The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Major Controversies about the Character of the Israeli State and Society

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The aim of this course is to provide advanced students with a comprehensive understanding of the major trends in contemporary Israeli society, by presenting and representing the major controversies among scholars of different approaches, paradigms and disciplines (sociology, political science, law, cultural studies, etc). The course will be conducted using the dialogic technique; namely, the students will be required as homework to study professional contrasting texts dealing with specific issue and to discuses them critically in the classroom, preferably using comparative perspectives.

Basic readers of the course:

I.   Alan Dowty, *The Jewish State: A Century Later*. Berkeley and Los-Angeles: University of California Press, 1998.

II.   Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society and the Military*. Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

1.   The Israeli Exceptionalism?:

The introductory class deals with the question of whether Israeli society and its process of nation building represent a unique historical case and how to classify Jewish nationalism vs. other invented or re-invented ethnicisms and nationalisms. In addition to the texts, the basic approaches of Anthony Smith, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbame, and Benedic Anderson will also be discussed.

Yehezkel Dror, "On the Uniqueness of Israel: Multiple Readings," in Michael N. Barnett (ed.) *Israel in Comparative Perspectives: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom* (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), 245-261.

Gershon Shafir, (1996) "Zionism and Colonialism: A Comparative Perspective," in M.N. Barnett (ed.), *Israel in Comparative Perspectives: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom.* Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 227-244.

2. The Controversy over the1948 War:

Most of the bitter historiographical controversy between the so-called "new historians" and the "established historians" is over the various versions of how and why the 1948 war was conducted and what caused the uprooting of most of the Palestinians from the expanded territory of the Jewish state.

Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988

Yoav Gelber, *Palestine 1948: War Escape and Emergence of the Palestinian Refuge Problem*. Brighthon: Suxessex Academic Press. (Chapter One).

Optional:

Baruch Kimmerling, "The Social Construction of Israel's 'National Security'," in: S. Cohen (ed.) *Democracies and their Armed Forces towards the 21st Century: Israel in Comparative* Context. London: Frank Cass, 2000, pp. 215-253.

3. <u>From a Community to a Sovereign State: Continuity or a New Entity?</u>

The conventional Israeli historiography and sociography considered the so-called "Yishuv society" (the Jewish community in the British Mandatory state) as a "complete state" since about 1939. For this point of view, the establishment of the state (namely sovereignty) is regarded just as the formalization of an establish fact. The other "school" argues for a major conceptual and political difference between a community and a state on every level of analysis. Moreover, behind the "continuity" approach lies the hidden wish to freeze the dominant political, social, and cultural positions of the veteran Israelis.

Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak*, Origins of the Israeli Polity: Palestine under the Mandate*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. Pp.187-213.

Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society and the Military*. Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001 (Chapter 2).

Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003, Chapter 6.

4. <u>The Creation of Israeli Master Narrative: Historiography or Mythmaking?</u>

Together with the establishment of the state (as an institution), there occurred a reshaping and reinvention of a local identity, civil religion and nationalism. It was a mixture of religious and secular symbols and myths, synthesized from history, collective memory, archeology and religious writings. The major controversies of the recent decade were about the necessity and the specific contents of these myths.

Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 12-36, 48-59.

Baruch Kimmerling, "Academic History Caught in the Cross Fire: The Case of Israeli-Jewish Historiography," *History and Memory*, 1995, 7, 4: 41-65.

5. Were the Oriental Jews "Orientalized" and Marginalized?

The immigrants that arrived during the 50s and 60s from the Islamic lands were considered "primitives", possessing poor human capital and were the subject of profound "westernization," modernization" (including secularization") and Israelization within the framework of the melting pot ideology and its machinery. Except for some minor "subversive" protest movements, two generations of these immigrants accepted their peripheral location in the Israeli state. Only during the last decade have Oriental Jews (Mizrahim) become a significant political force, changing, at least partially, the rules of the game and enforcing a kind of multiculturalism on Israeli society. Today there is no doubt that the melting pot ideology failed, but there are fierce professional and cultural debates about the "real motives" and causes of the past policy and attempts at "social engineering" as well as what kind of social policy Israel must adopt in order to reduce the inequalities based on ethnic origins.

Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, *Troubles in Utopia: The Overburdened Polity of Israel*, Albany: University of New York Press, 1989, pp.32-36, 64-83.

Shlomo Swirski, *Israel: The Oriental Majority.* London: Zed Books, 1989, pp.

Optional:

Ela Shohat,"The Narrative of the Nation and the Discourse of Modernization: the Case of the Mizrahim." *Critique*, 1997, Spring:3-18.

6.   Democracy or Ethnocracy: Is the Arab Minority the litmus test for the Character of the Israeli Regime?

Israel defines itself as "Jewish and Democratic". Some researcher and thinkers argued that it is a contradiction in terms for a state to call itself democratic when its Arab citizens, who are nearly 20% of the population, are defined in its constitution as having fewer rights than the Jewish majority. Is this just a minor "imperfection" of the Israeli democracy or complete and unacceptable deviance from the basics of a democratic regime?

Oren Yiftachel, "Israeli Society and Jewish-Palestinian Reconciliation: 'Ethnocracy' and Its Territorial Contradictions." *Middle East Journal*, 1997, 51(4):505-519.

Sammy Smooha, "Minority Status in an Ethnic Democracy: the Status of the Arab Minority in Israel." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 13, 3, 389–412 .

Optional:

Ian Lustick, *Arabs in a Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980, Chapters 1-2.

7. Between Nationalism and Religion: What is Judaism in a Jewish State Context?

As was mentioned during previous meetings, religion and nationalism are intermingled in Zionist ideology and practices. However, the Jewish religion is open to very different interpretations, which not only causes splits and struggles among various religious streams and between secular and religious factions, but also leads to crucial divergences among Israeli scholars about definitions of (local) Zionism or the Israeli nationalism vs. Jewish nationalism.

Menachem Friedman, "The State as a Theological Dilemma," in B. Kimmerling (ed.), *The Israeli-state and Society: Boundaries and Frontiers*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1989, pp. 165-215.

Gideon Aran,"From Religious Zionism to Zionist Religion: The Roots of Gush Emunim", in P.Y. Medding (ed.) *The Challange of Modernity and Jewish Orthodoxy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986 , 2:116-143.

Optional:

Baruch Kimmerling, "Between Hegemony and Dormant *Kulturkampf* in Israel," *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 4, Nos. 3 –4, pp. 49-72.

Charles S. Liebman, and Elihu Katz, *The Jewishness of Israelis: Responses to Guttman Report*. Albany: New York State University Press, 1997, *passim*.

8. Women in a Patriarchal Society: Between Oppression and Equality:

The Israeli society (ruled from the beginning by socialist streams) was regarded from the start as an egalitarian society from gender perspective. However, a closer historical and sociological analysis shows that from the beginning (even in the communal settlements) men and women were never truly equal. In addition to the usual causes of gender inequality, three major factors contributed to the intensification of the Israeli patriarchy: (a) the protracted Jewish-Arab conflict and the periodic wars and armed conflicts which contributed to the development of a male-dominated culture; (b) The authority to determine personal status issues (marriage, divorce, burial, etc.) was transferred by the state to the jurisdiction of religious courts that make their decisions according the patriarchal, orthodox *halachic* (or *shariyya*) codex; (c) a considerable portion of Jewish (as well Arab) families perceive themselves as followers of "traditional" or religious, belief systems that partially or completely exclude women from the public spheres. By the way, this is one major reason that "reformist" religious movements are unacceptable in Israel. The major controversies are whether the Jewishness of the state demands making women second-class citizens (as stated by the newly emerging Israeli feminist movements), as well the Israeli version of the debate between liberal and radical feminism.

Nitza Berkovitch, "Motherhood as a National Mission: The Construction of the Womanhood in the Legal Discourse of Israel," *Women's Studies International*

Forum, 1997, 20, 5/6:605-619.

