
Book Review: *Education in East Jerusalem*

Education in East Jerusalem: Occupation, Political Power, and Struggle by Samira Alayan (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019). 166 pp., US\$155 (hbk), ISBN-13: 978-0815352372, US\$28.98 (ebk), ISBN-10: 0815352379.

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In *Education in East Jerusalem: Occupation, Political Power, and Struggle*, Samira Alayan chronicles the nature of the political context within the Palestinian territories and Israel. She begins with a detailed historical narration of various levels of citizenship in- and outside the West Bank and Gaza Strip as it relates to Palestinian inhabitants. It is particularly important, as Alayan explains, to understand the development of the education system within one of the most controversial cities in the context of Israel and the Palestinian territories: Jerusalem. In East Jerusalem, inhabitants do not possess Israeli citizenship; rather, they have Jerusalem identification (ID) cards. Its status is not at the level of Israeli citizenship; however, it gives more rights to movement in the West Bank than that of a Palestinian with a Palestinian ID card or passport. Although given more rights than the average Palestinian in the West Bank, East Jerusalem residents suffer, according to Alayan, from a lack of clarity in belonging. Owing to Jerusalem's unique status, the Israeli Ministry of Education possesses formal authority over East Jerusalem schools. Pedagogical areas, such as textbooks and curriculum, are provided by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). The resulting reality is that neither the Palestinian Authority nor the Israeli government assumes responsibility for the educational deficiencies of the current system. These deficiencies, according to the author, have been rampant for years with no actual remedies

in place. Alayan examines the reasons behind these deficiencies and why it has contributed to decades of a failing education system.

The book is composed of two parts. In the first, containing chapters 1 and 2, Alayan details the historical development of the State of Israel, the major wars fought, and the historical progression of the city of Jerusalem. In chapter 2, she specifically details the education system in East Jerusalem establishing the authorities in place, the position of the Israeli Ministry of Education, and the rationale behind a Palestinian curriculum used in the schools of East Jerusalem.

In the second part, in chapter 3, Alayan explicates the method used in the study, followed by chapters 4–6, in which the main findings from the interviews and the analysis are set forth. The study examines the nature of the eighty-eight official public schools in East Jerusalem, as well as the ninety-seven unofficial public schools and the seventy-nine private ones. All these come under the Israeli Education Ministry's umbrella with administrators and staff from the city itself. Through in-depth interviews with teachers, administrators, and inspectors hired by the ministry and students who attend these schools, she finds an increasingly complex and confusing reality that has had major negative effects on the identity of the inhabitants of the city.

Educators are frustrated as they have no control over the curriculum that they teach or the books which are brought in from the PNA, which are censored by the Israeli Ministry of Education. These educators blame their frustration on the system and the administrators in charge of their respective schools, while administrators feel that their hands are tied by procedural issues as they take direct orders from the Israeli Ministry of Education and thus have no control whatsoever over the process. Inspectors, who, as Alayan explains, are hired by the Israeli Ministry of Education, are typically Palestinian with Israeli citizenship. These inspectors are often envied by school administrators as individuals who have been able to climb the employment ladder. Inspectors, however, explain that their instructions are also dictated to them from higher up the hierarchy, illustrating the lack of agency given to Palestinians in East Jerusalem. It also illustrates the strong discriminatory tendencies of the system against Palestinians in East Jerusalem and showcases the deeper damaging realities of occupation, such as political insecurity, economic disadvantage, and social exclusion from state welfare and educational benefits.

Alayan's work comes at a very significant time, shortly after the American government's announcement of the US embassy's move from Tel-Aviv to

Jerusalem. This move, according to many, was a blatant rejection of the peace process and the understanding of the centrality of the city of Jerusalem to the process of peace. In understanding the complexity of the city, Alayan demonstrates an awareness of a system that is otherwise overlooked. She shows not only the negative effects of the system on teachers and administrators, who cannot progress within their careers, but also displays its effect on students and their education, in addition to the development of confusion among the populace about their identity, origins, and value in the community.

Another splendid work on East Jerusalem's education system is Rawan Asali Nuseibeh's *Political Conflict and Exclusion in Jerusalem: The Provision of Education and Social Services* (2015), which provides a detailed narration and analysis of the structure of the education system in East Jerusalem. Although presenting a detailed orientation of the education and social welfare system in East Jerusalem, Nuseibeh's work does not concentrate on the actual narratives of the inhabitants of East Jerusalem and those directly affected by the education system in the city. While Alayan's study differs in that it provides the actual narrative through in-depth interviews and surveys of teachers, administrators, inspectors, and students, Nuseibeh's work concentrates on the actual structure, substance, and consequences of the actualities of the education system in East Jerusalem. Both books, however, provide a window onto the realities of life under occupation in a city plagued by failed international treaties, false compromises, and a harsh power struggle between the Israeli government and the PNA.

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REFERENCE

Nuseibeh, R. A. 2015. *Political Conflict and Exclusion in Jerusalem: The Provision of Education and Social Services*. Abingdon: Routledge.