Content

For a sociologist, Israeli society is a fascinating social laboratory that "thrives on conflict" between modernity and Jewish legacies, secular and religious lifestyles, as well as multiple ethnic traditions. In no other domain do these clashes come to the fore as forcefully as in family processes and gender relations. This domain is morally charged and crucially important for most societies, but even more so for a small country still striving to survive in a hostile milieu of the Middle East. This course will help the students to understand the complex dilemmas surrounding marriage and divorce (religious vs. civil definitions), alternative family forms, childbearing, parenting, and new reproductive technologies, the so-called demographic contest between the Jewish and Palestinian populations, and the evolution of gender relations in the light of all these complexities.

Format, assignments, and grading

The course will merge lecturing and interactive forms of class work, such as student presentations with subsequent discussion. The mid-term assessment will draw on class presentations based on readings (both within and beyond the syllabus) and/or annotated bibliography for those unwilling to present.

The final grade will be based on the mid-term assignment (30%) plus the 8-10 pp. paper (60%) to be submitted at the last class meeting. The students should consult the professor about the topics of their papers. Attendance and readiness to participate in discussions will contribute another 10% to the final grade.

Our interactions and readings will be largely in English, with optional literature items in Hebrew and a possibility of Hebrew usage at all times.

Recommended texts:


**Recommended articles:**


**Key Topics**

**Weeks 1, 2**  
**Israeli society between tradition and modernity.**  
Why are gender and family issues at the core of Israel’s political arena and social dynamics?

**Readings:**  
Halperin-Kaddari, Part I. The Legal State.

Fucks, 2005 - chapters by Hanna Herzog "Homefront and Battlefront…" and by Nira Yuval-Davis "Bearers of the Collective…"


**Week 3**  
**Women in Israeli politics, in the military and their participation in the national Elites**

**Readings:**  
Halperin Kaddari, 2004 - Part II. Progress and the Limits of the Law. Chapters 7,8

Fucks, 2005 - chapters by Hanna Herzog " Homefront and Battlefront…", Tamar Mayer "From Zero to Hero: Masculinity in Jewish Nationalism" and Orna Sasson-Levy "Gender Performance in the Changing Military"


**Weeks 4, 5**  
**The spectrum of Israeli families: Between traditional families (Arab Hamula, Haredi family) and same-sex couples**

**Readings:**  

Fucks, 2005 – Chapter by Tamar El-Or "Paradoxes and Social Boundaries…" and Susan Sered "The Ritualized Body…"


**Week 6**  
**Legal and ethical dilemmas around Jewish marriage and divorce**

**Readings:**  
- Fuchs, 2005: Chapter by Nira Yuval-Davis "Bearers of the Collective"  

**Week 7**  
**Israeli familialism and pronatalism: Causes and implications**

**Readings:**  
- Fuchs, 2005: Nira Yuval-Davis "Bearers of the Collective"

**Weeks 8, 9**  
**A baby at any cost: New reproductive technologies in Israel**

**Readings:**  
Week 10  Demographic Contest between Jews and Arabs: Myth or Reality?


Anson and Meir, in Transaction volume, 2007

Weeks 11-12  Student presentations in class (may be either scattered over classes or concentrated during the last two sessions)