Religion and Society in Israel (REL 3672/RLG5613)

Distinguish Professor Tudor Parfitt and Galit Shashoua, Ph.D.

Email: tparfitt@fiu.edu; gs112@columbia.edu

Office hours:

Prof. Parfitt by appointment

Dr. Galit Shashoua Tue. 10-11 and by appointment

Course objectives:

Three years ago, Gaza was in the news and Europe was filled with demonstrations against the Gaza blockade and war. There were many voices blaming Israel, while others thought Hamas responsible. The religious motives behind this conflict did not receive much attention in the media, but they will in this course. Now, Jerusalem is at the center of our attention, after President Trump declared it the capital of Israel and ordered the US Embassy to relocate there from Tel Aviv, despite the UN’s rejection of Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The religious roots of the conflict and the long-standing struggle for control of the “holy places” were on everybody’s minds, but went undiscussed. This course will enable students to acquire the tools to analyze the current situation and many world-wide situations like it. As some people are saying, “religion is the new politics”. Therefore, we will try to understand the importance of religion, culture and politics in the internal and external conflicts of Israeli and the wider Middle Eastern society.

This course will look at Israeli and Middle Eastern society from a variety of perspectives. Israel is an immigrant society. Like many other immigrant societies, it is heterogeneous and composed of different groups. Its diversity is based on varied dimensions: origin, religion, ethnicity, life chances, identity and many more. This class will examine Israeli society through the lens mainly of religion. It will discuss variations between different Jewish, Christian and Muslim. In order to understand those issues in current Israeli and Middle Eastern society, we will include in our study the historical events and debates that led to external conflicts and internal cleavages. However, we cannot understand religion in current Israeli and Middle Eastern society without understanding the importance of the land of Israel to the three monotheistic religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Our discussion will therefore start with explaining the status of the “holy land” past and present.
We will continue our discussion with the formative years of Israeli society. In this section we will discuss life in Palestine under the Ottoman Empire and we will focus on the Jewish “old Yishuv”. We will continue with the British Mandate and the emergence of Jewish and Arab nationalisms. In this section we will discuss the emergence of the Zionist movement and its different ideologies. We will highlight the role of religion in secular Zionism and in religious Zionism. We will continue to discuss the emergence of the state of Israel as the homeland of Jews from around the world and the importance of the “Law of Return.” In our discussion of the Law of Return we will discuss its roots and the tensions it carries for different groups in Israeli society. For the Jews it raises the question of “who is a Jew?” and the status of different Jewish groups (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and various marginal groupings) in Israel. The other friction has to do with the implications that the “Law of Return” has for non-Jewish citizens of Israel -- Muslims, Christians, Druze, Bedouin, and Circassians. We will discuss the question of being not Jewish in a Jewish state and the voices within Israeli society which demand that Israel be a state of “all its citizens” and not just a “Jewish state.” While debating these issues we will discuss the question: Can Israel be both a Jewish and a democratic state?

In the next section we will continue to discuss the role of religion in the Arab Israel conflict past and present. In order to better understand the conflict we will discuss the relationship between Islam and the Jews. This will include a discussion of the position of the Jews in the Quran, the situation of the Jewish communities during the so-called “Golden Age” in Spain to that of Jews more generally living in Muslim countries and under Muslim regimes past and present. We will discuss the role of Islam in the Palestinian national movement, its influence on different factions and its attitude toward non-Muslims. We will look closely at the conflict within the Palestinian movement between religious and secular groups. The last part of the course will discuss the relation of Islam and anti-Zionism and we will finish our discussion with Jihadism both within Palestine and more generally throughout the Muslim world - its meaning and its relation to the State of Israel.

**Grade Distribution:**

Final exam: 60%

Three Reaction papers: 30% (each 10%)

To facilitate discussion, students will write three “reaction papers” on the readings. The reaction papers should be part summary of the literature you have read and part criticism of the arguments you have read in the article. You will present your argument at class and be graded upon presentation of your argument.
Class participation (including attendance): 10%

Readings:

**Week 1: Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the land of Israel**


Recommended read the whole book; minimum read:

Prologue;

Part 1: 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 13;
Part 3: 15, 16
Part4: 17, 18, 20
Part 5: 21, 23, 26, 27
Part 7: 31, 32, 33
Part 8: 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41

**Week 2: Palestine before Zionism – Arabs, Jews and the Ottoman Empire**


Film: Pillar of Fire: Episode 1

**Week 3: The Zionist Movement and the Emergence of Jewish Israeli identity**

Http://jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/isdf/text/maor.pdf


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Film: Pillar of Fire Episode 2

**Week 4: Religion and Nationalism under British Mandate**


Film: Pillar of Fire Episode 4

**Week 5: The “Law of Return” and who is a Jew?**


**Week 6: Jewish and Democratic State?**

Smoocha S. 2002 “The Model of Ethnic Democracy: Israel as a Jewish and democratic state”. Nation and Nationalism, 8(4) 475-503


**Week 7: Islam and the Jews**


**Week 8: Islam and the Palestinian National movement**


**Week 9: Islamism and anti-Zionism**

Yitzhak Reiter (2010) “Religion as a Barrier to Compromise in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” in Yakkov Bar Siman Tov (Ed.) Barriers to Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies


**Week 10: Jihadism**

Week 11: The Israeli-Arab conflict: is it about religion? Is it about nationalism?


Anshel Pfeffer (2014) The Israel-Palestine conflict is not just about land. It’s a bitter religious war

www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/20/israel-palestine-conflict-religious-war

Week 12: Back to Jerusalem:

Week 13: Conclusion and Review