

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

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



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Abstract

BACKGROUND University of Haifa and the University of Maryland, Baltimore faculty developed a parallel binational, interprofessional American-Israeli course which explores social justice in the context of increasing urban, local, and global inequities.

OBJECTIVES This article describes the course's innovative approach to critically examine how social justice is framed in mixed/divided cities from different professional perspectives (social work, health, law). Participatory methods such as photo-voice, experiential learning, and theatre of the oppressed provide students with a shared language and multiple media to express and problematize their own and others' understanding of social (in)justice and to imagine social change.

FINDINGS Much learning about "self" takes place in an immersion experience with "others." Crucial conversations about "the other" and social justice can occur more easily within the intercultural context. In these conversations, students and faculty experience culture as diverse, complex, and personal.

CONCLUSIONS Students and faculty alike found the course personally and professionally transformative. Examination of social justice in Haifa and Baltimore strengthened our appreciation for the importance of context and the value of global learning to provide insights on local challenges and opportunities.

KEY WORDS global learning, interprofessional education, social justice, mixed cities, divided cities

INTRODUCTION

This paper 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 course, titled "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 United

States–Israel course based on a mutual interest in antioppressive research and practice.^{1,2} In December 2012, in his role as academic director of the University of Haifa Flagship Program for Combating Social Exclusion, Dr. Strier invited Dr. Shdaimah to speak at a daylong 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

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partnership centered on a course appealing to both leaders' commitment to interprofessional education and service to their public university–related communities. The course was also timely because it coincided with UMB's campuswide, newly developed Center for Global Education Initiatives, which provides grants and administrative support to students and faculty proposing new short-term interprofessional global educational opportunities. The support of 2 university leaders, access to grant funds for its first 3 years, and, most importantly, the strong commitment by course faculty have been key to success in testing and implementing this unique course. This support was supplemented in year 2 by a grant from the Straus Family Foundation, which defrayed costs of hosting a reciprocal program for UH students at the UMB campus.

METHODS

Theoretical Course Underpinnings. *Social justice.* Social justice is a highly disputed concept.^{3–5} 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 (ie, 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 ableism.⁶

Mixed/divided cities. A mixed city is defined as a city with a population composed of different ethnic, national, or religious groups living within a context of intergroup tension or conflict.^{7,8} Referred to by some as divided cities, they 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ In many instances, mixed/divided 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,¹¹ mixed/divided 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, or national character/identity of the city.

Mixed/divided cities tend to fluctuate between integration and segregation. Although 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.¹² 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 2 or more races.¹³ Baltimore is challenged by extreme tensions emanating from historical social inequalities in many areas such as housing, education, health, criminal justice, wealth, and income.^{14–16}

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. This unique interchange combines a local, global, and interprofessional focus on justice through community-university partnerships. Through the Haifa-Baltimore lens, UMB and UH students

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