

Mira Sucharov. The International Self: Psychoanalysis and the Search for Israeli-Palestinian Peace. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005.

Scott Fitzsimmons, University of Calgary

In The International Self: Psychoanalysis and the Search for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, Mira Sucharov poses the intriguing question of what leads long-standing adversaries of unequal military power to seek peace. In doing so she confronts a puzzling and understudied phenomenon - a stronger party agreeing to seek peace with a much weaker adversary. Such a scenario played out during the Oslo peace process in 1993 between the State of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). As Sucharov explains, the Oslo process is puzzling because, unlike a traditional peace process at the end of a war, “wherein the stronger state may be motivated to terminate the fighting by prospective war spoils, for an occupier, withdrawal usually represents a net material loss” (p. 2). Sucharov seeks to explain Israel’s peace seeking behaviour by pushing past purely material explanations and taking psychic costs into account.

In the first chapter, Sucharov introduces a sociopsychanalytic model to explain foreign policy formulation and change. The model is remarkable for its use of psychological and psychoanalytical concepts and its emphasis on deep investigation of individual actors within an interpersonal context. Sucharov premises her model on the assumption that “states, being collections of individuals, share some elements of human psychology,” including self-image, which she defines as “the way a polity conceives of its specific place in the world” (p. 2). Put succinctly, the model purports that a state’s

self-image corresponds to its foreign policy actions. However, if a state's foreign policy clashes with its self-image, Sucharov argues that the citizenry of the state will experience a "cognitive dissonance" arising from the contradiction between the state's activities and its identity. State decision-makers are made aware of such a cognitive dissonance by a "mirror" that domestic and/or international actors hold up, which functions to bring to the surface unconscious counter-narratives that represent what the state fears becoming. Once cognitive dissonance has taken hold, one can anticipate that elites will undertake fundamental policy shifts to realign their state's policies with its self-image. In this way, a self-perceived "defensive" state that acts "aggressively" over time can be expected to attempt peace with even a longstanding adversary in order to restore its defensive self-image. Thus, the core proposition of the sociopschoanalytic model at the heart of The International Self is the constraining power of identity and ideas over policy and action, an emphasis familiar to constructivists and members of the English school.

Using this model, Sucharov argues that post-Cold War Israel is an example of a self-perceived "defensive" state that curbed its aggressive behaviour and sought to make peace with the PLO in order to overcome the cognitive dissonance that developed between the state's "defensive-warrior" self-image and its unconscious and more aggressive counter-narrative. Israelis saw the first five Arab-Israeli wars to be defensive operations, despite acting preventatively in 1956 and preemptively in 1967, and consequently did not experience a cognitive dissonance between their state's actions and its identity. In contrast, Sucharov argues, the 1982 Israeli-PLO war in Lebanon and the first *Intifada*, which lasted from 1987 to 1993, cast defensive-warrior Israel into the

role of aggressor – “the realization of which forced Israelis’ unconscious fears to battle with their conscious role-identity” (p. 4). Only by seeking peaceful compromise with the Palestinians were Israelis able to address these unconscious counter-narratives and overcome their cognitive dissonance by realigning their state’s policies with its self-image.

The rest of the book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter two elaborates on the theoretical framework outlined in the first chapter. In what is likely to be the most interesting chapter for political scientists, Sucharov outlines a typology of six self-images or role identities that may occur over time across the international system and across state and non-state actors. These include “passive victim,” “passive defender,” “defensive victim,” “defensive warrior,” “aggressive victim,” and “aggressive warrior.” In addition, she predicts what an actor might do after deviating from their identity and addresses the question of why states might deviate from their identity in the first place. In chapter three, she draws on popular channels of narrative dissemination, along with a discussion of five significant events that form the backbone of Israelis’ memorialized history, to sketch a picture of the “Israeli Self” and its defensive-warrior self-image. Chapter four outlines the history and doctrine of the Israeli Defence Forces, detailing what Sucharov calls its “security ethic” in the realm of defense policy; that is, the normative underpinnings of the use of force as viewed by the military. The argument here is that, like the overall role-identity of the state, the military’s security ethic has the potential to shape and constrain security policy. Chapters five and six explore Israeli’s actions in the Lebanon War and the first *Intifada*, demonstrating that these two operations challenged Israel’s self-image as a defensive warrior and helped to

precipitate an Israeli policy shift toward the Palestinians, from belligerency to peaceful compromise. Chapter seven examines the path of Israeli policy leading up to the Oslo process. Sucharov concludes in chapter eight by situating the book within the broader discipline of international relations, and by discussing what the argument says about the current crisis in the Middle East and the prospects for peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

The International Self is commendable for several reasons. First, the book offers a unique answer to a major empirical puzzle. Indeed, Sucharov demonstrates the utility of a sociopsychanalytic model for analyzing a problem within the purview of political science. As a result, The International Self makes an implicit case for greater cross-disciplinary scholarship. In addition, the book is notable for its spartan and straightforward prose, which allows Sucharov to convey complex psychoanalytical concepts in terms easily understandable by political scientists and general readers. Moreover, the book skillfully critiques the utility of a host of alternative materialist/realist and non-realist explanations for the Israeli decision to pursue peace with the PLO. Finally, the conclusions reached in The International Self reflect Sucharov's extensive primary research, which included three years of interviews during the 1990s with most of the major Oslo participants on the Israeli side and also a number of other military, cultural, and political figures. This aspect of the book is particularly satisfying given the tendency of many self-proclaimed experts on the contemporary Middle East to rely exclusively on secondary sources.

On the other hand, despite Sucharov's admirable defence of her single case study methodology, this reviewer was left concerned over the generalizability of the

sociopschoanalytic approach to international relations and its applicability to peacemaking specifically. This should be interpreted less as a criticism and more as a call to action for other scholars to follow the lead set by The International Self and test the appliance of Sucharov's model on the plethora of cases of inter- and intrastate peacemaking between adversaries of unequal strength.

Scott Fitzsimmons is a graduate of the Norman Patterson School of International Affairs (Carleton University) where he conducted research on private military companies. He is currently a PhD candidate in the University of Calgary's Department of Political Science.