Instructors: Eve Spangler, 402 McGuinn, (617) 552-4146

Class Meetings: Wednesdays, 3:00 – 5:20 p.m., Carney 006
Office Hours: Mondays, Wednesdays: 1:30 – 2:30 p.m., and by appointment.

**Human Rights and Social Justice in Israel/Palestine**

This seminar is designed to prepare students to better understand the Israeli/Palestinian conflict by being able to answer questions like the following: Does a human rights framework allow people who are not Middle East scholars to address the issue? How is the actual conflict mirrored in conflicting historical narratives? What are the chief strengths of weaknesses of the most discussed political solutions (the one vs. two state debate)? Can there be an economic peace without a political solution? What is the role of religious ethics in crafting a just and lasting peace?

The curriculum will accomplish three major tasks:

- The readings will present a variety of descriptive and theoretical materials about a part of the world about which most Americans know little. The selection of readings reflects the paradox that Israelis and Palestinians are equally stakeholders in a just peace and that relations between them are highly unequal – the relations of an occupier and the occupied.

- The class discussions and written assignments will allow students to develop their own analytic framework to answer such basic questions as: what happened to set Israel/Palestine on a collision course? How could this long-standing conflict be transformed to produce a just peace? What would a healthy economy and a healthy state in Israel/Palestine look like? How do religious narratives create models of right living and responsibility toward others in the context of Israel/Palestine?

- The study/immersion trip to Israel/Palestine in January, plus the project that students are asked to design (in the seminar) and to implement (upon their return) should allow them to test their capacity for using their education to serve the world.

Taken together, the seminar, study trip, and project will ask students to practice a version of discernment: to do work that mixes intellectual and practical skills; to explore their talents and the social causes that might move them; and to build a model of how they might serve the world. The course is primarily focused on intellectual analysis, while the field trip and project add a significant service component. On the trip, the primary form of service is bearing witness – to the sufferings and resilience of occupied communities and the courage and wisdom of dissidents. The project should combine service with
intellectual analysis; it is designed to test students’ capacities for thinking strategically and acting effectively in service to the world. My assumption (following the distinction proposed by historian Richard Flacks) is that BC students will aspire to more than making a living; they will want to make history. This course is an opportunity to explore the possibility of making history.

A human rights perspective, broadly construed, provides the ethical spine of the course. Thus, human rights include both freedom from state interference in our lives, and also freedom to live in peace and safety and to develop oneself, one’s family, and community to be the best they can. In the first section of the course, we will be exploring the widely agreed-upon human rights frameworks, asking whether they are indeed universal, how much they may be tainted by neo-colonialist intentions, if they need to be culturally inflected, how they relate to religious teachings, and how a human rights perspective might inform our understanding of the Israel/Palestine conflict.

Using a human rights perspective, we will examine the historic background of the current situation. In this process, we shall find ourselves studying the profound impact of narratives on shaping our sense of past, present, and future. In many ways, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is being waged through contradictory narratives competing for support from the United States, the United Nations, and others. While reading both Palestinian’s (Karmi, Jawad, Masalha, Khalidi) and Israeli’s (Morris, Pappe, Segev, Rogan and Shlaim, Kimerling and Migdal) narratives, students should be asking themselves: “What really happened here?” remembering, with Thomas Kuhn, that narratives trump facts in so far as frameworks have the power to organize attention to facts; and that such narratives operate within a field of unequal power.

We will explore the power of narrative by comparing the principle metaphors that prevail in the field. Students will examine the empirical adequacy of “Israeli self-defense,” “ethnic cleansing/sociocide,” “apartheid,” and “genocide” as organizing frameworks for understanding the conflict.

Next, we will focus on models of conflict transformation and peace-making, especially as developed by Nadim Rouhana and John Paul Lederach. We will be asking how the actions of grass roots activists, NGOs, and states could be aligned to further the transformation of this heretofore intractable conflict. On our trip, we will be meeting with some of the leaders of Palestinian and Israeli civil society, as well as ordinary citizens of both communities.

A sustained, just peace in Israel/Palestine depends also on the development of a robust economy or economies. To study past and possible future economies in the region, we will be looking at the historic work of Alexander Scholch who documents an industrious and prosperous 19th century Palestine. From there we will look at trajectories of de-development (Roy), labor policy (Farsakh) and business development (Bahour, Avishai). On the Israeli side, we will consider Friedman’s analysis of Israeli capitalism and the alternative views of Klein and Halper, who emphasize the degree to which Israeli
capitalism relies on militarism as its engine of growth. The question for this section is whether an economic peace can operate in the absence of a political solution.

Finally, no study of the Middle East would be complete without an examination of religious narratives. For this class, we will not be interested in the often described and seemingly contradictory claims of the Old Testament and the Islamic waqf. Instead, we will be asking: what ideas do each of the major religions of the area offer about a preferred way of life, care of the world, obligations to one’s own community and “the other.” Cohen’s historic study, Under Crescent and Cross, provides an example from 14th and 15th century Andalusia of peaceful coexistence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Daniel Gavron supplies more contemporary examples in Holy Land Mosaic.

