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Creating Sociological Awareness: Public and Applied Sociology  
Terrorism and the Politics of Fear by David L. Altheide; Resistance, Repression, and Gender  
Politics in Occupied Palestine and Jordan by Frances S. Hasso; Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of  
Hasidic Rebels by Hella Winston  
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 Creating Sociological Awareness: Public and Applied Sociology
 

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**Introduction**

The following review essay focuses on three books that demonstrate how the complexity of socio-cultural issues can be broken down into specific patterns of behavior and symbols that define and give meaning to human activity, attitudes, social structures, and gender identity. Each employs variations of applied sociological research methods combined with an approach that has recently been labeled public sociology. Sociologists for many years have successfully balanced the application of scientific rigor with sociological theory as the foundation for exploratory investigations into a range of social problems in order to create a more informed populous and to facilitate social change; public sociologists seek to reach out to multiple publics in a manner that both facilitates an understanding of sociological subject matter and instills a sense of empowerment and awareness among members of disenfranchised groups (Klayman 2007). Despite critics' somewhat obtuse descriptions of this hybrid sociological practice, public sociology incorporates the theoretical and methodological tools of the discipline. It is not, as some would have it, a partisan unscientific enterprise (Deflem 2005).

Several well-known books by public sociologists, including Steven Fraser's (1995) *The Bell Curve Wars: Race, Intelligence and the Future of America*, Massey and Denton's (1993) *American Apartheid* and Ehrenreich's (2001) *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, influenced the popular socio-political discourse at the time of their publication. These, as well as many other works of public sociology, have tempered the neoliberal rhetoric championing cuts in welfare and other social programs, the devastating impact of urban isolation and poverty, and stereotypes of the working poor. As exemplary works of Public Sociology, these books "spoke" to people at both ends of the economic spectrum and elucidated complex social problems.

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*Terrorism and the Politics of Fear*, by **David L. Altheide**. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006. 254pp. \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 0759109192.

*Resistance, Repression, and Gender Politics in Occupied Palestine and Jordan*, by **Frances S. Hasso**. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005. 216pp. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 0815630875.

*Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels*, by **Hella Winston**. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2004. 216pp. \$23.95 paper. ISBN: 9780807036266.

**Why Public Sociology?**

The current presidential administration is an obvious example of the need for a sociology that reaches beyond the confines of academe and informs the voting public about the problems associated with social policies that are ideologically conceived, rather than those that are systematically designed and theoretically grounded. What the George W. Bush administration lacks in strategic and intellectual capacity is more than made up for by an adroit ability to create and distribute misinformation to the American public. The administration does this with pinpoint accuracy. From policies associated with the administration's domestic agenda to foreign policy, ideological propaganda is used to sway an increasingly uninformed voting public that has been characterized by researchers as largely ignorant of, and disinterested in, mainstream political issues—a phenomenon that no doubt contributes to low voter turnout in national elections (Federal Election Commission, Office of the Clerk, U.S. Census Bureau 2007). Even more shocking is the finding by political scientist Michael Delli Carpini (1996), that virtually no relationship exists between the political issues that low-knowledge voters say matter most to them and the positions of the candidates they voted for. This finding exemplifies one of the most important objectives for

the public sociology movement, which is to elucidate complex socio-political issues for consumption by multiple publics with the goal of creating a more informed voting public. The unfortunate pervasiveness of misinformation in American society and the resulting ignorance of American voters bring to mind that “the tyranny of a principal in an oligarchy is not [as] dangerous to the public welfare as the apathy of a citizen in a democracy” (Montesquieu 1750). Because purposefully misinforming American voters is a political tactic that works for mainstream political candidates, it must be countered by a public sociology that is theoretically and methodologically sound, and that effectively conveys information to a broad audience.

The three books reviewed in this essay attempt to explain the complex labyrinth of contradictions that characterize three different cultures that have participated in and/or have been affected by the protracted conflict in the Middle East among Palestinian social movement (“resistance”) organizations and Israel, and more recently, western democracies. All three tackle exceedingly complex and related, if not interdependent, subject matters. Although they vary in terms of their depth, use of empirical information, and sociological theory, they speak to broad audiences using compelling analyses, coherent prose, and detailed descriptions of socio-cultural conflict, ideology, and insularity.

