



## **Women's Activism in Israel**

### **Taglit academic Course**

**Prof. Orna Sasson-Levy, Dr. Tanya Zion-Waldoks**

**Course No.: School year: 2017 – 2018 Semester: Winter**

**3 course credits**

#### **About Bar Ilan University:**

Bar Ilan University is one of the top public research universities in Israel located in the greater Tel-Aviv metropolitan area. Established in 1955, Bar Ilan has a student body of almost 27,000 students annually. Bar-Ilan offers an International B.A. Program which makes it the first university in Israel to offer a full undergraduate program taught entirely in English. Bar Ilan University is accredited by the Israeli Ministry of Education and the Council of Higher Education. Bar Ilan University has partnerships with many universities worldwide for studying abroad exchange programs. Most universities will accept Bar Ilan credits from your Birthright Israel: Study Abroad trip even if they didn't previously have a partnership.

#### **"The Course: "Women's Activism In Israel**

##### **Overview\***

This course proposes to introduce participants to Israeli society from an innovative perspective, that of women's activism. Israel provides a unique case study for examining women's status in society. On the one hand, Israeli society is modern and democratic – it strives for gender equality and has relatively progressive legislation on women's rights. On the other hand, it is shaped by religious/traditional values, and many of its norms and institutions are characterized by hierarchical gender relations. This duality, in addition to a dominant militarist and pronatalist culture, create complex yet dynamic gendered processes that affect what it means to be an Israeli (man or woman) today.

In response, women in Israel have a long history of taking action for social change, and they do so within a variety of social and ethnic sectors and in distinctive cultural and political fields. Thus, learning about women's activism can provide a diverse, comprehensive and unconventional view of Israeli society. Employing the lens of women's activism, students will learn about past successes, challenges and obstacles currently hindering transformative change, and myriad opportunities to improve women's status in the future.

The course will adopt an intersectional perspective that examines the many issues and concerns affecting the lives of different women in Israel. We will open the course by providing an overview of women's status in Israel. Following sessions will be divided into units according to themed topics, showcasing a specific sector of

Israeli women and/or focusing on different types of activism. These sessions will be highly experiential as they include meeting activists “on the ground”. Sessions will also encourage analysis and reflection, as they will be accompanied by relevant academic readings from up-to-date studies. At the end of each session, the students and course lecturers (Prof. Sasson-Levy and/or Dr. Zion-Waldoks) will conduct a brief joint discussion with the goal of contextualizing and integrating that day’s learning with previous and future study.

\*This course, its content, lectures and lecturers are subject to change

### **Bios of Course Lecturers:**

#### **Prof. Orna Sasson-Levy**

Orna Sasson-Levy is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, and the Program in Gender Studies at Bar Ilan University, Israel. Her research and teaching interests include feminist theory, militarism and gender, nation-state and gender, gender and new social movements, and Israeli ethnicities. Sasson-Levy has published widely in journals such as *Gender & Society* (2003, 2007, 2011), *The Sociological Quarterly* (2002, 2013), *Signs* (2007), *Men and Masculinities* (2008), and *The British Journal of Sociology* (2015). She is the author of two books (*Identities in Uniform: Masculinities and Femininities in the Israeli Military*, 2006; *Women Soldiers and Citizenship in Israel: Gendered Encounters with the State*, with Edna Lomsky-Feder, 2018) and co-editor of two more books.

#### **Dr. Tanya Zion-Waldoks**

Zion-Waldoks is Israel Institute postdoctoral fellow at the Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel & Zionism at Ben Gurion University. Her research investigates the intersection of religion, gender and politics in Israel, with a focus on social movements. She earned her Ph.D. from Bar-Ilan University's Gender Studies Program, and teaches there and at the International Israel Studies program at BGU. She is the recipient of several prestigious awards and research grants. She has published in international and Israeli peer-reviewed journals, including an article in *Gender & Society* which won the Israeli Sociological Society award for best article in 2015. Her upcoming book is a comparative study of Jewish and Muslim feminisms in Israel, co-authored with Dr. Ronit Irshai.

