

Preliminary Analysis of “Palestine & Israel: Settler-Colonialism and Apartheid” Syllabus

Verity Educate undertook a preliminary analysis of the materials and texts assigned as part of the “Palestine & Israel: Settler-Colonialism and Apartheid” class. This analysis has led to the following conclusion:

The course material fails to engage students in the following course objectives:

- “1. Develop a historical understanding of the conflict in the Middle East.
2. Develop an understand [sic] of differing perspectives of the people of the Middle East conflict.”

The materials focus solely on objectives 3 and 4, which are to “Develop an understanding of Palestinian voices through contemporary literature and media,” and “Develop an understanding of students [sic] personal relation in the conflict and how it affects them, as well as how to develop the skills to communicate their understanding to others.” It is clear from the textual evidence analyzed that the architect of the course forwent providing materials that would establish the historical facts and context of this conflict and texts that would present a variety of perspectives on the conflict in favor of presenting academic rationales for political activism – and primarily those activities promoted by the “Students for Justice in Palestine” organization. The core academic and educational values of knowledge acquisition and critical thinking have been hijacked by a particular strain of political action, and specifically by a particular politically oriented activist organization.

- The material presented to students in this course reflects a singular interpretation of the “Palestine-Israel conflict.” Nearly every text presents Israel as an “occupying” power and deems it morally repugnant and guilty of “settler-colonialism.” No other competing interpretations, arguments, or views are presented through the readings over the course of the semester. Thus, students lack the textual evidence to gain a thorough understanding of “differing perspectives” on the “Palestine-Israel conflict.” With only one view presented, the course cannot be considered academically or educationally objective. Students read only works from the “settler-colonialist” academic framework and never engage with the works of historians, ethnographers, and political scientists who operate in other frameworks. The sole exception to this is the inclusion on the last week of the course of a work by Israeli historian Benny Morris.
- The course evidences a complete lack of historical information about the “Palestine-Israel conflict.” Despite the stated learning objective, “develop a historical understanding of the conflict in the Middle East,” the course material fails to offer a single work of history that even relates historical events in a chronological format. Thus, students have no solid historical basis on which to evaluate the argumentative and interpretative texts they are presented with each week. The lack of any semblance of an objective historical narrative contributes to the profoundly political and activist objective promoted by the course.



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- A majority of the texts actively promote a particular political position vis-à-vis the “Palestine-Israel conflict,” specifically the dissolution of the State of Israel and its replacement with a unitary “democratic” state composed of Arabs and non-Arabs. Several of these texts (see Saree Makdidi and Steven Salaita) present these political agendas under cover of addressing other topics such as accounts of Palestinian experiences in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and cultural interpretations of Zionism. These texts essentially engage in propaganda efforts by presenting students with political agendas and promoting the adoption of a particular conclusion under the guise of exploring other topics.
- The predominant political framework of interpretation in these texts is Marxist. This includes condemnation of Israel simply because it exists within the nation-state and therefore capitalist framework. (See Said, Ram, Salaita, and Abunima).
- The most prevalent theme of the textual material for this course is that of activism. Many works contain prescriptions for activism or a rationale by the author in favor of activism. Some notable examples of this include the following statements made by the authors of the texts within their books:
 - “I have called my book a political essay because it tries to put the matter before the American readers, not as something watertight and finished, but as something to be thought through, tried out, engaged with – in short, as a subject to be dealt with politically.” (Said, xv)
 - “What is Israel, what is the United States, and what are the Arabs going to do about the Palestinians?” (Said, introduction)
 - “What draws me to Palestine, then, is neither nationalism nor patriotism, but my sense of justice, my refusal to remain silent in the face of injustice, my unwillingness to just go on living my life – and enjoying the privileges of a tenured university professor – while trying to block out and ignore what Wordsworth once called the still, sad music of humanity.” (Makdisi, introduction)
 - “My interest in Palestine is not only linguistic and scholarly, of course. I have very strong feelings about the Palestinian experience and cause.” (Makdisi, introduction)
 - “My hope is that readers will let lie Israel’s dead soul and examine Israel’s destruction of actual minds and bodies instead.” (Salaita, introduction)
 - Nora Barrows Friedman: *In Our Power: U.S. Students Organize for Justice in Palestine*



Analysis of Select Texts from of “Palestine & Israel: Settler-Colonialism and Apartheid” Syllabus

- Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* – Intro and Ch. 1
- Uri Ram, “The Colonization Perspective in Israeli Sociology”, in Ilan Pappé, *The Israel/Palestine Question*, pp. 53-77.
- Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, pp. 182-217
- Saree Makdisi, *Palestine Inside Out*
- David Grossman, *Writing in the Dark* ch.1
- Steven Salaita, introduction to *Israel’s Dead Soul*, pp. 1-11

Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* – Intro and Ch. 1

This material is primarily a reinterpretation of historical events that occurred in Ottoman and British Palestine and later in Israel within the author’s preconceived ideological framework of Palestinian victimization. This fails to provide the student with any chronological account of historical events. For a student taking the course, this type of ideologically focused historical interpretation discourages critical thinking and replaces it with a preconceived framework for the student to interpret past (and current) events. Thus, the student can reach no other conclusion than that provided by the author. Historical documents and events such as the Balfour Declaration, British Census for Palestine in 1922, George Antonius’s *The Arab Awakening* are not provided to students to analyze and examine but instead placed within Said’s ideological framework of establishing Palestinian victimhood and promoting political activism.

Said also appropriates Palestinian voices and claims for himself the right to speak for an entire people. Recall that Said was then a professor of comparative literature at Columbia University and not living in the Middle East.

ix: “my aim has been to write a book putting before the American reader a broadly representative Palestinian position, something not very well known and certainly not well appreciated even now [1977] when there is so much talk of the Palestinians and of the Palestinian problem.”

Said establishes the purpose of his text is to establish a case in favor of activism, particularly against the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty under negotiation at the time he wrote this book.

ix: “we have been unable to interest the West very much in the justice of our cause. Nevertheless we have begun, I think, to construct a political identity and will of our own; ... we have been united as a people largely because the Palestinian *idea* (which we have articulated out of our own experience of dispossession and exclusionary oppression) has a coherence to which we have all responded with positive enthusiasm. It is the full spectrum of Palestinian failure and subsequent return in their lived details that I have tried to describe in this book.”



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Said attempts to whitewash terrorist actions committed by Palestinians in the name of Palestinian nationalism (including such horrific events as the murder of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics and multiple aircraft hijackings). His work attempts to remove the intentionality from the hijackings, assassinations, mass casualty attacks, and bombings perpetuated on Israeli and Jewish civilians by Palestinian terrorist groups and reduce the historical record of events to a numerical comparison of dead bodies. This accounting sublimates the intentionality of violence in a manner not dissimilar to Eastern European historian Timothy Snyder's work "Bloodlands" in an attempt to whitewash terrorist activities, just as Snyder's work can be said to downplay the specific horrors of the attempted genocide of Jews during the Holocaust as just another in a series of mass killings.

ix: "Yes I suppose that to many of my readers the Palestinian problem immediately calls forth the idea of 'terrorism,' and it is partly because of this invidious association that I do not spend much time on terrorism in this book. To have done so would have been to argue defensively, either by saying that such as it has been our 'terrorism' is justified, or by taking the position that there is no such thing as Palestinian terrorism as such. The facts are considerably more complex, however, and some of them at least bear rehearsal here. In sheer numerical terms, in brute numbers of bodies and property destroyed, there is absolutely nothing to compare between what Zionism has done to Palestinians and what, in retaliation, Palestinians have done to Zionists."

Said describes his own work as a call to action aimed at Americans, rather than a work of historical or academic significance. Thus, in an academic setting, it should be read as a primary source on the beginnings of Palestinian intellectual activism. It provides a window into the development of Edward Said, a prominent Palestinian intellectual and activist who, himself, was involved in the Palestinian leadership circles, but cannot be taken as a window or conduit for understanding Palestinian people. It is a deliberate call to action, and as the first reading, betrays the fact that the course is primarily designed to teach students how to become active participants in this issue.

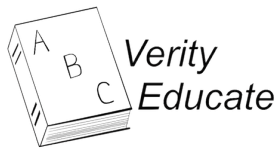
xv: "I have called my book a political essay because it tries to put the matter before the American readers, not as something watertight and finished, but as something to be thought through, tried out, engaged with – in short, as a subject to be dealt with politically."

Uri Ram, “The Colonization Perspective in Israeli Sociology”, in Ilan Pappé, *The Israel/Palestine Question*, pp. 53-77.

The discussion topic for the week explains that students will gain an “understanding of how settler-colonialism and apartheid function in Palestine.” This statement itself betrays the inherent bias and political ideology of the course. Despite the fact that the reading on “settler-colonialism” laments the fact that discourse on Israel as a “settler-colony” has long been considered on the fringe of Israeli sociological studies, the discussion takes this as fact. No readings are provided as a counter-balance to the sociological point of view in this text – perhaps because the author’s work labels those who fail to accept this perspective as mainstream as “racists.” The readings and discussion topic do not subject the topic to rigorous academic debate but rather accept this radical framework as a presupposition. These are theories and concepts, largely non-mainstream ones, yet the syllabus removes them from their actual academic context and promotes them to students in the course as mainstream, universally accepted ideas. This is a technical academic work indented for an audience of sociologists to understand fringe trends in sociology while calling for these fringe trends to enter the mainstream. The architect of the course betrays her ignorance by including this work in a syllabus for undergraduates with no prior background or pre-requisites.