David Altheide’s *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear*, a fine exposé on the perpetuation of fear among Americans by political elites, mass media, and the “military-media complex” (p. 89), appositely exposes several social institutions that purposefully misinform and manipulate public opinion. The author’s reasoned and coherent prose, lucid theoretical explanation, and well-constructed examples of the media’s influence on popular culture, politics, industry, and the formation of ideology, are both appealing and accessible. In a sense, David Altheide’s book is a basic meta-ideology for the masses; it explores the structure and manifestation of ideologies related to the social construction of fear in a way that will no doubt resonate with non-academic readers.

Altheide’s hypothesis that “fundamental changes in the mass-mediated world cannot be understood without careful consideration of culture and the symbolic construction of meanings that are produced by a few and

shared by many” (p. 8) is so well-articulated that academic audiences may find it unnecessary to read past the introduction, as most will instantly draw parallels between the theory of *Social Constructionism* and the social reality created by the media and other tools of mass communication, with particular emphasis on the subject of the sociology of knowledge. But those who are not sociologically inclined will likely be compelled to read Altheide’s explanations of how this process works in American society. Altheide states that “powerful people in the United States thought it was perfectly appropriate to invade Afghanistan and then Iraq as part of the war on terrorism after the attacks of September 11, 2001. It did not matter that there was no evidence that Iraq was involved in the attacks on the United States or that it had any weapons that could harm” (p. 2) the United States. Altheide also recounts the silly display of pseudo-patriotism when President George W. Bush, standing on the bow of the *Abraham Lincoln* pronounced that major combat operations in Iraq have ended, under the now infamous “Mission Accomplished” (p. 3) banner. Through the use of this and many other such examples, the author demonstrates how fear is used to influence electoral politics and more generally, public opinion. Altheide also describes how the process of the social construction of fear controls public opinion and behavior, entertainment format (e.g., the television show *24*), and consumerism (e.g., “Government and business propaganda emphasized common themes of spending/buying to ‘help get the country back on track’” [p. 2]), thus subjectively creating a social reality that meets political, industrial, and ideological goals.

For Altheide, fear is a state administered tool of social control that is used to moderate social behavior, public opinion, and cultural discourse. It is described throughout the book as a dialectical concept that creates ambiguity, chaos, and the perception among people that state control over almost every aspect of society is indeed necessary in order to stabilize the threats articulated by the mass media. Furthermore, fear is a semantically ambiguous concept that becomes clear only through further elaboration and specification by those in power. In the case of *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear*, a combination of the political power structure, municipal agencies, and the media are responsible for defining the reality

of the social order in ways that influence broad sociological themes. For example, “‘crime entrepreneurs,’ mainly law enforcement agencies, play a large role in getting out the message about fear of crime through the local news media” (p. 34). This, combined with the diffusion of fear through news headlines and articles prepared and disseminated by the mass media, create a distinct semantic that is, according to Altheide, tied to the economic interests of the military industrial complex, economics, and the new focus on home security. Even more striking is the convincing case Altheide makes for the significant influence of the mass media on social institutions and structures as “media logic becomes a way of seeing and interpreting social affairs. . . . But at the same time, there is a concern that media can and will distort what they present” (p. 57) using a “problem frame” (p. 61) that provides new information within a familiar context.

*Terrorism and the Politics of Fear* presents research findings that show a “clear media presence and impact on cultural symbol systems (i.e., typologies) from which societal members draw to make sense of routine and extraordinary events” (p. 64). Sometimes these cultural symbol systems (p. 64) become *indigenous typologies* that are socially constructed to provide meaning to the complexity of certain aspects of day-to-day dialogue and activities. “The interaction and shared meanings of news workers who follow the entertainment format and audience members who ‘experience’ the world through these mass-media lenses promote sufficient communication to achieve the news organization’s goals of grabbing the audience while also enabling the audience member to be ‘informed’ enough to exchange views with peers” (p. 64). When mass media depicts a breakdown of social control, “we can expect those agents (of social control) to present dramaturgical accounts of their resolve and success in order to increase the citizens’ confidence in them” (p. 65). The author’s analysis in chapter 5 (“Consuming Terrorism”) describes how the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were used to bolster public support for the state apparatus rather than a thoughtful, articulated response to the attacks. “While the military-media complex familiarized audiences with coalitions against evil, the collective response to the terror attacks was framed as a

communal patriotic experience that provided opportunities to ‘come together’ and be ‘united’” (p. 92).

