

Sami Adwan
Armin G. Wildfeuer (eds.)

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Participation and Reconciliation

Preconditions of Justice

Schriften der KathO NRW, Band 16

In order to make justice work, participation and reconciliation is needed within and between societies, peoples, and nations. In this compilation, authors—senior academics as well as students—from Bethlehem University, Palestine, and the Catholic University of Applied Sciences, Cologne, Germany, contribute to this important field. Thus, to some extent, the book in itself is an example of the subjects it deals with.



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Josef Freise – Sami Adwan

Values and Value Education among German and Palestinian Youth

Introduction and background

The research project focuses on the prevailing values and value development among German and Palestinian youth in their respective societies¹. This project included the following phases:

The first phase of the Project consisted of research on the theoretical discussions of how adolescents develop their values and how educational values are facilitated in German and Palestinian societies and in their educational systems. In Palestine the main theme of research was the area of conflict between tradition and modernity on one side and in the Palestinian and Israeli conflict whereby Palestinians still continue living under the calamity of the Israeli occupation on the other side (see Adwan 2007). The research in Germany was mainly focused on volunteerism in an individualised society and in the EU context (see Keupp 2000).

In the second phase, participants² were introduced to the methods of focus group interviews. Focus group interviews are a method that was first developed in the United States of America and used in qualitative market research. It enables the interviewers to get as much information as possible from interviewees in a short amount of time. Focus group interviews can be compared to methods of qualitative empirical social research (see Mayring 1999: 58-61). The objective of a focus group interview is for the interviewees to talk in depth about personal experiences and attitudes.

1 This paper is based on research on values among German and Palestinian youth that took place in Germany and Palestine in 2007 by the authors as part of an exchange program. The project was financed by the German Academic Exchange Program (DAAD) and it would not have been successful without the cooperation of colleagues, assistants and students, e.g. Dr. Eman Abu Sada who trained the German students in using the Focus Group Method. Dr. Inge Tiemann trained the German and Palestinian students in intercultural awareness. Ina Borkenstein was responsible for the organisation and the successful functioning of the exchange program.

2 Participants included seven Palestinian students from the faculty of education in Bethlehem University who were studying to be school teachers and seven German students from the Katho in Cologne who were studying to be social workers. Participants include German and Palestinian Muslims and Christians.

The third phase consisted of working on a compendium of questions to be used in the interview with both the German and the Palestinian focus groups. The set of questions was first produced in English then translated into German and Arabic. Validity of the translation was checked through back translation. The set of questions focused on values related to the thematic concepts of family, friendship, religions, politics and future and job opportunities.

After the conclusion of the compendium, the fourth phase included students practising discussions to develop their own skills in moderation, facilitation and observation of the interviews. After that, the real interviews were held and transcribed. Each interview took about one and a half hours. The results were divided into the central thematic categories.

Finally both groups of students presented and discussed their findings in two workshops held in Bethlehem in June and October 2007 in Bethlehem University and Katho University respectively.

It will not be possible to describe the whole research project and all its results in this paper. The following will merely be a short overview of the central findings of the interviews from Germany and Palestine about the values of juveniles, as well as the consequences for the future of the education of values in Palestine and Germany.

Furthermore this paper will take into account the discussions that arose between the German and Palestinian students about the research results in the above-mentioned workshops. These will concern the similarities and differences of the values in the four main thematic areas: family and friendships, religions, politics, and the future and job opportunities.

It is worth mentioning here that the results cannot be generalized to include either the whole German society or the whole Palestinian society but could be seen as indicative.

1. Family values

The Palestinian youths mostly portray their family as a safe haven for themselves. For them family is what defines life, gives it colour and fills it with joy. Without family society would have no basis for tradition or moral orientation: "Family is the most important part of society like the core to the cell. It determines the well-being of the society". Family supports their needs and gives them advice to choose the best. They feel that their families give them a sense of happiness and serve as a source of comfort to them.

Discussions showed that the Palestinians associate the word "family" much more strongly with the extended family than the Germans.

