

The Muddy Waters of Multicultural Acceptance: A Qualitative Case Study on Antisemitism and the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict

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The Jewish peoples have endured thousands of years of discrimination and subjugation, yet during this new millennium, Jews and antisemitism are conspicuously absent from university ethnic studies classroom discourse in the United States. Those scholars, determined to penetrate the walls of the multicultural education stronghold, are met with an ebb and flow of silence and vociferous resistance. A primary rationale for multiculturalists ignoring antisemitism appears to be the Zionist question and how they, themselves, perceive Israel's relationship with Palestine. This qualitative case study analyzed interviews of six prominent scholars in the areas of multiculturalism, history, and Judaism through a critical pedagogical lens. Throughout this paper, the author explores his personal experiences in regard to educational multiculturalists and the dismissal of Jews as a persecuted group. From discourse analysis of themes and recurrent meanings in the data, it is evident that the majority of study participants believe that Israel's behavior toward the Palestinians is unacceptable, yet that does not justify the large-scale generalizations of the Jewish people in the United States. As a result, this paper argues for the inclusion of the Jewish experience into university multicultural discourse.

Keywords: antisemitism, diversity, multicultural education, Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Introduction

A theoretical battle has been brewing of late; one which pits me, as a Jewish scholar, against those whom I support and champion on a daily basis. As a professor of Diversity and Multicultural Education (DME) in the United States, I am motivated to confront and educate those who attack others based upon race, class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, dis/ability, and national origin (Rubin, 2018). Yet, as I try to convince the multicultural education community that antisemitism, or the “unfavorable sentiment, attitudes or judgements made against” Jewish people (Moulin, 2016, p. 685) is still a major issue left unanalyzed in the United States, I am met with both resistance and refutation by my fellow educational multiculturalists. Alexander (1994) asserted that, “multiculturalists do not recognize antisemitism as a form of racism” (p. 63) because “their wise men have decreed that only ‘people of color’ can be the targets of racism” (Alexander, 1992, p. 65). From my research and personal experience, this appears to be the case. Jews continue to be left out of university multicultural classroom discussions (Langman, 1995; MacDonald-Dennis, 2006; Rubin, 2013; Schlosser, Ali, Ackerman, & Dewey, 2009) despite an increasing frequency of vitriolic antisemitic activity occurring around the world (Berg, 2015; Kaplan, 2015; Noble, 2014; Sokol, 2016).

The classroom environment only becomes richer when a variety of cultures and experiences are included (Arslan & Yigit, 2016; Karatas & Oral, 2015; Mathews, 2016; Raba' & Harzallah, 2018; Tarman, 2017; Tarman & Gurel, 2017). Unfortunately, researchers have found that, in university academic programs in the U.S., there is little to no discussion of antisemitism and of Jews being a discriminated minority group (Altman, Inman, Fine, Ritter, & Howard, 2010; Langman, 1995; MacDonald-Dennis, 2006; Rubin, 2013). In addition, “many major works on stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination have paid relatively little attention to resurgent anti-Semitism” (Cohen, Harber, Jussim, & Bhasin, 2009, p. 290). This lack of focus on Jewish people and Jewish issues, such as antisemitism, is evident in different ways. For instance, the discussion of multicultural issues at the university level is often based off of prominent texts in the field of multicultural education, yet in many of these texts, there is little to no discussion of Jews in any capacity. This is evident from analyzing popular texts such as *Multicultural Education: Issues and*

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Perspectives (9th Edition) by Banks and Banks (Eds.) (2016), *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education* (6th Edition) by Nieto and Bode (2011), *Rethinking Multicultural Education: Teaching for Racial and Cultural Justice* (2nd Edition) by Au (Ed.), and *Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference* by Sleeter and McLaren (Eds.) (1995) (Rubin, 2018). In the text *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* by Adams, Bell, Goodman, and Joshi (Eds.) (2016), Jews are discussed on a few occasions in one chapter called “Religious Oppression” (pp. 255-297), yet it is a minimal representation amongst several prominent texts in the field of multiculturalism. Ultimately, the issue of antisemitism is completely absent from several prominent texts in the field of diversity and multicultural education. This is problematic, for if the struggle against antisemitism is not recognized by popular texts that puts into question the validity of the struggle.

The reasons why antisemitism is addressed infrequently in the university multicultural/ethnic studies classroom discussion varies, yet there are several ideas that emerge from the research: 1) most Jews are seen as White² and therefore benefit from White privilege³ (Deniz & Ersoy, 2016; Greenberg, 2015; Halpern, 2017; Haynes, 2003; Langman, 1995; MacDonald-Dennis, 2006; Maizels, 2011); 2) they are seen as a successful model minority (Freedman, 2005; Gilman, 2003); and 3) they are accomplished in the fields of politics and finance (King & Weiner, 2007; Langman, 1995; MacDonald-Dennis, 2006), as well as the areas of entertainment, art, and the sciences (Alba, 2006; Gilman, 2003). It is here that I contend that there is also another reason why antisemitism is not often addressed in multicultural and ethnic studies programs - because of the negative perception of Zionism and the tension between Israel and Palestine.

