

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Sociology 157a
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SOCIOLOGY OF THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFRONTATION

When our models of who we are fall away, we are free simply to meet and be together.

Baba Ram Dass and Paul Gorman

A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He [sic] experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Albert Einstein

OVERVIEW

With the Cold War over and the desperate need to safeguard the fragile ecosystems of the planet, the time could be ripe for war to wind down. Openings to peace and restructuring—not without pain and not without violence—appear in Ireland, the former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, South Africa, and many other places, including the Middle East. Yet with the collapse of the Post War ideological confrontation (between the so-called capitalist countries and the so-called socialist or communist ones), religious and ethnic strife, those archaic structures positively expressing identity and group affirmation and, as well, hatred, self-righteousness, and opposition, are renewing themselves.

However different their histories and present contexts, inter-communal conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, several parts of the former Soviet Union, Somalia, Rwanda, Lebanon, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Canada, China and environs, Sudan, and many other places are strikingly similar. They are all studies in national rivalries, sometimes mitigated by ideologies of democracy, inclusiveness, equality, and human rights, yet often exacerbated by ancient hatreds and associated absolutist systems of political and/or religious thought.

The conflict that for a very long time has appeared most intractable and a threat to the entire world is the Israeli-Palestinian antagonism, which even now, with the “peace process” in a

very precarious state, could lead to further war—even, conceivably, to one final nuclear conflagration. It is, then, especially fascinating and urgent to understand the terms of the tenacity of that confrontation (as well as that between Israel and its other Arab neighbors).

The conflict took a major turn in September 1993 with the signing of the Declaration of Principles by both parties and the historic handshake between Rabin and Arafat on the White House lawn. In November 1995, Israeli Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated. Benjamin Netanyahu, who did not push the peace process along, succeeded him as Prime Minister. Netanyahu gave way to Ehud Barak, who tried to broker peace but failed. Arik Sharon, who succeeded Barak, is in office now. He is gambling on Israeli withdrawal from Gaza playing a major part in ending violence between the two contending parties.

Some see the death of Arafat and his likely succession by Abu Abbas as steps that could move the parties toward peace at last. Yet violence in both directions has grown under Arafat's and Sharon's leadership, and Israeli and Palestinian economies and morale have suffered mightily. Although by now Israel and the PA recognize each other's national rights, and although a majority of Israelis and Palestinians accept what appears to be the eventuality of a Palestinian state alongside the Israeli state, the prospect of a renewed peace process looks uncertain.

On both sides, rejectionists appear dedicated to preventing or destroying negotiations and remaining at the state of undeclared war. Indeed, although for some years, it has appeared that the contest was no longer between Israel and the Palestinians so much as between advocates of compromise and peace on the one hand and people committed to a zero-sum outcome of the conflict on the other, rejectionists on both sides seem in recent times to have tried to return it to a battle between Israeli Jews and Palestinians of Israel as well as the West Bank and Gaza.

It is well to learn of both parties from their own representatives and also from authors not directly involved. Throughout, the emphasis of the course will be on sociological analysis and interpretation: what religious, ethnic, demographic, and personality characteristics define parties, the terms of conflict, and possibilities of resolutions? There will be special emphasis on the social psychology of nationalism, national identification, and adversary relationships.

The course assumes serious interest in its topic and does not assume any background in the subject, sociology, or social psychology. The premium is on understanding and working with the concepts and readings of the course and on thinking creatively with them. It is assumed that real learning involves risk and re-thinking assumptions and familiar paradigms (with no preordained or "right" outcome of this process) as well as learning new information. We will pay attention to such matters as intellectual involvement, keeping up with the reading, attendance, and particularly in discussion sections, participation. All students are encouraged to take active part in the larger class, but we respect that some people are reluctant to do so.

Students are urged to follow the conflict in at least one daily newspaper and other periodicals and web sites and are encouraged to monitor a variety of views from both the Jewish and Palestinian perspectives. An early task of the course will be for the class to compile a listing

of such publications and to apportion responsibility for following them.

FORMAT

The course is designed to operate more as a seminar than a straight lecture class. We will meet on Tuesdays and Fridays from 1:10-3:00. There will be occasional lecturing by the professor; but for the most part, students will be asked to focus discussion by presenting problems, issues, difficulties with each week's reading. Our goal will be for professor, TAs, and students to learn from and with each other.

