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A brief history of Israel through a few seminal intellectual and political debates

This course aims at introducing students to some of the major political debates which paved the history of the State of Israel from the days of Herzl to our contemporary interrogations. While being focused on Israeli intellectual history, the course will also shed light on the major moments in the history of Zionism and later the State of Israel. We will study how these events shaped Zionist and Israeli intellectual discourse.

1. Herzl and Ahad HaAm: Political versus Cultural Zionism

We will read Herzl's 1896 *Jewish State* with the critical answer of Ahad Ha'Am. This will give us the opportunity to define the two major figures of Zionism, Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) and Ahad Ha'Am (1856-1927). We will also describe two major features of Zionism, cultural and political Zionism. We will also consider events of extermination in Eastern Europe, as well as major challenges against civil emancipation of Jews in France and Germany (Dreyfuss affair and New Antisemitism in the German Reich).

Sources:

Ahad HaAm, "The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem" (1897). Translated from the Hebrew by Leon Simon c 1912, Jewish Publication Society of America. Online access:
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-the-jewish-state-and-jewish-problem-quot-ahad-ha-am>

Herzl Theodor, *The Jewish State*, Dover Publications (New York 1988). Translated by Sylvie d'Avigdor. Online access:
<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/25282>

On Herzl, see:

Eds. Mark H. Gelber and Vivian Liska, *Theodor Herzl: From Europe to Zion*, Max Niemeyer Verlag (Tübingen 2007)

Kornberg Jacques, *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism*, Indiana University Press (Bloomington and Indianapolis 1993)

2. The Debate Between Max Nordau (1849-1923) and Martin Buber (1878-1965) at the Fifth Zionist Congress, 1901

Herzl's understanding of Zionism as a strictly political project brought to an historical and ideological debate at the fifth Zionist Congress in 1901 between the young Martin Buber (1878-1965) and the faithful associate of Herzl, Max Nordau (1849-1923). Against Nordau's prioritization of the productivization of Jews before any cultural consideration, Buber developed in his famous speech on

“Jewish Art” the necessity of a cultural, artistic and spiritual elevation of Jews. In this seminal text of cultural Zionism, Buber unfolds the idea of a common redemption of Jews and *Eretz Israel* in the re-settling of Jews in their natural environment. For Buber, only the return of Jews to their land will create the condition for their cultural and artistic adaptation to their environment – an adaptation which was impeded in Exile and brought about Jewish cultural degeneration.

Sources:

Schmidt Gilya Gerda, *The First Buber: Youthful Zionist Writings of Martin Buber*, Syracuse University Press (Syracuse 1999) pp. 46 – 64

Nordau Max, 'Jewry of Muscle (June 1903)', in: Eds. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, Oxford University Press (Oxford and New York 2011) pp. 616 – 617.

3. The Debate Between Buber and Cohen during WWI, 1916

In 1916, in the middle of WWI, Buber’s cultural Zionist notion of national regeneration in *the Land of Israel* sets the backdrop for another debate and clash, this time with the German Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen (1842-1918). Criticizing the Zionist identification of “religion and ethnicity [*Nationalität*], Cohen attacks the Zionists claiming: “as little as there is an identity between religion and ethnicity, so there exists no identity between State and ethnicity.” Against Cohen’s articulation of ethnicity, Religions and State within the “future victorious” German Reich, Buber defends his cultural Zionist notion Jewish ethnicity as “a reality of Spirit and Ethos in History ... which... always seizes anew its own Idea and transforms it ...”

Sources:

Buber Martin, 'Concepts and Reality', in:Ed. Asher D. Biemann, *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings*, Palgrave Macmillan (New York 2002) pp. 263 – 267.

Buber Martin, *Volker / Staaten und Zion: Ein Brief An Hermann Cohen und Bemerkungen zu seiner Antwort*, R. Lowit (Berlin 1917).

4. Two conflicting visions of redemption through the Land of Israel: A. D. Gordon and Rabbi Isaac Abraham Kook

In this class, we will read two conflicting ideologues of Zionism living in Palestine in the first decades of the 20th century: on the one hand, A. D. Gordon (1856-1922), the ideologue of the kibbutz movement, and on the other hand, Rav Isaac Abraham Kook (1865-1935), the ideologue of religious Zionism. We confront their views on the redemptive role of the Land of Israel for the Jews.

Sources

Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot*. Translated by Bezalel Naor. : Jason Aronson (Northvale, N.J. 1993) pp. 89 - 95

Aaron David Gordon, *Selected Essays*. Arno Press (New York 1973) pp. 171 - 181

5. 1948: The Declaration of Independence and the federative position of Judah Leib Magnes

In this class, we will confront the 1948 *Declaration of Independence* with David Magnes' position in favor of federative solution as expressed in his 1943 article "Toward Peace in Palestine." We will also read Hannah Arendt's article "Zionism Reconsidered."

Sources

Official Translation of the *Declaration of Establishment of State of Israel, May 14 1948*, first published in the Official Gazette, No. 1 of the 5th, Iyar, 5708 (14th May, 1948). Online access at the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website:

<https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/declaration%20of%20establishment%20of%20Ostate%20of%20israel.aspx>

Magnes Judah L., 'Toward Peace in Palestine', in: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (January 1943) pp. 239 - 249.

Arendt Hannah, 'Zionism Reconsidered', in: Eds. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman, *Hannah Arendt: The Jewish Writings*, Schocken Books (New York 2007) pp. 343 – 374.

6. The Six-Day War of 1967: a messianic moment or a tragic error?

In this class, we will confront the messianic perception of the victory of 1967 by the circle of Rabbi Yehudah Zvi Kook (1891-1982, the future leader of the settler movement in the newly occupied territories) with a few articles written by the Israeli philosopher, Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903-1994) concerning the new political and religious situation created by the Six-Day War.

Sources

Kook Yehuda HaKohen, *Mizmor 19: Vision and Reality - the State of Israel Nineteen years* May 1967

Yeshayahu Leibowitz article 'The Territories' from April 1968 in his book: *Judaism, human values, and the Jewish state*, translated by Eliezer Goldman, Harvard University Press (Cambridge Mass. 1992)

Ben-Pazi Hanoach, 'R. Abraham Isaac Kook and the Opening Passage of 'The War'', in: *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* (25), 2017, pp. 256-278.

7. Benny Morris: a trajectory of a new Israeli Historian from the first Intifada to the Netanyahu period

In this last class, we will read passages from several books and articles from the great historian Benny Morris, author of the path-breaking 1989 book *The Birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, 1947-1949*. We will see how this book fitted to period of the first Intifada, and later of the Oslo agreements. We will also consider the later evolution of Benny Morris, who adopted more conservative positions after the collapse of the peace negotiations and the second Intifada in the years 2000s.

Sources

Morris Benny, *The Birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, 1947-1949*, Cambridge 2004, pp. 163-341.

Morris Benny, 'A new exodus for the Middle East?', in: *The Guardian* (3 October 2002)

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/oct/03/israel1>

Brahm, Gabriel Noah. “‘There is a clash of civilisations’: An interview with Benny Morris.” *Fathom Journal* (Autumn 2015). Online access: <http://fathomjournal.org/there-is-a-clash-of-civilisations-an-interview-with-benny-morris/>

Shavit, Ari. “Survival of the Fittest? An Interview with Benny Morris.” *Haaretz*, Jan 8, 2004 [<https://www.haaretz.com/1.5262454>]. Online access: <http://www.logosjournal.com/morris.htm>

8. Exam in class on some of the texts studied during the course.