

CONTEMPORARY JEWISH SOCIETIES

Spring 2015
Tuesdays 3:30-6 PM
University Club 6

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Graffiti in Tel Aviv

Uses transnational lens to explore contemporary debates about Jewish people, places, and practices of identity and community; places that Jews have called “home,” and what has made, or continues to make those places “Jewish”; issues of Jewish homelands and diasporas; gender, sexuality, food, and the Jewish body; religious practices in contemporary contexts. Readings are drawn primarily from contemporary journalism and scholarship.

The course satisfied Core curriculum requirement: human diversity. All readings in English.

BOOKS TO PURCHASE (paperback copies of all titles are available):

1. Judith Shulevitz, *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time* (Random House, 2011)
2. Gershom Gorenberg, *The Unmaking of Israel* (Harper Perennial, 2012)
3. Matti Friedman, *The Aleppo Codex* (Algonquin Books, 2013)

All other readings will be made available on the course website in PDF format and as web links; all films and other digital media (e.g. podcasts) will be streamed through the course website as well.

COURSE POLICIES

- **Attendance** is mandatory to do well in this course, especially because the class is so small. Please sign the attendance sheet that I will pass around each day. No unexcused absences permitted. (See a more detailed note on attendance, below.)
- **Preparation:** critical comprehension of assigned readings and knowledgeable engagement in class discussions are essential. Because class discussions will revolve around the readings, you will be expected to come to class having completed all the readings. Once again, you must prepare for each class in order to participate effectively.
- **No cell phones / smart phones / texting / use of wireless messaging services of any kind in class.** Please silence and put away your phones and any other mobile devices during class—your phones need to be in the “silent” (not “vibrate”) mode and stored safely out of sight so that they will not disturb you (and others) if someone tries to reach you during class.
- **Bring copies of readings to class.** You need to always have copies of whichever reading we are discussing with you in class (whether books or articles). If the assigned reading is a book, please have a paper copy with you (not an electronic copy). With articles, please get in the habit of printing out at least some of the assigned articles for every class—you may read some on your laptop/tablet as long as you print out most other readings. Please do not do any readings on an electronic device that is your phone—the screen is simply too small to allow for effective reading...
- **Laptops / tablets / e-readers.** Given that our class relies to a great extent on web-based content, I recognize that you may be doing some of the reading of web-based materials online. So, laptops and other electronic devices may be a necessary evil. You may bring those to use exclusively for assigned readings, provided that you print out at least some of your readings in hard copy.

Classroom environment will be far better if you do not sit in front of an open laptop rather than facing your classmates so the best bet would be not to use laptops. Checking Facebook during class, shopping for shoes, or doing anything else on the internet that has nothing to do with what we’re doing in class is a waste of your tuition and my time, so please avoid keeping your laptop open during class unless absolutely necessary (to refer to some of the readings).

There are multiple studies available now on the negative effects of laptops and tablets in the classroom; for example, check out “A Case for Banning Laptops in the Classroom” from *The New Yorker*—this article is particularly compelling because it’s written by a professor of—of all things—Computer Science: <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom>

- **Bring a regular paper notebook to class to take notes.** There is a lot of research on the negative effects of laptops in the classroom. There is now good research on how taking notes by hand on paper is far more effective than turning yourself into a transcription machine writing down every word that the professor says without processing what’s being said as much as you do when you take notes on paper. For example, take a look at this: <http://www.vox.com/2014/6/4/5776804/note-taking-by-hand-versus-laptop>
- I communicate by email outside of class, so please feel free to contact me at sasha.senderovich@colorado.edu if you’d like to set up an appointment or for any other reason. Do

not expect that I reply to your email right away—be prepared for wait for 24 hours for me to reply, so be sure to ask your questions in a timely manner.

- **Please feel free to bring a snack or drink** if you think you'll get hungry, thirsty, or fatigued during the class. I will likely bring cookies. We will periodically stand up and stretch if/when the energy in the room is flagging.

ATTENDANCE, of course, is part of the picture when it comes to class participation. You cannot be a meaningful participant if you are not regularly attending class. You may miss one class without penalty and without any explanation (note, however, that because we meet only once a week, each class covers a lot of content). For absences #2 and #3, you will have 7.5 points deducted from your participation grade for each absence (so that if you miss 3 classes, you will get a 0 on your participation). When you miss your 4th class, you will fail the course no matter how well you do on any other assignment.