The course will proceed along the lines of "cooperative learning." Students will be asked to work in groups of two or three for class presentations and for most of the written work. The three class hours will be supplanted by a weekly hour-long discussion section headed by one of the course teaching assistants. Each group will be asked to work out positions as Jewish and Palestinian accommodationists and rejectionists for class role-playing exercises.

There are other resources available to us, such as videos, slide shows, visiting speakers, etc. While it will be possible and desirable to schedule some of this during class time, we may find it convenient sometimes to meet in the evening for such presentations. Some of these events might as well be open to the entire Brandeis community.

WORK IN CLASS

A. Response Papers

One of our goals in this course is to have a conversation going among all of us-- students, TA, and professor. One way to do this is through written responses to readings and other course materials. Toward that end, we will ask you to work together in pairs in writing 3-5 page papers approximately every other week. The paper is to cover readings and may also include class discussions, outside materials, struggles engaged in, whatever, as long as it is germane to the course and as long as it shows you are grappling with the main issues of the readings. Here are more specific guidelines:

1. It is well to learn to write very succinctly. Practice getting to the point quickly and saying what you mean. The papers should be held to three to five pages.

2. If you find the reading difficult, summarizing it to get a hold of it can be useful. The point of this part of a response paper is to ask if your interpretation of what the author said makes sense to the reader. But do not limit the paper to this. We know you can write book reports. Response papers are meant to be much more than that. *Do not restate* what the author said in the author's terms. Quotations may be used to illustrate a point or ask a question, but do not repeat the author without interpreting in your words, and do not write a paper that is mostly quotations.

3. Remember that all reading is interpretation. We never focus on it all, we never comprehend it all, and we do not know exactly what the author had in mind. Nor does that matter. What matters is what the reader makes of what is read.

4. Once you become pretty comfortable with your understanding of the reading, then go into your own questions about it, your own critical reactions to it, your own hesitations, reservations, etc. *And most important: your own insights about it.* Strive to make connections within the reading that the author may not have made. Strive to connect the reading with other reading, with central ideas and issues as they develop in the course, with your own understanding of the world, your reactions to what you see in society and your own life.

5. The premium in these papers is on showing the reader that you are grappling with the course materials and have opened yourself up to the possibility that there is something in them for you, and that you can think creatively with what we are studying. The premium also is on integrating what may seem like disparate materials, and struggling to make sense of them in your thinking, your reality as a citizen and as a thinking, feeling, viable actor in society.

6. In the response papers, you may work with class discussions, professors' and TAs' views, world events, whatever, but **always in the context of the readings**. I.e., no riffing from the top of your head on interesting things that may be relevant to the course but are not anchored in the texts. We are looking for **real struggle** with reading and other course materials.

B. Outside events

Attend at least 3 Middle East conflict-related events (preferably but not necessarily) on campus during the semester. The professor will advise as to when such programs are going to happen and will welcome suggestions about programs that might not have come to his attention.

The final written work for the course will include a paragraph or two of very brief discussions of each of these programs and their relevance to the course.

C Final paper:

This will be a sort of mega-response paper (approx. 15 pages or so), to be done in groups of two or three. The paper is to show what sense you make of the readings and other course materials and how you come to terms with them. Contrast your position on the confrontation when you entered the course with where you are at the end. What accounts for the change, or if there is no change, how do you deal with what we have studied in the course? There are no right answers to these questions, and no politically correct ones either. The emphasis here is on your authenticity in how you deal with what we have studied. The paper is meant to integrate, as best you can at this stage of your understanding, materials of the course with your thinking and feelings about them and the events and multiple interpretations of them. *The final paper will be due at the professor's office May 3. There will be boxes or bags there for copies of the paper for professor and for TAs*

GRADING

Our standards for grading are these:

A--mastery of readings, concepts, and exercises; full participation, engagement, *risk-taking, and growth*; grappling with the course and coming to your own insights about its issues, its implications, its relation to yourself.

B--clear understanding of course materials and conscientious participation but little evidence of risk-taking and growth or grappling with the course toward one's own insights. Not full or steady participation.