Antisemitism and Multicultural Education

Antisemitism and Jewish acceptance is a very complex issue in the field of multiculturalism. For some multiculturalists, it is a place where the Jewish elephant in the room is ignored, and when once identified, is told that it deserves the disdain that it receives due to its treatment of others. For example, at universities in the U.S., it has been observed that “students view Jewish issues as being solely about Israel and its treatment of Palestinians...[Furthermore], Jewishness has been associated with Israel, white privilege, colonialism and racism” (Jaschik, 2009, p. 2). Alexander (1994) asserts that, “The multiculturalist hostility to Jews expresses too the ancient tendency of majorities to bully minorities, especially minorities unlikely to hit back” (p. 64). And for Jewish people, due to their small population around the world (0.2%) (Pew Research, 2015), it is easy to be abused as well as ignored. Therefore, it is imperative that antisemitism be discussed at the university level in DME courses. It is essential that university professors teach disparate perspectives and facilitate class discussions that support a wide range of opinions (Bernstein, 2012). That is the only way to confront antisemitism on a local and global level – to critique, discuss, and analyze. According to Rosenblum (2007), “Every oppression is different, and every oppressed group deserves our time and commitment to learning what their specific experience is like, and how we can best support their struggle for liberation” (p. 7). Despite what some might feel about Israel’s behavior towards the Palestinians, Jews in the U.S. (as well as around the world) deserve recognition in the multicultural and ethnic studies classroom.

In 2016, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) statistics showed that Jewish people were the largest group of victims of religious hate crimes in the U.S. (Potok, 2015). The same 954 racist hate groups standing against Blacks and other peoples of color in the U.S. equally despise Jews (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Antisemitism has only gotten worse in the U.S. as it moves forward in the age of Trump. It has been asserted by Goldstein and Hall (2017) that during Trump’s election campaign, he “stoked a revived white nationalism while denying its racist content” (p. 402). As a result, Trump has emboldened racists to express their hateful rhetoric out in the open (Crandall, Miller, and White II, 2018). Antisemitic incidents (i.e., assaults, vandalism, and harassment) jumped 86% at the beginning of 2017 and there was a “59% increase in antisemitic attacks at colleges in 2017 over the previous year and a 107% increase in kindergarten through grade 12 in schools” (Wilner, 2017). White Nationalist groups have also taken aim at American Jews. This was on display during the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017. Inflamed by Trump’s racist brand of leadership (Roberts, 2017), White Nationalists chanted “blood and soil” and “Jews will not replace us” (Rosenberg, 2017) while marching with torches through the streets. In a larger context, a recent global study estimated that 26 percent of the world’s population holds antisemitic attitudes (Tausch,

² This refers to the predominance of Ashkenazi Jews in the U.S., not the Sephardim and Mizrahim

³ For a deeper analysis of Jewish people and White privilege, see Rubin (2017) “Whiter shade of pale: Making the case for Jewish presence in the multicultural classroom”

2014). It is for these reasons that it is time that Jews be given the attention they deserve alongside their oppressed peers.

Antisemitism, just like other forms of racism and discrimination, often lurks beneath the surface (Cohen et al., 2009; Weinstein & Jackson, 2010). In the twenty-first century, there appears to be a tendency to ignore antisemitism due to Israel's interactions with Palestine, often seen as perpetuating the "'brutal,' illegal 'occupation' of Palestinian lands...[as well as] being a 'colonial settler state'" (Cravatts, 2011, p. 408). Consequently, many people believe that Israel is violating Palestinians' rights (Ghanem, 2016; Lasson, 2010). It is not my intention in this piece to either justify or condemn the behavior of the state of Israel, nor am I refuting those who hold beliefs on either side of the argument. I believe that Bernstein (2012) said it best when he asserted that, "It is in no one's interest for colleges and universities to stifle critical but legitimate discourse on Israel" (p. 3). My concern is that the topic of antisemitism is rarely addressed in university DME courses in the U.S. due to the fact that there is an Israeli/Palestinian conflict - a conflict that portrays Jews, embodied collectively by the state of Israel, in a negative light.

Jewish people in the U.S. are, in no way, a uniform community (Bernstein, 2012). It is impossible to generalize Jewish peoples due to the fact that "Jewishness is a cultural identity, an ethnic identity and a religious (or non-religious) identity" (Rosenblum, 2007, p. 29). There is a wide variation in Jewish beliefs and attitudes across the country. There are many Jews who support Palestinian human rights, the use of boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against Israel, as well as a "two-state solution," but when an entire group of people is blamed for the actions of the few, as is happening with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that is clearly racist (Sheskin & Felson, 2016). Of course, it is possible to take issue with Israeli governmental policy and not be antisemitic (Sheskin & Felson, 2016). The two are not necessarily connected.

