CULTURES AND CONTEXTS: MODERN ISRAEL

Prof. David Engel

This course will explore the cultural values and expressions through which residents of the modern State of Israel, established in 1948, have tried to come to grips with the manifold challenges their country has faced since its inception. The term “culture” in the course is taken to designate the set of ideas, practices, and objects through which human beings adapt to their physical and social environment. The founders of the State of Israel envisioned that the country would initiate extensive changes in the way its citizens interacted with their environment: they anticipated major modifications in their economic and political behavior, their family life, their attitudes toward their bodies, their relations with their neighbors, their religious outlook, and their view of their place in the world. They expected further that these changes would find concrete expression in literature, art, music, architecture, and intellectual life, all of which would promote their vision of how the State's population should behave.

However, for all that they looked forward to cultural change, Israel's founders did not imagine that the environment to which the new culture was supposed to help Israel's citizens adapt would itself change profoundly. In the sixty-five years of its existence Israel has had to confront many challenges, brought about, among other things, by rapid mass immigration, periodic wars, shifting geopolitical alignments, transformation of the global economy, and sweeping technological innovations. The course will analyze these farreaching changes in the context in which the new Israeli culture has functioned and investigate how that culture has responded to them.

Please note that this is a course about the culture (or more accurately, cultures) of the State of Israel, not about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That conflict constitutes only one part of the context in which Israeli cultures have evolved, and it will be considered from that perspective only. Students will not be asked to develop, express, or debate a personal position toward the conflict or toward any of the other issues of contention within Israeli society to which the course will make reference. They will be asked to understand what is and how it came to be, not to determine what should have been or ought to be.

Readings for the course are drawn from the speeches and writings of Israeli cultural and political figures, from acts of the Israeli Knesset (Parliament) and decisions of the Supreme Court, from international treaties and legal documents, from texts that the founders of Israel regarded as canonical, from the historical and contemporary Israeli press, from statements by a range of Israeli citizens, and from works of Israeli literature. Many of these texts will be distributed via NYU-Classes; they are marked in the syllabus with the symbol (C). Others, marked with the symbol (R), are found in books to be obtained from the Reserve Reading Room in Bobst Library. Still others are located in one of two anthologies: Israel in the Middle East, edited by Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz, and The Zionist Idea, edited by Arthur Hertzberg. They are labeled (IME) and (ZI) respectively, with page numbers following.

In addition to the week-to-week reading assignments listed below, students are required to read two books at their own pace during the semester: My Promised Land, by Ari Shavit, and Like Dreamers, by Yossi Klein Halevi.

The four titles listed here can be purchased at the NYU Bookstore. They are also available in Bobst Reserve.
Lectures and Readings:

I. Introduction
A. Basic Concepts
B. Film: My Land Zion

Readings:
- Verdict of the Supreme Court in the Matter of Uzi Ornan et al v. The Ministry of the Interior and the Attorney General, 2 October 2013 (C)

II. Foundations: The Idea of a “Jewish State”
A. Zionism in the Age of Nationalism
B. The National Conception of Jewish Identity and its Alternatives

Readings:
- “Proclamation of of the State of Israel” (IME, pp. 72-74)
- John Stuart Mill, “Of Nationality as Connected with Representative Government” (C)
- Lord Acton, “Nationality” (C)
- Ernest Renan, “What Is a Nation?” (C)
- Simon Dubnow, “The Doctrine of Jewish Nationalism” (C)
- Perez Smolenskin, “It is Time to Plant” (ZI, pp. 293-95)
- Eliezer ben Yehuda, “A Letter of Ben Yehuda” (ZI, pp. 160-65)
- Theodor Herzl, from *The Jewish State* (ZI, pp. 204-26)
- M. J. Berdichevski, “Wrecking and Building” (ZI, pp. 293-95)
- “Statement by the Lubavitcher Rebber on Zionism” (C)
- I. M. Bickerman, “On Zionism” (C)
- Alfred Lilienthal, “Israel's Flag is not Mine!” (C)

