

Peace Education: Overcoming the Contradiction of Values and Politics

The Center for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation (CCRR) is a Palestinian Civil Society organization working in Peace Education. CCRR believes in the importance of connecting education to nonviolence with teaching the values of justice, democracy and human rights. Though Peace Education is a political task, there is a danger of short sighted politicization of Peace Education.

War is horrible, and therefore it is imperative to continue the struggle against this seemingly eternal scourge. As a Palestinian, I know what I am talking about: Since I was born I am living in an area torn apart by wars and violence. I can tell the sound of a firecracker from the sound of live ammunition. I heard women crying about their sons, and I know how a father's heart bleeds when he is losing his daughter. Hearing a car, I can easily tell if it is my neighbor coming home, or an army jeep that might be after him, or after my son, or after me. War is horrible, and this is just a very short list of war horrors. War in Palestine means people becoming homeless, walls separating families, a crippling economy, malnutrition and food aid, prison becoming a familiar place, violence becoming an accepted reality, children and youth becoming paranoid and depressed, or both. War is horrible indeed since it is about the dehumanization of both victims and aggressors, starting a vicious circle of continuous suffering.

I am a refugee born and lived in a tent for 6 years and in a refugee camp my first 17 years and 15 years in a prison as a result of war.

I know war, but do I know peace? I do not want to define peace in a solely negative way. Peace should be more than the mere absence of war, and more than the careful and fragile balance of interest or powers. Peace is security and trust; peace means that individuals and communities alike can progress. Peace is happy children; peace means justice, future, and love. Peace means that people are making plans; it is the critical precondition to development and prosperity.

Though politics and politicians play a crucial role in building peace, their role is commonly overestimated. History shows that it is much easier for political leaders to start a war than to end a conflict. Peace is not merely a political decision with politicians agreeing on a deal, securing their economic interests with building walls or setting up an Apartheid state. Politicians alone can't achieve lasting peace – that is why peace becomes the responsibility of us all. Peace needs to come from the grassroots, from the people peace has to be between peoples not just leaders. However, nobody can force people to work for peace if anything they know is the logic of war. For us Palestinians, the occupation took us in headlock: We can't move, and every move might hurt – we know the border police and the soldiers, the checkpoints and the prisons. We are afraid. This is the reason why an overwhelming majority of us tend to support militant attacks in Israel. We cannot do anything, but the militants are taking action. We are bitter and hopeless. We feel the instinct of taking revenge, and we do not see any future but the concrete of

the Apartheid wall. Knowing nothing but the logics of war and occupation, who can show us a way out of this quagmire?? ?

Peace Education could be a possible solution, since it gives the hands-on experience in successfully using new strategies to overcome conflicts. However, if we talk about Peace Education in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, many people think about political maneuvers like the Israeli-American led campaign against the Palestinian curriculum. Indeed, the Palestinian curriculum does not match the Israeli government's understanding of a peace agreement or peace education. Therefore, there is a campaign demanding to change Palestinian textbooks, and "to be realistic". I regard this demand to be a euphemism for abandoning not only the olive trees our forefathers planted hundreds of years ago, but to abandon our history, and our culture. I will not do so, and I will not follow the politicization of Peace Education, either. Putting Palestinian history aside would be in the interest of the occupying power indeed. However, this is not Peace Education, but straightforward brainwash. Brainwashing methods are known from Israeli prisons, and from some media. Brainwashing is as much part of violence and warfare as the shooting, or the smoke of burnt tires. However, it is not as easy to smell: While criticizing the Palestinian state curriculum many people tend to ignore the heterogeneous character of the different Israeli curricula that differ from public schools to the settlements, and the religious schools. Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge there is no study about these three Israeli curricula. Palestinian schoolbooks are not perfect, but they are much better than most people believe – especially if compared with other schoolbooks used in our region, including Israel.

Peace has to come from down up not from up down. It has to respond to the need of the people and not the leaders. This will lead to the question of peace education.

But who will do peace education? Can the leaders who lead us for years in war and

Hatred do that? Do they change in one night and become peace lovers for peace educations?

I think this is the responsibility of inelegant thinkers and educators. To make the change of the way of thinking of the people to change the public opinion and the trend of events. Because peace education has to be building on human values and not just the absence of war it has to be led by philosophers, thinkers, leaders and writers.

Peace Education is not about neglecting our identity, but about strengthening it. Peace Education is not about a one-step solution, and it is not about short-sighted politicians giving a definition of Peace Education that serves their ends. Peace Education is a process. Peace Education can't be reached by a political decision, although politicians could give NGOs working in the field of Peace Education more support. If politicians try to use Peace Education as a tool to serve their ends, the public should be alarmed. In short, Peace Education is not about politics, but about values: This is one of three pillars of Peace Education in Palestine as seen by the CCRR.

The first pillar – Values: Peace Education has to be based on values, not on political positions. It is very simple: We have to educate our children on the values of justice, love, respect, democracy, respect of human rights, and we have to teach them how to deal with conflict in nonviolent means. I am referring to internal and external Palestinian conflicts: The conflict between villagers and people from the cities, or between different political convictions or religious beliefs. If we base our education program on these values, the logical result will be that we can build a new relation based on respect, equal rights, democracy and justice among each other without discrimination according to nationality , culture, color , religion , ethnicity or race . For learning this, CCR is also advocating a new way of teaching where people learn to think for themselves, taking decisions and responsibility for their lives, and where they find an inviting and challenging atmosphere for a life long learning.