It has been asserted that racism and prejudice against the Jews has taken on a different form in the twenty-first century, with a focus on the state of Israel and its citizens, in what is now often called the "new antisemitism" (Cravatts, 2011; Marque et al., 2018). According to the Report on Antisemitic Activity at U.S. Colleges and Universities (2015), campus antisemitism is still quite prevalent; in particular, there is a strong correlation between the presence and number of anti-Zionist groups on campus (as well as faculty supporting the BDS movement) and the amount of antisemitic activity on college campuses (Antisemitic Activity, 2015). Data show that there has been an increase in anti-Zionist activity on university campuses across the United States (Lasson, 2010); for example, the recent finding of two antisemitic stickers on light poles at Appalachian State University (Muckenfuss, 2017).

The countries that realize this thanks to multicultural education have managed to minimize social, cultural and educational problems of the past (Alanay & Aydin, 2016; Aydin, 2013; Damgaci & Aydin, 2014). This research addresses the potential systemic bias against Jews in multiculturalism and ethnic studies courses in the United States due to the beliefs concerning Israel and its interactions with Palestine. It is not my intent to create ill-will with my multicultural colleagues nor paint an entire group of scholars with a wide brush. The purpose of this article is to address the notion that the behaviors of the state of Israel, in some ways, are used to justify the ignoring of antisemitism in university multicultural/ethnic studies courses. The inspiration for this paper came from the reception I received from a manuscript I had written exploring the issues of antisemitism, Whiteness, and lack of Jewish presence in the multicultural/ethnic studies university classroom (see Rubin, 2017). This piece is a result of the exploration of those personal thoughts and experiences during the manuscript submission process over the course of a year.

Research Questions

In this research study, my primary research question is: what are the participants' attitudes and/or feelings about the assertion that antisemitism cannot be discussed in a DME classroom without addressing Israel and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict? I also explored the following sub questions:

- 1) What are participants' attitudes and/or feelings about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict?
- 2) What are participants' attitudes and/or feelings about the Israeli government's treatment of Palestinians?

Methodology

This research is a qualitative case study presented through the lens of critical pedagogy. A qualitative case study "can be defined as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive and heuristic, and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources" (Merriam, 1991, p. 16). Using a case study enables the

researcher to address a wide variety of evidence, such as observations, interviews, artifacts, and documents (Yin, 2008).

I obtained my research data through individual, asynchronous, email correspondences with university professors in the U.S., well-versed (i.e. teaching) in the fields of multiculturalism, social justice, and Jewish studies. To find my study participants, I searched for academic scholars currently teaching at the university level, with more than ten years' experience in their respective fields, and holding a high academic rank (e.g., that of full Professor). I initially contacted, via email, four professors of whose work I found while doing research for a prior manuscript about antisemitism, Whiteness, and the lack of Jewish presence in university multicultural classroom discussions (Rubin, 2017). From these original four academics, I inquired recommendations for additional scholars I should contact for participation; this is known as snowball sampling (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Five scholars declined participation; in all, I interviewed six participants for this study. I decided on six total participants due to the anticipated amount of data they would provide for this study. I felt that six study participants would offer a great deal of information in order to thoroughly address my research questions.

Collecting research data via email has been found to be an appropriate method for a study such as this since it has been shown to yield both rich and insightful information (Hershberger & Kavanaugh, 2017). Email interviewing has many benefits, such as expanding one's access to potential study participants, saving time, reducing research costs, and allowing participants more time for reflection before answering (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015; James, 2007). The potential limitations of using email interviews can be misunderstandings due to a lack of social cues and rapport between interviewer and participant as well as potential delays in receiving responses (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015).

Since it is necessary to modify email interviews as compared to traditional face-to-face interview methods (Mason & Ide, 2014), the email correspondences took place over the course of several days from initial contact. The interviews were conducted in a semistructured format. In this type of interview style, there are topics to be explored, yet the exact wording of the questions are not identified beforehand (Merriam, 2009). As such, the interview is more flexible and responsive to the line of discussion. In my initial email to the six study participants, I explained the research topic of antisemitism and a university Jewish multicultural presence and my concerns regarding feedback to a previous manuscript submission (discussed more in-depth in Results). I also attached two reviewers' comments in response to said manuscript submission for their consideration. After receiving consent to publish their thoughts, I posed the initial question intended to begin the dialogue: "What do you think about this? I would appreciate any insight you could give me." I was deliberately open-ended with this question since I did not want to steer the conversation in any particular direction. The email interviews ranged anywhere from three to ten email exchanges, depending on the study participant.

