

## **Religion and Society in Israel (REL 3672/5613)**

**Distinguish Professor Tudor Parfitt**

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**Office hours:**

**Prof. Parfitt by appointment**

### **Course objectives:**

The Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023 brought Israel and its relationships with its neighbors and the role of Judaism and Islam in the ongoing conflict to public attention once again. The atrocities perpetrated against Israeli civilians apparently in the name of religion invites us to consider the role of religion in the conflict between Muslim majority countries and Israel. The uncompromising stance of the Israeli Right and the religious parties similarly invites us to look at the overlap of religion and politics in the Israeli and Middle Eastern context. Most scholars of the Middle East over the last forty years have insisted that conflicting nationalisms and in particular the steady rise of Arab nationalism provide the key to the future of the area. This was the view espoused by Edward Said around whose work an orthodoxy emerged which underplayed the role of religion in the area. Others, and notably Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami insisted that Middle Eastern identities were essentially along religious lines.

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. 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 or Islamism both within Palestine and more generally throughout the Muslim world - its meaning and its relation to the State of Israel.

### **Grade Distribution:**

Final paper: 60%

Short papers and presentations in class: 30%

Class participation (including attendance): 10%

## **Readings:**

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

Read Simon Sebag-Montefiore, (2012) Jerusalem: **The Biography** (Vintage)

Recommended read the whole book; minimum read:

Prologue;

Part 1: 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 13;

Part 3: 15, 16

Part 4: 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**

Kramer G. (2008) **A history of Palestine, from the Ottoman conquest to the foundation of the state of Israel**. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press. Ch. 1, “Names and Borders” pp. 1-2; Ch. 5, “Evolving Nationalism” pp. 101-127; Ch. 6 “Land without people” pp. 128-138; Parfitt, Tudor (1976) **The Jews in Palestine 1800-1882**, Royal Historical Society, London.

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

Maor M. (2009) The History of Zionism in M. Bard and D. Nachmias (Eds.), **Israel Studies Anthology**.

[Http://jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/isdf/text/maor.pdf](http://jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/isdf/text/maor.pdf)

Almog O. (2000) "Idealistic Euphoria" pp. 23-72 in **The Sabra: The creation of the new Jew**. Berkeley: University Of California Press.

DS.112.3 A5613 2000

Schwartz, Dov (2008) **Religious Zionism: History and Ideology**. Emunot: Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah pp. 10- 27

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

Segev T. (2000) **One Palestine Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate**. NY: Henry Holt. Pp. 127-145; 314-328; 342-359

Simon Sebag-Montefiore, (2012) *Jerusalem: The Biography* (Vintage): part 9:391-504

Rashid Khalidi (2006) **The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood**. Boston: Beacon Press. pp. 1-65

Conor Cruise O'Brien (1986) *The Siege: The Saga of Israel and Zionism* Paperback (1986) Touchstone Books.

Suggested Film: Pillar of Fire Episode 4

## **Week 5: The "Law of Return" and who is a Jew?**

Rebeca Weiner "Who is a Jew" **Jewish Virtual Library**.

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/whojew1.html>

Tudor Parfitt and Yulia Egorova (2006) **Genetics, Mass Media and Identity: A case Study of the Genetic Research on the Lemba and Bene Israel**. London: Routledge. Read: introduction, ch3, 4, 5

## **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

Ghanem A., Rouhana N., and Yiftachel O. 1998 Questioning "Ethnic Democracy": A Response to Sammy Samoocha" **Israel Studies** 3(2) 253-267

Reiter Y. 2009 "Israel and its Arab Minority" **Israel Studies Anthology**.  
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/isdf/text/reiter.html>

Charles S. Liebman 1984 *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State*, University of California Press.

## **Spring Break**

### **Week 7: Israel as a multicultural society? Schisms in Israeli society**

[https://www.israelinstitute.org/sites/default/files/II\\_Mag\\_Wtr2017\\_Web.pdf](https://www.israelinstitute.org/sites/default/files/II_Mag_Wtr2017_Web.pdf)

<https://www.pewforum.org/2016/03/08/israels-religiously-divided-society/>

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-divided-along-tribal-lines-rivlin-warns/>

### **Week 9: Islam and the Jews**

Bernard Lewis (1987) **The Jews of Islam**. NJ: Princeton University Press.

Norman Stillman (1998) **Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book**. Jewish Publication Society of America.

## **Week10: Islam and the Palestinian National movement**

Nathan J. Brown (2010) "Religion and Politics in Palestine: Debates about Islam and the Hamas-Fatah Schism" Prepared for **The Transformation of Palestine: Palestine and the Palestinians 60 Years after the 'Nakba'**," Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Berlin

[http://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/assets/boell.de/images/download\\_de/Dossier\\_Palaestine\\_Session4\\_Conference\\_Paper\\_Nathan\\_Brown\\_09032010.pdf](http://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/assets/boell.de/images/download_de/Dossier_Palaestine_Session4_Conference_Paper_Nathan_Brown_09032010.pdf)

## **Week 11: 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

[http://www.kas.de/upload/dokumente/2011/03/barriers\\_to\\_peace/chapter6.pdf](http://www.kas.de/upload/dokumente/2011/03/barriers_to_peace/chapter6.pdf)

<http://www.jiis.org/.upload/barriers.pdf>

Robert S. Wistrich (2010) **A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad**. Random House

by Beverley Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell ((2010)) **Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement**

Bernard Lewis, (2004) **The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror**, Random House.

## **Week 12: The Israeli-Arab conflict: is it about religion? Is it about nationalism?**

Khaled Diab (2015) “The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Is Not About Religion”

<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.671543?=&ts= 1515454598194>

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](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/20/israel-palestine-conflict-religious-war)

Sprinzak, Ehud. “Extremism and Violence in Israel: The Crisis of Messianic Politics.” The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 555, 1998, pp. 114–26. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049215>. Accessed 17 Oct. 2023.

Ian Black (2017) **Enemies and Neighbours: Arabs and Jews in Palestine and Israel 1917-2017** Atlantic Monthly Press.

## **Week 13: Conclusion**