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**BOOK REVIEW: HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE
PALESTINIAN ARAB MINORITY IN ISRAEL BY
KHALID ARAR AND KUSSAI HAJ-YEHIA, PALGRAVE
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For both Prof. Arar and Haj-Yehia the study of education related topics in the context of the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel has been a career guiding theme. Their previous research projects and publications have touched on various dimensions of this issue, mainly emphasizing issues such as access to education, but also documentation of migration for study relation purposes of members of this community. Their latest book, “Higher Education and the Palestinian Arab Minority in Israel”, published in 2016 by Palgrave Macmillan, can be described as a synthesis of previous research and, at the same time, an argument for supporting access to education for underrepresented groups. From the prologue even of the book the authors state their objective clearly: “to raise pertinent questions concerning the dual marginality of Palestinian Arab minority in Israel (PAMI), [...] in Israel’s HE system and employment market” (p. 1).

The book is structured in seven chapters and an Epilogue, starting with general historical information about the PAMI and the formation of the state of Israel and ending with policy proposals to widen access to education for members of the PAMI minority. The narrative follows a classical structure, with each chapter approaching a different dimension of the more general topics of access to education, outcomes of education on the labor market and finally policy evaluation and proposals for improvement of both. Using data and research results from both quantitative and qualitative previous studies, the authors argue that the existence of numerous hurdles hampering access to higher education, in particular, foster further inequalities on the labor market for members of the PAMI community.

The first chapter of the book describes, briefly, the context of the PAMI as an ethnic group within the state of Israel. Starting with the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, the authors argue that the PAMI group as a cultural and ethnic minority within a democratic state face several disadvantages which become barriers in accessing higher education and the labor market. Historical information is mixed with economic and political systems general arguments, a few cultural and anthropological hints regarding individual and group identity of the PAMI, to point towards a rather general idea: as the PAMI are clearly a distinct ethnic and cultural group and as individuals of this group are citizens of a democratic state the principle of equality should prevail. Ranging from political representation to higher education access and labor market participation, all citizens of a democratic state should have the same rights and equal

opportunities.

The second chapter of the book makes the case for disadvantages faced by members of the PAMI community. The argument made in this second chapter is that education is important, that higher education is even more important and that, ultimately, access to education acts as a one-way factor pushing individuals towards better jobs and better lives. The second part of the chapter is devoted to documenting and arguing how several types of barriers: financial, informational, motivational and “miscellaneous” ones hamper the access of PAMI members to higher education in particular. There are two parts to be found inside this chapter: the first part is a literature review of the role education in general plays in the formation and development of individuals. The authors place their future arguments within an interpretative paradigm, defined by the concept of equal educational opportunities developed by J.S. Coleman in the 1960’s. The authors quote a contemporary reprint (dating from 1996, a year after Coleman’s death) of the original report, in order to argue for the role the family context plays in ensuring education success. Their line of argument follows through the line of thinking inspired by Coleman and takes the reader through the entire sociological line of interpretation of various factors which influence an individual educational opportunities and success, ending with Bourdieu and Passeron’s work published in the 1990’s. The second part of the chapter sets the scene for the following chapters, by briefly describing how the case of PAMI fits within that theoretical framework.

The third chapter starts bringing empirical proof into the so far theoretical framework. The reader is provided with statistical data on the number of PAMI students enrolled in Israel’s universities, their share in the total number of students and also by degree studied, by gender and by discipline. The chapter documents two important trends observable throughout at least the past two decades: the increasing access of women from the PAMI to higher education and the integration of PAMI members within the teaching and research community. Even though shares of PAMI students are still low, benchmarked to their share in the overall population, they are continuously rising albeit at a rather slow pace. The main barrier towards access to higher education documented by the authors is the inflexible *scholastic aptitude test* imposed on all pupils in Israel at the end of secondary education. The results of this *psychometric testing* determine future access to higher education and are clearly, as statistics show, the most important objective disadvantage faced by PAMI pupils. As alternative testing tools have been employed the share of PAMI students gaining access to higher education institutions rose sharply, furthering the case against standardized testing as a means of obtaining access to higher education. Other bottlenecks which prevent access to higher education in Israel are also documented, such as age requirements, cultural and language barriers or other admission exams (such as interviews). Faced with all these barriers, a part of the PAMI youngsters, who have the opportunity and means to do so, choose studying abroad.