For several participants, the initial brief question elicited comments that were insightful, articulate, and passionate. Some scholars also provided suggestions for further thought on the issues addressed in this study. For example, Dr. Goldberg wondered whether, 'A Jewish presence in a multi-cultural classroom might require a conversation about antisemitism and its relationship to anti-Zionism? Even it [*sic*] you argue that it doesn't, shouldn't you address the issue at least in passing in your paper?' For these particular scholars, feedback was enlightening as well as supportive of the writing of this study.

Due to the nature of this contentious research, all research participants are provided pseudonyms in this piece. While their thoughts are incredibly valuable, their strong, off-the-cuff opinions have the potential to be interpreted in both positive and negative ways by their colleagues and universities. Unfortunately, as happens quite often, their positions are provided thoughtfully and easily in confidential, one-on-one communication, yet these voices are not always found in the academic literature

Table 1

Study Participants

Dr. Feinman - Distinguished Professor of History at a small, private liberal arts college
Dr. Goldberg - Distinguished Professor of Jewish Studies at a public research university
Dr. Stevens - Multicultural Administrator at a small, private liberal arts college
Dr. Finkelstein - Professor of Jewish Studies at an Ivy League university
Dr. Maier - Professor of Judaic Studies and History at a private, research university
Dr. Holtzman - Assistant Professor of Near Eastern Studies at an Ivy League university

*Additional comments are provided anonymously by reviewers from a peer-reviewed journal in the field of multiculturalism and social justice in the U.S.

In order to thoroughly analyze the email interviews for this qualitative study, I used a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001, 2005; McGregor, 2003). Simply stated, discourse analysis is the study and analysis of how language is used (Barton, 2002; Corona et al., 2017; Faltis, 2014; Hodges, Kuper, & Reeves, 2008; Kaya, 2015). This form of analysis is a valuable research tool in both textual and contextual research studies (Huckin, Andrus, & Clary-Lemon, 2012; James, 2018) because it provides insight into the power dynamics of social interactions. Critical discourse analysis covers subjects such as racism, power, domination, and social inequality (Huckin et al., 2012; McGregor, 2003; Van Dijk, 1993; Yigit & Tatch, 2017), and it is particularly concerned with issues of power and control and the injustice and inequity which results (Van Dijk, 1993). During the data analysis, recurring themes emerged (McClaskey, 2008). I coded the emerging themes into specific categories for later analysis and discussion. They are as follows: antisemitism (veiled or intended), the need to discuss the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and personal experiences with anti-Israeli sentiment, hostility, and frustration.

I used triangulation for general validity and trustworthiness in this research study. I did this to attempt to suspend any judgements, theories, and preconceived knowledge I may have had in order to help me see cultural phenomena in a different way (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell and Miller (2000), "Triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (p. 126). This was accomplished through my layered interview process. I also had a professor play the part of a "critical friend," and he commented on my analyses, questions, and concerns as I moved through the process of writing this qualitative study (Heath & Street, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Theoretical Lens

This research is presented through a lens of critical pedagogy. For about the past four decades, the framework of critical pedagogy has been used by critical theorists and educators in order to analyze complex political, socioeconomic, and educational issues (Orelus, 2015). It is an intricate, multifaceted framework that has had a significant impact on many academic fields, such as sociology, education, cultural studies, and philosophy (Orelus, 2015; Yigit & Tatch, 2017). There are various definitions of critical pedagogy across academic literature, and I choose to follow the precepts explained by one of the leading theorists in critical pedagogy, Peter McLaren of Chapman University (California, U.S.). He asserts that critical pedagogy:

constitutes a dialectical and dialogical process that instantiates a reciprocal exchange between teachers and students - an exchange that engages in the task of reframing, refunctioning, and reposing the question of understanding itself, bringing into dialectical relief the structural and relational dimensions of knowledge and its hydra-headed power/knowledge dimensions. (2001, p. 121)

By questioning the world in which we live - otherwise known as "reading the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1998) - new understandings of complex societal issues emerge through dialogue and critical analysis.

It is believed that through education and the exchange of ideas between teacher and student, youth can begin to question the world in which they live in order to form a more egalitarian society. Critical

pedagogy is centered in the process of critical thought, and it is based upon the vital and productive use of critique (McLaren, 2005). Ultimately, “[critical pedagogy] is a powerful philosophical tradition that has attempted to bring the most formidable political and philosophical principles of a radical social theory to bear upon the education of oppressed communities” (Darder, 2015, p. xiii). In this study, critical pedagogy supports the critical assessment of Zionism and the tenuous relationship of Jews and multicultural thought in the university setting.

