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Ariel Controversy



Prof. Ariel Rubinstein
Photo: Orel Cohen

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In favor of academic boycott

Recognition of Ariel college as a university a purely political move

Ariel Rubinstein

About two years ago, Yigal Cohen-Orgad, chancellor of the college in Ariel, asked me to come and visit. Cohen-Orgad feels, correctly, that we have similar views – for example, against the trend of private colleges. Colleagues spoke in praise of Cohen-Orgad's performance as finance minister. And I'm always curious to peek into what is happening in the territories. So I went.

In Ariel, I found an energetic person, an experienced politician of the old Mapai type, a mover and shaker. I remember him racing, armed with a lit pipe, among the science labs, where giant signs on the doors warned that smoking was absolutely prohibited. How jovial and good-natured of him to ignore these basic safety instructions.

Since the short visit was aimed at convincing me to support the college, I feel at liberty to share my conclusions with the public: The college in Ariel is an educational institution with good social intentions, which absorbs, for example, new immigrants from Ethiopia. And it also has some good researchers. The college makes great efforts to look like a "university," but primarily serves as a forward outpost in conquering the hills of Samaria. A research university it is not!

The list of publications by the college's faculty in fields that I can assess is meager. The institution takes pride in the academic journals published at the college. They sought to wow me, but the journals struck me as amateurish. An academic conference at Ariel was entitled "Studies of Judea and Samaria." A typical scientific lecture: "Was the ark of the covenant present at the battle of Michmash?" Another lecture: "Post-partum depression and feelings toward motherhood in Samaria." Can it be assumed that researchers at the academic center in Ariel have also studied depression among Palestinian women who miscarried at checkpoints?

I came upon a funding request from the college in Ariel for an environmental conference in Israel. The fund providing the money asked the applicants to provide the names of researchers who had explicitly committed to participate. Among the names that Ariel declared as ready to participate in the conference were two Palestinian researchers from... the Gaza Strip! Students and lecturers are not permitted to leave Gaza, even to go overseas. The Strip is closed and sealed for patients who are dying. Workers attempting to infiltrate Israel from Gaza in search of work are shot at the border fences. But the college in Ariel has connections with the security establishment that enable it to make use of two lecturers who, in their desperation to leave the Strip, have agreed (perhaps) to adorn a conference organized by those who are making the wilderness of Samaria bloom.

The Hebrew University in Jerusalem was also established as a political symbol of the Jewish people's return to its land. However, unlike the college in Ariel, the Hebrew University was from the outset a glorious academic forum, a research university that combines the universal with the Hebrew. Ariel is a large regional college. The recognition of the college as a university was a purely political move.

I do not purport to be objective about the college in Ariel. Nor was the review committee of the Council for Higher Learning in Judea and Samaria in determining that the college is worthy of an [academic upgrade](#). This committee included renowned people who are devoted to science. There is also no doubt about the extreme devotion to the settlement enterprise by some of the most eminent members of the committee.

Angry Response

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I admit my weakness. I also have a warm corner of my heart for the people I met at Ariel. A captivating nostalgia radiates from the settlement. But this sympathetic feeling must not be allowed to confuse. The recognition of the college as a university has nothing to do with its academic level. No one would consider granting such recognition if the college were located in Ramat Hasharon, Safed or Rahat. The planting of a "university" in Samaria is merely another component in the government of Israel's bluff of a freeze policy.

The use of academia to drive the cogs of occupation demands an appropriate Zionist response. Ariel is a college designed to advance a catastrophic goal that could lead to the uprooting of the people of Israel – if not from its state and from its land, then from its soul. Boycotting the college is the necessary response.

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