It is important to arrive in class on time. Many of you commute, work alongside your studies, are involved in sports or other extracurricular activities, and/or have family responsibilities that demand your attention. You are expected to arrange your schedule such that you can attend class and complete all assignments. Except in situations spelled out by the university (which include religious holidays, some athletic commitments, and illness which is documented by a doctor's note), absences beyond your one "freebie" will detract from your grade. Please be in contact with the professor as early as possible if regular attendance problems arise due to extended illness or another reason.

For absences to be excused, they must be documented. If you are in a complicated or ongoing personal situation (family death or illness, personal injury or illness, situation of abuse, trauma), please contact the **Student of Concern Team at the Office of the Dean of Students** which, in addition to providing you confidential support, will generally also contact your professors to inform them of (and excuse) your absences without revealing any of the confidential information about your case. Call them at 303-492-7348 and/or email at SOCT@colorado.edu. This is a free resource available to you as a CU Boulder student – please take advantage of it in appropriate situations. If you are uncomfortable with contacting this office directly and would like me to refer you to them, please let me know (you do not need to disclose any details of personal nature to me if you do not wish to do so – I can refer you simply by request.)

For absences that you believe can be excused under university policy:

- 1) Document this absence (letter from doctor or coach, etc.), and upload an image of the document, along with a description in the text section about what class dates it covers, to the D2L folder called "Documentation of absences." Do not give me pieces of paper in class (I may lose them). Only properly documented absences can be considered excused absences. If you have a flu or a headache for which you do not see a doctor, or if, say, your dog has a nasty bathroom incident while you are the only one of your roommates at home (this happened to one of my students once, apparently)—you have two classes you can miss for any reason, so save these de-facto excused absences for such occasions, should they arise.
- 2) Only after you have done this, email me to let me know you uploaded a document excusing your absence.
- 3) Please retain all paper documentation of your absences in case I need to check it later on.

For all absences:

- 1) Do not write to ask if you missed anything (because, of course, you did miss a class's worth of material if you weren't in class.) Contact a classmate to ask what you missed.
- 2) Regardless of reason for absence, you are responsible for all class material.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Weekly Questions.** You should post questions on the readings for the class prior to every class session. These questions will form the basis for parts of our class discussions. If on a particular week you'd rather formulate your question as a comment for the discussion, without a question mark at the end, you are welcome to do that.

You are allowed to miss one class session's worth of questions without penalty (for missed comments #2 and #3, you will have 7.5 points deducted from this part of your grade for each missed week – so that if you miss 3 classes' worth of questions, you will get a 0 on this part of your grade).

Besides posing some of your questions in class for the whole group to discuss, I will be periodically returning your questions to you in batches, with comments. You should post your question in a Google Document that will be circulated for each class—all members of the class will post to the same document, and all will be able to see and read each other's questions. **You should post all questions/comments by 2:30 PM on the day of the class (one hour before class) so that I and each of you have some time to glance at each other's questions.**

The question should call attention to some theme, common bond or discrepancy in the texts (at least a couple of texts) assigned for the class that you think may be worthy of discussion. The length is not fixed, but it shouldn't be longer than around 250 words (or one page double spaced, if you do it in Word). It could also be shorter or a little longer as long as it's a well-formulated, thoughtful question. Aim for specificity; it can be a good idea to call attention to specific points or passages in the readings to exemplify your points. The best questions are thoughtful questions that show engagement with the texts; weaker questions are vague, discuss issues outside the texts, or simply serve to summarize the texts.

2. **An op-ed essay**, 800-1000 words; word limit strictly enforced. We will look at some examples of op-eds during our very first class and discuss how to write an op-ed then. In short, the key to writing a successful op-ed is that you must express an opinion about whatever you're writing about.

3. **An analytical essay** on any issue related to contemporary Jewish societies, which is of interest to you. The essay should present and analyze arguments and points of view from 3-4 articles from a range of periodicals and web-based publications (such as *Tablet*, *The Forward*, *The New York Times*, etc.) on the topic of your choice. While you will go through the arguments presented in the essays you analyze, you must begin your essay with a clear argument *of your own* that has to do with the nature of the contemporary debates you analyze. To be able to write this essay you should, from the beginning of the semester, follow ongoing coverage on an issue that interests you. Start paying attention to contemporary journalism. (Subscribe to email updates from specific publications, "like" certain sites on Facebook so they show up in your newsfeed, follow important journalists on Twitter, etc.). The length of this assignment is 1,000-1,200 words; it will be due halfway through the semester, in lieu of a mid-term exam.

