

Religion and Society in Israel (REL 3672/ RLG 5937)

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Office hours: by appointment

Course objectives:

Last year, Gaza was in the news and Europe is filled with demonstrations against the Gaza blockade and the war. There are many voices blaming Israel while other seeks Hamas responsibility. The religious motives of Hamas did not receive much attention in the media, but they will in this course. Similarly we hear voices blaming “the Jews” and anti- Semitism is on the rise throughout the world, and particularly in Europe. This course will enable students to acquire tools to analyze the current situation and the many world-wide situations like it. As some people are saying ‘Religion is the new Politics’. 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%

Reaction papers: 30%

To facilitate discussion, students will write “reaction papers” on the readings. Student require writing two reaction papers over the semester. The reaction paper 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

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

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

Tudor Parfitt . (1987). **The Jews in Palestine 1800-1882** Royal Historical Society.

Film: Pillar of Fire: Episode 1

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.

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

Film: Pillar of Fire Episode 2

Week 4: Religion and Nationalism under British Mandate

Segev T. (2000) **One Palestine Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate**. NY: Henry Holt

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

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.

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>

Sa'ar Amalia 1998. "Carefully on the Margins: Christian –Palestinians in Haifa between nation and state" **American Ethnologist** 25(2): 214-239

Week 7: 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.

Week 8: 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

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

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

Week 10: Jihadism

John L. Esposito (2003) **Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam**. Oxford University Press

The Third Jihad - Radical Islam's Vision for America - (A Clarion Project Film)

Week 11:

Week 12: conclusion