C--fuzzy, incomplete, lethargic relationship with course materials, minimal involvement of self in course, little risk-taking and growth, no insights of one's own, sporadic participation.

D—same as C but moreso.

E—trying to wing it by leaning too much on others' understanding, not writing papers fully germane to the readings and central concepts of the course, rare participation, etc.

To pass the course, the student must do all written work, attend the 3 outside events, come to class, and take part in discussion sections. All written work must be backed up on discs. Computers crashing, etc. are not acceptable excuses for not completing work.

ASSIGNED READINGS

BOOKS:

Deanna Armbruster and Mizhel Emery, *Tears in the Holy Land*

Naseer Aruri, *Dishonest Broker*

Alan Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel*

Gordon Fellman, *Rambo and the Dalai Lama: The Compulsion to Win and Its Threat to Human Survival*

Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*

ARTICLES, REPORTS, AND BOOK CHAPTERS (in reader and on reserve in the library)

B'Tselem (The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories), assorted reports (on line: <http://www.btselem.org/>)

GAP (Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry), *Self-Involvement in the Middle East Conflict* (xerox, in packet below)

Yehoshafat Harkabi, ch. 3, "The Two Streams of Zionism" and ch. 5, "Nationalistic Judaism," from Harkabi, *Israel's Fateful Hour*

Meir Kahane, "Uncomfortable Questions for Comfortable Jews"

Jeffrey Michels, "National Vision and the Negotiation of Narratives: the Oslo Agreement"

Anne Roiphe, "The Politics of Anger"

David Shipler, *Arab and Jew*, chs. 5-10

POEMS AND STORIES (xerox):

Collection of poems and stories by Israelis and Palestinians

DOCUMENTS (on Web-CT page for Soc 157a):

Collection of documents central to the conflict

RECOMMENDED BUT NOT ASSIGNED:

Emile Habiby, *The Secret Life of Saeed, the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist*

Mark Heller, *A Palestinian State, the Implications for Israel*

Deena Hurwitz, ed., *Walking the Red Line, Israelis in Search of Justice for Palestine*

Shaul Mishal and Reuben Aharoni, *Speaking Stone: Communiques from the Intifada Underground*

Wendy Orange, *Coming Home to Jerusalem*

Shimon Peres, *The New Middle East*

Conversations with Penny Rosenwasser, *Voices from a Promised Land: Palestinian and Israeli Peace Activists Speak Their Hearts*

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS

Wk 1, 1/14 Yehoshua and Habiby (Xerox)

Wk 2, 1/18 & 1/21 Poems and Kanafani and Yizhar (in Poems & Stories); Roiphe (xerox)

**response paper on your thoughts and feelings upon reading the stories and poems.

A HISTORY OF THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Wk 3, 1/25 & 1/28. Tessler, chs. 1 and 2

Wk 4, 2/1 & 2/4 Tessler, chs. 10 and 11

** response paper on what is new to you, troubling to you, etc. in the Tessler reading.

STEREOTYPING, NATIONALISM, PARADIGM SHIFT, AND NARRATIVE

Wk 5, 2/8 & 2/11. Shipler, chs. 5-10 (in readings packet)

Wk 6, 2/15 & 18. GAP Report

2/22-2/25 Vacation

Wk 7, 3/1 & 3/4. Fellman, Foreward and chs. 1-10

Wk 8, 3/8 & 3/11 Fellman, chs. 11-17; Michels

**response paper on weeks 5-8, on self-involvement analysis, paradigm shift analysis, and narrative analysis. Briefly, how do they fit together?

SOME JEWISH AND PALESTINIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONFLICT

Wk 9, 3/15 & 3/18 Dershowitz, chs. 1-19

Wk 10, 3/22 only. “ , chs. 20-Conclusion

Wk 11, 3/29 & 4/1 Harkbi; Kahane; skim B'Tselem web page for reports

Wk 12, 4/5 & 4/8. Aruri, chs. 1-8

Wk 13, 4/12 & 4/15 “ chs. 9-Conclusion

**response paper on your thoughts and feelings about these varied Israeli and Palestinian views and analyses of the conflict

Wk 14, 4/19 & 4/22 Armbruster and Emery, TBA

<i>Final paper due May 3 at the professor's office, Pearlman 110</i>
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Students with special needs

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see the professor immediately.