

# Final Report

BA Liberal Arts and Science/ Israel/ September 2018- Summer 2019/ Rothberg International School at Hebrew University in Jerusalem/ Israel-2018/19-8160!-w

## **Personal and academic interest in the host country**

Every person I met would ask me what my intention was to come to Israel to study. Its a hard question because a large part is just a feeling I followed. However, there are a few things to point out.

First of all, I had a great interest in understanding the region and the conflict better. Mostly because I felt that what I find here in the region is a concentrated version of challenges that can be found everywhere in the world. Coming here made me learn more about the complexity of identity and narratives, the impact of a colonial past, the power of religion, the influence of interfering States and many more aspects. I can clearly say that I have a better understanding of the conflict, the different claims and its complexity. However, I am not able to grasp the emotional dimension of it, simply because I am an outsider watching and listening. Therefore, I am also refusing to have a clear opinion about what is going on, simply because of its complexity.

Another intention of mine was to confront myself with the aspect of being a German in Israel and the ways the Holocaust has shaped my identity. In my past year I had many conversations with the second and third generation of Israelis about the Holocaust. It is interesting to notice what a difference between the generations exist. While the second generation sometimes refuses to ever go to Germany, buy German products or hear the language, the third Generation seems to embrace Germany. Consequently, our conversations about the Holocaust are quite different. While I am with older people more in the role of listening and emphasizing

how much I learnt about the Holocaust in school and how Germany has changed, the younger people are bored and often no interest to be bothered by the Holocaust. I was shocked when I came here to discover that Holocaust jokes are quite common in the younger generation. However, I deeply appreciate the beauty of being able to sit together with Jews and have a conversation about how the Holocaust has shaped the history of our families without having that influence our personal relationship.

Another intention of mine was to learn more about Islam and Judaism. Looking back, I have primarily learnt about Judaism and not so much about Islam, simply because I was more exposed to it. For me it is and was enriching to learn more about this ancient religion, rules and prayers. I have few religious friends and visited once a month a musical shabbat prayer of a reformist community (*Nava Tehila*). However, I haven't gotten deeply into it during my stay here.

## **Practical information**

**Preparation:** I took a two semester Hebrew course at the University before I came. That helped me a little bit to read signs or have a basic understanding of that language. However, even though I took a language class for some month once a week in Jerusalem, I did not learn Hebrew. The reason is mainly because of my lack of discipline. Anyway, it is helpful to speak Hebrew because almost all Israeli friends would only speak Hebrew in a group. Unless I force the conversation to be in English, I would not be able to follow. Anyway, there are also some interesting aspects of not being able to participate in group conversations, like studying the body language from the people around me.

In addition to the language class, I took the class: Introduction to Jewish studies (*Einführung in die Judaistik*) before I came to Jerusalem. This class gave me a great insight into the history of Jewish people, knowledge I have not been exposed to before. It did help me here to understand certain claims and facts faster.

**Visa:** I applied for a Visa six weeks before departure. In the first round it didn't get accepted, since I did not give all necessary documents. However, the second time it all went well.

**Health insurance:** I bought an all year insurance from my Health insurance (TK). Since I never needed to see a doctor, I have no experience of its service.

**Money/Cards:** I recommend having a Visa card where taking out cash is not being charged. I am using DKB and have good experiences with them.

**Scholarship:** Since I am part of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung already, I had the luck to get a higher monthly amount for my time abroad.

**Accommodation:** As in my first report mentioned, I had difficulties finding an apartment after arrival. Mostly because of my lack of Hebrew and not having an Israeli bank account. However, after I moved into an apartment which was fine but not great, I moved to a friend's house a few months later. If I would need to do this procedure again, I would make sure I have something for the first months, in order to have enough time to find something good. Most good apartments can be found through contacts. Despite that, all rooms and apartments are advertised in different Facebook groups.

**Paying Rent:** At my first apartment I could send money to my landlord's German bank account. At my second apartment I had to send the rent every month to the person who was written in the contract. Since I did not want to open an Israeli bank account, because that would have been too complicated, I asked every month another friend to send the money in exchange for cash. That is surely not the ideal solution but worked out well.

**Transportation:** I bought in the first week a RavKav charged with a year ticket. Since I took the bus every day at least twice, the ticket surely paid off. However, since there is a lot of traffic, I spend many hours in the bus. I regret to not have bought a bike earlier. Being able to use a bike now gives me way more freedom than public transport could. On the other side Jerusalem is quite hilly and not bike friendly.