Members of the extended family, especially those in villages, intervene regarding the individual behaviour when another family member deviates from fixed norms or expectations. Especially young Palestinian females mention that there are negative family-values as well positive ones. They describe restrictions concerning clothing and everyday behaviour, such as being banned from going out with friends unsupervised, that limit their personal freedom.

Segregation on the grounds of sex is generally seen as a good thing by Palestinian men as well as women. They argue that if male and female youths stay segregated, everyone is more comfortable. The interviews in the urban areas of Bethlehem and Jerusalem showed that Muslim girls feel they are more strongly regulated by their family than Christian girls.

In the refugee' camps the interviewees report, that they often have to take up responsibilities that are usually carried out by grown-up members of their families. They take up these responsibilities because family-members who should be carrying them out have been killed or imprisoned or have become handicapped by the Israeli military armies. Female and male pupils who lost the emotional support of their mothers and/or fathers find it difficult to deal with others when they get older. Usually, males take the role and responsibilities of their fathers in their absence and females take the mother's roles.

Like the Palestinians, the German youths describe family as a place of security and trust. But unlike the Palestinians they define family more often as "nuclear family" just with father and mother and their children – not taking into account the grandparents and uncles and aunts.

Most of the German adolescents say they want to marry some day. Those however, who visit "Gymnasiums" (schools of higher education) stress, that they would only want to start a family after they have gained some success and security in their professional lives.

While this is strictly taboo for the Palestinian juveniles, the German youngsters think it quite normal to have intimate relationships between males and females before marriage and to have several partners consecutively.

A few of the German interviewees voiced their concern that families are endangered by divorce and the mobility that a lot of jobs require.

Germans from "Gymnasiums" often describe their relationship to their parents as amicable. Students in other schools, especially with a background of immigration describe a high family pressure to perform, concerning their behaviour and performance in school. On the grounds of the shared conviction that family is extremely important and defines culture by raising citizens of a society, interesting and intensive discussions arose between the Palestinian and German groups.

How can the change from a "nomological" to an "autological" education in Palestine be shaped, that will give more individual freedom to members of a family and diminish group-pressure?

How can family values be strengthened in Germany to counteract the pressure of job-related mobility and the over-important role work takes in many people's lives?

Discussions around these questions do not only arise in the formal sessions of the workshops but also take place afterwards in personal and social meetings.

2. Religious values

Most of the Palestinian adolescents view religion as a regulating force that controls their behaviour, for example the Islamic rules forbidding alcohol or pre-marital sexual relationships. Religion is seen as something that strengthens family bonds and is the foundation for the responsibility to care for ones elderly parents or grandparents. Only a small number of Palestinian interviewees viewed religion as something private, as the intimate relationship between individual and God/Allah. Their criticism was that religion has such a big influence on people's everyday life (for example which clothes they are allowed to wear). "If God/Allah will judge us after we die, why do others have to judge us now"? They believe it is enough that religion gives them rules for the important things in life, like separation and divorce. They do not however think it is necessary to use religion to influence decisions like what people have in their sandwiches.

Here again, women feel more strongly influenced by religion than men. As examples, they mentioned regulations about wearing a headscarf or about not being allowed to go out with friends. Rules concerning everyday life like these are often justified with religious reasoning.

The Palestinian juveniles see religious practice as something calming and empowering in times of emotional hardship. One interviewee had spent 18 months in an Israeli prison on suspicion of actively resisting the Israeli occupation without being charged. Asked, how he spent his time in prison. He said, "I used to read the Quran and became a faithful man".

Some of the German youths of Muslim faith take their faith seriously and go to Friday prayer regularly but others do not feel that religion has a great influence on their everyday lives. In the groups of Christian interviewees too, there are those who do not participate in religious practice at all and those who pray and visit mass regularly. It is notable, that only in the group of Christians who attend Gymnasiums there are interviewees who describe themselves as atheists. This may be due to them having learned about the ideas of Marx, Feuerbach and Nietzsche in school. Confronted with the findings of the German students some of the Palestinians reacted fiercely: They cannot understand how people can live without religion. "...We are not ani-

mals after all ...” One very religious Palestinian participant said he would very much like to meet an atheist to learn more about atheism and especially on which sources they base ethical behavior.

