired and exhausted. This means for me that I have lost my professionalism. I just can't teach the lessons adequately and successfully anymore.

These statements from Muhammad, Eman and their colleagues were more than expressions of guilt and sadness. Their perception of their teaching practices and relationships with their students were being filtered through personal experiences with the conflict. Feeling increasingly stripped of their agency as teachers, they found their attitudes and practices in the classroom adapting in unexpected and unpleasant ways to the harsh new contextual circumstances brought on by the conflict.

In other words, these teachers were experiencing a kind of cognitive dissonance, an abrupt contradiction between their observed practices and behaviors in the classroom and their deeply held cultural beliefs about what it meant to be an effective teacher—a person with authority, with status, and with the capacity to lead change in his or her classroom.

This interpretation draws validity from empirical research by a number of scholars who have noted that what teachers experience in their personal lives influences their professional roles and relationships with their students [32,33,34,35]. For example, in a comprehensive review of the research literature, Day et al. [36] conclude that teachers' personal and professional identities are not only closely tied, but they also contribute to motivation, commitment and job satisfaction. This also corresponds with the way in which Berlak and Berlak [37] have defined professional identity as a complex and dynamic equilibrium where personal self-image and beliefs are balanced with a variety of social roles that teachers feel obliged to play (See also [38,39,40,41,42]).

Yet as we have seen in the cases of Mohammad and Eman, the equilibrium in teachers' professional identity is susceptible to changing conditions in the wider society, a point supported by the research literature. Holland et al. [43] conceptualize identity as "composites of many, often contradictory, self-understandings" (p.8). Britzman [44] argues that teachers' identities are heavily influenced by

multiple and contradictory discourses about teaching and learning and that their identities are constantly being reinvented in response to conflicting representations of teaching and learning. As the cases of Mohammad and Eman illustrate, violent conflict was creating conditions in which teachers were reinventing their professional identities in ways they deplored.

5.2. Teachers' Practice as Mediated by the Geographical Location of the School

The study findings show that there was a difference in how teachers responded in the interviews depending on the geographical proximity of the schools to violent events. The closer the conflict, the greater the effect on the school culture and its negative impact on teachers' practice and self-image as professional educators. For example, in the case of Al-Khader and Al-Nabesalh schools, situated near highly volatile Israeli military checkpoints, the majority of the teachers expressed heightened frustration as they struggled to teach effectively. And if the stress of teaching wasn't already enough, many teachers felt enormous pressure from being overburdened with new responsibilities in the face of the crisis. May from Al-Khader school reported during the interview:

At this time I find my teaching has become poorer than it was before as a result of the pressure of work... We currently have an emergency plan where a teacher takes on the role of a security guard and walks around the school inspecting and monitoring for any danger... Teachers are responsible for the psychological needs of the students and sometimes accompany them on their way home after school. Each teacher is responsible for the safety of her class... This overloads the teacher.

Linda, also from Al-Khader, repeated the same:

In these circumstances I don't feel that I am teaching effectively. I mean, I find myself often looking through the window during the lessons to see if something is happening... I am always worried about the safety of my class.

Likewise, in Al-Nabesalh school, Nasser described the struggle for professional normalcy:

The first and last responsibility belongs to the teacher... Teachers have to give the students the time to express their needs, but at the same time they have to keep the lessons running and create a safe and secure learning environment. This causes heavy pressure and less effective teaching.

These last examples reveal how the new attitudes and practices that teachers were adopting had, in turn, altered their views of themselves. In other words, because their professional identities were embodied in their classroom practices, their new responsibilities and fears for their own and their students' safety had decoupled their efficacy as teachers from the classroom context that defined their professional identity.

These findings are consistent with those of Giacaman et al. [45], Murray et al. [46], Save the Children [47], and MoEHE [48], who found that the closer a school was to an area of violent conflict, so much greater were the demands placed on teachers, leading to the destabilization of their professional lives. And as the analysis above has shown, this is precisely the situation facing Palestinian teachers, whose professional identity and practice fluctuate in an

inverse correlation to their school's geographical proximity to zones of violent conflict.

5.3. Teachers' Identity through Their Perspective of Student Behavior

The literature provides strong evidence for the theory that the professional identity of teachers emerges as a social construct in large part from social interactions with students [49-54]. My research examined the implications of this theory in relation to a school's physical proximity to violent conflict.

