



Judea and Samaria College in Ariel. In a state that respects the law, it would never have been founded.

Alex Levac

What can Israeli Arabs learn at Ariel?

By [Gideon Levy](#)

Three important Arab mayors decided to publish prominent advertisements congratulating the Judea and Samaria Academic College in Ariel after the government of Israel, including the Labor Party, made one of its most disgraceful decisions - to upgrade the college, located in the occupied territories, to the status of a university. As public leaders, the mayors of Tira, Kafr Qasem and Jaljulya not only shamed themselves in their public messages of congratulations, but also the Arab citizens they represent.

In a state that respects the law, this college would never have been founded in the first place. Its establishment constitutes a blatant violation of the Geneva Convention, which Israel tries to ignore. Any decent student, Jew or Arab, who studies there should at least feel uncomfortable. On the way to this college, one travels on a road built on lands of Palestinian villagers, which is mostly intended to serve only Jews, though a few of its roadblocks have been opened during the past six months. The Tel Aviv-Ariel highway was built in a way that makes it impossible to see the poor and humiliated people who live below it.

Upon reaching the college, which takes pride in its "supportive learning environment," the student enters a magnificent campus that was almost all constructed on stolen land. Students should remember this as they sit in the air-conditioned halls and listen to lectures on the philosophy of morality. Teachers and students who teach and study on stolen land are accomplices to the crime. An academic institution, which is in fact nothing more than part of a system based on rules of apartheid, whose teachers and students enjoy civil rights and freedom of movement denied to residents living on the land where it is located - cannot be considered an educational institution.

The fact that thousands of Jewish Israeli students chose to study at the college in Ariel, while heartlessly ignoring the injustice inherent in its existence, is already no longer surprising. It is part of the general indifference that characterizes Jewish Israeli society's attitude toward the occupied territories. It is much more difficult to understand why about 320 Arab Israeli students chose to study there. Do they look out the windows during breaks between lectures at the villages around them, where their brethren are confined because of this college and the settlements it is a part of?

It is true that the situation of these students, like that of all Arab Israelis, is not simple. There is no university that teaches in their language, as would be appropriate considering the fact that it is the state's second official language. So, in light of the limited options they face, these students chose to study in Ariel because of the price and the proximity to their homes in the Triangle.

Torn between their people and their state, they chose the more comfortable alternative. There is no reason for them to be proud of themselves. There are indeed Arab figures, such as MK Ahmed Tibi, who have rejected invitations by Arab students to come and lecture in Ariel, but it does not seem that this has decreased the number of Arab students or heightened their feelings of guilt.

And if the decision to study in Ariel means moral bankruptcy, the congratulatory messages the Arab mayors sent to the college already reflect a total loss of shame. The congratulators represent nearly the entire political spectrum: Qasem Khalil, the mayor of Tira, is associated with the Labor Party; Ouda Fayek, head of the Jaljulya council, is close to Meretz, and Sami Isa, the mayor of Kafr Qasem, is affiliated with the southern branch of the Islamic Movement.

They told Haaretz in stuttering language that they did not know their congratulatory messages would be published. But they did not deny them. The mayor of Jaljulya even added that he supports the decision to turn the college into a university because "it will help the young people in Jaljulya to study."

In their battle for equal rights and improvement of their economic situation, many Israeli Arabs have long ago abandoned solidarity with their brethren who live across the Green Line. Feeling like they have a lot to lose, and contrary to what we tend to attribute to them, they preferred allegiance to the state to loyalty to their people.

They could actually learn a lesson in solidarity from us - about the struggle the Jewish people waged for its brethren in the Soviet Union and the solidarity that exists between the Jewish people in the Diaspora and Israel, especially during times of distress. Most Arab Israelis have chosen to act otherwise. However, there is still a great distance between indifference and complacency with what their state is inflicting upon their people, versus actively participating in the occupation.

What exactly will the young people from Jaljulya learn from their mayor and what will they learn at their college, or university? They will learn that there is no limit to opportunism, that there is no place for concepts like solidarity and morality, and that the days of vote contractors in the Arab sector have not passed.