

Spring 2016

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### **Religion and Culture in Modern Israel**

Israeli history is over 5,000 years old; Modern Israel is 67 years-young. Ancient and modern Israel have a lot in common: mainly religion and war. Located in the Middle East, on the Mediterranean, it is a war-ridden area then and now, both ancient and modern Israel share more wars than one can count. In this course we will focus on modern history and her-story, too. Not an easy feat if you take into consideration that there is no separation between State and Synagogue in Israel and that traditional Judaism grants a different status and roles to men and women.

There is magic in a story of people returning to their homeland after 2,000 years of exile, the Diaspora. Attracting Jews from the 4 corners of the world, reviving an ancient language and starting from scratch on an arid land, filled with history, inhabited by other people.

Nowadays there are over 8 million inhabitants in Israel: over 6 million are Jews, more than a million and a half are Arabs, most of them Muslims, some part of different Christian denominations. In the 67 years Israel exist religion stayed mainly orthodox, as it was from the very beginning with slim representations of the kind of modern Judaism you find in the US. But when it comes to culture Israel made a huge leap: literature, film, music, technology, theatre, dance, are thriving. It seems as if the constant wars and the abundance of pressures are a fertile soil for creativity.

Even when war is not on central stage, you can still perceive the sound of roaring canons or witness different forms of PTSD. You can separate the numerous Israeli wars and give them names like: "The War of Independence", "The Yom Kippur War", "Lebanon War I" or "Lebanon war II". But in reality it is one long, relentless, ongoing war.

Roaring canons have been, and still are, a rich source of inspiration for artists in general, and for writers in particular. Every generation in Israel has its writers voicing their pain and diverging opinions on the war with the Arab world, with the Palestinians, and on dealing with a vast array of internal conflicts within Israeli society.

The first Israeli generation was the so-called “Palmach Generation”, young men and women who fought for a newborn state, struggling with new identity, in a foreign land inhabited by another people, surrounded by hostile countries. Among them were immigrants and Holocaust survivors, who shook the dust off an ancient language and made it their own.

The second phase in the young nation's life was creating and inventing a new nation/system/society/culture from scratch. In order to do so the Old World Jew was ignored and even denied, a process that started with modern Zionism, and replaced by a new entity: The Israeli. The New Israeli was depicted as brave and masculine, fighting his emotions as fiercely as he fought his enemies. Women did fight alongside the men but their story was yet to be told.

The 1967 war was a turning point and in few days transformed a small intimate society into a conquering empire. The 1973 war was a painful awakening, voiced in novels, films, short stories, poems and personal testimonies.

The 1982 the First Lebanon War gave voice to women, shedding a different light on war and the heavy toll it takes. The remains of innocence were blown into pieces, taboos shattered and writing became cynical and hurting.

Both the first and the second Intifada, the Palestinian Uprising, made even the die-hard realize that a Palestinian State is unavoidable. Young writers and filmmakers voiced their anger at the injustices inflicted on Palestinians as well as at the calamity of parents burying their children.

We will discuss the influence of war on different writers and filmmakers and examine the special circumstances of writing in a revived language and country.

16 years into the 21st century, 67 years after the creation of the State of Israel it seems as if basic moral dilemmas have not been solved. They are all mirrored in books and films we will be tackling during our semester.

Some of the assignments and the subjects discussed will be:

- Pride and Prejudice: The Arab stereotype in Israeli literature. Compare early writings to later ones.
- What is religion's role in the Jewish State?
- Israel's Identity Crisis: the New Israeli versus the Old Jew as reflected in the country's literature.
- The Loss of Innocence: militarism now and then, the Israeli soldier in 1948 versus the anti-heroes described by young Israeli writers nowadays.
- The toll of occupation on all sides and its influences on writings.
- The War Inside: Israel's many internal conflicts reflected in Israeli culture.
- Women voices in Israeli literature from 1948 to nowadays.
- The limitations of translation (Tradurre, tradimento = translate = "betrayal").
- Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac: fathers sending their sons to the army as expressed in Israeli's culture. How come no one asked Sara for her opinion?
- Escapist literature: ignoring the war and trying to establish the "normal" amidst the "abnormal".
- Post-Trauma after Yom Kippur war, Lebanon wars and the Intifadas.
- Is peace in sight and will it mean the end of soaring muses?
- Can Judaism survive the secularization of Israel?

### **Purposes**

1. Deepen your knowledge and understanding of Israeli religion and culture.
2. Enhance your proficiency in writing, reading and discussing topics in class.
3. Increase your self-confidence in writing and in making speeches in class.
4. Expose you to a different religion, culture, and way of life.

5. Demonstrate there are several ways to view the world around us and they are all legitimate as long as you can express it in a communicative and understandable manner.
6. Expand your tolerance to different religions, ideas and cultures.

### **Expectations**

You are expected to show up to every class, and on time. Unjustified absence and tardiness will interfere with your learning and hence affect your grade. For every unexcused absence your grade will be lowered by 5 pts.

Kindly avoid ringing cell-phones, text-messaging and eating during class.

All assignments will be presented in print, and in a timely manner.

### **Academic Honesty**

You are expected to perform your academic work honestly and fairly. Since you can choose your subject and your writing is supposed to be personal, write it on your own. The consequences of failure to meet those expectations are outlined in the current *Student Handbook*.

### **Grading**

1. Contribution in class .....	15%
2. Journals.....	10%
3. Midterm and research papers.....	20%
4. Presentations in class.....	15%
5. Written assignments .....	20%
6. Final essay.....	20%

### **Required texts**

My Promised Land Ari Shavit

Miriam Glazer *Dreaming the Actual* Contemporary Fiction and Poetry by Israeli Women Writers

### **Recommended texts**

Amos Oz *A Tale of Love and Darkness*

David Grossman *Someone to Run With*

MHL Modern Israeli Literature *Lives in Disguise Autobiographical Fiction*

Gershon Shaked, editor *Six Israeli Novellas*

**Schedule-** *with possible modifications*

Week I

Monday January 18 Introduction

Week II

Monday January 25 Diaspora and revival

Week III

Monday February 1<sup>st</sup> state or synagogue?

Week IV

Monday February 8 gaps and divisions

Week V

Monday February 15 war and religion

Week VI

Monday February 22 Midterm

Week VII

Monday February 29 Lost in translation

Week VIII

Monday March 7 spring recess

Week IX

Monday March 14 Rabbinical rule of marriages

Week X

Monday March 21 Israeli Purim

Week XI

Monday March 28 is Israel a democracy?

Week XII

Monday April 4 occupation and its toll

Week XIII

Monday April 11 women voices

Week XIV

Monday April 18 Exodus now and then

Week XV

Monday April 25

affirmations and conclusions

**Notes**

- 1) You can expect to dedicate 5-7 hours per week outside of class, reading and preparing assignments.
- 2) Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact the Academic Support Center, located in the lower level of Monocacy Hall, or by calling [610-861-1401](tel:610-861-1401). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.
- 3) The Writing Center is located in a building that is not accessible to persons with mobility impairments. If you need the services of the Writing Center, please call 610-861-1392.
- 4) Do not hesitate to address me with any kind of problem you have during class or after.
- 5) This syllabus is subject to change.