

THIRTEEN YEARS AND ALMOST FORTY VISITS

REFLECTIONS OF A PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR WORKING IN ISRAEL

PART THREE

Teaching in West Jerusalem people from East Jerusalem can present you with some irritating practical problems. Travelling from one side to another is not always straightforward. I wish the audience could have been bigger and that we had made more of a fuss of Areej when I presented her with the winning prize from the International Professional Development Association (IPDA) for her masters dissertation). She is now the headteacher of a girls secondary school in East Jerusalem. At the time she was deputy head.

Her registration class had a problem. She asked them why they were getting into trouble so often and why their reputation among the teachers was not as good as it could be. Their response was surprising. These were girls who wanted to learn, which in my experience is typical of young Palestinians. According to them there was one teacher who did not like to teach so she would provoke them into some form of bad behaviour and then punish them. Like me you might have experienced teachers telling you to sit up straight in silence with your arms folded. In that situation no teaching is done and it is very easy for a teacher to extend the period of silence if just one pupil scratches a nose.

Areej was very aware that the self-esteem of the girls was at stake; how to restore it? Her dissertation is the story of how the girls set about this by managing their troublesome teacher. They gradually introduced that teacher to the pleasures of teaching, the enjoyment to be had, the fulfilment that education can bring to all participants. I imagine that for years that process of restoring self-esteem will stay with those girls. I also contrast Areej's emotionally intelligent encouragement and support for her girls with our government's approach to education. Here, in particular in England, the notion of improvement has become a stick with which to beat everyone in the classroom. You have twenty minutes to demonstrate improvement. Education is something *done to* young people, not *with* them.

The University of Liverpool had almost 800 masters students in Israel. There were also some doctoral students but I was not responsible for them. Imagine reading the words of the Director of Bedouin Education on the impact upon women of having formal education for the first time. Imagine reading about what it was like to be educated in a village with a border going through it so that only on special occasions such as weddings and births might a grandmother touch the finger of a daughter or grandchild when each side was allowed to approach the fence. I wrote most of the assessment criteria and guidance that we used in order to make sense of and grade assignments and dissertations. I had no idea that I would be using those criteria in contexts very different from what I was used to. It was an enriching experience that too often came from reading about problems I had never encountered.

Recently I asked both Areej and an Israeli professor (a strong supporter of Corbyn) at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem if they knew each other. They did not but Nurit Peled-Elhanen (sister of Miko Peled) did know someone who did. It was Samira Alayan the author of *EDUCATION IN EAST JERUSALEM, occupation, political power and struggle* (2019). In my review of the book I concluded that although it is extremely expensive I was sure that the House of Commons Library could afford it. Someone who then worked for a Labour MP saw the review and now it is in that library. I just hope that one or two members of the Labour friends of Israel turn over a few of its pages. It might encourage them to unfriend when they learn about official censorship and how Palestinian schools can obtain more much needed funding if they teach the official Israeli curriculum. The book is now undergoing its fifth translation but, before becoming excited about how it will spread knowledge to debunk the many falsehoods about Palestine and Palestinians with which we are bombarded, we should remind ourselves that most purchasers will be university libraries. There is lots of research available but who reads it? And who among our policy-makers has the slightest idea what it might have been like in the classroom of Areej?

Cliff Jones 7th. August 2019

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