

# Student Voices

## Exorcism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

*by Gal Lin, MPP '17*



'Demonization in International Politics: a Barrier to Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict' is the name of a new book by Dr. Linn Normand, which was recently presented at an event sponsored by the HLS Program on Negotiation. In her book, Dr. Normand sheds light on a largely neglected phenomenon in conflict resolution: the adverse effect of group demonization on negotiations. When one or both parties locked in a conflict attribute demonic characteristics to the other side, to what extent is negotiation and compromise even possible?

Dr. Normand documented instances of demonization in conflicts dating back to medieval times, highlighting how demonization can be used to legitimize dehumanizing tactics and violence against others. Focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, she was able to demonstrate how demonization is

particularly detrimental to negotiations efforts. Demonized portrayals of the other side were used to set norms of non-negotiation. After all, when parties refuse to "shake hands with Satan," it continues to perpetuate the idea that there is no partner for peace.

Even when the parties in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict actually arrived the negotiation table, demonization contributed to a break-down in the process. Negotiators' ZOPAs (Zone Of Possible Agreement) were constrained by an unwillingness to compromise with "the devil". Even on a personal level, negotiators refused to muster the interpersonal trust needed to make the negotiation successful.

Having personally lived through the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is one thought I cannot shake: is demonization a natural outcome of a conflict? Is it a condition of human nature? Or are there those who benefit from actively propagating demonizing views of the other side while stalling any prospect of a resolution? Ultimately in any conflict, the true barriers may not be the side that appears as a 'demon,' but in those advancing the narrative of demonization. It is these actors that may have hidden interests that benefit from sustaining the conflict; it is these actors that just might be the real obstacles to negotiating peace.