

**Exploring Social Justice in Mixed/Divided Cities: From Local to Global Learning**

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**Abstract:**

This manuscript describes an innovative student and faculty project developed by the University of Haifa (UH) and the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) focused on social justice in the context of increasing urban, local and global inequities. The project, based on a parallel bi-national American-Israeli course, initially piloted in 2013, is now in its fourth year. The course adopts an inter-professional approach to critically examine how social justice is framed and conceptualized in mixed/divided cities from different professional perspectives (social work, health, law). Students and faculty alike found the course transformative personally and professionally challenging and transformative. By examining social justice in Haifa and Baltimore, we came to better appreciate both the importance of context and the value of looking to other global sites in order to gain insights on local challenges and opportunities.

### **Exploring Social Justice in Mixed/Divided Cities: From Local to Global Learning**

This manuscript describes an innovative student and faculty project developed by the University of Haifa (UH) and the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) focused on social justice in the context of increasing urban, local and global inequities. The project, based on a parallel bi-national American-Israeli course, initially piloted in 2013, is now in its fourth year. The three-credit graduate course is offered in both universities over a six month period, with joint coursework in Israel during the first two weeks in January. The course adopts an inter-professional approach to critically examine how social justice is framed and conceptualized in mixed/divided cities from different professional perspectives (law, social welfare, health).

### **Background**

The course, entitled “What Does Social Justice Look Like in My Community?”, grew out of a combination of personal and institutional relationships. The authors have long shared ideas of creating a US-Israel course based on a mutual interest in anti-oppressive research and practice.<sup>1,2</sup> In December, 2012, in his role as academic director of the University of Haifa Flagship Project for Combatting Social Exclusion, Dr. Strier invited Dr. Shdaimah to speak at a day-long conference for academics and community activists held at Haifa University. She then participated in a joint meeting at UMB in Baltimore between then-Provost of Haifa University David Farraggi and UMB President Jay Perman, which focused on creating a collaborative partnership which would be a course appealing to both leaders’ commitment to inter-professional education and service to their public university related communities. The course was also timely as it coincided with UMB’s campus-wide newly developed Center for Global Education Initiatives (CGEI), which provides grants and administrative support to students and

faculty proposing new short-term interprofessional global educational opportunities. The support of two university leaders, access to grant funds for its first three years and, most importantly, the strong commitment by course faculty have been key to success in testing and implementing this unique course concept. This support was supplemented in year two by a grant from the Straus Family Foundation which defrayed costs of hosting a reciprocal program for UH students at the UMB campus.

### **Theoretical Course Underpinnings**

#### **Social Justice**

Social justice is a highly disputed concept.<sup>3,4,5</sup> A value-laden construct, social justice refers to disparate life opportunities of some social groups in relation to others. A range of theoretical conceptualizations have been proposed to explain the construct, (i.e. liberal, social democratic, communitarian and radical), yet there is agreement that social justice includes a set of principles, procedures and relations based on notions of equity, equality and fairness. Social justice thus is an important underpinning for an orientation and practices that seek removal of cultural and social inequities such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, poverty, and disability.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Mixed/Divided Cities**

A mixed city is defined as a city with a population composed of different ethnic, national and/or religious groups living within a context of intergroup tension or conflict.<sup>7,8</sup> Such cities are the focus of research in various disciplines including architecture and urban planning, political geography, demography, public policy, anthropology, urban sociology, public health, and education.<sup>9</sup> The development of ethnically mixed cities raises questions related to municipal

management, majority-minority relations, multiculturalism, cultural responsiveness, urban justice, distribution of resources, and institutional representation.<sup>10</sup> In many instances, mixed cities are the center of ongoing political conflict as manifested in Belfast, Mostar, Nicosia, Berlin, Beirut, Tripoli, Kirkuk or Quebec. In other instances, such as Jerusalem, Acre, Haifa, and Lod in Israel,<sup>11</sup> mixed cities are characterized by tensions between groups, open competition for public space and resources, and ongoing conflict over the hegemonic definition of the cultural, religious and/or national character/identity of the city.

Mixed/divided cities tend to fluctuate between integration and segregation. While a case can be made that segregation has been a feature of urban life since ancient times, with the expansion of European empires and the consolidation of colonial urban spaces in the modern world, segregation increasingly became a mechanism for dividing and managing urban space along lines of color and economic privilege. “Segregation” includes not only once-legal racial separation in the United States or South Africa, but also persistent and widespread divisions along the mutually constitutive forces of race and class. These divisions give rise to social isolation and fragmentation, loneliness, environmental risks, and lack of access to basic services such as food, transit, health care, and public education.