#### **A. Course Goals**

This course proposes to introduce participants to Israeli society from an innovative perspective, that of women’s activism. Israel provides a unique case study for examining women’s status in society. On the one hand, Israeli society is modern and democratic – it strives for gender equality and has relatively progressive legislation on women’s rights. On the other hand, it is shaped by religious/traditional values, and many of its norms and institutions are characterized by hierarchal gender relations. This duality, in addition to a dominant militarist and pro-natalist culture,

create complex yet dynamic gendered processes that affect what it means to be an Israeli (man or woman) today.

In response, women in Israel have a long history of taking action for social change, and they do so within a variety of social and ethnic sectors and in distinctive cultural and political fields. Thus, learning about women's activism can provide a diverse, comprehensive and unconventional view of Israeli society. Employing the lens of women's activism, students will learn about past successes, challenges and obstacles currently hindering transformative change, and myriad opportunities to improve women's status in the future.

## **B. Content of the course**

The course will adopt an intersectional perspective that examines the many issues and concerns affecting the lives of different women in Israel. We will open the course by providing an overview of women's status in Israel. Following sessions will be divided into units according to themed topics, showcasing a specific sector of Israeli women and/or focusing on different types of activism. These sessions will be highly experiential as they include meeting activists "on the ground". Sessions will also encourage analysis and reflection, as they will be accompanied by relevant academic readings from up-to-date studies. At the end of each session, the students and course lecturers (Prof. Sasson-Levy and/or Dr. Zion-Waldoks) will conduct a brief joint discussion with the goal of contextualizing and integrating that day's learning with previous and future study.

### **Unit 1: Intersectional Gender Perspective on Israeli Society and Activism**

- Women's Status in Israel
- Activism and Diversity in Israeli Society

Goldscheider, Calvin. 2015. *Israeli Society in the Twenty-First Century: Immigration, Inequality, and Religious Conflict*. Brandeis University Press. Chap. 7. (pp. 134-156)

Halperin-Kaddari, Ruth. 2004. *Women in Israel. A State of Their Own*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

### **Unit 2: Legal activism and political leadership**

Herzog, Hannah. 1998. "Double Marginality: 'Oriental' and Arab Women in Local Politics." in O. Yiftachel and A. Meir. Boulder (eds.), *Ethnic Frontiers and Peripheries: Landscapes of Development and Inequality in Israel*, pp. 287-307.

Itzkovitch-Malka, Reut and Chen Friedberg, 2016. Gendering security: The substantive representation of women in the Israeli parliament. *European Journal of Women's Studies*.

### **Unit 3: Religious feminisms**

- Jewish Modern-Orthodox feminism
- Jewish Liberal movements' religious feminism
- Muslim Feminism and Women in the Middle East
- *Haredi* (Ultra-Orthodox) Women

Lahav, Pnina. 2012. *The Woes of WOW: The Women of the Wall as a Religious Social Movement and as Metaphor* (Vol. 13). Boston University School of Law.

Roded, Ruth. 2012. Islamic and Jewish Religious Feminism: Similarities, Parallels and Interactions. *Religion Compass*, 6(4), 213–224.

Zion-Waldoks, Tanya. 2015. Politics of Devoted Resistance: Agency, Feminism, and Religion among Orthodox Agunah Activists in Israel. *Gender & Society*, 29(1), 73–97.

### **Unit 4: Mizrahi feminism**

Erdrich, Lauren. 2006. Strategies Against Patriarchy: Sexualized Political Activism of Palestinian Israeli Women on Campus. *Israel Studies*, 11 (1), 35-58.

Misgav, Chen, & Fenster, Tovi. 2016. Day by day - protest by protest: Temporal activism and the feminist Mizrahi right to the city. *Cities*.

Weil, Shalva. 2004. Ethiopian Jewish Women: Trends and Transformations in the Context of Transnational Change, *Nashim* 7, 73-86.

