



CET ACADEMIC
PROGRAMS

Syllabus of Record

Program: CET Prague

Course Code / Title: (PR/JWST 362) Jewish Life in Contemporary Europe

Total Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: Jewish Studies / Religious Studies, History, Sociology, Central European Studies

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites/Requirements: None

Description

The main aim of this course is to encourage debate and reflection on the relevance of the Jewish experience in and for contemporary Europe. Zygmunt Bauman famously described the Jews as “the pioneers of the postmodern condition”, whose most significant contribution to current European culture was exposing all the contradictions and ambiguities that currently shape the life of all Europeans.

Jewish diaspora is often perceived as an archetypal diaspora and Jews as a perennial minority. For millennia, European Jewish culture has represented “the other” for Europe, necessary for Europe’s self-definition. At the same time, however, in the narrower sense of Judaism, and in the broader dimension of Jewish culture, Jews were at the birth and development of the modern European cultural sphere as we know it today. This phenomenon of the dual position of the Jewish minority in relation to the majority, which is not entirely unusual for Jewish Diaspora communities, manifested itself most distinctly on the European continent.

This unique Jewish experience of ambiguous position of insider/outsider may provide valuable views on contemporary European reality and identity crises. During the course, main common denominators of contemporary Jewish life, such as an intense confrontation with the heritage of the Holocaust and unrelenting antisemitism on the one hand and on the other hand, high recognition and appreciation of traditional Jewish learning and culture by the majority of European society, will be discussed. This discussion will bring about the following questions: how does the European Jewish minority differ from other Jewish diasporas outside of Europe in the sense of belonging? Is there an emerging European Jewish identity on the backdrop of particular national identities or do European Jews nowadays rather perceive themselves as global citizens? Are members of minority groups in general, Jews in particular, the most persuaded supranational Europeans? To what extent are relations between the Jewish minority and the non-Jewish majority nowadays “normalized”? To what extent are Jews and non-Jews inclined to share a culture and politics of memory regarding World War II and the Shoah? The course will explore these questions by focusing on selected countries of Europe.

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This course is designed for Jewish Studies, Religion, History, and Sociology students as well as those interested in questions of nationalism, racial prejudice, and inter-faith relations in a European context.

Objectives

In this course students

- Gain an understanding of the complex and multifaceted Jewish experience in contemporary Europe
- Understand the interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish communities
- Learn the ways in which these various communities create a multilayered sense of “European identity”

Course Requirements

- Attendance and active participation in class is required
- Students prepare short presentations on the readings with each student responsible for introducing the readings (average 20 pages per reading per week) to the class and initiating the group discussion
- Students are also expected prepare three presentations during the semester.
- Students write a midterm test based on required reading texts.
- Students write a final paper that contextualizes contemporary Jewish life in Europe
- Students are expected to abide by CET’s Attendance Policy.

Grading

The final grade is determined as follows:

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| • Enthusiastic class participation | 30% |
| • Oral presentation on the readings | 20% |
| • Oral presentation on special subjects | 20% |
| • Oral presentation on the news | 10% |
| • Final paper | 20% |

Readings

Ben-Moshe, Danny and Segev, Zohar. Israel, the Diaspora, and Jewish Identity, Sussex Academic Press, 2007.

Ben-Rafael, Eliezer. “New Jews in Europe”. In Becoming Jewish: New Jews and Emerging Jewish Communities in a Globalized World, Parfitt, Tudor – Fisher, Netanel (eds.). Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, pp. 120-138.

Biale, David. *Power & Powerlessness in Jewish History*, Schocken 1986.

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Bodemann, Y. M. (ed.). *The New German Jewry and the European Context, The Return of the European Jewish Diaspora*, Palgrave MacMillan 2008.

DellaPergola, Sergio. "Jewish Demography in the European Union – Virtuous and Vicious Paths." In *Being Jewish in Central Europe Today*, Porat, Dina – Holý, Jiří – Fireberg, Haim – Zoufalá, Marcela (eds.). *Jüdische Kultur: Studien zur Geistesgeschichte, Religion und Literatur*. Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2017. Upcoming volume.

Gebert, Konstanty. "Post-Communist Europe: Twenty-Five Years after the Collapse of the Ancien Régime," *Israel Journal Of Foreign Affairs* Vol. 8, Iss. 2, 2014.

Gitelman, Zvi Y. – Kosmin, Barry Alexander - Kovács András (eds.). *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond*, Central European University Press, 2003.

Gitelman, Zvi Y. *Religion or Ethnicity? Jewish Identities in Evolution*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2009.

Glöckner, Olaf - Fireberg, Haim (eds.). *Being Jewish in 21st-Century Germany*, Series: Europäisch-jüdische Studien – Beiträge 16, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015.

Glöckner, Olaf. "Europe, Israel, the Jewish Communities, and Growing Antisemitism". In *Handbook of Israel: Major Debates*, Ben-Rafael, Eliezer - Schoeps, Julius H. - Sternberg, Yitzhak - Glöckner, Olaf (eds.). Series: De Gruyter Reference, 2016.

Gruber, Ruth Ellen. *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe*, An S. Mark Taper Foundation Book in Jewish Studies, 2002.

Judt, Tony. "From the House of the Dead: An Essay on Modern European Memory." In *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, Penguin Books, 2006, pp. 803-835.

Khanin, Vladimir (Ze'ev). "Russians," "Sephardi" and "Israelis": The Changing Structure of Austrian Jewry. In *Being Jewish in Central Europe Today*, Porat, Dina – Holý, Jiří – Fireberg, Haim – Zoufalá, Marcela (eds.). *Jüdische Kultur: Studien zur Geistesgeschichte, Religion und Literatur*. Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2017. Upcoming volume.