### **Course Overview, Goals and Objectives**

Since the course’s inception, our emphasis has been on Haifa and Baltimore as divided cities. We began by providing students with demographic, political, and historical information on both cities as home to diverse groups with a range of cultural perspectives and experiences. Both UMB and UH are located in mixed/divided cities with similar concerns. They are both seaport

cities with a multicultural population affected by high ethnic, national or racial inequalities and tensions. Haifa is the third-largest city in Israel with a population of 90% Jews, of which 25% are immigrants from the former Soviet Union and 10% Christian and Muslim Arabs.<sup>12</sup> Baltimore is no less a multicultural city. According to the 2010 census, 63.7% of the population was Black, 29.6% White, 0.4% American Indian and Alaska Native, 2.3% Asian, 1.8% from some other race and 2.1% of two or more races.<sup>13</sup> Baltimore is challenged by extreme tensions emanating from historical social inequalities in many areas such as housing, education, health, criminal justice, wealth, and income.<sup>14, 15, 16</sup>

The course was designed to prepare students professionally to engage in collaborative community projects that enhance social justice and reduce social, economic and health disparities. Students examine social struggles to overcome inequality and injustice, using innovative and alternative research methodologies for the study of social justice. This unique interchange combines a local, global and inter-professional focus on justice through community-university partnerships and how this perspective broadens students' thinking. Through the Haifa-Baltimore lens, UMB and UH students examine how social justice is conceptualized in local contexts in two different global settings. UMB students have the obvious advantage of experiencing an example of social justice in another country more deeply, spending time in Haifa and other Israeli sites as well as witnessing firsthand the way that systems, interventions, and programs are designed in different local contexts. The course includes the opportunity for UH students to travel to the U.S. for a complementary in-country weeklong course. However, only one of the three student cohorts to date had this option because of the high cost of travel to U.S. A total of 31 UMB and 48 UH students have participated over the three past three years. The

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course drew students seeking degrees in social work, law, nursing, public health, and pharmacy and involved faculty from UMB and UH's Schools of Social Work, Law, and Nursing. We are currently recruiting the fourth cohort.

The course objectives, achieved over a six-month period of study, were to:

- Explore the concept of social justice and the role of universities in communities grappling with economic and social injustice.
- Examine the missions of public universities with a professional focus in serving local communities.
- Examine the tensions between universities and local communities, particularly in urban areas.
- Study collaborative research methodologies and practices.
- Promote research and the practice of social justice.
- Engage faculty and students from both universities in joint social justice research and action projects.

### **Course Methods**

The course has three phases. In the fall semester, students participate in three pre-travel classroom sessions, conduct a field-based assignment and explore the Israeli context of social justice through following Israeli media. The second phase, the “in- country” portion, includes 10 days (including travel) in Haifa and selected other locations, of which six are spent studying with Haifa students. The third “post-travel” phase includes assignments and experiences promoting connections between student experiences while in Israel and the Baltimore community. These assignments include written reflections on the experience, a paper on a relevant topic that

addresses an issue affecting both Baltimore and Haifa, and a group “photovoice” presentation to the campus community. This presentation is designed for students to share and process their experience and learning with other UMB students, faculty and staff.

Teaching methodologies and pedagogy include: “photovoice” techniques, “theater of the oppressed”, and experiential learning. Critically important were sessions with community members partnering with Haifa University’s Community Flagship Program, the purpose of which is to bring together people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds to address and enhance health and welfare in their own communities. Examples of projects include a community leaders educational program, an Ethiopian immigrant storytelling project, and a public multicultural performing arts project with UH’s theatre program. As noted above, following the 2015 course, UH students traveled to Baltimore to encourage bi-directional learning.

### **Pre-travel Phase: Thinking about Justice Locally**

Three 90-minute classes during the fall semester introduced students to the course and each other. We discuss student goals for the course and prepare for the bi-directional aspects of the course. In addition to assigned readings for each of the three classes, students are asked to scan headlines and read relevant articles in the Baltimore Sun and Ha’Aretz Israeli newspaper. Specifically, they read two articles from each paper each week and to post a brief (2-3 sentence) reflection on their readings prior to class. We encourage them to look for shared themes or interesting juxtapositions in the news from both countries.