Data from the study show that teachers' identification with teaching varied considerably with the geographical location of the school. This was borne out for a number of teachers who are presented here as examples. Nasser teaches at Al-Nabesalh, a school located in an area where violence associated with the Second Intifada was severe. Nasser recounted the following:

The students always think of the current situation. They are unable to concentrate and are losing their ability to learn ... Students become alarmed at the sound of an ambulance or a military jeep...They are also worried when there is silence in the road, thinking that a curfew has been imposed and maybe they will not be able to go home... I feel really sad about the students' circumstances.

His colleague at Al-Nabesalh, Abed, similarly noted:

The students become more violent and less able to concentrate or learn well...Their concentration is fixed on the general living conditions, especially when soldiers are seen in the area... Students immediately rush out of class when they hear any noise outside, thinking there may be a shooting going on....Students become uncontrollable and sometimes I am unable to manage this type of behavior... This greatly affects me as I become more nervous and angry, especially when I see no response to my instructions or commands... and sometimes I feel upset, as I am unable to control this type of behavior. I would like to create a better atmosphere, one which is more satisfying for the students and conducive to learning.

Furyal, from Al-Khader School, which was also greatly impacted by the conflict, observed:

Several students in my class are clearly traumatized by fears of being physically harmed. This does not help them to make progress in their studies. They can't study as they did before ...They're always fearful when coming to school or going back home... This really makes me feel angry!

Likewise, in Al-Khader school, Haluma commented:

I feel frustrated and sad about my classroom conditions. It is an extremely stressful and chaotic environment. Most of the students are rebellious and misbehave because of their experiences in the current political conflict... I am always thinking of ways to adapt the lessons and manage the class so as to enable the students to concentrate.

Evidence from Al-Mghayer also illustrate how students' behavior changed during the conflict.

Maha, for example noted:

The unstable teaching conditions, realistically speaking, have produced new behavioral problems in students. They are more disobedient in the class, less controllable and have less motivation to learn. I really feel sad and guilty about the students' circumstances.

Despite the unstable teaching conditions and how these impacted on their practice, several teachers from Al-Mghayer School, where proximity to the conflict was less intense, commented that their students' attitudes had actually become more sympathetic toward their teachers. For example, Rose stated:

Students always ask me about my travels to school... They are aware of the teachers' concerns... You know, this makes me happy and encourages me to struggle and to reach school even under difficult circumstances.

Hiba also reported:

The commute to school is hard and demanding, which we all expect of course. But let me tell you, the way in which the students welcome me when I arrive at school, it's really surprising and uplifting. It gives me renewed motivation to teach.

Although these last two statements suggest that students appear to show more concern for teachers' well-being when the contextual circumstances of the school are less intense, such feelings can quickly diminish in proportion to the intensity of violence in the surrounding environment and its impact on the students' emotional state.

To reiterate, study's findings point to strong associations between a school's proximity to conflict zones and declining student behavior. Furthermore, the study lends theoretical and empirical support to the work of a number of researchers, cited above, whose studies indicate that the professional identity of teachers emerges in part as a result of their interactions with students. What the Palestinian examples demonstrate so clearly is that teacher-student interaction and its influence on professional identity cannot be disassociated from the climate of violent conflict and its psychological impact on students' attitudes and behaviors.

5.4. School Leadership, Conflict Zones, and Teachers' Professional Identity

The educational research literature, not surprisingly, points to the important influence of the attitudes and behaviors of the school principal on the schooling context. Day et al. [55], for example, found that the principal played a significant role in co-constructing teaching identities and that this had an influence on teachers' motivation, commitment and self-efficacy.

Evidence from the study shows that in the cases of Al-Khader and Al-Nabesalh, located in areas of heavy violence, the principals had a similar style of management, which may be identified as "authoritarian" [56]. The majority of the teachers in both schools expressed a sense of unhappiness, dissatisfaction and frustration with their particular situations, which they felt to be exacerbated by the principals' forceful attitudes. For example, at Al-Khader School May explained:

I come to school mostly without motivation. This is due to the principal's harsh attitude in keeping order in the school.

Hourey, from Al-Nabesalh School, wondered:

How can teachers ever be satisfied and teach effectively when they lack motivation from the principal... I don't feel that I love teaching at this time, not because I can't do it, but because I feel I have to be accepted.