The author claims that the failure to place the settler-colonialist narrative at the center of academic discourse on Israel is inherently racist rather than based on significant evidentiary issues contained within these works. Failure to adopt this ideological framework as “mainstream,” the author writes, is due to the fact that academics refuse to “bestow an academic credibility on arguments which are used by Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular.” Thus, academics who fail to accept the premise that Israel is a “permanent war society” and that the “The Israeli-Arab conflict has at its core the efforts of the Zionist settlers to create an exclusivist Jewish society in Palestine and the resistance, first of the native Arab Palestinians, and later of states, Arab and other, to this colonization project...” are racist and reject the concept because of its origins and not due to a lack of historical evidence suggesting that Zionist ideology was in no way as monolithic as these sociologists posit. (p. 52).

This chapter examines the historiography of the concept of equating Zionism with colonialism. Specifically, it explains that this framework emerged from a Weberian and Marxist conceptualization. The article operates from a foreordained position that “Israel is a settlement-colony type of society” and proceeds to review the emergence of this concept in academic literature and its usefulness in sociological studies. It reads concepts of colonialism and oppression back into Zionism without considering the vast corpus of literature produced by Zionist thinkers. The few examples turned up are presented as representative without any evidence supporting that conclusion. The chapter continues to deride even the Israeli-left for failing to realize that colonialism is inherent in the very nature of their political system and for adopting the settler-colony model only post-1967, and it ultimately ends with the statement that “The colonization perspective in Israeli sociology is an agenda just beginning to be realized.” (p. 68).



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Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, pp. 182-217

Rashid Khalidi's work provides a historically rigorous account of Palestinian civil society in the pre-World War II era. He argues that nascent state institutions may have been developing during the British Mandate but were quashed after Britain employed extreme measures of force when crushing the "Arab Great Revolt" in 1936. This, Khalidi argues, set Palestinian national development back so significantly that the community was unable to recover and develop comparable institutions until late in the 20th century. Khalidi utilizes a significant body of Arabic newspaper sources that Israeli historians had not examined in as great detail.

In his concluding chapter, Khalidi blames the Palestinian Authority for its failure to adequately represent the Palestinian national cause. "Instead of a new para-state structure emerging that might have marshaled and organized the energies of the Palestinian people to deal with the even greater challenges that the Oslo period produced, the new PA was essentially a copy of the post-Beirut PLO ... a patronage-laden and largely ineffective system rife with cronyism." The historical aspects of his work contribute significantly to the historiographic understanding of the time period, but none of these chapters were assigned in the syllabus. Although this text could contribute to students' understanding of the historical conflict in the Middle East, the sections that might provide historical knowledge were not assigned. Thus, the text contributes only Khalidi's interpretation and concluding remarks rather than the chronological details and facts contained in the rest of the text.

Saree Makdisi, *Palestine Inside Out*

The author primarily considers himself a participant in the conflict and not an observer – but decries his “outsider” status because he grew up in Lebanon and the United States and not in “Palestine.” His failure to have personally experienced “Israeli occupation” undergirds his desire, through writing this book, to become part of the group and prove the “insider” status he feels his background fails to grant him. “My interest in Palestine is not only linguistic and scholarly, of course. I have very strong feelings about the Palestinian experience and cause. But my feelings are not motivated simply by a sense of belonging to the people, for my sense of belonging – to any group or people – has always been rather complicated.”

The text of the book recounts example after example of Palestinians in the West Bank who claim to have experienced “injustices” such as having their permits to drive around the West Bank revoked in order to pressure them into collaborating with Israeli forces and reporting on suspicious behavior. The anecdotes are presented as fact, complete with dialogue, but the author fails to provide any corroboration of events. The text appears to be based purely on interviews with subjects and their own memories and retelling of the events. Such information cannot be considered an unbiased primary source, as the syllabus presents the work, but rather as a primary source into how these people interpret and relate their experiences. The individuals in the anecdotes come across as characters in a story rather than journalistically accurate portraits of individuals.

