Israel from a Multi-disciplinary Perspective: Selected Issues

Sde Boker Campus

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Course Description:
Israel Studies are a multi-disciplinary practice. Intensive Academic discourse on Israel is been conducted involving various disciplines: History, Sociology, Political science, Philosophy, Cultural Studies, Geography, literature and more. The course will explore this multi-disciplinary character of the academic discourse on Israel by focusing on four lines of debate: understanding Israel as either a national phenomenon or a colonialist one; idea and power in the history of the Zionist movement, the pre-state Yishuv and Israel; the 'oriental question' in Israel's first decade; Israel's self definition as both Jewish and democratic republic. These debates will be addressed by general lectures and by reading and presenting selective texts.

Course Objectives:
The course is an introductory one, aiming to exemplify the interrelation between the different disciplines that are used within the field of 'Israel Studies' and to provide basic understanding of the debates that will be discussed.

Course Structure:
Each course meeting will includes a lecture or a presentation of a text that will be followed by a discussion.

Total # of Credits: 4

Course Requirements
Compulsory attendance YES
Pre-requisites: NONE
Structure of Final Course Grad

1. Participation 20%
2. Final short paper 80%
100%

Course Schedule Layout:

Week 1 [November 1st]
Introduction
- The definition of disciplines by the basic questions they address or by their subject-matter
- The academic origins of 'Israel Studies': Judaic Studies; Modern Jewish history and sociology; the study of Zionism and pre-state Yishuv
- 'Israel Studies' as a multi-disciplinary academic field

Week 2-4 [November 8th, 15th, 22nd]
Zionism and Israel between nationalism and colonialism
- Negating Nationalism – liberal, Marxist, Pacifist and Religious origins
- Negating Jewish Nationalism
- The 'colonialist school' in explaining Zionism and Israel and its critique of the 'national school'
- Critique of the 'colonial school'
Readings:

Week 5-7 [November 29th, December 6th-13th]
Idea and Power in pre-state Yishuv and in early independence
- The conflict interpretation of the Zionist project
- The ideological-functional interpretation of the Zionist project
- Sovereign power as the focus of the Zionist project and ideology
- A test case: early labor Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish polity in Palestine
Readings:
Week 8-10 [December 20th-27th, January 3th]

The 'oriental question' in Israel's first decade

- Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Mizrahi – some terminological and historical remarks
- The Middle-eastern Jews and the Zionist project before 1948
- The great transfer of the Middle-eastern Jews into Israel during the 50's and the 60's
- Class and cultural relations between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews in Israel

Readings:

- Shlomo Svirski, Seeds of Inequality, Tel-Aviv: Breirot, 1995 (Hebrew).
- Shlomo Swirski, Orientals and Ashkenazim in Israel: The Ethnic Division of Labor Haifa: Machbarot Le'mechkar Ule'bikoret, 1981 (Hebrew)
- Avi Bareli, 'Mapai and the Oriental Jewish Question in the Early Years of the State', Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society n.s. 16, no.1 (Fall 2009), pp. 54-84.

Week 11-13 [January 10th, 17th, 24th]

Israel's self-definition as a Jewish and democratic state

- Nation-states and democracy – inter-dependence or inner conflict?
- Particularistic and Universalistic patterns in modern Nationalism
- The democratic character of the Zionist process of nation building – practical and ideological aspects
- Israel's national self-definition in a comparative perspective
- The concept of Mamlachtiyut – an Israeli version to democratic republicanism

Readings:

Additional recommended Bibliography