

University of Florida, Fall 2019

Israeli Society

JST 3821 / SYA 4930/ POS 4931

Professor: Tamir Sorek

Time: Tuesdays 11:45-1:40 and Thursdays 12:50 – 1:40

Location: Tuesday, Turlington 2306; Thursday, Turlington 2318

Office hours: Office hours: 205 Walker Hall, Thursday, 2:00 to 3:00 or by appointment.

Description

The course introduces students to major themes in dynamics of contemporary Israeli society. It juxtaposes the different subjective points of view and motivations of the various actors involved, and focuses on the following: the tension between the definition of Israel as a Jewish state and democratic aspirations, the place of religion in defining national identity and in politics, the effects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the fragile status of the Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel, intra-Jewish ethnic divides, gender identities, struggles over collective memory, and the implications of globalization on Israeli society and culture. The course does not require any previous knowledge about Israel.



Assignments and grading:

Attendance Policy: Class attendance is mandatory. Legitimate reasons for absence include only documented medical conditions or absences pre-approved by the instructor. You cannot gain points by attending class, you can only lose points by not attending. After two unexcused absence, you will lose two percentage points from your final grade for each additional absence. If you miss six meetings or more you cannot pass the course even if your grade in other assignments are high.

On-line reading commentary (20%): Students are expected to upload to Canvas a brief but thoughtful commentary (approximately 200 words) referring to the weekly reading assignment **before class**. Remember – a commentary is not a summary. It could be in the form of a narrative, an analytical critique, or an essay illustrating the connection between a theme raised by an author and a corresponding social issue, or a comparison between the assigned text and other texts discussed in the course. Commentary will be graded twice during the semester, once on October 3rd (until this date you should submit at least five pre-class posts – 10%) at the end of the semester (from October 4th until the end of the semester you should submit at least additional five posts - 10%). Because the purpose of this assignment is to prepare students for a productive class discussion, **late submissions (after the date mentioned in syllabus for each item) will not grant any credit.**

Class participation (10%): You are expected to take an active part in the classroom. If you do not feel comfortable talking in public you can substitute it by participating in discussions on Canvas or by submitting extra reading commentaries and movie reviews.

Quizzes (28%)

Throughout the semester you will be required to take four quizzes. Each quiz will take approximately 10 minutes and its weight in the final grade is 7%.

Two movie reviews (2x5=10%): approximately 400 words analyzing two of the documentaries screened in class. A review must include your own input, beyond a simple description of the content.

Final take home exam (32%): During the last class meeting, students will receive specific instructions for a final take home exam. The exam will be in the form of an essay in which students are expected to implement the knowledge they acquired in the classroom and the reading materials. The grade will reflect the students' knowledge of the course materials, the way they implement the theoretical concepts, and the level of organization and clarity of the arguments. Students will have three days to complete the assignment.

Class schedule and reading assignments

Section 1: Dilemmas of boundaries and definitions

In the first week we will discuss the different perspectives on Zionism, both from its sympathizers and critics. In the second week we will discuss the Israeli public sphere as a battleground of competing definitions of collective identity and discourses of citizenship.

8/20 – Introduction

8/22 – Two narratives

Dowty, Alan. *The Jewish State: A Century Later*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001, pp. 34-84

Said, Edward. 1992. *The Question of Palestine*. New York: Vintage Books. pp. 56-82

8/27 - Fragmented society

Kimmerling, Baruch. 2001. *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: Society, Cultures, and Military in the Israeli State*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: California University Press, 2001. pp. 1-55.

Section 2: Religion and Nationalism

A major feature of the political and social order in the State of Israel is its definition as a “Jewish State”, a definition that creates blurred boundaries between religion, nation, and state. In this section we will discuss the various aspects of this complexity and identify the variety of conceptions among Jewish Israelis regarding the desired relationship between the two.

8/29 - Ultra Orthodox Jews and the state

Shafir, Gershon, and Yoav Peled. 2002. *Being Israeli - The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 137 – 155

9/3 - Religious Zionism

Inbari, Motti. 2012. *Messianic religious Zionism confronts Israeli territorial Compromises*, Cambridge University Press (pp. 1-11, 15-36).

Movie: Nadia's Friends

9/5 – Religionization or Seculrization?

Ben-Porat, Guy. *Between State and Synagogue: The Secularization of Contemporary Israel*. Cambridge University Press, 2013, Ch. 2 (pp. 27-59).

Peled, Yoav, and Horit Peled, Herman. *The Religionization of Israeli Society*. London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2018 (pp. 16-21).

Movie: Gevald

Section 3: Mizrahim and Ashkenazim

A major socio-political tension within Jewish Israeli society stems from the overlapping of socio-economic gaps and the continent of origin, where Jews with origins in the Middle East or North Africa suffer from inferiority in housing, education and occupation compared to Jews whose origins are in Western countries. In this week we will analyze the reasons behind this inequality, as well as its political and cultural aspects.

9/10: Background

Dowty, Alan. *The Jewish State: A Century Later*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001, pp. 143-157.

Quiz 1

9/12: Development towns

Oren Yiftachel, “Social Control, Urban Planning and Ethno-class Relations: Mizrahi Jews in Israel's ‘Development Towns’”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24 (2), 2000: 418-438.

9/17: Ethnic solidarity

Sorek, Tamir "Why did Beit-She'an let Beitar win? Ethnic solidarity, sports ethic, and national ideology," in: *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. 23, edited by Jonathan Frankel, Peter Medding, Eli Lederhendler, and Ezra Mendelsohn, Oxford University Press, 2009, 128-141.

Movie: Underdogs – a war movie

9/19: Ethnicity and music

Regev, Motti and Edwin Seroussi. *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel*. Berkeley London: University of California Press, 2004. 191-235.

