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## **Baruch Kimmerling – Some Personal Reflections**

*Dr. Michael Shalev*

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Dr. Michael Shalev is a member of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Baruch Kimmerling was a stubborn and ambitious man with a remarkable intelligence and a great hunger to play the role of *enfant terrible*. This combination of characteristics resulted in his making a huge contribution to the sociology of Israeli society, and at the same time teaching us all a lesson in the power of individuals to overcome personal hardship. I personally learned an enormous amount from his scholarly contributions and was awed and even intimidated by his heroism. While occupying neighboring offices on the new Mt Scopus campus in the early 1980s I came to know Baruch quite well. I was witness to his animated and sometimes heated discussions with the diverse group of intellectuals who used to go out of their way to see him. I observed the piles of books that his devoted Research Assistants would bring him, and the dissertation chapters that his equally devoted students would bring him. It always amazed me to see how quickly he devoured them and how quickly they were absorbed into his work. It was painful to observe how Baruch increasingly lost his mobility and health, but inspiring to see how in the process he became all the more determined to manage to write everything he had to say while there was still time. He was saved by the computer, the means by which, using one barely-controllable finger, he generated enormous quantities of scholarly work and media commentary and communicated constantly with colleagues, admirers and friends around the world.

As determined as Baruch was to be a radically dissenting voice, those around him could not help but notice how anxious he was to be recognized by his academic peers, and equally so, for his voice to be heard in the public arena. Baruch loved the role of troublemaker, but his critique of Israeli society and politics and his often radical dissent from the prevailing consensus rested on a complicated dual foundation. On the one hand he was a true stranger - the very best raw material for a critical sociologist - because of his double marginality: a new immigrant who was forever scarred by a rough transition at age 12 from Transylvania to Israel; and a severely handicapped person who was determined never to let it limit him. On the other hand, at heart Baruch was a patriot. His early work that grew out of his dissertation, which successfully positioned the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the center of Israeli sociology, retained some noticeable ideological and theoretical elements of the mainstream perspectives from which he sought liberation. In later years, although many of those who disagreed with his political views and his harsh rejection of treasured myths sought to position him as an anti-Zionist

polemicist, Baruch wanted to reform rather than eliminate Zionism. Also unexpectedly, in this post-modern age, he was firmly convinced that social scientists can and should rigorously separate their ideological and scientific selves.

Baruch gave Israeli sociologists many treasures. First and foremost was his early insight that Israeli society can only be understood by comparing it to other colonial settler societies, in terms of both similarities and differences. Second, Baruch insisted that the conflict has both shaped and been shaped by Israel's sociopolitical structure and culture. Relatedly, he argued fiercely for the centrality of the Palestinians to "Israeli society", including the Palestinians under occupation whom he memorably described as part of our "control system". Third, Baruch creatively and effectively exploited the power of universal analytical concepts to shed light on specific features of the social and political landscape of Israel. State autonomy, militarism, and multiculturalism are the three that most stand out in my own mind as being the basis for pathbreaking articles that altered our sociological self-understanding. However, the most impressive as well as ironic outcome of Baruch's relentless determination to wear glasses untinted by convention, was his insistence on explaining to "secular" Israeli Jews their deep indebtedness to the Jewish religion for having enshrined Zion – the object of their desires – in alluring mystery and conferred it with legitimacy. An early statement of that thesis, which appeared in one of his many op-ed articles in *Haaretz*, was reprinted as a paid advertisement in *Yediot* sponsored by none other than the Rav Shach! To be thus misused, and yet also thoroughly understood, by an "enemy" and to react to the resulting *balagan* by delight rather than frustration, was quintessentially and uniquely Baruch.

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## **Baruch Kimmerling as a Public Intellectual**

*Prof. Elia Zureik*

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Elia Zureik is a Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Queen's University in Canada. He was born in Israel but left as a young man for England and later Canada. A specialist in the sociology of new technology, particularly its use for surveillance, he is best known to Israeli sociologists for his classic 1979 book *The Palestinians in Israel: A Study in Internal Colonialism*, which among other things was the first scholarly work to conceptualize the Arab minority within the Green Line as "Palestinians".