Porat, Dina. "The International Working Definition of Antisemitism and Its Detractors," *Israel Journal of foreign Affairs* V: 3, 2011.

Roberman, Sveta. "Haunting images: stereotypes of Jewishness among Russian Jewish immigrants in Germany". *East European Jewish Affairs* Vol. 42, Iss. 3, 2012.

Rozenblit, Marsha L. *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria*. Oxford UP 2001.

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Rosner, Shmuel – Ruskay, John. *Exploring the Jewish Spectrum in a time of fluid identity*, Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI), 2016.

Sachar, Howard M. *The Course of Modern Jewish History*. Vintage Books, 1990.

Shain Yossi – Fainberg, Sarah. “French Jewry and the Israelization of Judaism”. In *Handbook of Israel: Major Debates*. Ben-Rafael, Eliezer - Schoeps, Julius H. - Sternberg, Yitzhak - Glöckner, Olaf (eds.). Series: De Gruyter Reference, 2016.

Wasserstein, Bernard. *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe since 1945*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Webber, Jonathan (ed.). *Jewish Identities in the New Europe*, Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994.

Zoufalá, Marcela. “Being Jewish in Europe in the 21st Century: Jewish Identity and Contemporary Antisemitism,” in: Zoufalá, Marcela (ed.): *Jewish Studies in the 21st Century: Prague – Europe – World*. Jüdische Kultur: Studien zur Geistesgeschichte, Religion und Literatur. Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2014, pp. 213-223.

Additional Resources

Readings

“Before the Law”, a story by Franz Kafka (1991).

Genesis 25,23-26 (The Bible)

Maus, graphic novel by Art Spiegelman (1991)

‘To Edom!’, a poem by German-Jewish poet Heinrich Heine (1824)

Films and TV

Europa, Europa, German/French/Polish, Agnieszka Holland. (1990)

Ida, Polish/Danish/French/British, Pawel Pawlikowski (2013)

Nu, pogodi! (Just You Wait!), Soviet cartoon (1969-1980)

Walk on Water, Israeli-Swedish movie, Eytan Fox (2004)

Architecture and design

Architecture of the POLIN (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLeFIEg4z7U>)

Design of German Holocaust memorials.

Music

Vladimir Vyssotsky’s song on the antisemites.

‘Ermutigung’, a song by Wolf Biermann (GDR songwriter),
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0e6q6tLRzGM>

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'Le Sable et le Soldat' and 'Juif et dieu', songs by Serge Gainsbourg (French composer, poet and singer), 1967.

'A Paris' a song by Riff Cohen (French songwriter and singer) (2012).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CeMtEa5QhcA>

Outline of Course Content

Topic 1

Introduction to the topic and to the working method. European Jews in statistical view.

Topic 2

Jews in pre-WWII Europe as „the Others“.

Polish Jews, the largest Jewish Community in pre-WWII Europe; Changing of Polish borders; Poles Between Nazis and Soviets; the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact; Assimilation; circumcision and Jewish Identity; Polish Jews under Nazis and under Stalin; Germans as perpetrators and as bystanders; Jewish responses; Jews in the Zero hour.

Topic 3

Eastern Europe 1: Poland

From largest Jewish community to largest Jewish graveyard; Jews, Communists, gentiles; year 1968 in Poland; After 1989, resurrection of Jewish life or Judaism without Jews?; the phenomenon of the POLIN center; are Polish Jews more secure than the Western ones?; Whose Auschwitz?; Polish-Jewish rivalry in victimhood – not so common history of Poles and Polish Jews (Case of Jan T. Gross and Jan Grabowski).

Topic 4

Eastern Europe 2: Russia, Czech Republic

Russia: Bittersweet relationship; Seen from within – an enormous role of Jews in Soviet culture and science; Communism, emancipation and antisemitism; 1990's - mass emigration to Israel and the US; 21st Century - new antisemitism or the old one?; Putin and his Jews; Russian Jews abroad; the Jewish Oligarchs.

The Czech Exception: a country without antisemitism?; case of Prostějov Cemetery.

Topic 5

Jews as victims and/or perpetrators? The Holocaust as trauma for the others.

Victims and perpetrators – who is who?; Poles, Jews and Communists. Facing one's own past. Jewish dilemmas; Christianity as a factor in Jewish-Polish relations.

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Topic 6

Western Europe 1: Germany

The two German states before 1989; Jews living in country of perpetrators; Russian and Israeli Jews in Germany; can a Jewish girl win German beauty contest? Valeria Bystritskaia and Tamar Morali; rise of far right in Germany; antisemitism among the Muslim immigrants; left-wing anti-Zionism; Henryk Broder's case; Is survival of Israel *raison d'être* of democratic Germany?

Topic 7

Europe 2: France and the UK

France: From Jews of France to Jewish Frenchmen; two Jewries in France, Sephardi and Ashkenazi. Three antisemitisms, rightists, Islamist and leftist; Anti-Zionist propaganda and antisemitic violence; Emigration to Israel: Zionism, saving of lives or betrayal of native land? The phenomenon of Jewish "public intellectuals" in France.

The UK: The question of Israel in the public debate. The Corbyn case. Left wing Jews against the others. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the exemplary 'European Jew'.

Topic 8

Price of power, price of weakness.

Topic 9

A Complicated Triangle: Israel, Jewish America, and Europe

Israeli or Jewish Identity?; Specter of the European Past in Israel and in Germany; From "European" meekness to "Israeli" belligerence?; From powerless Jews to Powerful Israelis? Image of Germany in Israel, image of Israel in Germany. American (and Israeli Jews) looking at their European brothers.

Topic 10

European Jews – defined by the powerlessness?

Jewish Europe – a graveyard and museum, or a territory with a future? European Jewry's alternative paths: what if the Holocaust had been averted? What if the Holocaust had been completed?