The purpose of this course is to use the modern Jewish experience in order to introduce
students to the complexities and challenges of understanding and defining the
development of modern nationalism. The course will consist of two major parts. The first
part will examine theories of nationalism and then survey the rise of modern nationalist
ideologies in Europe. The second part will take up the Jews as a “case study”. In what
ways does the development of modern Jewish nationalism conform to various
topographies of nationalist ideology? How was modern Jewish Nationalism influenced
by non-Jewish models and doctrines? By the same token, in what ways was the Jewish
experience “sui generis” or unique? How can a case study of modern Jewish nationalism
clarify wider aspects of nationalism as a political issue?

The course assumes that in studying the development of Modern Jewish Nationalism, and
especially Zionism, the student will come to understand the complexities and apparent
paradoxes that mark the rise of modern national identities. On the one hand Zionism
strove to make the Jews a “normal” people, yet on the other hand modern Zionism drew
much of its inspiration from the traditional conviction that Jews were a “special” people
and that their modern liberation movement had to create a model state and not just, to
quote Ahad Ha’am, a “kind of Jewish Latvia” (i.e., just another tiny ethnic nation state.
We apologize in advance to any Latvians). In many ways Zionism was a strikingly
modern movement that borrowed freely from the national awakenings of neighboring
peoples and that offered new models of leadership and new modes of mobilization and
propaganda. But on the other hand, Zionism also was inextricably linked to an ancient
religious tradition, to the Bible and to powerful national memories and myths. While
other national movements also appropriated and invented convenient “usable pasts” and
fashioned stirring “imagined communities”, it was modern Jewish nationalism more than
any other that had to renegotiate and redefine the complex interplay of religious and
ethnic identities and motifs.

Students will begin by surveying some of the recent scholarship on Nationalism and then
discuss some of the major issues that have preoccupied scholars. Is nationalism a largely
modern phenomenon, an invented instrument that uses modern forms of communication
to create “imagined communities”, mobilize backward masses, facilitate industrial
development and bolster the power of self anointed elites? Or must one modify this
linkage of nationalism and modernity in order to admit such decidedly pre-modern
antecedents and models as the Bible, the Reformation and atavistic ethnic bonds? The
first part of the course will also examine and redefine the common distinction between “ethnic” or “civic” nationalism. It will consider the complex role of religion in modern nationalism, as well as the reasons why some nationalisms proved to be more aggressive and exclusive than others. Studies will then study the complex interplay of ideology and nationalism as they consider critiques from the Left and from the Right.

Part One

Defining a Nation

Week One
Walker Connor, “A nation is a Nation, is a State is an Ethnic Group” in Walker Connor, Ethnonationalism, pp.89-118

Week Two
Anthony Smith, The Nation in History (Brandeis, 2000), entire(79 pp.)
Adrian Hastings, The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism (Cambridge, 1997), pp.1-5, 14-34

Part Two

The ideological context of modern European Nationalism

Week Three
From Omar Dahbour and Micheline Ishay eds. The Nationalism Reader:
Rousseau “On the Government of Poland” excerpt pp. 30-35
Kant Metaphysics of Morals pp. 38- 48
Fichte Address to the German nation pp, 62-71
Acton Nationality pp. 108-119
Mazzini Duties of Man 87-98
Herder Reflections on a Philosophy of History of Mankind 48-60
Week Four
Defining European nationalism from the Left


Lenin “Right of Nations to National Self Determination” (excerpts) Omar Dahbour and Micheline Ishay eds. The Nationalism Reader, pp. 208-216
Otto Bauer “The Nationality Question and Social Democracy” in Omar Dahbour and Micheline Ishay eds. The Nationalism Reader, pp. 183-192

Week Five
Defining European nationalism from the Right

Hitler Mein Kampf excerpts in Paul Mendes Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz eds. The Jew in the Modern World, pp. 637-640
Mussolini “Fascism”, Omar Dahbour and Micheline Ishay eds. The Nationalism Reader, pp. 222-230

Part Three
Modern Jewish National: How Secular? How Modern?

In this section of the course we will chart the development of modern Jewish nationalism through a study of the interplay of Jewish and non-Jewish history in Modern Europe. We will begin with a special consideration of Pinsker and Herzl and survey the impact of growing disappointment in the prospects of long term integration of the Jews into European society. Our study will return to the theoretical suggestions of Miroslav Hroch as we examine the role of writers and historians in the growth of modern Jewish nationalism. We will then consider various tensions within Zionism and the various attempts to create socialist, religious and integral nationalist versions of the movement.

Week Six
The Rise of Modern Jewish Nationalism: some general issues

Aviel Roshwald “Jewish Identity and the paradox of Nationalism” in Michael Berkowitz
Week Seven
The role of the historian
Heinrich Graetz: “Judaism can be understood only through its History” in Michael Meyer ed. Ideas of Jewish History (Wayne State, 1987) pp. 217-247

Week Eight
The role of the writer

All in Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg eds. A Treasury of Yiddish Stories (Penguin, 1990)


Week Nine
Rediscovering Language
Benjamin Harshav, Language in a Time of Revolution (Stanford, 1999), entire

Week Ten
The Zionist Project

Introduction, pp. 15-100
Pinsker Autoemancipation pp. 181-198
Herzl The Jewish State pp. 204-222
Ahad Ha’am “Flesh and Spirit” pp. 256-261


Week Eleven
Labor Zionism
Ber Borochov, “Our Platform” pp. 360-368
Aaron Dovid Gordon, “People and Labor” pp. 372-375
David ben Gurion, “The Imperatives of the Jewish Revolution” pp. 606-620

All in Arthur Hertzberg, The Zionist Idea


Week Twelve
Religious and Revisionist Zionism

Rabbi Samuel Mohilever, “Message to the First Zionist Congress”, Hertzberg pp. 398-401
Rabbi Yehile Michael Pines, “Jewish nationalism can not be Secular”, Hertzberg pp. 411-416
Zeev Jabotinsky Testimony before the Peel Commission pp. 559-572

Week Thirteen
Diaspora nationalism: the case of the Bund
Film: Image Before My Eyes
Excerpt from Bronislav Grosser’s “From Pole to Jew” in Lucy Dawidowicz ed. The Golden Tradition(Syracuse, 1996), pp. 435-441

Week Fourteen
America: a New Zion?
The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 p468
Louis Brandeis “Zionism is consistent with American patriotism” pp. 496-497
The Jew in the Modern World

Horace Mayer Kallen “Jewish Life is National and Secular” pp. 526-528
Mordecai Kaplan, “The Future of the American Jew” pp. 534-542

All in Arthur Hertzberg, The Zionist Idea