

Thoughts on examining an education masters dissertation on

A divided Palestinian village

The academic exploration of learning by educators is not always confined to what happens in the classroom. Contexts vary and may require us to make critical sense of a range of political issues. Why would we not? If, for example, two cousins are at schools on different sides of a wall erected in order to separate them we cannot write about their education and ignore the wall. Why is it there? Who put it there? Why is it maintained? Nor can we ignore the impact upon the cousins, their classmates, their teachers and the split societies in which they live and grow.

Considering a physical wall reminds us of other walls. The wall separating those, for example, attending Eton from those going to Bash Street Secondary Modern is no less tall, wide and impenetrable for being intangible. Tony Blair told us his priority was *Education, Education, Education*. His priority ought to have been *Society, Society, Society*. Can anyone imagine Blair the Peace Envoy talking about this schoolteacher's deep research prompted by personal experience of a deliberately divided society?

Experienced realities

There are times when the reality experienced by students and teachers tests academic conceptual frameworks. I taught the student whose work I examined but did not supervise the dissertation. I was the second marker (why do we refer to assessing as 'marking'?). The supervisor left the USA many years ago to live in Israel and had worked hard encouraging collaboration across cultural boundaries. Today that noble intent and effort has been negated by intentional government action.

Israeli school textbooks are officially approved and, as Nurit Peled-Elhanan showed in her '**Palestine in Israeli School Books, Ideology and Propaganda in Education**'ⁱ, the official national narrative has been constructed to justify inhuman policies. 'They' not only hate 'us' but 'they' stand in the way of 'our' fulfillment.

Internalising such views makes it easier to pull triggers. Children are born into different realities: some have bullets to fire and some have bullets to dodge, if they can.

Literature

This dissertation went into uncharted territory. There were masses of words generated by bureaucracies, in this case involving two countries and four

administrations working in four languages. Births, deaths and marriages come with lots of paper. So do taxes and deeds of property.

The quantity of this kind of literature is evidence of both family and official urges to record. When you record you also classify. What are the headings? How is it decided who or what comes under what heading? Israelis born there before 1948 have stated on their birth certificates that they were born in Palestine.

The Ottoman and the Roman Empires depended upon bureaucracy. Who, for example, had the rights to sell horses in a given region? It was recorded and so was everything to do with trade, property and people. Despite efforts to portray the Palestine past as empty of settled people, a land criss-crossed by a few nomadic tribes, this was not the case, as the dissertation demonstrated.

Is education a commodity to be weighed and measured? Is it about accumulating scores and qualifications? Might it confront and explain the causes and consequences of chosen inhumanity? Once grandmothers could hold newly born grandchildren. Now some are only allowed to approach a wall on special occasions to touch a finger through a crack.

Would you tell a student that this is irrelevant to education?

Note

A version of this piece has appeared in the 'in draft' part of the website because my intention was to write something much longer. Perhaps that is for another day.

Cliff Jones, November 2016

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