The second pillar - Advocacy: In Palestine, tens of organizations teach, advocate and train for peace, democracy, nonviolence, conflict resolution and human rights. I believe that all of these programs are part of a Peace Education program and an often overlooked Palestinian peace movement. In Palestine, you will find many people who try to contribute to peace and justice between the people of our region. However, many of these groups will not call their efforts " peace work" because the word "peace" is connected to the political agreements of Oslo and Hebron. These were deals by politicians that led to the current checkpoint regime, and to the materialization of the apartheid rule. I believe that we should build on the little initiatives and groups, and that we should try to professionally and enthusiastically work for our goals. This means that we have to communicate that advocacy for peace is not advocating for a specific political agreement, but advocacy for social education and the human values mentioned above. This will be the basic of a real peace agreement which will lead to reconciliation.

The third pillar – Justice and Democracy: I believe that any peace agreement which is not based on the above mentioned values is not a peace agreement. Such an agreement would not last because the people would not respect it. If the people do not accept the treaty, they would not collaborate to make it a success, and it would not reach the needs of the people. The Palestinian people did not support the peace of Oslo, because they felt that they had nothing to gain from it but further hardship.

At the moment, the Israeli government is trying to win the war against the Palestinians by fighting Palestinian militants and by building a wall. The Israeli government helped the spirit of the radical settlers becoming paramount in Israel. The Israeli government does not realize the costs of building an unjust Apartheid state that is bound to fail, as it was seen in South Africa.

The above mentioned pillars of Peace Education are crucial to its success. We saw that politicians are tempted to usurp upon Peace Education. However, this will not lead to peace but to a prolonged state of war. On the other hand, sometimes even well-minded people try to take a shortcut to peace, not respecting the necessities of Peace Education. All too often peace activists are in search of a "solution", not taking into account the nature of both conflict and peace as processes. Especially when Palestinians and Israelis

meet for direct discussions, they tend to stick on the mentality they have learned. This is also true for many foreigners coming to our region: Everybody is looking for a switch to turn our region to peace, not understanding that peace is not like a machine that you can switch on and off, but rather like a plant that we need to water in order for a slow and sustainable growth. Facilitating dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis I sometimes shock participants when they learn that I do not have a solution. There are people advocating a one state solution, and others want to live in two states. What is the benefit of living in two states if Palestinians will be continuously deprived of any perspectives to develop, if we continue to live without the possibilities to freely cross borders to pray in Jerusalem, to have enough water, without an option to escape our prison? What is the benefit of two states if Israelis will continuously live in fear and militarism? Why should we ask the questions of the political framework – a confederation that will fail, a total victory that is not possible – before developing the capacities for peace within our societies, and ourselves? Without this later goal the peace movement falls in the same trap as many politicians. Without readiness to start the search for peace within ourselves, the search for peace easily becomes a peace industry that organizes many meetings with no, little or irrelevant results.

We agree that a right process passed on human values and equal right for the two people from the human and political sides will certainly lead to a peace agreement satisfy and please the two peoples.

The CCRR understands itself as an organization of the Palestinian peace movement. The focus on the values leads us to work on two tracks: Within the Palestinian community, and between the peoples of our region and internationality +on the first track, we deal with the peace inside a person, within ourselves, and within the Palestinian community. For example, CCRR has a training program in Palestinian schools for dealing with the relation inside Palestinian community by giving a course of 30 hours on nonviolence, and peace relation inside the schools we face on the values of peace justice democratic relation and nonviolence and how to achieve that through cooperation between the different sectors in the community .

This program try to make students experience the values of justice and democracy. This has to happen at home and in the school first. We campaign to respect others and we talk about reconciliation. Always we start talking about these values, and only after discussing the nature of these values we start introducing the skills of nonviolent conflict resolution and communication. We think that skills of nonviolent conflict resolution without reflecting the values of peace, justice and human sympathy are of no use. We need peace, justice and human sympathy in order to improve the communication between the peoples of our region. We need to understand, and we need the ability to talk and to listen to each other. Last but not least we need the courageous to take our fate in our own hands, not allowing militant factions to monopolize the Palestinian voices. We need to use our voices to shout for help and freedom, not allowing anybody to silence us.

Talking about the values of peace is a continuous challenge. I am Palestinian, and I feel the same frustration and depression all Palestinians are so familiar with. The orientation

of values is not easy, but even on a personal level it is most rewarding to me since it helps me to effectively work for the people who are suffering so much, without harming my soul that is already hurt by so much sickening violence.

There are many different definitions of peace. For example, some people think that they could use war to reach peace, talking about a just war. I do not agree with this idea since I believe that the means to reach peace need to be peaceful, too. I mean that the goals and the means have to be from the same family of human values. Peace Education is as much a cultural and educational topic as it is a very practical issue, related to behavior. Peace is personal, social and political at the same time. It has to begin from inside ourselves to make peace between our values and our action. This has to begin from the individual by revising personal values, attitudes and actions. Peace is an intrapersonal work - we have a proverb in Arabic saying that you cannot give what you do not have so if you don't have these values or don't believe of justice and respect you can't give it.

After thinking about the importance of peace for the individual, the values of peace are important in our closest relationships. Peace is not about the restriction of movement after the Oslo treaty – peace is about relation between individuals in the family, in the schools, and in work. It is inside the community to build a peaceful relation inside the community and between the different sectors of the community; it is among the ethnics, religions, races or any kind of groups or individuals.

At the CRRR, we believe that peace inside the community affects and influenced the relations with other cultures or nations. If we do not believe in peace as a human value, the focus will be just on the interests, or on the business, and it will be easily politicized.

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