III. Foundations: “Old Jews” and “New Jews”
A. Negation of the Diaspora
B. The Ideal Life of Labor

Readings:
- M. J. Berdichevski, “The Question of Culture” (ZI, pp. 297-99)
- Y. H. Brenner, “Self-Criticism” (ZI, pp. 307-12)
- Ben Zion Dinur, “Seven Theses on Israel in Diaspora” (C)
- Perez Smolenskin, “Let Us Search Our Ways” (ZI, pp. 148-53)
- Manya Shohat, “The Collective” (IME, pp. 25-28)
- David ben Gurion, “The Imperatives of the Zionist Revolution” (ZI, pp. 606-19)
IV. Foundations: Between Jews and Judaism
   A. Secular Judaism
   B. Religious Zionism

Readings:
   Jacob Klatzkin, “Boundaries” (ZI, pp. 316-27)
   A. Shlonsky, “Toil” (C)
   Berl Katznelson, “Revolution and Tradition” (ZI, pp. 390-95)
   Martin Buber, “Hebrew Humanism” (ZI, pp. 453-57)
   Y. M. Pines, “Religion is the Source of Jewish Nationalism” (ZI, pp. 412-14)
   Ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel, “Angels of Peace” (in Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought, ed. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, pp. 73-76, electronic edition available at http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9781611683868)
   Meir Berlin (Bar-Ilan), “What Kind of Life Should We Create in Eretz Israel?” (ZI)

V. Foundations: Between Jews and Others
   A. Self-Reliance and International Recognition
   B. Neighbors in a New Land

Readings:
   Yitshak Gruenbaum, “The Beginning of Redemption” (C)
   League of Nations Mandate for Palestine (C)
   United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 181 (IME, pp. 61-63)
   Y. Epstein, “An Unseen Question” (C)
   N. Puchaczewski, “Obvious Questions” (C)
   Y. Tabenkin, “The Need for Defense” (C)
   D. ben Gurion, “Our Relations with the Arab Worker” (C), “On the Partition of Palestine” (C)
   V. Jabotinsky, “On the Iron Wall” (C)
   Histadrut, “Response to the Arab Riots” (C)
   Judah Magnes, “Like All the Nations” (ZI, pp. 443-49)

VI. Changing Contexts: War
   A. From Holocaust to Independence
   B. Ongoing Existential Anxieties

Readings:
   The Biltmore Program (C)
   Gideon Hausner, "The Holocaust and the Education of the Youth" (C)
Albert Hourani, “Palestine and Israel” (C)  
J. L. Talmon, “Israel and the Arabs” (C)  
Abba Eban, *Voice of Israel*, pp. 15-61, 93-122, 242-92 (R)  
Itamar Rabinovich, *The Lingering Conflict*, pp. 1-86 (R)  
Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Arab Strategies and Israel’s Response*, pp. 127-67 (R)  
Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Israel’s Fateful Hour*, pp. 194-244 (R)  

VII. Changing Contexts: Demographics and Boundaries  
A. Israelization and Palestinization of Non-Jewish Minorities  
B. Immigrants, Settlers, and the Ultraorthodox  

Readings:  
Israel First Knesset, “Debate on a Constitution” (IME, pp. 96-102)  
Israel First Knesset, “The Law of Return” (IME, pp. 102-103)  
Israel Second Knesset, “Nationality Law” (C)  
Giora Josephtal, “The Absorption of Immigrants” (IME, pp. 103-105)  
David Sitton, “A Call for Deepening the 'Mizrahi Consciousness' Among Us” (in *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought*, ed. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, pp. 214-23, electronic edition available at [http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9781611683868](http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9781611683868))  
Itamar Rabinovich, “From 'Israeli Arabs' to 'Israel's Palestinian Citizens’” (IME, pp. 183-87)  
Peace Now, “Platform” (IME, pp. 312-14)  
Yerachmiel Domb, “Neturei Karta” (C)

VIII. Changing Contexts: The Persistence of Diaspora and Tradition  
A. Creating a Jewish Hinterland  
B. Accommodating Diaspora Practices  