*First session.* Our inaugural class meeting includes initial discussion of the University of Haifa and Baltimore's respective mission statements and community-university partnerships (UMB Center for Community Based Engagement and Learning (CBEL) and Haifa University's Flagship Project). We then ask students to explore different understandings of social justice based on assigned readings and their own beliefs and experiences. We also discuss how the concept manifests in the different participating disciplines, and review their respective codes of professional ethics. We ask student to compare and contrast understandings of social justice across disciplines. We also ask them to consider whether these professional interpretations provide helpful guidance in practice settings and/or their daily lives.

*Second session.* Described as "Seeing" and "Showing", this session launches students' exploration of social justice through photovoice. Photovoice is a critical research technique that allows study participants (in this case students) to capture an idea or phenomenon visually.<sup>17, 18</sup> It is particularly rich in urban environments.<sup>19</sup> The recorded images themselves as well as any discussion about the images in interviews or focus groups are then used as data. We modified this research technique to fit pedagogical needs. Students used their own and others' visual representation of justice through photographs to explore evolving concepts of justice during their participation in this interprofessional, bi-national class. During this session, we introduce photo-voice as a social justice research tool and provide instruction, including ethics and safety. Students select a partner (from a different discipline if possible) and make plans to tour Baltimore City to "see" and photograph images of social justice locally. Each group of students is

responsible for posting a slide show with a phrase or sentence capturing student' interpretation of the photo.<sup>1</sup>

*Third session.* The last pre-travel session is dedicated to sharing group photos and reflections. We use this opportunity to explore how concepts of “justice” and “collaboration” manifest visually in an urban landscape. We also discuss what the students see in each other’s photos as a way to discuss perspective. In this final meeting, we provide information and respond to questions regarding logistics of the “in country” phase of the course. A part of this preparation, students groups are paired with their Israeli counterparts, who also take photos locally. The pairs are asked to exchange photos and brief introductions via email so that the connections began before travel.

### **In-Country Phase**

The following three signature pedagogical methods were central to the in-country phase of the course.

#### **Global-local photovoice exploration**

Described in greater detail above, just prior to the UMB students’ travel to Israel, small groups of UMB and UH students were placed in email contact and instructed to share their photovoice projects prior to travel. When the two groups met in person in Haifa,

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<sup>1</sup> Although the technical aspects of photography are not a focus of the photovoice methodology, in two of the last three years we offered an optional session to meet with and learn from a D.C.-based photojournalist, Earl Dotter. Mr. Dotter shared his approach to photographing individuals and settings in a respectful and collaborative manner to communicate a larger message.

they continued their photovoice exploration together, exploring similarities and differences. Each small group was instructed to devise a theme, which they presented to the class on our final day. Photovoice helped students communicate across language, culture, and professional roles.

### **Theatre of the Oppressed**

Theatre of the Oppressed was initially developed by Augusto Boal, a Brazilian director, artist and activist. The idea behind the technique is for participants to be able to see themselves through perspectives on actions that, through small adjustments and interactions with others, can change their understanding of a situation.<sup>20</sup>

Theatre of the Oppressed was born in 1971, in Brazil, under the very young form of *Newspaper Theatre*, with the specific goal of dealing with local problems –... now it is practiced in more than 70 countries. Growing up, TO developed *Invisible Theatre* in Argentina, as political activity, and *Image Theatre* to establish dialogue among Indigenous Nations and Spanish descendants, in Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico. Now these forms are being used in all kinds of dialogues.<sup>21</sup>

The course engage a facilitator trained in Theatre of the Oppressed to lead students and faculty in a series of exercises in which participants are asked to imagine to create theatrical scenes, often without using words, in which they imagine and present themselves as oppressed and oppressor. Through guided facilitation, other students interact with the human displays by joining or leaving them, shifting others' positions, and reflecting on what they see and understand. Like its photovoice counterpart, this dynamic and deeply thoughtful interaction allows students to reflect

on social justice in a more visceral and visual manner that is designed to transcend disciplinary and cultural boundaries.

### **Experiential learning**

Experiential learning is learning that supports students in applying their knowledge and conceptual understanding to real-world problems or situations where the instructor directs and facilitates learning. Technically, the classroom can serve as a setting for experiential learning through embedded activities such as case and problem-based studies, guided inquiry, and simulations.<sup>22</sup> However, learning within the context (e.g. community) where real world problems are experienced and solutions developed, provides a more enriching learning environment and experience. Experiential learning in community also provides the critical opportunity for bi-directional learning between students and the individuals and populations “living” the experience that students are challenged to address in their professional lives. An essential feature of experiential learning is student reflection on their experience, their learning and “worldview”.