In addition, critical pedagogy addresses improvement of societal inequalities, inequity and exploitation of power, the repression of the masses by those in power (i.e., based on wealth and race), and how the omission of those particular groups in education can be addressed in schools (Darder, Mayo, & Paraskeva, 2016; Keesing-Styles, 2003; Shudak, 2014). According to Aliakbari and Faraji (2011), “it can be said that [critical pedagogy] challenges any form of domination, oppression and subordination with the goal of emancipating oppressed or marginalized people” (p. 77). Exploring the issues of power and oppression is essential in this study due to the continuing Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, critical pedagogy assists in answering the question of whether Jewish people continue to be oppressed and/or marginalized in U.S. society due to the actions of Israel.

Positionality

Positionality is important in a study when personal thoughts and feelings play a pivotal role. According to Maher and Tetreault (1993), positionality refers to the:

gender, race, class, and other aspects of our identities [that] are markers of relational *positions* rather than essential qualities. Knowledge is valid when it includes an acknowledgement of the knower’s specific position in any context, because changing contextual and relational factors are crucial for defining identities and our knowledge in any given situation. (p. 118)

As a multiculturalist and professor of a DME course, I need to position myself within both the smaller local community and the larger Jewish community in the U.S. It is important that I clearly see the biases I might have in addressing my thoughts about antisemitism and multicultural education in order to write from a position of honesty and openness. In brief, I am a Jewish, White, heterosexual male of Polish-Russian descent in his mid-forties. I was raised in southern New York state, about 30 miles north of Manhattan. In southern NY, considered to be a Jewish hub, I was constantly surrounded by practicing and non-practicing Jews (Rubin, 2013). Although I identify as being an agnostic Jew, I feel quite strongly about being Jewish and what that means to me personally due to my heritage and familial history. I have written a great deal about Jewish issues in multicultural education in recent years; it has been a difficult, personal exploration for me and how I see where I fit in U.S. society. This article was written to help explore my own conflicting emotions regarding my support for a Jewish state yet strong feelings about the treatment of the Palestinian people. Being a university professor living and working in the deep South, I am constantly reminded of my minority status in U.S. society due to my religious background, and I also see my dominant status based on my gender, race, class, ability, and primary language (English).

Zionism and the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict

For the purpose of this study, it is important to define Zionism as well as briefly explain the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Zionism can be defined simply as the return of the Jewish people to “the promised land” in Palestine (Ashkar, 2015, p. 67). This process resulted in the forming of the state of Israel in 1948. Although in no way an exhaustive explanation of the struggle between Israelis and Palestinians, the conflict can be explained as a battle for contested land (i.e., the West Bank and Gaza Strip) (Rosenblum, 2007; Salem, 2014) as well as a struggle due to Israel’s lack of recognition of Palestinian statehood (Friedman, 2016). In addition, according to Nicholson (2016), “Living with conflict has been a core reality for more than 60 years since the State of Israel was declared on land that was contested by the indigenous mostly non-Jewish population, 80% of whom were displaced elsewhere” (p. 5). As is evident, the issues surrounding Israeli-Palestinian tension have a long and checkered history. The point for this analysis is that there is a deeply rooted conflict between the two groups of peoples. This conflict affects how Israelis, and Jews as a whole, are represented in DME courses and treated on university campuses across the U.S. (Antisemitic Activity, 2015).

Results

The seed for this research was planted during the submission process for an article I authored titled “Whiter shade of pale: Making the case for Jewish presence in the multicultural classroom.” It focuses on

Whiteness in regard to Jewish people in the United States, reasons why Jews are not often discussed in university multicultural and social justice courses, and whether Jews even deserve to be covered in said multicultural courses alongside people of color. The piece had been rejected six times from various multicultural, peer-reviewed journals, based in both the U.S. and the U.K. I found that each time the feedback was completely nondescript and blunt in its rejection. Due to the relative ease and success of prior publications, I became curious as to the rationale for the large amount of rejections that this manuscript had received (i.e., my critical thought process had not changed nor had my writing style and execution). I began to wonder if the topic of antisemitism was just not an issue that these journals found valuable or desirous. My theory became solidified upon receiving rejection number seven.

The detailed feedback from a peer-reviewed, U.S. multicultural journal were both concerning and cause for reflection. As seen from the words of the two reviewers, both considered by the journal to be “experts in multicultural studies” as well as performing “extensive teaching and research within the field of Jewish Studies (Reviewer 1)” (Journal Associate Editor, personal communication, August 3, 2016), the predominant concern with the piece was that I did not address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in my analysis of university multiculturalism courses. According to Reviewer 1:

