

World Education Forum in Occupied Palestine: 27 – 31st October, 2010

By Joy Moore

Novembre 2010

As part of the FNEEQ delegation to the World Education Forum held in Occupied Palestine I submit the following observations and reflections on my experience.

Racial Profiling:

On arrival at Ben Gurion airport on 27th October, our group all made it through Israeli Passport control except for one person – we had been warned that racial profiling was a feature of security and passport monitoring. A member of our party because of her name and skin color was held incommunicado for several hours, and subject to intimidation, questioning and harassment.

We arrived in Ramallah late in the evening and on entry witnessed the Wall with soldiers and watch towers. The following day, I joined a group going to Haifa for a presentation by Dr Hatim Kanaaneh on the detention and trial Ameer Makhoul, an Arab Israeli human rights activist. This was to be followed by a visit to the Bedouin village of El Araqib in the Negev desert to meet with members of the village. A village whose houses have been demolished and bulldozed by Israeli police forces in Israeli's on going policy of ethnic cleansing and displacement of the Bedouin indigenous people.

The Wall:



On the bus to Jerusalem we passed through the Qalandia check point – the exit out of Ramallah– the Wall is massive and covered with pictures of Barghouti, a respected Palestinian leader and a long term political prisoner together with other symbols of Palestinian resistance. My next door neighbor on the bus is a Palestinian who is en route to visit his sister who is seriously ill in a Jerusalem Hospital. He has been traveling since the

early hours of the morning and with weary frustration described the days it took to obtain a pass from the IDF to permit him to visit Jerusalem. The cars are lined up at the check point, it is chaotic; there is no movement. After a long wait we inch forward and an Israeli soldier enters the bus to check identification gun slung over her shoulder; it is intimidating. My fellow passenger points to the Palestinian villages outside the wall but

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with no access to Ramallah or neighboring Palestinian communities. The Israelis have effectively encircled all Palestinian towns and villages with the Wall cutting off communication and employment opportunities as well as access to farm land owned by Palestinians. “The Wall accounts for 240,000 destroyed olive trees. A further 2,128,000 trees (twice the destruction of 40 years of occupation) will be on the ‘other’ side of the Wall and for all practical purposes permanently lost to Palestinian farmers. The agricultural sector and hopes for peace are being wiped out.” (*Zatoun*, Olive Oil from Palestine pamphlet, in support of farmers in Palestine.)

On arrival in Jerusalem we change buses for Haifa and meet up with fellow WEF participants from France in a small Arab Youth Centre where Dr Hatim Kanaaneh is to give a presentation. France had a delegation of 150 participants who are staying in different parts of Palestine. As Palestinians are constricted in their movements conference participants visited their communities to share pedagogical ideas and educational practice.

Political Prisoners, Detention and Torture:

Dr Hatim Kanaaneh¹, a retired Public Health Doctor was head of the Public Committee for the Defense of Ameer Makhoul, a Palestinian citizen of Israel and political and human rights activist falsely accused of espionage. In May of 2010 Ameer was arrested in the middle of the night by Israel Security Agency known as Shin Bet and computers and other personal items seized. He was detained incommunicado, subjected to tortuous interrogation techniques including excessively prolonged sleep deprivation. Though there was no real evidence against Makhoul, the prosecution claimed they had ‘secret evidence’ and the Courts sentenced him to imprisonment despite an international campaign to free him. Ameer Makhoul is a voice for politically disadvantaged groups of Israel’s Palestinian Arab citizens and an internationally recognized defender of human rights and member of international coalitions. Makhoul also spoke out against Israel’s 2009 invasion of Gaza and use of phosphorous – Shin Bet had threatened that they would



¹ Hatim Kanaaneh, MD, MPH (2008) *A Doctor in Galilee: the Life and Struggle of a Palestinian in Israel*. London: Pluto Press. Internet reference: <http://a-doctor-in-galilee.blogspot.com/>

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“tailor a file for his disappearance and prolonged separation from his family” if he would not tone down his political and human rights activism. Amnesty has charged that his arrest and continued detention is “harassment designed to hinder his human rights work”