Readings:  
Abba Eban, *Voice of Israel*, pp. 62-82, 123-34, 165-200 (R)  
Jacob Blaustein, *The Voice of Reason* (C)  
Ben Gurion-Blaustein Agreement, 1950 (C)  
David ben Gurion, “Letter to Jacob Blaustein” (C)  
Ben Gurion-Blaustein Statement, 1961 (C)  
Aharon Meged, “The Name” (in *Israeli Stories*, ed. Joel Blocker, pp. 87-106) (R)  
Simon N. Herman, “The Yom Kippur War and Jewish Identity” (C)
IX. Changing Contexts: Economic Development and Globalization  
A. Economic Development  
B. New Cultural Influences  
Readings:  
Avraham Shlonsky, “Mr. X Speaks about his Neighborhood”  
Sasson Somekh, “Call It Dreaming” (C)  
Emmanuel Marx, “The Development Town” (IME, pp. 158-64)  
Lea Ben-Dor, “The Black Panthers” (IME, pp. 234-37)  
Motti Ashkenazi, “The Protest Movements in the Aftermath of the Yom Kippur War” (IME, pp. 284-86)  
Hanna Herzog, “Israel's Road to Feminism” (IME, pp. 287-96)  
Eliezer Livneh, “Values and Society in Israel” (C)  

X. The Contemporary Scene: The Political Debate  
A. Foreign Policy Perspectives  
B. A Jewish and a Democratic State  
Readings:  
Itamar Rabinovich, The Lingering Conflict, pp. 205-75 (R)  
Israel Twelfth Knesset, “Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty” (C)  
Israel Thirteenth Knesset, “Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation” (C)  
Oren Yiftachel, Ethnocracy, pp. pp. 84-100, 259-94 (R)  
Gadi Taub, The Settlers, pp. 167-87 (R)  
Ruth Gavison, “A Jewish and Democratic State” (C)  

XI. The Contemporary Scene: Historical Consciousness  
A. Changing Perspectives on Zionism  
B. The History Wars in the Schools  
Readings:  
Benny Morris, “The New Historiography: Israel Confronts Its Past” (C)  
Uri Ram, “Zionist Historiography and the Invention of Modern Jewish Nationhood” (C)  
Shlomo Sand, The Words and the Land, pp. 7-23, 45-98 (C)  
Yoram Hazony, The Jewish State, pp. 3-73 (R)  
Israel Bartal, “What's Left of the Onion?” (C)  
"Selections from an Israeli High School History Textbook, 1960" (C)  
Eyal Naveh and Esther Yogev, "Histories" (C)  

XII. The Contemporary Scene: Identity and Cultural Orientation  
A. West vs. East  
B. Television Episodes from the Series Arab Labor  
Readings:  
Azmi Bishara, “Arab Citizens of Palestine: Little to Celebrate” (IME, pp. 467-68)  
Nissan Shor, “I'm a Dirty Russian” (C)
Haaretz (Editorial), “A Defeat for Israeli Identity” (C)
Responses to Haaretz Editorial (C)
A. B. Yehoshua, “Who Is An Israeli?” (C)
Dmitry Shumsky, “Those Whom A. B. Yehoshua Forgot” (C)
Yitzhak Laor, The Myths of Israeli Zionism, pp. 1-13 (C)
David Ohana, Origins of Israeli Mythology, pp. 182-225 (C)

XIII. The Contemporary Scene: Nationalism and Religion
   A. The Culture Wars
   B. Film: My Brother

   Readings:
   Tom Segev, Elvis in Jerusalem, pp. 49-112 (R)
   Meimad, “Position Papers” (IME, pp. 442-46)
   Shlomo Avineri, “The Zionist Legacy and the Future of Israel” (C)
   Gadi Taub, The Settlers pp. 1-22, 99-165 (R)
   Moshe Garelik, "Who Are We Really?" (C)
   Tamar El-Or, "The Lessons of an Intercultural Encounter" (C)

XIV. Assessment

   Readings:
   Itamar Rabinovich, The Lingering Conflict, pp. 276-81
   Anita Shapira, “An Interim Summary” (C)
   Ari Shavit, "Down the Tubes" (C)

Course Requirements:

Students will write four directed papers, each 1,500-2,000 words in length, in response to prompts distributed via NYU-Classes, according to the following schedule:

   Paper 1 — prompt date: 28 January; due date: 6 February
   Paper 2 — prompt date: 11 February; due date: 6 March
   Paper 3 — prompt date: 11 March; due date: 10 April
   Paper 4 — prompt date: 11 April; due date: 8 May

Students are required to attend a weekly recitation section, in which quizzes and additional assignments may be given.

Grading:

   Paper 1 — 10 points; Paper 2 — 20 points; Paper 3 — 25 points; Paper 4 — 25 points
   Recitation Section — 20 points