Anyone who teaches on a US college campus today knows that Israeli policies towards the Palestinian people are a major social justice and human rights issue, and a flash point for debates over anti-Semitism. Critics of Israel see the Jewish people as a hegemonic, privileged colonizing power co-extensive with other white imperialist empires. Defenders of Israel see criticisms of its policies as just more anti-Semitism. I don't know how you introduce anti-Semitism and Judaism into today's multicultural curriculum without taking up these issues. The author's failure to address this subject and to outline how s/he would deal with it disqualifies the essay from publication in its current form. (manuscript reviewer for peer-reviewed U.S. journal, July 2016)

Reviewer 2 had a quite similar take on the issue:

I would encourage the author to delve deeper into the implications of the role of Zionist racism in modern US Jewish identity. That is, approximately 40% of Jewish Americans identify in some way with the state of Israel, and this is an important and contentious issue when it comes to Islamophobia, and Zionist racism, especially on college campuses with the rise of Islamophobic Zionist organizations. (manuscript reviewer for peer-reviewed U.S. journal, July 2016)

This unified response regarding the lack of discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was concerning for several reasons. First of all, it is debatable whether one has to address Palestine in an article critiquing the notion of Jewish Whiteness and the lack of Jewish representation in the American university DME classroom. In a global discussion of Israel, antisemitism, and Zionism, the treatment of Palestinians is an important topic to discuss as a social justice issue, yet the need to discuss it in relation to American Jews is arguable. There are those who believe that “Claims that criticism of Israel stems from anti-Semitism not only relieves Israelis of responsibility for anything except their own protection, but can also be used to justify repression and delegitimize critics, even Jewish ones” (Scham, 2015, p. 114). It is certainly understandable that a claim of antisemitism can be used as a method to deflect criticism, and the Reviewers' grounds for rejecting the manuscript end up supporting the manuscript's initial thesis (i.e., the lack of antisemitic analysis in university multiculturalism courses). Consequently, I reached out to experts in the areas of antisemitism, history, and multiculturalism to provide further insight into my beliefs regarding the manuscript's rejection and the notion that Jews cannot be discussed in the context of U.S. multiculturalism without addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I first approached Dr. Goldberg, a Distinguished Professor of Jewish Studies, in order to get his opinion about the Reviewers' comments and the issues they address. He posited that the “reviewer's rhetoric” (Reviewer 1) did sound antisemitic because “when someone can't talk about the Jews outside of Israel without bringing [the Israeli-Palestinian] issue in, you know you're dealing with anti-Semitism.” Therefore, according to Dr. Goldberg, the inability to separate U.S. antisemitism from the treatment of Palestinians in a Middle Eastern country is troublesome, indeed. In support of the Reviewers' comments, Dr. Goldberg did assert that when discussing “Jews within the American multicultural context [one] can't ignore Israel altogether, although certainly not in the polemical sense intended by [Reviewer 1]” (personal communication,

August 5, 2016). In other words, Dr. Goldberg did believe that it is important to address Israel since it is tied to the Jewish American experience yet not in the way asserted by Reviewer 1.

Dr. Stevens, a multicultural administrator at a small, private liberal arts college, took issue with the comments from both Reviewers and found them to be quite insulting. He stated that, “I have come across this issue so often and really struggle with it. It is really frustrating that Jews are forced by many to have to think about the actions of Israel, no matter their relationship to the country” (Dr. Stevens, personal communication, August 3, 2016). Dr. Stevens did not feel that the Reviewers were insinuating that Jews deserve to be the victims of antisemitism due to Israel’s actions. Unfortunately, he had met university colleagues personally who did hold those racist thoughts, though. Dr. Stevens understands and agrees that, when addressing U.S. Jews and antisemitism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an important issue to identify and explain how the multiculturalist might address it in the classroom. Unfortunately, it is still quite frustrating that we, as Jewish scholars, feel bound to do so.

When approached about participating in this study, Dr. Feinman, a Distinguished Professor of History, felt compelled to contribute. She explained how she was concerned about the Reviewers’ possible political agenda. Dr. Feinman asserted that:

It’s one thing to raise a question about why you don’t address the Palestine question. Fair enough, although you will have an answer. But the tone, vehemence, etc. makes the whole thing much more suspicious. Even if you agree (as I actually do) that many Israeli actions against Palestinians are reprehensible, it has nothing to do with Jews as a group. It’s exactly this elision in the comments between Israel and Jews that is anti-Semitic. I don’t label all Catholics as child molesters. (personal communication, August 10, 2016)

This is a key point to the argument that some multiculturalists appear to ignore the discussion of antisemitism in university multiculturalism and diversity courses – that the perceived negative behavior of Israeli Jews speaks to the behavior of *all* Jews. By doing so, antisemitism is ignored due to the behavior of the Jewish peoples, as if they are one, unified collective. As stated earlier, there are many scholars who believe that it is perfectly acceptable to be critical of Israel, yet it is not acceptable to do so with an entire group of people, such as the Jews.