In Al-Mghayer, located in a less intense conflict area, the situation was quite the opposite. The school had a principal with a different attitude, corresponding perhaps to what Blasé and Anderson [57] call “facilitative leadership.” The teachers shared the opinion that the principal’s style of management in response to their experiences during the conflict was effective in reducing their stress and increasing their motivation to teach. Hiba, for instance, stated:

When I arrive at school after a long, hard journey and hear positive words from the principal, I feel more at ease.” Another teacher reported that “the principal’s response and attitude have done a lot to encourage me to come to school, even when the situation has escalated.

These findings echo those discussed by Blasé [58] and Stoll and Fink [59], who state that those principals whom teachers described as open and supportive tended to be highly interactive with teachers, rather than authoritarian. They understood teachers’ feelings and built a supportive environment, which helped teachers to express their personal feelings and needs, thus contributing to the way teachers viewed themselves as teachers. Flores and Day [60] likewise found that teachers who taught in schools in which there was a supportive and encouraging principal were more likely to show positive attitudes towards teaching.

Does this assumption of supportive school leadership hold up in relation to the schools’ geographical proximity to violent conflict and its impact on the school culture? A number of teachers from Al-Khader school believed that the school location had a negative impact on the principal’s attitude and behavior. They explained that the principal faced intense pressure because the school was very close to an Israeli settlement and a military checkpoint, locations that were often flashpoints during the Second Intifada. This characterization of principals working under duress was supported by my own observations in Al-Nabesalh school, where the principal often had to substitute for teachers who were prevented from reaching school. This double duty, combined with the unstable security situation, made his capacity to both lead and manage the school all the more challenging and stressful.

To sum up, the above discussion described the varying ways that violent political conflict may negatively influence school leadership. The result is a vicious circle of conditions inside and outside the classroom context that work to undermine teachers’ idealized perception of their professional identity and what it means to be an effective teacher. Having considered the impact of the geographical location of schools, I now examine the impact of emergency educational policies on teachers’ professional identity.

5.5. The impact of the Emergency Educational Policy on Teachers’ Professional Identity

The data generated by the case studies reveal that the emergency educational policies which were established by the Ministry of Education in response to the Second Intifada resulted in teachers having to face difficult classroom management conditions and a heavy workload. Teachers had to contend with, among other things,

teaching large and often chaotic classes; stress resulting from a compensation program to make up for lost hours of teaching; inadequate educational materials; and financial distress due to low salaries. The study found that accommodations teachers had to make in their teaching practices under the emergency educational policies negatively impacted their professional identity.

May from Al-Khader School described the array of problems she and her fellow teachers faced:

At present teaching is increasingly challenging and we are overloaded. I give every minute of the day, even break time, in order to catch up with the curriculum requirements in the time scheduled. There are days when I just cannot manage this and I feel tired, disappointed and think my teaching practice is inadequate and without encouragement.

Eman, from Al-Mghayer School, also reported:

A curfew gets imposed...and the soldiers left the town at 10.00 am. Teachers then have to come to school and compensate for lost hours. When can this be achieved? In the sixth period? As a science teacher, I see that my students’ minds are tired at this time of day, not to mention my own state of physical and mental exhaustion.

Views such as these are consistent with previous studies which found that educational policies in Palestine exerted enormous pressure upon the work of teachers [61,62,63]. In the face of demands imposed by the emergency policies, data from the study show that the majority of the teachers from the three schools perceived their teaching practices as both inadequate and ineffective compared to their view of what the proper role and status of a Palestinian teacher to be. The policies forced teachers to compromise their professional integrity by having to adopt stopgap measures in their instructional practices to deal with the challenges of keeping pace in teaching the curriculum.

For example, Haluma from Al-Khader School showed her aversion with the teaching style that she felt obliged to adopt:

Currently, I need to be more hurried in my teaching approach ... I do not really believe in this strategy... but I was forced to apply this style of teaching in order to cover the syllabus and finish the lessons in the time required.

At Al-Mghayer School, Suha complained:

I am upset. My lessons are becoming rushed in order to cover the huge curriculum in a limited time... I therefore do not enjoy teaching as much as I did before... In fact, I don’t feel that I am benefiting the students as much as I should be.

Rose, another teacher, reported her dislike of the situation:

I don’t feel that I am doing a good job because I have to rush through my teaching practice in order to cover the huge curriculum in the time required and for a large class size... I don’t like my lessons to take this form!