**Political activism:** It has been a longer journey to find my role in this highly tense political environment. On one hand I am an outsider and do not feel entitled to have a clear political viewpoint. On the other side I must admit that I am witnessing injustice here. As a result, I decided to become politically active, but more in a background, supportive role. The best organised and English speaking group is *All that's Left* (an anti-occupation collective). This group consists primarily out of diaspora Jews living here. I have been part of organising several events (tours, film screening etc), solidarity work (in the West Bank and East Jerusalem) and other actions. Another address could be the activist space and café *Imbala*, which is based on volunteering and a great space to meet the Lefty groups in Jerusalem. In

addition, every Saturday a group of primarily Israelis go into the Westbank to accompany Palestinian Sheperd's against the violence of settler. I went with them few times; the organization is called *Taayush*. Another option is *Free Jerusalem*, but they are primarily Hebrew speaking. I also tried to get involved into *Combatants of Peace*, but it was hard to pin them down and get involved. The language barriers might also exist here.

Furthermore, I am currently doing an internship at *Mejdi Tours*, a dual narrative Tourism company. It's worth going on one of their tours or getting more involved, in case one has an interest in social businesses and the political landscape.

Despite being involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I was active in the Food rescue community in Jerusalem. They are called *food rescuers* and I helped organising, rescuing and preparing food for rescue-parties.

Next to that I gave English lessons once a week for refugees living in Jerusalem. Israel follows a strict anti-refugee policy and does not provide any support for the refugees living here. The organization I volunteered in is called *JACC* (Jerusalem African Community Centre). I have deeply loved teaching English, since the students are very kind and loving.

In general, if you are interested in political tours in order to understand the environment better, I recommend: *Ir Amin*, for learning more about Jerusalem, *Breaking the Silence*, for leaning about the Occupation, *Dual Narrative Tour* to Hebron from *Abraham Hostel*, or *Dual Narrative Tour* in the Old City from *Mejdi*. Furthermore, *All that's left* offers Birth-left tours (the opposite of Birth-right tours), and *Occupation-Orientation* tours.

## **Culture**

This region is a challenging and enriching place. Just Jerusalem itself is an intensive city, given that it is consisting out of two worlds, East and West who are next two each other but so separated at the same time. But not only this divide, also the segregation between the ultra-orthodox and secular people in West-Jerusalem is interesting to witness. In addition, the perceived holiness of that city is increasing the intensity. As a person who has not been exposed to religion as much, this city has many lessons to offer. For example, the special dresses and tradition of people of different faiths. It is truly special to live at a place that is called holy from so many people.

I perceived the Israeli culture as really welcoming and it wasn't hard to make friends with many people. However, sometimes it was difficult to establish deeper friendships, but that's the case in most places you are new at, I guess. I learnt that many Israelis make great plans, which does not necessarily mean that they will take place. In the way I was socialised I put much more weight on spoken promises. In comparison here, any plan or suggestion can be understood as an expression of the moment, which does not necessarily lead to anywhere.

The stereotype of Israelis as being honest, root and really welcoming might be true in many situations. I learnt to accept that people do not stay in straight lines, the people in public transport are unfriendly and that you have to use your elbows to get anywhere. At the same time I have been invited every Shabbat for a dinner at another friend's house and was able to find truly good new friends.

## University

The Hebrew University/Rothberg School was a great host university for me. I did enjoy most of the courses I took, even though the level may vary between the classes. Generally, I would recommend to take the "shopping week" in the first weeks serious and look into as much classes as possible. There were far more courses interesting as I could study and it was hard sometimes to admit that I am not able to learn all of that. Since I did not take language classes I had the advantage to have even more time for other classes. This is the timetable of both of my semester

### First Semester

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
12.30-14.00 Reportet Armed Conflict (Journalism)	8.30-10.00 Development in Practice	12.30-14.00 Reported Armed Conflict	10.30-12-00 Forced Migration, Gender and Vulnerability
16.30-18.00	16.30-18.00 Cybersecurity, Policy	16.30-18.00	

Palestinian History and Society		Palestinian History and Society	
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## Second Semester

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
12.30-14.00 Israeli Economy	9.00-12.00 Development in Practice	9.00-12.00 International Relations in the Middle East	10.30-12-00 Conflict resolution
18.30-20.00 Issues Israeli society	16.30-18.00 Social Entrepreneur ship	12.30-14.00 Israeli economy	
		18.30-20.00 Issues Israeli society	

## Rothberg classes and Faculty classes

The Rothberg classes take place four hours a week, while the Faculty classes only take place two hours a week. Consequently, the Rothberg courses give you more credit points than the classes at the faculty. Bear in mind that the courses at Rothberg start two weeks earlier and also finish two weeks earlier than the faculty classes. Despite that, papers and exams at Rothberg are very close to the end of the semester while the faculty classes have their deadlines about two months after the semester break starts.

The courses at Rothberg gave me a great opportunity to learn more about the region. Courses like “Palestinian History” or “Issues Israeli society” helped me understanding my environment much better. I also would have liked to learn more about Judaism, since they were really interesting classes offered. However, it is impossible to do all of it.