When asked her thoughts about the topic of multiculturalism and how perception is effected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Dr. Finkelstein, a professor of Jewish Studies, had strong feelings. She stated that she was upset because the Reviewers’ “obnoxious rejection” appears to “reflect a pretty widespread attitude. Many of my colleagues would agree with the sentiments, even if they would not express them openly” (personal communication, August 12, 2016). Herein lies my concern – that there are negative and pervasive feeling about Jews, Israel, and antisemitism, yet they are rarely spoken out in the open. I have found that having people speak up, honestly, about their critical beliefs of Jewish people, even anonymously, is difficult to come by.

Dr. Maier, a Professor of Judaic Studies and History, provided further insight into the discussion. She offered a detailed rationale as to why Jews and antisemitism might be missing from the multicultural education discussion. Dr. Maier theorized that:

[Multiculturalists] might rightly say (although I do not agree with the premise) that persecution of the Jews was a matter of the past, it happened and is over. Jews now control a state, with a powerful army, a nuclear bomb, etc., and they cannot claim persecution. Therefore, they do not fit the [requirements] to be included in the multicultural category. They have achieved and are not outsiders, which is essentially what multiculturalism says is the issue with African Americans, Latinos, etc. (personal communication August 14, 2016)

Even though Jews comprise only 2.2% of the total U.S. population (Lipka, 2013), they are somehow not seen as a minority group needing acknowledgement in multicultural/ethnic studies discourse. In reality, “No one could argue that the trauma of past [Jewish] oppression continues to reverberate and that no matter how much clout, power, and ‘insiderness’ Jews have, they carry the legacy of trauma with them” (Dr. Maier, personal communication August 14, 2016).

Discussion

Manuscripts can be rejected from academic journals for a plethora of reasons. The issue here is not the rejection itself, but rather, why the manuscript was rejected from several multicultural and ethnic studies journals and what deeper meaning this hold for me, as both a Jewish scholar and as a multiculturalist. The Reviewers' critique of the manuscript solidified a suspicion I had held about the discussion of antisemitism in the university multicultural classroom, even though it is not addressed in academic literature. Based on the thoughts of several prominent scholars across the U.S., the Reviewers' critique appeared to support the idea that antisemitism is not often covered in the multicultural classroom due to the perception of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For that reason, issues relating to Jewish peoples and antisemitism need to be discussed critically in university multicultural and ethnic studies programs.

The study of antisemitism regarding U.S. Jews, and all Jews outside of Israel, appears to be tightly connected with the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. While some may assert that the treatment of the Palestinians by Israel does not factor into antisemitism, many students and teachers see a link. Caro (2015) asserts that:

The anti-Semitism of the new millennium has new sources, such as the growth of extreme right movements represented by European populism; the persistence of a radical leftist speech with populist elements, as is shown by some Latin American cases; increase of Muslim presence in Europe and the US; and persistent economic crisis. However, all these sources use the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a propitious element to express anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, which operate in a related and indiscriminate manner, blaming Israel and the Jews for Palestine problem. (p. 291)

Dr. Holtzman, an Assistant Professor of Near Eastern Studies, echoed these sentiments. He queried:

Is [Reviewer 2] calling upon you to answer for Israeli policies vis a vis the Palestinians?...Or does s/he expect American Jewish students to do so? Is the idea that to have a legitimate place in the multicultural classroom one must (be able to) justify the actions of everyone with whom one is willingly or unwillingly associated? If so, one wonders: who exactly is left in that classroom? (personal communication, August 14, 2016).

This is a very important point because U.S. Jews cannot be held responsible to explain the position of the Israeli government in their conflict with the Palestinians. They can only speak towards their own lived experience in the U.S. and the antisemitism they may confront in their own lives. Antisemitism exists and has existed for thousands of years (Biale, 1998), and this twenty-first century rationale of ignored antisemitism (or a "new antisemitism"), due to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, is misplaced. Dr. Feinman adds that:

[The Reviewers' comments] reads more like, 'A nation of Jewish people is acting badly. That has to be addressed when we address anti-Semitism.' Maybe it's more like saying any discussion of Arab American prejudice has to take into account the horrific abuses of ISIS. Yes, maybe, but exactly in the opposite way – ISIS leads to unjustified bigotry against Arab Americans or Muslims. [Reviewer 1] seems to be saying that because ISIS is bad, anti-Arab sentiment is somehow legitimized or must be addressed in that sense. (personal communication, August 10, 2016).

In other words, Dr. Feinman asks whether U.S. Jews should be condemned due to the actions of the Israeli government. The negative actions of a particular sect does not legitimize hatred toward that group as a whole.