The fourth chapter documents the migration for educational purposes of PAMI young people towards other countries, mainly in the Middle East, but also in some European Union members countries and even in the United States of America. The chapter is in fact composed of several case studies describing the reasons, outcomes and the general life of PAMI students in other countries, such as Jordan, the USA, the

Palestinian Authority Universities. The authors combine statistical data from different sources, with research data obtained from previous research in which they participated or have coordinated. The mix of quantitative and qualitative methods provides a rather vivid description of life as a PAMI student choosing to pursue tertiary level study programs abroad and provide a basis for pointing out shortcomings of the higher education in Israel.

The fifth chapter is an attempt in documenting a somewhat debatable concept in social sciences: identity and the formation of it among young people. The debate presented in this chapter is mainly based on a qualitative research whose aim was to identify the way identity of a member of a cultural or ethnic group and social awareness are shaped by the academic experience. The authors are building their argument around the role that access and participation in higher education play in shaping an intellectual and cultural elite of a minority ethnic group. Once shaped and numerous enough this elite should gain access to positions and jobs which would allow them to influence the policy agenda and bring further social, political and economic benefits to members of their originating group. It is important to emphasize that both in the fourth and this fifth chapter the evolution of PAMI women who gain access to higher education is particularly important to shaping the argument for overcoming disadvantages. The foremost importance of higher education is that of supporting individuals overcome disadvantages and women are subjected to a two-fold bias: due to their gender and their belonging to a minority ethnic group. As higher education is perceived as a step towards elite formation and overcoming the lack of equal educational opportunities, this chapter also serves as a framework towards the interpretation of the reality of the labor market.

The sixth chapter implies that the natural outcome of higher education is absorption into the labor market. Thus statistical data is again brought to the table to document the employment status of PAMI men and women, throughout time and by comparison to other social groups. The description of the labor market in Israel provides further arguments that disadvantages are clearly observable. The term “discrimination” is finally used by the authors when it comes to jobs in public administration or other government ministry employees. Statistical data also shows that discrimination not only exists for PAMI employees, but also hinders women members of PAMI from accessing jobs in almost all of government ministries, with the notable exception of health. Against the backdrop of improvement of access to an participation in education, a slow one but observable, the picture of a labor market which is still very segregated on gender and ethnical lines is thus painted.

The seventh chapter follows logically and provides proposals for solutions for further improvement of participation and access to education but also equal employment opportunities. Barriers preventing PAMI members from accessing education, previously documented through statistical and research data, are restated and proposals to overcome them are being put forward. This chapter acts mainly as a synthesis of the whole book and provides decision makers with the necessary arguments and tools to formulate informed public policy decisions aimed at making equal opportunities in a democratic state a reality.

The Epilogue serves as a rather clear public policy statement, which can also

be read as a political one. As the authors hint, they have been involved in educational policies drafting for a rather long time. As proposed policies have not been enacted and have been postponed or ignored, the need to restate the importance of access to education and also the role of education in general is important. Access to education and further towards equal opportunities on the labor market, especially in the public sector, is beneficial for the entire society and the state as whole. The authors clearly state that “increased participation of the PAMI population in HE will enhance their socioeconomic status in the Israeli society, and will contribute significantly to the economic success of the State of Israel as a whole.” (p. 186). At the same time, between the lines, the case is made at the end for a more instrumental objective: the foundation of a PAMI University in Israel, a project long prepared and long postponed by decision makers.

There are two ways one can read this book. There is in-depth knowledge one can obtain on the evolution and participation in education and, to some extent, the labor market of a minority ethnic group in a country of this world. This story has so far not been in the spotlight of higher education research. It is a case study. From a scientific point of view it merely fits data into a theoretical framework and shows that previous theories are right and that they can be used to interpret a reality. The other way one can look at this book is how to make a solid and informed argument for public policies in a certain field. The authors synthesize results of previous research, combine them with population level, longitudinal statistical data and also qualitative information, to make an excellent case for implementing public policies in the field of education. All under a principle fundamental for any democratic society: equal opportunities for citizens irrespective of gender, ethnicity, color, culture or religion.