What was clear from Dr Kanaaneh’s presentation is that political repression, detention and a deliberate policy of intimidation and the silencing of politically active Palestinians has escalated with the rise of the politically right policies and overt plans by Avigdor Lieberman to transfer the Arab minority out of Israel. The Judaisation of Israel and military control of occupied Palestine is a blatant strategy to further squeeze the Palestinians both economically and politically. They are literally walled in and Israel has control of all movement and aspects of Palestinian life. Dr Kanaaneh’s analysis is that Israel is deliberately embracing extremist and racist politics. In particular there has been an escalation and intimidation of educated politically active Israeli Palestinians with links to International human rights organizations throughout Israel and the West Bank.

As a Public Health professional Dr Kanaaneh pointed to statistics that indicated that infant mortality was twice as high among Arab Israelis, and this is linked to higher rates of poverty, unemployment and lack of clean water among the Arab Israeli population.

Ethnic Cleansing and forced displacement of Bedouin population:

We arrived at El Araqib later the same day – it was a wasteland – all houses demolished and only the grave yard existed. Women and children greeted us, showed pictures of their former dwellings and marriage celebrations. These Bedouin villagers are now living in squalid conditions as they are determined to remain on their land. Israel policy is to ethnically cleanse indigenous people from land and then



evoked an ancient Ottoman law that says that if land is not occupied or farmed over a three year period the land automatically belongs to the State. This has been Israeli policy in systematically confiscating, and stealing land from Palestinians. Early in October, an activist with the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil equality who joined a protest against the Demolitions at El Araqib village was violently attacked by the police, subsequently detained

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and her whereabouts are unknown. The Head of the village, Sheikh Altouri has declared that the residents are determined to remain on their land and will re-build. On return to Montreal there was another report (7 November 2010) of a direct assault on the Bedouin-Palestinian community of Rahat when Israeli police demolished a mosque in the Negev Bedouin city – again in the middle of the night with use of tear gas and force. Rahat is located in the Negev and has a population around 52,000.



The Israel Land Authority is the government agency responsible for managing land in Israel. The policy has been to uproot olive trees in Palestinian villages and the plan is to 'green' the Negev and make life for the Bedouin impossible and forcing expulsion to cities, unemployment and poverty.

World Education Forum opening in the Negev desert:

The opening of the World Education Forum for our group took place in the Negev desert, in the open under a tin roof, together with the members of El Araqib and Palestinian citizens of Israel who were active in organizing the Education Forum. Though



the speeches were in Arabic the oration, elegance, dignity of the presentation was impressive. The Head of the village, Sheikh Altouri was a proud spokesperson for his people and their resilience and determination to resist oppression and refusal to vacate their land.

Photo by Ariane Bilodeau

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Day 2 – WEF conference in Ramallah

Education and Curriculum control – Palestinian history silenced.

Education at the secondary and post secondary level is integral to Palestinian culture and aspirations. Despite the daily difficulties of traveling to school, the hunger and determination for knowledge is evident. However the curriculum is monitored and controlled by Israel. Following 1967 and the occupation of Palestine by Israel, the World Bank has been funding education in Palestine however this entails control by Israel over the curriculum and what is taught. The history of Palestine pre 1948 can not be taught or the forced displacement of Palestinians and policy of ethnic cleansing that took place in 1948. The pedagogy is exam based and to enter University certain courses have to be passed. (Information obtained from a panel of Palestinian educators).

The Knesset parliament in Israel (2010) drafted a bill that would make it illegal for Palestinians to publicly remember and acknowledge the Nakba (this bill was among 14 other bills that were designed to limit freedom of expression and discrimination towards Palestinians)².

The Palestinian educational system is pedagogically conservative and exam-based. One of the employees at the Hotel where we stayed, a young man who spoke good English wanted to go to University but he failed mathematics three times at the secondary level so entry was denied. His alternative was to go to Jordan to take a course in Hotel Management. He has a job, but no hope of better prospects, further education or upward mobility. Another Hotel employee who had also studied tourism in Jordan said that Israel has effectively killed tourism in the West Bank – given the Wall, the check points and intimidation by the IDF, the political and economic controls - this is inevitable and integral to Israeli policy to impoverish and diminish the lives and livelihoods for Palestinians.