*Terrorism and the Politics of Fear* is a lucid, if not detailed account of the social construction of fear and its influence on American social institutions and structures. It is unfortunate, however, that Altheide repeats these themes so many times that even the least well-informed reader may find the author’s explanations in which the social construction of knowledge has been the obvious culprit in the proliferation of misinformation, somewhat limiting. Even I began to wonder what would have happened if the media avoided any mention of terrorism after 9/11? Would Americans still be fearful of another terrorist attack? Could the attack on Afghanistan be justified on the grounds that the Taliban was harboring the leader of Al Qaeda, the group responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center? Are the United States’s ephemeral efforts to secure its airports, shipping ports, and the Internet justified on the grounds that another devastating attack *is* likely to occur? Are the more tangible realities of the failure and overall mismanagement of the Iraq war, preexisting inequities in the United States’ Middle East foreign policy and foreign aid, and the United States’ relationships with the Saudi and Israeli governments other factors that should instill fear in ordinary Americans? Indeed, there *are* other ways to explain Americans’ fear of terrorism. Fortunately, David Altheide’s book explains the most relevant source of misinformation and anxiety among Americans since September 11, 2001.

Francis S. Hasso provides insight into the often misunderstood Palestinian role in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and the intraparty tensions among organizations engaged in the Palestinian resistance movement. Her account of the development of the Palestinian political party apparatuses and the role of women and gender politics in countering patriarchal impulses and authoritarian ideologies is particularly useful as it illuminates a variety of sociological complexities that the author describes in detail using interviews and observations of the Jordanian and Occupied Palestinian Territories Democratic Fronts (DF), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and the Palestinian Federation of Women’s Action Committees (PDWAC).

But where *Resistance, Repression, and Gender Politics in Occupied Palestine and Jordan* is most useful as a work of public sociology is in its analysis of the role and influence of women in movement tactics, leadership, and political organizing, and in understanding women's gendered subjectivities within the context of severe gender inequality, poverty, and repression by their own patriarchal culture. Hasso describes women who believe in the cause of Palestinian sovereignty, willingly accept leadership positions within the resistance movement, establish women-led organizations that provide social, educational, and occupational services, and engage in dangerous militant tactics. Yet, these very same women fight an internal battle against the male-dominated network of resistance organizations in Palestine and Jordan in which they suffer myriad patriarchal indignities and the eventual demise of a once vibrant woman-led resistance movement.

Hasso also explores the historical factors that contributed to resistance movement tensions between the Palestinians and Arab States, which were largely due to the existence of two social movement frames or ideologies: pan-Arabism and Palestinian Particularism. According to Hasso, pan-Arabists view Arab and Israeli boundaries as European colonial creations that carry no historical or cultural meaning for Palestinians or Arabs, and therefore should be disavowed by all Arabs. Pan-Arabists also view the Palestinian resistance movement as one of Arab regional survival and expansion, rather than a struggle for Palestinian liberation. Alternatively, Palestinian Particularists seek to focus the struggle for liberation on Palestinian resistance and eventual liberation, rather than a regional movement that favors the liberation and eventual domination of the region by Arab states.

The author hypothesizes that the popularity of pan-Arabism eventually dissipated due in part to the widespread belief among leaders of the Palestinian resistance movement that pan-Arabists sought to expand their Arab state boundaries into Israel and the Occupied Territories rather than resist the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Hasso explains that pan-Arabist leaders were increasingly faced with reconciling support for Nasserist pan-Arabism with the desire to liberate Palestine through armed action against Israel. Unfortunately,

Hasso's discussion of this clash of ideologies does not include an historical-cultural explanation of how these competing systems of ideas emerged, including the values and norms that influenced the political attitudes and behaviors of movement leaders and members, and the existence of any variant strains of these two schools of thought. Nonetheless, excerpts from interviews with movement leaders, vivid descriptions of the Palestinian struggle and political isolation, combined with the author's extensive knowledge of the resistance movement, provides for a truly compelling read.