Dapfna N. Izraeli, "Paradoxes of Women's Service in the Israel Defense Forces," in: D. Maman, E. Ben-Ari and Z. Rozenhek (eds.) *Military, State and Society in Israel.* New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 2001, pp. 203-238.

Optional:

Frances Raday (1996) "Religion, Multiculturalism and Equality: The Israeli Case," *Israel Yearbook in Human Rights,* 25:195-8.

9. A Nation-in-arms or a Militaristic Society: The Israeli Military-Cultural Complex:

There is no disagreement that the armed forces and the military officers (either active or reserves) play a major role in Israeli society (politics, economy and culture). The controversy is about the inevitability, scope and outcomes of such a pattern of civil-military relations. Most of the mainstream social scientist perceived the heavy presence of the military in all spheres of life as a positive "role expansion," while others see it as a heavy militarization of the society, supported by various economic and ideological interest groups, that intentionally or non-intentionally contribute to the persistence of Jewish-Arab conflict.

Uri Ben-Eliezer, *The Making of Israel Militarism.* Bloomington, Indiana, 1998, pp. 1-50.

Moshe Lissak, "Epilogue: Uniqueness and Normalization in Military-Government Relations in Israel", in D. Maman, E. Ben-Ari and Z. Rozenhek (eds.) *Military, State and Society in Israel.* New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 2001, pp. 395-422.

Optional:

Baruch Kimmerling, "Patterns of Militarism in Israel," *European Journal of Sociology*, 1993, 2:1-28.

10. How Civilian is the Civil Society in Israel

From the start, the Israeli state did not encourage the creation of a civil society in Israel because of its desire to exert almost exclusive control over most areas of its citizens' lives. However, over time, thousands of non-profit associations were established, some of them gaining autonomy or independence from state intervention.

It is yet questionable if this multiplicity of associations is, at the present stage, able to forms a reasonably cohesive civil or public sphere that is able to influence the Israeli state and counter-balance some of the state activities, while filling the increasing vacuums left by the state.

Uri Ben-Eliezer, "Is Civil Society Emerging in Israel? Politics and Identity in the

New Associations," (forthcoming).

Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 213-306.

Optional:

Yael Yishai, *Land of Paradoxes: Interest Politics in Israel*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991, Chapter One.

11. Israel-Diaspora Relations: Partnership and Conflict

Several times during Jewish history, "Jewish existence" was bilocal and bifocal at the same time (for example, Babylon and Alexandria versus Judea in the ancient time). In the modern time the Jewish "centers" wandered from eastern and western Europe to North America, almost simultaneously with the creation of the Jewish national homeland in Palestine. The existence and the form of the new Jewish experience and its ethno-communal organization created a series of dilemmas for the Zionism, mainly after the establishment of the Israeli. These dilemmas and their domestic-policy options will be discussed.

Baruch Kimmerling, "Between 'Alexandria-on-Hudson' and Zion," in*: The Israeli State and Society,* B. Kimmerling (ed.), *The Israeli-state and Society: Boundaries and Frontiers*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1989.

Gabriel Sheffer, "Israel-Diaspora Relations in Comparative Perspective. in Michael N. Barnett (ed.) *Israel in Comparative Perspectives: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom* (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), 53-85.

Optional:

Jacob Neusner, *Israel in America: A Too-Comfortable Exile?* Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.

12.   Is post-Zionism Possible in Israel

The debate around the so-called "post-Zionism" can be divided into two different issues: (a) a non-ideologically loaded historiography and social-science researching the "Israeli realty"; (b) a basic change of the identity of the Israeli state, by its redefinition of "belonging" and representing the whole Jewish people to a state of its citizens. Both issues will be discussed in the class, focusing on their feasibility and normative desirability.

Yoram Hazony, *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel's Souls*. New York: Basic Books, 2000, Chap

Laurence J. Silberstein, "Postzionism: The Academic Debates " In Postzionisim Debates: knowledge and power in Israel Culture (New York and London: Routledge). 89-126.

13.   Concluding Discussions

Open debate: What should be changed, added or dropped from a similar course next time when will be given?