Nasser, from Al-Nabesalh School, shared his dissatisfaction:

Most of the time I feel my work is not carried out properly because I have to cover a heavy syllabus. This makes me feel powerless and dissatisfied with my teaching practice.

Abed, from the same school, confessed his dislike for changes he saw in his attitude and behavior:

Recently, my class has grown to 45 students. It is not easy to control them, and it’s impossible for teachers to

cater to students' individual needs ... Sometimes I behave badly and punish a pupil in order to manage a class of such a large size. This makes me feel guilty. I no longer enjoy my teaching.

Although the social construction of identity is never fixed and can be reconstituted in response to internal and external stimuli, these last excerpts reveal the sharp tensions and conflicted emotions the teachers were facing in trying to reconcile their professional identity and practice against the pressures placed on them to comply with emergency policies. In other words, the teachers' accounts of their "new" teaching strategies and behaviors had created a deeply conflicted perception of *what is* and *what should be* [[64], p.10]. This idea is echoed in a study by Enyedy et al. [65] who explain that such conflicts in teachers' professional identities emerge when they find themselves working against their own values and beliefs.

5.6. Coping by Situating a Positive Identification onto Practice

Interestingly, the data show that four teachers from the three schools in this study reported their practices and identities as being different from the majority in the sample who exhibited identity-conflicts of various kinds. These four seemed to accept the "abnormal" as normal as a way of coping with external circumstances largely out of their control. This group of teachers perceived themselves managing to keep their identities intact while continuing successfully to meet their professional responsibilities in the face of violent conflict. They explained this in terms of efforts to increase their sense of belonging, commitment and effectiveness. For example, Fulye from Al-Khader School stated:

Whatever I face in terms of experiences of the current crisis, I keep going in my teaching... This is my duty.

Similarly, Nisreen from Al-Nabesalh School claimed that the violent political climate had had no influence on her ability or motivation to teach. She stated during the interview:

In the current political conflict I have found that I love teaching more and more. It gives me more strength to face the challenge of coming to school and to be more committed to my work!

Hussein also commented that despite the dangerous times, "I try to forget about whatever happens, rise to the challenge and do my work. We are used to it."

Majed from Al-Mghayer School made a similar point:

Thank God, I adapt myself to the new teaching conditions... I have become accustomed to the changes... The circumstances have shaped my skills and how I respond... Teachers have to teach no matter what the conditions are... I love teaching. And this means I have to rise to the challenge and give more and more to teach successfully.

This group of teachers could be defined in the context of this study as "capable teachers," fitting the description by Lampert [66] who characterizes the capable teacher as "an active negotiator, a broker of sorts, balancing a variety of interests that need to be satisfied in classrooms... [and who] initiates actions as solutions to particular environmental problems and defines herself as the locus on various alternative perspectives on those actions" (p.190). In other words, for this group of Palestinian

teachers, their attitude as capable teachers appears to reflect a conscious strategy to increase their capacity to differentiate and integrate their understanding of their professional selves in relation to the harsh reality around them and without becoming destabilized [67].

In sum, the attitudes and behaviors of these four teachers demonstrate the flexibility of professional identity. These teachers, despite sharing challenges in common with the others, were somehow able to resist the difficult conditions in the school culture by adopting attitudes that preserved their notions of professional identity.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, this paper focused on teachers' professional identity. It explored the formation of Palestinian primary teachers' professional identity in the context of violent conflict that took place during the Second Intifada and its impact on the school social culture.

The findings demonstrate how violent conflict had a disruptive impact on teachers' professional identity. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on education in emergency situations by demonstrating the devastating toll on teaching and learning in societies experiencing prolonged and violent political conflict. The study shows that the cumulative impact of being both a teacher and a victim in times of war creates high levels of stress, anger, self-doubt, and guilt, all of which can seriously damage the otherwise positive values, beliefs and attitudes associated with the formation of teacher professional identity.

Finally, the study challenges the assumption prevalent in the literature that people who live and work in conflict zones necessarily become habituated to local conditions associated with violent political conflict. On the contrary, evidence from the present study shows that the majority of teachers living and working in such conditions were unable to adjust their professional identity and practice to the daily fears and threats of harm to themselves and their students. Rather, the interpretation of the findings suggests that the identities of the Palestinian teachers appeared to be highly conflicted, torn between past and present cultural models of the ideal teacher, and confused as to how to negotiate their professional identity against the larger societal context of violent political conflict.

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