As stated several times in the study participants' responses, the Israeli government's behavior towards Palestinians is concerning, and to some, flat-out wrong. Israel has shown to be less than positive in its treatment of Palestinian peoples for decades as evidenced by:

the demolition of legally unrecognized Palestinian houses and villages in the Occupied Territories and pre-1967 borders; the deferral of any substantive Palestinian governmental authority over lands claimed by Israel; the denial of, or highly constricted access to, vital resources, such as water; and the denial of the ability of exiled Palestinians to return for fear they will reclaim their lands. (Rifkin, 2017, pp. 27-28)

As a response to the actions of the Israeli government, Palestinian violence, in the form of bombings and knife attacks of Jewish Israeli civilians (in what is often referred to as “lone wolf” attacks), continue at significant rates (Beaumont, 2016). As is apparent from the recent mass killing of Palestinians protesting the U.S. embassy’s move to Jerusalem (Maza, 2018), the Israeli and Palestinian struggle is as contentious as ever. This cycle of aggression has occurred for decades now, and it does not appear to be ending any time soon. Despite the horrible violence between the Palestinians and the Israelis, “People fail to remember that only two generations ago the Jews were among the most powerless and oppressed people in the world and that reality was a major reason for Zionism” (Dr. Goldberg, personal communication, August 5, 2016). It must be remembered that the Jewish state of Israel was created *as a result of* constant Jewish persecution, which continues to this day.

Conclusion

As a Jewish multiculturalist, I find myself becoming increasingly frustrated fighting for a Jewish presence in the multicultural academic community. As affirmed by some of the study participants, whether spoken out loud or behind closed doors, there is a strong belief that Jews do not need, or are not worthy, of being represented in the university multicultural/ethnic studies classroom. This needs to change.

I undertook this qualitative study due to the repeated rejection of a Jewish-themed piece I had written and the suspicions I felt due to the lack of acceptance of my assertion that Jewish people need representation in the university DME classroom. These feelings were solidified upon receiving feedback from yet another round of rejections. I believed that I was onto something – that many multiculturalists simply do not believe that Jews deserve representation as a racial/ethnic minority group due to the actions of the Israeli government. Unfortunately, there was nothing in the literature to substantiate my suspicions. Therefore, I had to begin the line of research myself. As a result, I created this qualitative case study that analyzed the thoughts and feelings of scholars in the fields of history, Middle Eastern Studies, Judaism, and multiculturalism through email interviews. A lens of critical pedagogy was used to analyze the data as it has direct connection with multicultural education. Several important themes emerged in the study: antisemitism (veiled or intended), the need to discuss the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, personal experiences with anti-Israeli sentiment, hostility, and frustration.

The data revealed that educational multiculturalists often ignore the topic of antisemitism in public and private university ethnic studies and multiculturalism courses due to the Israel-Palestinian conflict and the perceived behavior of the Israeli government. According to Caro (2015):

Anti-Semitism appears related largely, though not exclusively, with the Israeli Palestinian conflict, showing that much of the anti-Semitic incidents recorded in the last decade and a half are linked to the Palestinian cause, and specifically to the Second Intifada as well as operations carried out by Israel in the Gaza Strip. (p. 304).

Several of the study participants stated that they had been witness to negative comments regarding Jews and Israel on their own university campuses. Unfortunately, comments like these are rarely made on record, so there is little opportunity to address and explore this type of deeply hidden antisemitic belief.

The study participants also elaborated on the forced connection between Jews in the U.S. and the actions of Israel as being unfair and potentially perceived as antisemitic. As a result, even though several participants believed that the actions of Israel are unacceptable in regard to the Palestinians, they did not feel that this justifies the large-scale generalization about Jewish people in the United States.

Implications

It is imperative that all educational multiculturalists, not just in the United States, but around the globe, address their own personal beliefs of who belongs under the umbrella of multiculturalism. Antisemitism is not only an issue effecting Jews in the U.S.; this is a global concern. It has been reported that there are growing antisemitic feelings around the world, which has resulted in a lived reality of fear for many Jews (Noack, 2018). In order to advance the discussion of antisemitism on university campuses, it must be recognized that Jews are a minority group that are still in need of understanding and compassion. Unfortunately, for many Jewish scholars:

After centuries of experiencing other people not coming to our defense when we were targeted by violence and persecution, Jews have internalized the idea that there’s no hope of getting other people to stand with us. For Jews who struggle for social justice, that means we often stay quiet about anti-Jewish oppression:

We learn to fight in support of other groups without requesting the solidarity we, ourselves, need. (Rosenblum, 2007, p. 9)

Therefore, it is vital that all multiculturalists begin to stand up and address antisemitism in their university courses; simply, Jews are just too few in number to fight this battle alone.

Future Research

In the near future, I intend on executing a larger study with Jewish university professors across the United States. In this study, I intend to ascertain their beliefs regarding the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and the role they feel that Israel plays in the conflict. I will also document the professors' personal experiences with antisemitism, as well as if they have ever experienced antisemitism at the colleges and universities in which they work.

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