4. **Final project: reported essay / issue essay / cultural or political criticism / profile essay on a topic of your own choice.** We will be reading plenty of examples of different types of essays and book chapters during the semester and will be discussing the craft and strategies for writing them as we go along. Depending on the type of essay you choose to write, your research may involve web-based resources, interviews with relevant people in person or by phone/Skype, or a combination of all of these. You must cite at least 2-3 scholarly articles. Ideally, this essay will be an outgrowth of your

analysis of the specific issue that you submit at mid-term but you may focus on an entirely different subject as well. Each student will meet with the professor to talk about their individual interests in preparation for this project. Length: about 4,000-5,000 words (but not more than that). Your work should be close to done and exist in readable draft form by the final week of the semester, when there'll be a peer-review workshop to read and comment on each other's work.

EVALUATION

- Weekly questions (in Google doc, visible to everyone) 15%
- An op-ed essay (800-1,000 words) 20%
- Analytical essay (1,000-1,200 words) 20%
- Final Project (4,000-5,000 words); grade includes meetings with prof. 30%
- Participation (very important to the success of the seminar!) 15%

GRADING RUBRIC

Grade	Explanation and Interpretation
100-90 A/A-	“A” papers elegantly weave simple and clear writing with sophisticated use of relevant concepts, and demonstrate convincing arguments with good use of empirical data and/or examples.
89-83 B+/B	“B+/B” papers are coherent and the arguments make sense. B papers usually could use a little more clarity, editing, or pizzazz in the writing. Sometimes B papers would actually be A papers if they used less ‘padding’ and jargon and got straight to the point.
82-80 B-	B- papers demonstrate that the writer invested a significant amount of work, but either the argument or the writing is a little fuzzy. “B-“ papers usually could have benefited from one more round of revision or spell check to improve the paper’s structure, tone, and/or grammar.
79-70 C range	Although the writer spent some time, thought, and use of the relevant course material, in C papers there are some clarity or logic problems in the argument, the presentation of examples, or the writing needs some attention.
69-60 D range	If a writer earns a “D” in this course, I suspect that you banged this one out an hour before class. Let’s all try our best not to get into this territory.
0 F	No paper was submitted for grading or plagiarism was found. If there is evidence of plagiarism in any assignment, the immediate consequence is a failure for the class. Please practice academic honesty, it’s an important standard to maintain in college and an important practice for leading an ethical life!

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Note: all readings, especially those that are hyperlinked, are subject to change. This course examines a lot of journalism and journalism, of course, is a vibrant and ever-changing field — so some readings may be updated if more suitable readings are found during the course of the semester. So, always check the syllabus on the course website for updates.

Jan 13 INTRODUCTION: JEWS AND WORDS

*** By way of introducing the course, we will examine a couple of op-eds, which will point us towards some of the issues in this course. We'll examine these op-eds for their subject matter as well as their craft to help you draft your own op-eds.

- Liora Halperin, "[Israel Misses Point With Ad Campaign](#)" (op-ed, *The Forward*)
- Dara Horn, "[Jewish Identity, Spelled in Yiddish](#)" (op-ed, *The New York Times*)
- Daniel Kahn, "[Inner Emigration](#)" (song)

Jan 20 JEWS AND FOOD

- Samantha Shapiro, "[Kosher Wars](#)" (*NYTimes Magazine*)
- Marc Tracy, "[Chopsticks](#)" (*Tablet*, on Chinese food and "Jewish Christmas")
- Benjamin Resnick, "[Unkosher](#)" (op-ed)
- Leah Koenig, "[Farmville](#)" (*Tablet*)
- Sasha Senderovich, "[Moscow Goes Kosher](#)" (*Tablet*)
- Julia Moskin, "[Everything Old is New Again](#)" (*NYTimes*)
- Grace Bello, "[A Disappearing Delicacy](#)" (*Tablet* – on ptcha, jellied calf feet!)
- Emma Morgenstern, "[Taking on Tamarind](#)" (podcast, *Vox Tablet*)
- Corollary: Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, "Kitchen Judaism"