The book's most noteworthy contribution to the existing literature on the subject of the Palestinian resistance movement and gender politics is a detailed account of the inner machinations and political and military objectives of resistance movement organizations within the context of the rise and eventual demise of a Palestinian women's movement. The author sheds light on the use of traditional patriarchal ideology as a political tactic used by the Jordanian government to repress movement activity. As she explains, the Jordanian government assimilated Palestinian tribes using a reinforced form of patriarchal organization that, according to Hasso, had a sedative effect on men who might otherwise have resisted the regime, thus demonstrating how gender and sexuality are at the center of Palestinian politics. While male activists in the Occupied Territories thought of themselves as sons in a patriarchal system under the Israeli occupation, the Jordanian government limited mass organizing through social programming, including employment and higher education subsidies; Jordanian security services were also empowered to prohibit political activism and restrict the creation of businesses established by known members of the Palestinian resistance movement. In contrast, Palestinians in the Occupied Territories united against a foreign military occupation while Palestinian laborers and leftist university students engaged in guerilla warfare that, in essence, deemphasized the role of women and created a heightened awareness of Palestinian nationalism and Islamic tradition.

The unique circumstances of Palestinian women and their efforts to engage in the Palestinian resistance movement is relevant to a better understanding of modern social movements including the American civil rights

movement in the 1960s, the Women's Emergency Brigade during the Flint Michigan Sit-Down Strike in 1937, and the 1909 Labor Movement Strike, among dozens of other women-led social movements that achieved their objectives. Hasso's detailed descriptive analysis is thought-provoking but does not offer an explanation for the deleterious consequences of patriarchy and traditional Islamic ideology on the advancement of the Palestinian resistance movement.

Hella Winston's ethnographic study of *Hasidic Rebels* follows the lives of young men and women whose interests in secular culture led them far afoot of the "modesty" (p. 1) of their own people and who are deeply troubled by an acculturative stress that has them searching for both social solidarity and a more stimulating intellectual, social, and spiritual existence. Using a participant-observation ethnographic methodology, the author travels with, interviews, and becomes part of the lives of several Hasidic men and women as a friend, guest, and confidant of *Hasidic Rebels* who struggle with a profound compassion for their faith and an intense desire to escape from it.

The *Unchosen* begins with a lengthy introduction that describes the author's attempt to gain access into the Satmar Hasidic community in New York City. The story begins at the home of a Hasidic woman named "Suri" where the author dines with several Hasidic women and is impressed by their "warmth and openness" (p. 14). Winston connects with Suri on the basis of their mutual experience as the children of Holocaust survivors and seems pleased that her conversations with Suri and her friends result in an admission by Suri that Hasidic women "are very secretive" (p. xv) and that "there is a lot of hypocrisy here among Satmar women, and a high rate of suicide" (p. xv). The author offers no empirical evidence of higher than average suicide rates among Hasidic women, yet expounds on the subject by admitting that she has not "heard or seen any information on that" but if "it's not [true], I wonder whether this is [Suri's] way of trying to communicate something about the degree of unhappiness she, or some of the other women she may know, might have experienced" (p. xv). Rather than offer a brief empirical exploration of the prevalence of suicide among Hasidic Jews, the author simply speculates about the veracity of "Suri's" state-

ment leaving the reader unclear as to the prevalence of such maladaptive behavior among the insular Hasidim and its association with Hasidic rebelliousness.

Throughout the book, several young "Hasidic Rebels" are made into martyrs, unhappy with their way of life and likely to utter phrases such as "Hasidic craziness" (p. 52), visit *massage parlors* to have sex, and learn about other religions or the social and sexual freedoms of popular culture icons by surfing the Internet, reading magazines, and engaging in relationships with non-believers. "Yitzchak," a religious scholar and feminist who is described as a "Rock Star" within the Hasidic community, spends evenings visiting secular bookstores and socializing with non-Hasidic Jews. He resents the fact that he is unable to tell his students what he thinks about Hasidic culture and feels that he is forced to be a member of a group to which he no longer belongs. There is little difference among the many profiles of the "Hasidic Rebels" described in the "Unchosen," as "Yossi," "Dini," and "Malki," among others, are similarly frustrated, alienated, and disenfranchised by their culture's overwhelming social restrictiveness.

*Unchosen* attempts to uncover the paradox of *Hasidic Rebels* but does not attempt to understand the causes and correlates of the rebellious behavior, the reasons why some Hasidic Jews seek to disengage from their own culture while many others do not, nor the impact of role strain on the emotional well-being of the characters profiled throughout the book; any of the latter issues would have been a more coherent and sociologically compelling subject matter than the anecdotal descriptions of child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and restrictive cultural mores. As importantly, Winston's descriptions of *most* Hasidic rituals are unquestionably negative, evidencing a palpable disregard for the importance of cultural relativity in sociological research.