Day 3 Nablus

Nablus – an ancient Palestinian town in the heart of the West Bank: the City where soap making began 1,500 years ago. Greta Hoffman Nemiroff and myself were to give a workshop at the University in Nablus. The workshop was titled: ‘Resisting the Politics of Power: Critical and Humanistic Pedagogy’. The journey to Nablus by public taxi-bus took about an hour. Once outside Ramallah the hilly terrain is dramatic, but what is evident

² The Association of Civil Rights in Israel: www.acri.org.il

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were the illegal Israeli settlements perched on hill tops – visible from the bus. These illegal settlements are deliberately situated where there is access to water – water that is taken from Palestinian villages and farms. The bus passed Ariel University – a University in the middle of the West Bank named after Ariel Sharon. With Israel installations come Israeli Defense forces and check points and as we neared Nablus the bus was stopped at a check point by armed soldiers monitoring entry to the city.

The University is on the outskirts and consists of two large impressive campuses – built with funding from South Korea. From the window of the classroom where we held the workshop there was a view of the surrounding countryside. The hills bordering the University are monitored by Israeli soldiers and patrols. Students living in outlying villages have to navigate around roads controlled by Israeli forces – this can add miles to their journey. We were welcomed by Dr Sami Zaidakilani, Head of the Social Work Program and just returned from Montreal after obtaining his Doctorate from McGill University. His thesis is informed by a rights based theoretical approach to social work intervention. The McGill School of Social Work has a Program with links to the Middle East and Palestine. Dr Kilani also obtained his MSW from McGill and had spent a year in Montreal with his family. Dr Kilani has established a social work community agency based on the information and advocacy model of Project Genesis in Montreal. Among the participants of the workshop was a young woman who had just graduated in English from the University. She lived with her family in one of the oldest refugee camps named ‘the Old As Ker Camp’ consisting of 25,000 refugees. The refugees, now third generation were displaced after losing their homes in 1948. There is now a second adjacent Refugee camp with newly displaced Palestinians. Though this student has an English degree she is unemployed as there is no work in Nablus. Another member of our workshop was Maji Shella who works for the Palestinian Federation of Trade Unions. He has spent time in Israeli prisons as many of the educated Palestinian men whom we met including Dr Kilani. The director of Public Relations for the University also attended the workshop. He was articulate, dapper and politically savvy Dr Kilani could not attend because of a medical appointment for his heart and it later transpired that the public relations man also had to see his heart Doctor that afternoon. The level of tension and stress of living in Palestine inevitably leads to health problems and cardiac disease.

Following the Seminar we joined a Norwegian student group in a guided tour of the heart of the old city. Nablus had been occupied by Israeli forces until 2008 and the old soap factory had been completely bombed – this ancient economic engine of Nablus was now a ghost like ruin in the darkened light of early evening. Bullet holes were clearly visible in other buildings. We visited a thriving spice factory – nestled among the tightly knit buildings of the Souk. While waiting to re-group in the centre of Nablus a well-dressed young women in traditional clothes approached us and inquired what we

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were doing. Her line of discourse hinted that she may have been spying for the IDF. Because Israel-Palestine is a police state – there is a heightened awareness and paranoia about Israeli spies. Nablus left me with feelings of the warmth, nervous energy, and resilience of the Palestinians we met, but also sadness at the oppressive nature of the occupation and the limits it placed on mobility, opportunity and democratic freedoms.