Jan 27 No class (professor away at a conference)

- Read ahead for the coming week (and read any of op-eds you get your hands on)

Feb 3 JEWS AND BOOKS

- Matti Friedman, *The Aleppo Codex* (280 pages – read ahead!)
- Andre Aciman, "[The Exodus Obama Forgot to Mention](#)" (op-ed, *NYTimes*)
- Avi Shilon, "[A counter to the Nakba](#)" (op-ed, *Ha'aretz*)

Feb 10 JEWISH TIME

- Judith Shulevitz, *The Sabbath World* (xiii-90 and 157-217; feel free to read the rest)
- Gershom Gorenberg, "[I don't Text on Shabbas](#)" (op-ed, *The Daily Beast*)

*** op-ed assignment due Friday, Feb 13, at 7 pm

Feb 17 ISRAEL (I): WRESTLING WITH ZION

- Gershom Gorenberg, *The Unmaking of Israel* (selected chapters)
- Elizabeth Rubin, "[Girls at War](#)" (*Tablet Magazine*)
- Corollary: Rebecca Stein, "'First Contact' and Other Israeli Fictions: Tourism, Globalization, and the Middle East Peace Process" (pp. 259-287)

Feb 24

ISRAEL (II): COMPLEXITIES OF “BIRTHRIGHT”

- Gershom Gorenberg, *The Unmaking of Israel* (selected chapters)
- Corollary: Shaul Kelner, “Deploying Tourism” in *Tours that Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tours* (pp. 1-20)

March 3

FAR FROM ZION

- Charles London, *Far from Zion* (excerpts about Jews in Bosnia and Iran)
- Jonathan Garfinkel, “[A Congregation of One: Having Tea with the Last Jew of Afghanistan](#)” (*Tablet Magazine*)
- Zev Chafets, “[The Sy Empire](#)” (*The New York Times*)
- Janet Malcolm, “[Iphigenia of Forest Hills: Anatomy of a Murder Trial](#)” (*New Yorker*)
- Corollary: Caryn Aviv and David Shneer, “From Diaspora Jews to New Jews” in *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora* (pp. 1-25)

March 10

THE POLITICS OF HERITAGE

- Benjamin Paloff, “[Who Owns Bruno Schulz?](#)” (*Boston Review*)
- Elif Batuman, “[Kafka’s Last Trial](#)” (*The New York Times Magazine*)
- Corollary: Erika Lehrer, “Repopulating Jewish Poland—in Wood,” in *Polin* 16
- Corollary: Jack Kugelmass, “Turving the Slum: New York City’s Tenement Museum and the Politics of Heritage,” in *Remembering the Lower East Side* (pp. 179-211)

***** analytical essays due on Friday March 13 at 5 pm**

March 17

AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

- Leon Wieseltier, “[Hitler is Dead](#)” (*The New Republic*)
- Philip Lopate, “Resisting the Holocaust”
- Alana Newhouse, “[A Closer Reading of Roman Vishniac](#)” (*NYT Magazine*)
- Cynthia Ozick, “Who Owns Anne Frank?” (*The New Yorker*)
- Film: *The Flat* (directed by Arnon Goldfinger, 2012)
- Corollary: Michael Rothberg, “From Gaza to Warsaw: Mapping Multidirectional Memory”

March 24

Spring break – no class – Watch “Transparent” over break

March 31

SEXUALITIES

- Watch: *Transparent* (all ten episodes add up to the total of 5 hours long – please watch over spring break; this is a fantastic show to watch with family and/or friends. This is on Amazon Prime, which offers a free trial [here](#), or a discounted student membership if you’ve already had the free trial gig before. Ideally, nobody will have to spend money on this...)
- “[Funny, Dirty, Sad](#)” (*Transparent* director Jill Soloway on NPR’s Fresh Air)
- Additional articles on *Transparent* and transgender / LGBT issues
- Corollary: Caryn Aviv and David Shneer, “Castro, Chelsea, and Tel Aviv: Queer Jews at Home” in *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora* (pp. 107-136)

***** Individual meetings** with the professor regarding your final projects this week – the sign-up sheet will be circulated in advance to arrange these.