### **Unit 5: Bedouin women**

Abu-Rabia-Queder, Sarab. 2007. The activism of Bedouin women: Social and political resistance. *Hagar*, 7(2), 67–84.

Abu-Rabia-Queder, Sarab. 2014. Our problem is two problems: That you're a woman and that you're educated: Gendering and racializing Bedouin women experience at Israeli universities. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 35, 44–52.

### **Unit 6: Women in the IDF**

Lomsky-Feder, Edna and Orna Sasson-Levy. 2017. Israeli Women Soldiers and Citizenship: Gendered Encounters with the State. Chapter 5. London: Routledge.

Sasson-Levy, Orna. 2003. "Feminism and Military Gender Practices: Israeli Women Soldiers in 'Masculine' roles", *The Sociological Inquiry* 73 (3): 440-465.

### **Unit 7: Millennials and Web-based Activism**

Vaisman, Carmel L. 2014. The 'Designs Industry': Girls Play with Production and Power on Israeli Blogs. In Bennet, A. and Robards, B. (eds.), *Mediated Youth Cultures*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 95-113

### **Unit 8: LGBT activism**

Hartal, Gilly. 2016. The politics of holding: home and LGBT visibility in contested Jerusalem, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 23(8), 1193-1206

### **Unit 9: Economics, Business and High-Tech as a site for women's leadership**

Frenkel, Michal, 2008. Reprogramming Femininity? The Construction of Gender Identities in the Israeli Hi-Tech Industry between Global and Local Gender Orders *Gender, Work and Organizations*, 15(4), 352-374

Heilbrunn, Sibylle, Khaled Abu-Asbeh, Muhammed Abu Nasra. 2014. Difficulties facing women entrepreneurs in Israel: a social stratification approach, *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 6 (2), 142-162

### **Unit 10: Women's Grassroots Activism**

Badarne, Marie-Olivia. 2008. 'Flower by flower, we make a garden': Palestinian women organising for economic justice, *Gender and Development* 16 (3), 509-521.

Herzog, Hanna, 2008. Re/visiting the women's movement in Israel, *Citizenship Studies* 12 (3), 265-282.

### **Unit 11: Women's Peace Activism**

Helman ,Sara. 1999. From Soldiering and Motherhood to Citizenship: A Study of Four Israeli Peace Protest Movements. *Social Politics*, 6 (3), 292-313

Lemish, Dafna and Inbal Barzel. 2000. "Four Mothers': The Womb in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Communication*, 15 (2), 147-169.

### **Unit 12: Education and Empowerment of girls and adolescents**

Stier, Haya, Herzberg-druker, Efrat. 2017. Running Ahead or Running in Place? Educational Expansion and Gender Inequality in the Labor Market, *Social Indicators Research*, 130 (3), 1187-1206.

## **Course Requirements:**

### **Readings:**

Students will be required to read 4 academic articles in advance, as preparation for the course. After the course, students will read an additional 4-6 articles on specific topics related to their final written assignment.

### **Components of the final grade:**

**1. Critical review:** 25%

In preparation for participating in the course (prior to their arrival in Israel students will submit a 3-5 page report.

Part A will include a review of the main arguments made in 4 bibliographical items that touch upon different topics. Students will also be expected to articulate questions they have on the topics raised in the reading materials (at least 2 questions per article).

Part B will be a personal reflection. This portion may include elaborating upon students' own Jewish and gender identities and possible intersections between, their preconceptions of Israel with respect to gender issues, why they chose to participate in this course, what they expect to learn, and what their personal response to the readings were.

**2. Reflexive essay:** 15%

While in Israel, students will submit a 2-page essay summarizing their responses to experiences, group discussions and topical sessions.

**3. Final written assignment** 60%

The final paper will be based on additional reading materials as well as the oral material conveyed during the course sessions. The analysis will either center around comparing two different topics or focus more in-depth on a single topic. The paper will integrate between readings, experiences, ideas and interactions throughout the course. Exact details regarding the format of this assignment will be provided at a later date.