

Dr. Cedric Cohen Skalli
Director, Bucerius Institute for Research of German History and Society
Dept of Jewish History
Faculty of Humanities
University of Haifa
Cell: 972-545-930328
ccohensk@univ.haifa.ac.il

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).

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.

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 ...”

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.

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 articles on Zionism and on David Magnes in from the 1940s.

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.

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 evolution of Benny Morris, who adopted more conservative positions after the collapse of the peace negotiations and the second Intifada in 2000.

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

A more detailed syllabus with the complete bibliography will be sent later.