As I was about to leave for my first trip to Jerusalem in 1987 after twenty-five years of absence, I received a fax from Baruch Kimmerling of the Sociology Department at the Hebrew University, whom I did not know personally, asking me to visit the Department and talk about my work, which I did. It was summer time, and 18 members of the Department showed up for the impromptu seminar. For me it was a strange encounter, for I came face-to-face with individuals whose names were familiar to me in print as a result of my

research on the Israeli-Palestinian encounter. Baruch handed me a review that he had written of my book *The Palestinians in Israel* for the journal *Megamot*. Offhand I was impressed, I must admit. Here is someone from the other side, so to speak, who had taken the time to read and write about my work. In reading the review, however, I realized that it was not an endorsement of the book, but a critical assessment of it. He quarreled less with the facts and more with the title of the book, which to him was ideological. After all, there are “Arabs” in Israel and not “Palestinians”. The latter live in the West Bank, Gaza and outside historical Palestine. He went on in the review to label the book as part of “continuation of the war.” by other means. Fifteen years later he published a book with Joel Migdal titled *Palestinians the Making of a People* (1993), which included the “Arabs in Israel”. The book was well received in its Arabic translation in Palestinian circles and was used as a textbook in teaching about Palestinian society. This false separation between Israeli Arabs and Palestinians and its implications for Israeli sociology was referred to by Baruch in an article which appeared in 2002 in the *American Journal of Sociology*.

Throughout his intellectual career, his interests and research focused mainly on the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Sociologists are not terribly known for tackling historical-national conflicts. This is an area that is usually left to international relations experts and historians. Right from the outset, Baruch turned his attention to analyzing the conflict between the two peoples. While I did not agree totally with his analysis, I found it refreshingly eclectic and theoretically sophisticated. In his monograph *Zionism and Territory: The Socioterritorial Dimensions of Zionist Policies* (1983), he showed mastery of analytical thinking and the use of conceptual frameworks from other disciplines, such as history and geography. However, if there is any colonialism in the Israeli experiment of nation building, for Baruch it was not in Israel itself but in the West Bank and Gaza following the 1967 war. His opposition to continued Israeli occupation of the West and Gaza and its treatment of the Palestinian population was clearly expressed in the numerous articles and op-ed pieces that he wrote primarily for the daily *Haaretz*. On March 27, 2001 he wrote an article for *Haaretz* in which he commented “The continuing circumstances of occupation and repression give them [the Palestinians], by any measure, the right to resist that occupation with any means at their disposal and to rise up in violence against that occupation. This is a moral right inherent to natural law and international law.” A public intellectual, Baruch championed unpopular causes with much vigour that concealed for those who do not know him personally the terrible affliction of cerebral palsy from which he suffered since childhood. In his 2003 book, *Politicide: Sharon’s War against the Palestinians*, Baruch mounted a polemical, yet research-based attack on Sharon’s policies as Prime Minister. These deadly policies against the Palestinians had a history dating back to the 1950s, but were clearly reflected in March 2002 when, following a Palestinian suicide attack in Israel that killed 29 Israelis and injured 150 others, Sharon ordered the army to embark on a sustained military operation, dubbed Operation Defensive Shield, that laid to waste the Oslo agreement and resulted in the destruction of the Palestinian Authority, much of the infrastructure, the humiliation and siege of the presidential compound used by

the late Arafat, the expansion of the system of check points, and most seriously a large military operation in the Jenin refugee camp that resulted in wide scale destruction and killings of Palestinian refugees. Baruch saw the ascendancy of the right in Israel and the eclipse of the left and the peace camp generally as a byproduct of fundamental changes taking place in Israeli society which saw the end of Ashkenazi hegemony in Israeli politics, a phenomenon he dealt with more thoroughly in *The End of Ashkenazi Hegemony* that was published in Hebrew in 2001.

There were times when Baruch did not agree with his Palestinian counterparts on matters of policy. For example, he was adamantly opposed to the campaign to boycott Israeli cultural and academic activities. As a teacher, Baruch mentored several Arab students studying sociology at the Hebrew University. As a colleague, I found in Baruch a loyal friend with whom I maintained an intellectual relationship that spanned two decades. His death after a long illness is a great loss to me personally and to the intellectual community which admired his work. But he will be a loss to the intellectual life of Israel, in which he was its public intellectual par excellence. My last correspondence from him was two months ago in which he complained about the creeping cancer, but also said that he was close to completing his autobiography.

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