### **Combining signature pedagogies to create a total learning experience**

The following outline of the joint course programming gives a sense of how we integrate the signature pedagogies outlined above. Interspersed with the activities are brief lectures provided by UMB and UH faculty and guest speakers, to provide context and guided conversations around questions that arise from each activity. In addition, create we reserve time at the end of each day for facilitated debriefing. Each year, based on feedback from the previous year, we have reduced the number of activities to include more time for debriefing and discussion. We have come to

recognize the need for depth over breadth when discussing contentious and, often, deeply personal experiences with and conceptions of (in)justice. Throughout the joint programming, we ask UMB and UH students to continue their photovoice exploration of social justice in their small groups, together with discussion of an overarching theme that emerges from their work.

*Day 1 – Walking tour of Haifa.* UMB Students participate a professionally guided walking tour of City of Haifa through a social justice lens, with special attention to physical manifestations such as architecture, state of home repair, and signage, that reflect segregation, integration, and tensions within the city.

*Day 2 – Introductions.* UMB and UH students meet for a combination of presentations and activities. Students and faculty are responsible for presenting “their” cities, through sharing of media reports, demographic trends, and pictorial representations of justice and injustice. Each group responds to questions that grow out of the different cultural understandings of social justice and comparing/contrasting how this manifests in Haifa and Baltimore.

*Day 3 - Theatre of the Oppressed.* The timing of this program is purposeful; students at this point have a better understanding of the different local contexts and have had some time to interact. However, the Theatre of the Oppressed programming brings dialogue quickly to a much deeper level, and sets the students up with tools that they can use through the remainder of the course. For example, it focuses students’ attention to people’s body language and demeanor and alerts them to subtleties in group dynamics.

*Days 4 and 5 - Study tour.* These days are devoted to visits with community groups that work with University/Community Programming in Haifa and another city or region (these have included Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and the Negev Desert). These days are largely comprised of visits to community-university partnerships and community-based initiatives to address social (in)justice. In most instances, these are presented by community activists who provide a better understanding of the concerns that gave rise to the collaborations, their vision for the work, and the obstacles that they have faced. We ask students to think about the proper role for professionals and the universities in working to combat injustice in divided cities, and to reflect on the possibilities for collaboration from the efforts of organizers that often cross ethnic or religious divisions.

*Day 6 – Student Photo-voice presentations:* The culmination of the joint UH/UMB programming is the student presentation. Each group is asked to prepare a show that contains approximately 8 slides which can feature a single picture or a composite. The presentation must share an overarching theme that expresses their understanding of social justice generally or to a particular substantive area or topic. For example, one group used the concept of doors to express inclusion and exclusion. Another group discussed concrete barriers to accessing health, with one of their pictures for example showing a woman leaning on a walker at the top of stairs leading down from a health center. Presentations are followed by feedback and open discussion.

*Day 7 – UMB student debrief.* The UMB students' final day of programming in Israel is reserved for a discussion where we ask them to create a message to share with the UMB campus upon return. In preparation for developing this message, we review concepts or ideas that emerged

from conversations during the week, as well as the themes of the prior day's presentation. For example, in 2016 the concept of privilege (cite) and double-consciousness (DuBois) allowed us to characterize many of the tensions that arose within the course. Following that discussion, the students planned their UMB campus presentation which included reflections on the prior year's Baltimore uprisings. The students decided to call their Conscientization, after the Freirian concept defined as "the process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action" (The Friere Institute, n.d.).

### **Post-travel phase**

Following completion of the "in country" phase of the course, students devoted 12 hours of the spring semester to the course, completing additional research, writing papers and preparing a final presentation for the Campus community. This audience included the UMB President and other high-level university officials as well as the broader campus community. The presentation included recommendations for community-university partnerships that promote social justice based on students experiences and learning.

Post-course interviews are being conducted among UMB students who have completed the course, with a focus on photo-voice. However, since the course itself did not include an institutional review board application or approval, findings describing student experiences are paraphrased from these data and not as verbatim statements. As such, the following findings are based on faculty experience directing the course, discussion with students throughout the course and themes emerging from student written reflection and papers.

## **Findings**

Many important themes emerged from the faculty and student experiences over the three years that the course has been implemented. The following are those that are most relevant to a discussion of bi-directional globally based learning.

### **Crucial Conversations About “the Other” and Justice Occur More Easily Within the Inter-Cultural Context.**

Early in the pilot year of the “in-country” portion of the course, we began to hear conversations between and among Baltimore and Haifa students that struck us as intense and at times awkward. But they were also freeing. This often stemmed from the fact that the groups were unaware of culturally taboo conversations. In explaining to outsiders who often questioned out of curiosity rather than an agenda, responding students spoke more fully about topics that they would not have broached with their local peers. For example, Haifa students upon meeting Baltimore students of color asked about their “ethnicity,” not something most US students would ask. Also early in the course, Baltimore students questioned Haifa students about their religion. We soon realized that across wide cultural divides, Baltimore students were more comfortable asking questions that they might not ask in their own cultural context. Students from both groups also seemed more open to questions from the outside group, experiencing these questions as stemming from genuine curiosity or ignorance rather than confrontational or motivated by an agenda.