Day 4

Hebron: a city divided



Hebron was described as a city where tensions and the potential for conflict exists between Palestinians and Israeli settlers. In 1948 when land was allocated for Israel and Palestine was artificially divided, and Hebron was in the Palestinian sector. Hebron had a history of religious conflict and is sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims. The Tomb of the Patriarchs and Mosque was originally thought to be the site where Abraham buried his wife Sarah and served

as his burial place together with his descendants Isaac and Jacob. Around 20 BC Herod sealed the cave and built over it. Under Byzantine rule the structure was turned into a Church and then after the Arab conquest of 638 it became a Mosque. The invading Crusaders attempted to reclaim the site for Christianity but in the 13th century Saladin completed the structure as a Mosque. There was an old Jewish community in Hebron who had lived peacefully together with their Palestinian neighbors for years. The two communities worshiped together in the historic mosque in the heart of the city which was traditionally sacred to both Jews and Muslims. However following 1948 this Jewish community was relocated to Haifa leaving their homes which were re-settled by Palestinians. Following the 1967 six day war militant Jewish settlers moved into the centre of Hebron and are protected by large numbers of Israeli soldiers. The Mosque remained Muslim but Jews were given access. In 1994 a Jewish colonist from New York, Dr Baruch Goldstein entered the mosque and gunned down 29 Muslim worshipers and injured around 80 others. Following this massacre, the Israeli High Court ruled that the Mosque would be divided into two sections with different entrances – sixty percent of the building was allocated as a synagogue and the remainder a mosque. In the centre of Hebron there is a



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blocked off street with concrete and an Israeli checkpoint. On the other side of the street Israeli settlers are living in houses adjacent to the ancient Souk market. The bus station and vegetable market were in the Israeli zone and have been destroyed and are now a desolate wasteland behind concrete blocks.

Israeli settlers throw rocks and garbage down on the narrow lane of the Souk market so a metal cover has been put in place to prevent the garbage and stones from injuring people. It is an ugly symbol of racial and religious hatred. On the Jewish side a Religious school, a Yeshiva has been built to house and school ultra orthodox Jews. As we entered the Souk market we passed Israeli soldiers guns drawn and again outside the Mosque was another Israeli checkpoint. Then there is a no-mans land area with a desolate reminder of the former British Colonial period of a walled up shop with the sign 'Oriental Holy Land'. Palestinians who live and work in this area are not allowed to own cars or bring goods by truck so the sole mode of transportation for market goods is horse and donkey.



Though the guidebook speaks of two zones and the greater zone being controlled by the Palestinian Authority, the military presence of soldiers and Israeli settlers in the historic heart of the City, a city famed for its Mediaeval Souk and Crusader-era vaulted passage ways is a tragic reminder of the repressive nature of the Occupation and the crippling economic consequences for the economic life and welfare of Palestinians. It is noteworthy that the original Jewish occupants of Hebron now living in Haifa have declined to return to their homes out of respect for their fellow Palestinians.

A Police State:

Leaving Israel is a potentially hazardous and a frightening experience. At the airport there are line ups and hordes of religious tourists, Israeli citizens and others. Women Police officers patrol the lines of people waiting to go through the electronic baggage check. Every departing passenger is stopped, passport examined and questions asked about what you did, where you went, the origins of your name and genealogy. A number is assigned to your passport but you have no knowledge the significance of that number. Those with the misfortune to have a middle-eastern or Muslim sounding names, or happen to look middle-eastern or have dark skin color are targeted – they are allocated the number 6. Five of our group were targeted, isolated, interrogated and strip searched; x-ray machines were used in the examination – it was a frightening and

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intimidating experience and designed to discourage any visitor who would bear witness and contemplate returning.

I left Israel with a profound sense of outrage and shock at the intimidation, repression, social injustice and militarism of this regime. The Wall that imprisons Palestinians and separates them from their farm land; the destruction of olive trees; the illegal settlements and settlers who deliberately poison the water and destroy the Olive trees of Palestinian farmers; the apartheid nature of the state; the racism and indifference to the suffering of Palestinians; the harassment, daily humiliation and intimidation that occurs and the escalation of human rights violations, detention and torture of those active in politics and human rights activities. I am also outraged by the silence and indifference of Western countries, Canada in particular - a country that dismissed the ruling of the International Court of Justice in July 2004 that the Wall was illegal under international law.

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