

## My Mobility

Students from Ca' Foscari Recount their Learning Experiences Abroad

## Two men

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This is a vision of conflict, of shifting perspectives, involving two men, one an Israeli and one a Palestinian (we suppose, but are never told) whom the protagonist meets on her visit to Hebron in the occupied territories. It is skillfully told, using noun phrases and snatches of dialogue, and only minimal authorial intervention. After this scene of 'strangers in a wounded city' the account broadens out to a reflection on learning and how things are always more complicated than they might at first appear, leading the protagonist to conclude that 'settling for complexity' is a more realistic goal than 'gaining comprehension of the world'. It is a satisfying conclusion to a sophisticated piece of writing.

Hebron, February 2018

A group of strangers in a wounded city. We stroll around crowded markets and abandoned streets, we hear the quiet rage of exhausted voices, we see the enthusiasm in hopeful eyes, their fearless resolution. We pass through revolving metal doors, carousel they call them, like the merry-go-around of night time fairs, a toy for kids, turned into a grown up monster. A five-years old boy follows us, he wants to play, pushes the rods, but they stop him and he goes back, disappointed. He is not allowed to come with us. Two men are our guides. The old one explains: – Here's the sanctuary, our side, I am not allowed access beyond that line.

The young one, a few meters away: – We are standing on the holy site, our part of it. I am not allowed to the other side.

The first one, his heavy American accent: – You are Christians, you can visit both of them.

The second, with a clear British intonation: – We like Christians here, so I don't care, today you all are Christians.

Our first guide continues: – Here there were all the time attacks, so we closed it up.

The second: – The soldier shot him, he was lying on the ground.

– He saw a bomb vest, he feared for everybody's life.

– They kill my cousin in front of me, we were nine. He wanted his ball back, and for that he lost his life.

– They entered and killed her father at night, she was reimbursed with a new house.

– They throw us stones, waste, even acid at times.

– It happens from time to time, we condemn those actions, they are just a few violent boys.

– My uncle had a heart attack, we had to carry him on our shoulders, the ambulance could not get through.

– We impose the curfew just once a year, thousands of people come here for the annual celebration, we cannot protect them otherwise.

Muhammad says: – My childhood was not easy, but you get used to everything, it's my life.

Eliyahu: – I wasn't born here, but my people are. We just want to live in peace.

On the open space, no man's land, between H1 and H2, between two worlds, maybe two states, certainly separated families, also foreign families, two - more - languages, the same language, the same blood, the enemy blood - between everything and everyone, all the same and all the opposite, they come close, see each other, smile and ask: – Is everything ok today?

My learning from this experience went beyond university lessons, welcoming parties, English written papers, Hebrew grammar, Arabic conversations, history and religion, persecutions and wars, atrocities and humanity. It went even beyond new friendships and the strengthening of old ones, surprising habits I made mine, of which I did not have a clue before, tasty foods and incredible landscapes. It went undoubtedly beyond delusion and disillusion, mistakes, deceits, cheaters who swindled me, but made me stronger. I saw with my own eyes things about which everyone talk, and I learnt how much they are easy there, everyday life, but at the same time, how much they are complicated.

I have a vivid memory, from primary school: my teacher is standing up, in front of the blackboard, and with a white chalk traces a circle. Within that circle, she draws a slice, saying: – When I was your age, do you see this pie? My knowledge was limited to this little slice, and I hoped that, growing up, with patience and dedication, I would get to know the entire pie. – then she enlarges the circle, now it fills the whole blackboard, and continues – But one day I realised: the more I learn, the more material I discover worth learning. I suddenly understood that the pie will continue increasing, and that I will know only my slice.

Those two men reminded me of my teacher. They are two enemies working together not to bring knowledge, but awareness. If I had convictions, I lost them. However, I acquired something far more important, though destabilizing. There is no one truth, no right and wrong. The goal which will boost my efforts from now on, will not be about gaining the comprehension of the world, but settling for its complexity. Thanks to those two friends-enemies in that tormented-holy land.