### **“Divided cities” is a Theme that Bridges Borders, Cultures and Identity.**

The program evolved over the three years to intentionally focus on “Mixed/Divided Cities.” This theme emerged following the pilot year of the course, in part in response to student (and faculty) conversations and experiences regarding how social justice, in their respective countries, is diminished or promoted based on divisions in each country based on race, class and culture/religion. Although the demography of Baltimore/the U.S. and Haifa/Israel is starkly different in many important aspects, the course brought to light the shared experiences and challenges of cities divided by race, culture and/or class in both cities and the larger societies. The photo-voice project of local images in two diverse urban settings as well as the student final joint presentation compared and contrasted the divisions across the two cities and included recommendations for applying the learning locally.

**Much Learning about “Self” occurs in an Immersion Experience with “Others”.**

The immersion experience encouraged personal growth and professional learning among students from each city and across cities to an extent not anticipated by students. While many think that study abroad opportunities are designed primarily to expose students to other cultures, the instructors always intended this course to have students think critically about assumptions and problems that they take for granted or to which they have become inured. For example, Baltimore students every year comment or recognizing anew the presence of street-homelessness in their midst, due to a combination of their photovoice project bringing their attention to visual cues and UH students’ surprise at a phenomenon that UMB students have come to see as “normal”. Most if not all students across the three cohorts described the course as being “life transforming.” Students also described a range of impacts that this course has had and will continue to have on their professional development and practice locally.

### **Culture is Diverse, Complex, and Personal**

The course also exposed unexpected dimensions of culture, which often lead to personal interactions. In a presentation of low-income Israeli women who participated in an ongoing photo voice advocacy project, one of the photographers shared a photo that expressed her inability to advocate for her son due to poverty. In discussion following the presentation, one US student revealed her experience with homelessness as a teenager, and interactions with her own mother, which were characterized by anger and shame on her part. The UMB student, now in Law School, told the Israeli mother that her mothers' love and belief in her gave her strength and helped her succeed. This emotional, public exchange was one of the more extreme, but each year we witnessed personal connections evolve between and among the UMB and UH student groups, faculty, and community members. These exchanges were often difficult, as they revolved around deeply held assumptions, beliefs, or core aspects of identity. We believe that the weeklong immersion together and the core pedagogies provide the space and tools to facilitate these engagements

### **Interprofessional Education is Made Richer in the Context of Local and Global**

#### **Experience.**

UMB students were recruited and selected to maximize the interprofessional aspects of the course. Over each of the three years the course was taught, UMB students were enrolled in at least three different UMB professional schools. At Haifa, the course was designed for social work students but during the second year the course was also offered to UH's schools of Social Work, Nursing and Law. At our introductory meeting when UH students shared why they

decided to participate in the course, one of the incentives was the opportunity to get to know and work with students from other professions; we heard similar feedback from UMB students. We also believe that the IPE as enhanced by the use of visual and other non-verbal methods such as photovoice and theatre of the oppressed. Although initially designed to bridge the language gaps between (and among) the UH and UMB students, they also moved students away from professional jargon and lenses in identifying social (in)justice and discussion how best to address it. The levelling of the linguistic and cultural playing field also provided for a leveling of the professional playing field.

### **Conclusions**

It is difficult to capture the many themes expressed by students over the history of this course. Certainly, an overarching theme shared by students from both countries was that the course and related experiences were personally and professionally transformative. In addition to the theme of shared student experiences across the two countries and cultures, each of the group of students who had the opportunity to travel to the others' country (all cohorts and one of Haifa cohort) told us that biases they held about the other country were challenged by the course. For example, UMB students acknowledged that by spending time in Israel they came to see the enormous complexity of the Israel and Palestinian conflict in a new way, and realize the intractability of the current political situation. The UH students who spent time in Baltimore expressed an unexpected sense of fear for their own personal security while in Baltimore, something they did not expect coming from a country that is viewed as "dangerous". Finally, all of us involved in the project came to more fully appreciate both that learning and actions need to be sensitive and

appropriate to the local context as well as that many of our experiences and challenges related to social justice are shared by students and faculty globally.

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