Requirements

A schedule of assignments and dates is attached below.

Students will be REQUIRED to attend classes, to participate in class discussions and organized presentations, and to write five reflection papers that integrate intellectual learning and a broader sense of discernment about the world.

By the end of the semester, students are asked to prepare a project prospectus outlining what they particularly want to accomplish during the field trip and how they propose to use their knowledge and experience to promote Israel/Palestine focused social justice work upon their return.

ABSOLUTELY NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR CREDIT UNLESS AN EXTENSION HAS BEEN GRANTED BY ME BEFORE THE DUE DATE OF THE ASSIGNMENT.

Assignment sheets will be distributed separately.

Your final grade will be computed as follows:

5 essays @ 12% each = 60%
class participation = 30%
Project prospectus = 10%

Readings are available in the bookstore, via the internet, and through the library’s on-line reserve system.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a standard of utmost importance in this class. Guidelines for academic integrity in written work are posted on the Boston College website at:
Abbreviated Schedule of Assignments

Pre-readings:

Please read the assignments for the first week of discussions BEFORE the first class meeting. 
(A complete schedule of readings and assignments is provided separately)

Assignment: due September 14
Using the assigned readings, please construct your own model of an essential human rights framework. (1). In your opinion, what are the most important points – the non-negotiable political (and/or economic rights) of a viable human rights framework? (2). To whom do these rights belong – individuals, communities, states? (3). By what mechanisms should these rights be secured? (4). Does this framework apply only internationally or intra-nationally as well? (5). Is it universally applicable? How should it be tailored to local cultures? Please be sure to use the reading materials in constructing your answer, with special emphasis on the Israel/Palestine case.

Assignment due: October 5
The philosopher Santayana argued that “those who do not learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them.” Others argue that history is a millstone, best cast off lest it sink us. And still others argue that there is no “real” history, only competing narratives, in which power, not truth, determines the outcome.

We have studied 4 frameworks/competing narratives for organizing the study of Israeli/Palestinian history: Israeli self-defense, genocide, Israeli apartheid, and ethnic cleansing/sociocide.

Using the course readings and discussions, please evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each of these frameworks. Which facts does each highlight? Which facts does each obscure? Which is the most consistent with the human rights framework you have developed earlier? In the end, how is (or is not) history useful in understanding the present situation in Israel/Palestine?
(Hint: When you focus on the Israeli view of the occupation, in addition to Avnery and Hare, please also review Morris and preview Swirski).

Assignment Due: October 26:
It is unlikely that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians will be resolved in the absence of a political solution – either one (perhaps bi-national) or two states. If we were to adopt the position of the poet Yitzak La’or, that any of these solutions is acceptable and that the most desirable is “whichever one comes first,” – what would you advocate as a model of conflict resolution and state formation? Does your solution honor Rouhana’s call for awareness of history, justice, and power? Does it require Lederach’s complex alignment among grass roots, civil society and state actors? What should a sustainable political solution, acceptable to both Palestinians and Israelis, look like, in your opinion? Please use the readings to support your answer.

Assignment: Due November 16
Please see Assignments – December 7

Assignment: Due December 7:
Please chose one of the following two assignments:

Either:
If you were a consultant for the European Union or the Quartet, what advice would you give them about healthy economic development in Israel/Palestine? Please be sure to draw on the reading materials in constructing your answer. Is it possible, as Netanyahu proclaims, for Israelis to offer Palestinians a purely “economic peace” (and, implicitly, prosperity) without resolving the political issues of statelessness? Should “BDS” (boycotts, sanctions, divestments) be an appropriate economic tool for Palestinian self-determination?

Or:
How do the Abrahamic faiths of the Middle East understand concepts like right living, care of the world, obligations to self and others? Do you think these narratives share a large common ground? Can they produce compatible religious and ethical directives for their respective communities? Please be sure to use the material above in constructing your answers.

Final Project Prospectus – during the finals period for this course
Please complete your prospectus for the project you would like to accomplish after returning from our field trip.
Describe the project – what do you plan to do?

What are the intellectual foundations of your project – i.e. what questions are you trying to answer?

Who is the audience for your project – i.e. with whom are you dialoguing?

Who is the intended beneficiary of your project?

How will you know if the project is successful – what are your measures of success?

In what ways might this project be a prototype for your further engagement in “making history” (as distinct from simply making a living)?

What is the place of your project in the world – i.e. if we consider legislation and regulation (law), market incentives (economics), people-to-people initiatives (grass roots action), ngo development (civil society), and faith based initiatives (religion) as the principle instruments for constructing just societies, where does your project fit on this map and how could it link to other projects that share your values?