Religion has a very different meaning for young people in Palestine and Germany. Christians as well as Muslims in Palestine let religion influence their lives very strongly. For them, religion is strongly intertwined with culture. Religion is used to judge males’ and females’ behavior and it defines what is acceptable and not acceptable. Muslim females feel they are much more restricted by religion than males when it comes to the way they dress and their freedom to go outside the homes and travelling alone. Religion does not affect German youths the same way. They see religion as a personal matter, which does not influence everyday life significantly.

At the end of the first meeting between the German and Palestinian students it was agreed to delve deeper into the problems that arise from the cohabitation of Christians and Muslims: for Germans the question arises how religion and spirituality can be incorporated into children’s education. For the Palestinian students however it is important to find a way to teach religion whilst still allowing for individual freedom and to discourage group-pressure that is fuelled by religious reasoning and can lead to religious fundamentalism.

3. Political orientation

It is not possible not to be politically involved in Palestine. Everyday life is strongly influenced by politics. The occupation, the killing and injuring of innocent civilians, the destruction of private homes, the checkpoints, the overall extensive charges and restrictions Palestinian civilians suffer at the hands of the Israeli military make it impossible not to be interested in politics.

Consequently most of the Palestinian adolescents want to politically support the liberation of their country. Interestingly enough, most of the interviewees from Jerusalem refuse to talk about politics. They feel oppressed by the Israelis and have difficulties expressing how they feel about their role in the Palestinian Israeli conflict. As citizens of Israel (they hold Israeli ID cards), they feel treated as second-class human beings. They do however take advantage of the Israelis wealth and are therefore better off than the people living in the West Bank.

Those interviewees who live in the refugee camps around Bethlehem suffer significant restrictions to their freedom: they have difficulties travelling abroad and cannot even move through the Palestinian Territory freely. Furthermore, they feel they are being treated unjustly because they are not allowed to reclaim the houses and land their parents and grandparents were evicted from by the Israeli military. They also complained about the lack of

security and privacy. As the USA support Israel strongly, the Palestinian students blame them for the continual suppression of their people.

The young women who were interviewed said they were encouraged to vote, but not to become active in politics themselves. They feel being women handicaps them in taking political responsibility.

All of the Palestinian interviewees feel safer at home and in their schools than in public spaces and roads.

Politicians are perceived as having no connection to the people of Palestine and who only speak to their people when elections are coming up. All Palestinian juveniles interviewed agreed that they lack all kinds of freedom: Freedom of movement and travel inside and outside their country, education, expression, play, survival, and the return of refugees to their original lands. This is because of the continued Israeli Occupation and Israeli policies. They also lack safety, security and privacy.

Concerning the correlation between socio-economic status and the level of political engagement Palestine and Germany portray oppositional pictures. While in Palestine the poorer and underprivileged adolescents tend to be more politically active than the richer ones in attempts to improve their degrading situation, in Germany the opposite is true: The richer juveniles with a higher education show a stronger interest in subjects or politics like compulsory military service, global warming, or military assignments abroad. They discuss the different political parties' programs for government. The male interviewees seem more interested in discussing foreign politics while the female ones are interested mainly in local politics.

Both German and Palestinian samples are not happy with how their politicians deal with their needs and interests. They both agree that politicians are far removed from their constituents except in election times.

The young people from schools with lower education on the other hand seem much less interested in politics. Youths with a background in migration claim they do not know enough about politics to form their own opinion.

One fierce discussion arises between Muslim males and females. While the young men believe a "suppression of women without violence" is justifiable, the young women demand an equality of rights for men and women.

The informal conversations between the participating students from Palestine and Germany about politics and other sensitive topics proved to be at least as important and productive as the official discussions. The situation of oppression and confinement, the overall difficult political circumstances Palestinians find themselves in leads them to a form of polarized thinking and to perceiving the world in simple categories of being either fully with them or against them.

The Palestinian students describe the conflict between Hamas and Fatah as a catastrophe for the Palestinian people. One female Christian interviewer gave voice to her fear that she herself could become a victim of this polariza-

tion and could be seen as an enemy by the people who should be on the same side as her. "The prime enemies are the Israelis. But, now Hamas and Fatah regard each other as enemies. All this could lead to people one day see Christians as enemies of our country."