Section 4: The Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel

Approximately 17 percent of Israeli citizens are Arab-Palestinians. This population consists of Palestinians who were not uprooted during the 1948 war, and received Israeli citizenship. They face diverse forms of discrimination and they hold a marginal status, in both the Israeli and Palestinian spheres.

9/24: Predicament

Ghanem, As'ad, and Nadim N. Rouhana. 2001. "Citizenship and the Parliamentary Politics of Minorities in Ethnic States: The Palestinian Citizens of Israel." *Nationalism & Ethnic Politics* 7(4)

9/26: Reading a document

"The Koenig Report: Demographic Racism in Israel." *MERIP Reports*, no. 51 (1976): 11-14.
Makdisi, Saree. *Palestine inside Out: An Everyday Occupation*. W. W. Norton, 2010.

10/3: Attitudes in polls

Smootha, Sammy, 2017, *Still Playing by the Rules*, p. 17-77

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LSOYGxn6G7qXMlo7fG4KC2-PC8Uw8jno/view>

10/8: Soccer and identity

Sorek, Tamir "Between Football and Martyrdom - the Bi-Focal Localism of a Palestinian Town in Israel," *British Journal of Sociology*, 56 (4) 2005, 635-661

Quiz 2

Movie: Sakhnin my life

Section 5: The newcomers of the 1990's and the guest workers

The massive immigration to Israel during the 1990's, mainly from the former USSR, but also from Ethiopia, is the sharpest expression of Israel still being an active immigrant settler society. This immigration has forced the local Jewish population to face basic questions regarding several aspects of their collective identity, including the Jewish identity of the state and the status of the Israeli- Hebraic culture. During the same time, Israeli economy absorbed a significant number of guest workers, who came from many countries, mainly from Romania, Thailand and the Philippines. Despite a highly restrictive and exclusionary policy, small communities of migrant workers have grown, including families with children, adding another question mark to the definition of Israel as a Jewish state.

10/10: Comparison between two waves of immigration

Smootha, Sammy. "The Mass Immigrations to Israel: A Comparison of the Failure of the Mizrahi Immigrants of the 1950s with the Success of the Russian Immigrants of the 1990s." *Journal of Israeli History* 27, no. 1: 1-27.

10/15: Ethiopian Jews in Israel

Kaplan, Steven. 2002. "Black and White, Blue and White and beyond the Pale: Ethiopian Jews and the Discourse of Colour in Israel." *Jewish Culture and History* 5(1):51-68.

10/17: Guest workers

Kemp, Adriana and Rebeca Raijman. 2003. "Christian Zionists in the Holy Land: Evangelical Churches, Labor Migrants, and the Jewish State." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 10:295-318

Section 6: The occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip

The 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip created a political reality in which a large part of the Palestinian people live under an Israeli system of control as non-citizens. In this week we will analyze the process of colonization of these territories, and the implications on Israeli society following this process.

10/22: What is the occupation?

"Conquer and Divide: The shattering of Palestinian space by Israel," B'tselem, 2019, <https://conquer-and-divide.btselem.org/map-en.html>

10/24: Mundane occupation

Makdisi, Saree. *Palestine inside Out: An Everyday Occupation*. W. W. Norton, 2010. P. 1-9; 16-23.

10/29: Movie: Arna's Children

10/31: Is Israel a democracy?

This meeting will be devoted to a major academic and political controversy. In American media, Israel is frequently referred to as 'the only democracy in the Middle East', but this definition is not universally accepted. The reading in this discusses the following: in light of the systematic discrimination of its Arab citizens and the enduring occupation of the West Bank, to what extent is it legitimate to consider Israel a democracy?

Smootha, Sammy. 2002. "The Model of Ethnic Democracy: Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State." *Nations and Nationalism* 8(4):475-503.

Yiftachel, Oren. 1999. "Ethnocracy: the politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine." *Constellations* 6(3):364-390.

Quiz 3

Section 7: Memory and Identity

Collective memory is the pillar of any collective identity, and controversies over the past are often related to contemporary disagreements about the boundaries and character of a certain collective identity. In this week we will discuss some aspects of this phenomenon in the Israeli context.

11/5: Holocaust in the education system

Resnik, Julia. 2003. "'Sites of Memory' of the Holocaust: Shaping National Memory in the Education System in Israel." *Nations and Nationalism* 9:297-317

Movie: Slaves of Memory

11/7: Memory struggles

Benvenisti, Meiron. 2002. "The Hebrew Map." Pp. 11-54 in *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

11/12: More memory struggles

Sorek, Tamir. 2008. "Cautious Commemoration: Localism, Communalism, and Nationalism in Palestinian Memorial Monuments in Israel." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50(02):337-68.

Section 9: Globalization in Israel

Israel is part of a globalizing world. Like in other countries, homogenization tendencies in patterns of consumption have provoked local reactions. The article we will read refers to the particular tension and even the synthesis between falafel and McDonald's in Israel, and their significance to the issue of national identity in Israel.

11/14: The global and the local

Ram, Uri. 2004. "Glocommodification: How the Global Consumes the Local – McDonald's in Israel." *Current Sociology*, January, Vol. 52(1): 11–31.

Gender, sexuality, and the nation

11/19: Gender and Nation

Kanaaneh, Rhoda, *Birthing the Nation: Negotiating Babies and Boundaries in the Galilee*. UC Press 2001, pp. 23-80

11/21: Gay rights in Israel

Walzer, Lee. 2000. *Between Sodom and Eden: a gay journey through today's changing Israel*, New York: Columbia University Press (Ch.1, pp. 13-57)

Conclusion

12/3 (Quiz 4)

The invention and decline of Israeliness, pp. 229 -237