April 7

THE JEWISH BODY

- Masha Gessen, *Blood Matters* (pp. 3-68)
- Film: *The Quest for the Missing Piece* (directed by Oded Lotan, 2007)
- Michael Orbach, “[Orthodox and Anorexic](#)” (*Tablet*)
- Ophira Edut, “Bubbe Got Back: Tales of a Jewess With a Caboose”
- Corollary: Sander Gilman, “The Jewish Nose”

4/14 & 4/21 PROFILES, ISSUES – AND THE CRAFT OF WRITING

*** Note: the reading assignments for these two sessions involve several profile and issue essays on a range of people and subjects—there is a diversity of genders, political affiliations, views, etc. represented here. Our task is to examine the craft of longform essay. In one way or another, all of these essays will reflect back on the larger questions we’ve raised earlier in the semester. Our larger task: to look at this type of essay and examine it specifically for its craft to help you draft your final projects.

*** We may end up choosing more readings or some readings in place of the readings above, depending on where class interests are by this point of the semester. But all of the selections above are excellent examples of the genre—read them anyway.

- Emily Raboteau, “Searching for Zion” (on Jews and race, from *Best American Non-Required Reading*)
- Susan Faludi, “[Death of a Revolutionary](#)” (profile of Shulamith Firestone + the history of feminism in the United States, *The New Yorker*)
- Allison Hoffman, “[A Gentleman from Virginia](#)” (profile of Rep. Eric Cantor—the former US House of Representatives Majority Leader, *Tablet*)
- David Remnick, “[The Party Faithful](#)” (profile of Naftali Bennett—an Israeli right wing politician, *The New Yorker*)
- Allison Hoffman, “[The Curator of Joy and Ashes](#)” (profile of Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett—a scholar and head curator of the new Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, *Tablet*)
- Joshua Lambert, “[James Deen vs. the Nebbishes](#)” (profile of a Jewish porn star – yes, a Jewish porn star... —*Los Angeles Review of Books*)
- Ariel Levy, “[The Perfect Wife](#)” (profile of Edith Windsor, the plaintiff in the Supreme Court case that nullified the Defense of Marriage Act—*The New Yorker*)
- George Packer, “[The Unconsoled](#)” (profile of David Grossman, a major Israeli writer—*The New Yorker*)

*** **Friday, April 24, by 7 PM:** Drafts of your final projects are due. These drafts should be complete; 4,000-5,000 words in length (not longer and not much shorter). Your assignment for the final class session on April 28 will be to read and comment on all several of your peer’s drafts—the exam number will depend on the number of groups of peer we have working together.

April 28

PEER REVIEWS (AND DINNER / GARDEN PARTY)

- Class conference based on drafts of your final projects. We'll break down the class into 3-4 groups; members of each group will read drafts of their fellow group members' final projects ahead of this class. In groups, you'll spend about 20 minutes discussing and giving feedback on each paper.
- **Note:** this class will be somewhat longer than our usual meetings and we will hold this class, followed by dinner (or a garden party, weather permitting), at the professor's house (10 mins on the Skip from campus; even quicker by car.)

***** Date TBA:** revised final projects are due (on the date set by the Registrar).

DISABILITY POLICY

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to your professor a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (for exam accommodations provide your letter at least one week prior to the exam) so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or by e-mail at dsinfo@colorado.edu.

If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see Temporary Injuries under Quick Links at Disability Services website (<http://disabilityservices.colorado.edu/>) and discuss your needs with your professor.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND THE HONOR CODE

All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at

<http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html> and at <http://honorcode.colorado.edu>

APPROPRIATE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, disability, and nationalities.

Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

See policies at: www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html and also www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code

DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU-Boulder) is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. The University of Colorado does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status in admission and access to, and treatment and employment in, its educational programs and activities. (Regent Law, Article 10, amended 11/8/2001). CU-Boulder will not tolerate acts of discrimination or harassment based upon Protected Classes or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. For purposes of this CU-Boulder policy, "Protected Classes" refers to race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or veteran status. Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Student Conduct (OSC) at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies, and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. If you have a potential class conflict because of religious observance, you must inform me of that conflict within three weeks of the start of classes. See policy details at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html.
<http://hr.colorado.edu/dh/>