The *Unchosen* lacks a discussion of the *bidden* socio-cultural framework of Hasidic Jewish culture presented without idiomatic expression and the author's obvious efforts to overdramatize the plight of *Hasidic Rebels*. While the dramatic descriptions of the Hasidic lifestyle humanize the key characters in the book, there is no interest on the part of the author in describing how the entrenched,

intensely religious, complex, and articulated cultural ideology and way of life of Hasidic Jews continues to survive the encroachment of popular culture. In fact, the reader is led to believe that Hasidic Jewry is dissipating due to its antiquated lifestyle and the growing number of Hasidic Rebels seeking liberation in the secular world—two themes that have no basis in reality.

Throughout the book, the author appears to be searching for a compelling way to engage the reader by exposing what she apparently considers to be the failures of a more than 300-year-old culture, but instead offers the following admission of her own cultural ethnocentricity: “Indeed it was hard for me to reconcile [the Hasidic lifestyle] with what I had always admitted about [Judasim]—namely, its profound insights into human psychology and social life, its wisdom about how to treat others and behave in the world” (p. xix). Later the author admits that “the nature of my inquiry required that I focus most of my attention on those Hasidim who are in some way dissatisfied with their lives” (p. xxiv) and admits that she did spend time with many Hasidic people who expressed a very positive affiliation with their religious community. Unfortunately, she does not use her interviews with those who embrace their way of life to facilitate a better understanding of why some Hasidic Jews reject their culture. Indeed, the answer may lie in the author’s own ideological biases.

### Conclusion

In Patricia Hill Collins’s (2007) *Doing the Sociology That Had No Name*, the author describes the “importance of connecting scholarship to broader audiences” (p. 101). For Collins (2007), public sociology “constitutes a constellation of oppositional knowledges and practices. If American society were just and fair, if the American public were fed, clothed, housed, educated, employed, and healthy, there would be no need for public sociology” (p. 105). Despite sociology’s obvious historical connection to civic engagement, its *influence* over socio-cultural and political discourse via efforts to inform and empower the oppressed has been severely limited.

As described in this review, David Altheide’s *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear* suggests a way out of the propagandized social order through “good investigation and clear lan-

guage about the context, nature, and consequences of certain [policy] changes” (p. 220) and “investigative reports, movies and television programs that dramatize the injustice and oppression that result from this expansive [form of social] control” (p. 220). Francis O. Hasso’s *Resistance, Repression, and Gender Politics in Occupied Palestine and Jordan* provides a comprehensive view of Palestinian social movement organizations, gender identity, cultural conflict, and state-mandated oppression through which the American public can begin to view the Palestinians as something more than religious fundamentalists. Her descriptions of the modern-historical circumstances of the Palestinian resistance movement and its relationship with Israel and surrounding Arab states are clearly meant to define the Palestinian cause as one that is autonomous, plagued by both internal and external conflict, yet socially cohesive. Hella Winston’s account of Hasidic Rebels and their apparent desire for a secular life is peculiar. It is no doubt the most accessible book of the three, yet it lacks a counterfactual, and a socio-historical and theoretical explanation in which the author *could* have offered greater insight into this small, insular religious sect. In the end however, Altheide, Hasso, and Winston conclude that there are no easy answers for the disempowered, misinformed, and those highly susceptible to the propaganda of well-financed political campaigns and the United States government, which create fear, isolation, and alienation among American voters.

The three books in this review shed light on important sociological issues in a way that can educate and empower the disenfranchised with detailed, yet lucid information on very complex political, social, and cultural dynamics. In the words of Sharon Hays, “If we aren’t doing public sociology, we’re just talking to each other. To claim to study society and to say that you needn’t bother to make your work relevant or accessible to social members—well, that seems to me just plain insane” (p. 84). Public sociologists like Hays believe that sociologists should not only engage in the intellectual pursuit of knowledge through innovative approaches to theoretical analysis and sociological research methodology, they should also engage in public discourse in order to raise awareness of social injustice and inequality, and the impor-

tance of civic engagement to a functional democratic society. Though only recently labeled, public sociology is our disciplinary heritage and should remain an important part of the larger sociological community.

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