In regard to German politics the only topic that concerns the German group personally is compulsory military service.

Discussions about politics display the biggest deviations in the German and Palestinian students' attitudes. The implications that arise in relation to politics and educational values were discussed and understood in more depth during the second meeting in Germany.

4. The future and job opportunities

The political circumstances in Palestine lead most of adolescents there to view their vocational future pessimistically. Chances to find a job and earn a livelihood are slim, even for university graduates. Those who can will emigrate. Others will work in family businesses.

Male youths voice the opinion that as more women enter the workforce, the employment market is becoming more competitive and male unemployment rates are rising further. In Palestine people get hired mostly not because of their qualifications but because of the connections they have. "To get a job you need a connection" they stated. "It is not what you know it is who you know" they added. "Around 75% of the vacancies filled are based on favouritism and nepotism".

The interview results from the German group are split. This same division is portrayed in the Shell Study: While young people with lower education or a background in migration believe they have little hope of finding a satisfactory vocation, those who attend schools with higher education have a more positive outlook on their vocational future. Pupils from middle range schools see their future as uncertain, despite their qualifications from school. However, they do not give up on their future as do the pupils with less education.

There is a considerable distinction concerning geographical mobility in Germany and Palestine. On the one hand the Germans feel they have to be willing to move to another city or district to find a job, the Palestinians on the other hand can only find work in their hometowns: the security measures imposed on them by the Israeli military make it all but impossible to commute to another part of the West Bank. There are also reasons not to move far away from the family which plays an important role in their lives. Economically, they can be independent family members but depending on each others support to survive.

A Palestinian sample indicated that their future salary will not be enough (not paid well), job security is very weak and compensation is not up to standard. Therefore, some think they should have more jobs and get married with a working spouse. The German sample from the other side, also feels that it will be hard to get a permanent job that generates enough income to cover their basic needs and they may need to work at more than one job at the same time in the future.

5. Practical implications for value education in youth work

The purpose of the first research meeting in Bethlehem was to inspire innovative approaches in youth work that respond to the results that were produced in this project. In Palestine two initiatives were designed: Several students founded a youth parliament that offers young people a platform to voice their wishes and demands concerning politics. The founders of the youth parliament are Hamas as well as Fatah supporters. They refuse to be divided by the quarrels between the two parties.

Another group of students started an art project in a refugee camp. They encourage adolescents living there to express their individual feelings and attitudes through writing and photography. The students asked the young people to let themselves be photographed in an environment that expresses how they feel about their life. They were then asked to write a text about their situation. The pictures were enlarged and put together in an exhibition that was also shown in Germany.

The students in Cologne have started organizing meetings for juveniles of different faiths. In these meetings they compare their different belief systems and get the chance to learn more about what people from other religions believe. Christian youths partake in Friday Prayer in a mosque, Muslims are invited to visit a catholic parish for a youth meeting. The meetings are documented through participatory observation and interviews with participants.

6. The importance of students in international research projects

What impact do students have in an international research project? Paulo Freire (1975) described the traditional school-like concept of learning as the “Bankers Concept”. New information is transferred and deposited into an empty head. Students who do research themselves however will probably be

able to read scientific literature with a more critical eye and to compare what they learn with the experiences they themselves have made while conducting their research. This way they will be able to develop a discerning mindset. Discussing results with other students, who come from a background that is very different culturally, economically and politically, widens their horizon even further.

Both groups of students experience irritation as they realize how different their respective views of reality are. Confronted with these discrepancies, with the fact that what was taken for granted is suddenly up for discussion, the irritation becomes an impulse for learning. These irritations can be especially productive when the Palestinian and German students like each other personally and at the same time experience each other as very different in terms of thinking and feeling.

One central objective of this research project is to integrate students in international and intercultural research as part of the university's teaching.

Through projects like these, students learn to link empiricism and theory early on. They will be able to develop a certain level of sensitivity, consideration and respect for differences and feel comfortable with being different. This will widen their perspectives to become globally literate in international politics and economic and cultural values. They will become critically willing to question assumptions which are often taken for granted and become active participants and more socially, professionally and globally responsible citizens.

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