At the faculty I rather focussed on courses that might be relevant for my future path. Over the course of two semester I took several classes from the master “Glocal”, an international

development study program. The classes gave me a great insight in this field and rather focused on passing skills than theories. For example, within the course “Development in practise” we had to implement our own project within an organization. All of that were valuable experiences that will help me in the case I continue in this field. On the downside, especially Glocal is in my opinion not critical enough in the context of post-colonial theories.

Except of one or two classes, I did not learn much theory in my time here. The classes rather felt like an intensive discussion with the professor, than being focused on the understanding of academic sources. From Freiburg I am used to discuss articles, but here the focus laid more on the personal experience and stories of the professors. I did like this approach; however, it might be challenging for some people who expect something different. All in all, the content of the classes wasn't so challenging academically and it felt easy to get good grades.

However, I have learnt a lot during my time here. I dived deep into the existing conflict, started to understand the relationships within the middle East much better and got a great insight in the world of development studies.

Another aspect to consider regarding the faculty and Rothberg classes are the people you study with. At Rothberg only other exchange students are taking these classes. Most of the students come from the US, however a big portion of Germans can be found at Rothberg as well. In the beginning I had some prejudices and did not want to spend much time with other internationals. However, I think that it is a quite arrogant viewpoint since all people can be interesting and studying at Rothberg taught me a lot about the US I did not know before. In comparison at the faculty classes you study with other Israelis and Palestinians. This can be an enriching and interesting experience as well.

### **Service at the University**

Regarding the supervision of the University, I appreciated the fact that I had a supervisor for academic questions. However, despite checking my choices for the classes and evaluating the courses, I did not have much contact with my advisor. Thus, I felt that my questions and critic were taken seriously.

In the second semester I thought about doing an internship, offered by the University. However, despite the fact that it would cost money to do an internship, the catalogue of possibilities did not convince me. Most of the offerings required knowledge in Hebrew. In

addition, the communication with the coordinator for internships did not work well, since she did not reply for mails for month.

The organised student activities at Rothberg are generally really interesting and I regret to not have participated in more of them. Due to the fact that I did not live in the Student village, I did not connect with the internationals living there as much. Consequently, I did spend less time in activities and events offered by the Student organisation. However, I appreciate that internationals were offered so many activities and had people to contact in case they did not feel good.

### **What I would have done differently**

Looking back, I could have been more patient with me and my process to settle here. When I arrived, I had this high expectation of myself to integrate here fast and find local friends. But, obviously, that needs time. Even though I found friends quickly, to establish a deeper friendship requires time. I am thankful to have had that time. But I remember well how there were times I felt lonely or needy because I was the one who tried to initiate contact and not the other way around ( I am only talking about local friendship here). I believe these feelings are a fundamental part of arriving at a new place. Therefore, I hope next time I am in this position I can relax in these feelings better, knowing that they will pass.

Financially the stupidest thing I did was to buy this “special deal package” offered by Rothberg. This package included a membership at the gym, the costs for an internship, and student live points for trips. If I would have used all these offerings, it would have been a great deal. But since I did not use one of them it was a really bad investment.

Another thing I regret is to not have invested in a bike earlier. The reason I waited so long is that it is very hilly in Jerusalem and cars are not used to people riding a bike. However, I discovered that the hills are absolutely manageable and the mobility and freedom of a bike increases the quality of live immensely.



## **Beautiful moments**

There are so many. But for sure I will miss Shabbat dinners when I am back in Germany. Every Friday evening West Jerusalem becomes so quiet and you only see festively dressed groups wandering to their family and friends houses to celebrate shabbat together. I had the luck to have spend nearly every shabbat at different friend houses and enjoy this traditional, weekly gathering of friends. What a beautiful tradition.

Another beautiful moment was when I organised with friends a big food-rescue festival on one of the roof tops of Jerusalem (*Muslala*). More than hundred people came, enjoyed the prepared rescued food and engaged in different workshops we organised.

A weekly beautiful moment of mine to teach English to a group of people from Ethiopia and Eritria who are here as Asylum seekers, some times for many years. I really like the people and feel moved to have the opportunity to get to know them much better.

In my semester break I spend time in Jordan and Sinai and would recommend every person to do the same. In Jordan I hitchhiked and used Couchsurfing with a friend and it worked very well. We spend most of our times with Bedouins in their tourist camps in the desert and helped out in the kitchen or what ever was needed. In Sinai I spend most of my time in a camp, just snorkelling and doing nothing. Definitely worth visiting.

## **Final words**

All in all, this has been a really intensive, important time for me. It's too early to grasp the influence it will have on my future path. I am really thankful that the university offered me this opportunity! Thank you! What a gift to have spent here such a long, meaningful time!

## Photos



In Jordan in a  
Bedouin camp



Food  
Festival



Desert