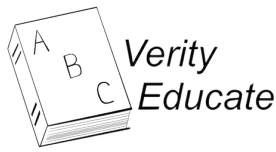
Ultimately the book judges Yasser Arafat’s decision to walk away from the Camp David 2000 deal and argues that a “unitary” state replacing Israel is the only solution to the ongoing conflict. This text, rather, than present students with an objective account of Palestinian experiences in the contemporary West Bank and Gaza strip in their own voices, supports a non-mainstream and fairly radical political proposition. By assigning this text without any competing narratives and alternative proposals, the syllabus shifts the spectrum of debate and promotes a singular political narrative and radical perspective advocated by activists on the issue. The reading for the week cannot form the basis for an informed discussion or debate of the variety and spectrum of proposals for solutions to this conflict because the only reading assigned to students promotes the destruction of the State of Israel.



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David Grossman, *Writing in the Dark* ch.1

This text is an essay by writer David Grossman reflecting on the books by Shalom Aleichem that he read as a child and some of the other influences on his own works. The essay is rather cryptic for those who have not read David Grossman's works. The only relationship this text has to the course-topic is a short discussion of the author's experiences during the First Intifada and how he came to realize the existence of the Palestinian people in the West Bank. He also briefly mentions his idea that living in a constant state of conflict or "a prolonged state of incongruity between its founding values and its political circumstances, a rift can emerge between the society and its identity ..." (p. 22). His personal view is that, "Israel was not prepared, because it did not know it was an occupier, it did not think it was an oppressor, and it did not tell itself that there was a people out there." (p. 25).



Steven Salaita, introduction to *Israel's Dead Soul*, pp. 1-11

**Note:* Steven Salaita is a professor of Native American studies who recently came under fire for violent tweets he composed regarding the 2014 Gaza conflict. This resulted in the loss of a job offer and has led to a lawsuit.

Salaita's work is essentially an attempt to demonize Zionism and those who support or ascribe to its ideological precepts and those who regard the State of Israel as a legitimate entity. He writes, "I conceptualize Zionism as deeply inhumane ethically, and as destructive politically, for Jews and Arabs, and for humankind in general." He opens with the pre-supposition that Israel is the only nation on earth to undergo a "soul search" because it has committed deeds so much worse than other nations. Salaita rejects all attempts at such soul searching as inherently wrong because the very act of engaging in "soul searching" codifies Israel's legitimacy.

"To my knowledge, no other country has had its soul publicly examined by a panel of experts. All nations throughout history have been endowed with souls by zealous or anxious citizens, but Israel is unique insofar as its soul is under constant scrutiny. There are many reasons for this scrutiny, but it largely can be attributed to two factors: (1) Israel's self-image as exceptional requires a fair amount of idealistic anguish, and (2) Israel's moral and legal misdeeds necessitate a professed commitment to self-improvement based on the nostalgia of an invented past."

"Nobody has ever mourned the condition of Israel's soul without being deeply attached to Israel as an ethnocentric state."

"We must remember that Zionism, as difficult as it is to define, is an ideology that supports a colossal military enterprise and underlies one of the greatest and most intractable conflicts of our time. Multiculturalism is similarly multivalent but no less important, for it directly affects policy not only at the level of bureaucratic protocol but also at crucial sites of capitalist power."

Salaita's work generates a number of arguments, so radical in nature that his work verges on anti-Semitism. For example, he equates Zionism with Nazism.

"To support Zionism is to place belief in the probity of the state, a dubious proposition, and in a myth of democracy that is inherently exclusionary. It is outside the purview of the modern nation-state that Arabs and Jews most fruitfully coexisted; it is directly from the ideological deficiencies of the modern nation-state that the Nazi Holocaust occurred."

His book also attempts to brand the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) as a hate group.

"This exploration is most relevant in light of my argument that some Zionist civil rights organizations, the Anti-Defamation league (ADL) most notably, can be accurately classified as hate groups."

These arguments are presented not with facts, but with the author's own forays into cultural critiques. For example, Salaita's argument that Zionism is an inhuman ideology relies solely on



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his own interpretation of several movies. “Chapter 5, “The Heart of Darkness redux, Again,” discusses a number of films that either tacitly or lucidly reproduce Joseph Conrad’s archetypal dark heart motif through representation of an inherent inhumanity deep within Zionism brought out by the Jewish encounter with Palestinians.”

Finally, Salaita decries the entire notion of the nation-state itself, “Nation-states, like corporations, exist to enrich those who fortify their power,” revealing the underlying biases that motivate this analysis and, to no surprise, reaches the conclusion foreordained by his framework of analysis, that “Israel is the least likely of nations to have a soul, given its creation through ethnic cleansing and its current policies of garrison colonization. The idea of a national soul arises from the metonymical fantasy that there is an innate good in the national community encapsulated by the state, that the natural progression of a nation-state is toward fulfilling a promise of fundamental goodness.”

Ultimately, Salaita encourages his readers to take up the cause of the destruction of Israel. “My hope is that readers will let lie Israel’s dead soul and examine Israel’s destruction of actual minds and bodies instead.”