

Reviving Pilgrimage: Decolonizing Religious Travel to the Holy Land

IRRS-1300

3-4.5 Units

Starr King School for the Ministry -- Graduate Theological Union

Spring 2020

Immersion: March 20-29, 2020

Instructor: Faryn Borella

fborella@sksm.edu

802-379-7055

Virtual Office Hours: Fridays 12:30-2:00 p.m. PST

Meeting Dates and Times:

Fridays from 9:40-12:30 p.m. PST on Zoom

Immersion: March 20-29, 2020 in Israel/Palestine

Course Description:

What does it mean, as a religious leader, to visit the Holy Land in these times? Is pilgrimage possible in the midst of occupation and colonization? How is bearing witness to injustice a political tool in liberation movements, and what more is required of us? How does travel to the Holy Land require of us responsivity to the moral and political crisis on the ground? How can travel bear witness to ongoing systemic injustice without tokenizing individuals or exploiting, romanticizing or fetishizing suffering? How can we challenge the white/western saviour complex in the way we travel? How can we move from charity to solidarity? How can we move from religious tourism to pilgrimage? How do we, as people of faith, put faith into action?

This semester-long hybrid course involves six preparatory Zoom classes, a 10-day trip to Israel/Palestine over Reading Week, and five Zoom reflection & action sessions following return from the trip.

Scholarships are available through Starr King to cover all ground costs for your trip. Outside scholarships are available to cover airfare. Please set up an appointment with the instructor to secure a scholarship and discuss your financial options.

Immersion details:

This trip emerged in response to a call by Sabeel Ecumenical Center, a Palestinian Christian Liberation Theology Center located in Jerusalem, for Christians and people of faith to come on trips of ethical witness to the Holy Land to come into a greater understanding of the present-day political reality in the land of which their holy books teach and to build relationships of solidarity with those most impacted by the political reality of military occupation and dispossession.

The trip will follow the trajectory of *midbar* (wilderness) into *haaretz* (the land), contemplation into revelation, in an attempt to answer the question: is pilgrimage possible on occupied land? We will begin in intense spiritual

preparation in the desert and then journey to Jerusalem, where we will explore the ways in which certain forms of religious tourism are used as tools of occupation dispossession while other forms are barred outright. We will spend days exploring contested religious sights and the histories and present realities of Jewish, Christian and Muslim pilgrimage in the land. We will meet with religious communities throughout the land resisting by existing and orienting their religious practice toward building a more just society and we will both learn from and pray with them, recognizing that our pilgrimage has power and how we choose to make pilgrimage can be the difference between colonization and decolonization.

The trip will begin in the late afternoon of Friday, March 20th and will close in the early afternoon of Sunday, March 29th. Please arrive through Ben-Gurion Airport no later than 2 p.m. on March 20th and depart no earlier than 6 p.m. on March 29th.

Teaching Philosophy:

“Rabbi Tarfon and the Elders were reclining in the loft of the house of Nit’za in Lod, when this question was asked of them: Is study greater or is action greater? Rabbi Tarfon answered and said: Action is greater. Rabbi Akiva answered and said: Study is greater. Everyone answered and said: Study is greater, but not as an independent value; rather, it is greater as study leads to action.” Kiddushin 40b, Babylonian Talmud

My teaching philosophy for this class is inspired by the Jewish principle that study is righteous only if it leads to righteous action. This aligns with the methodology of liberation theologies worldwide that places theological praxis before theological doctrine and understands the goal of the theological project to be to participate in the bringing about of redemption of this world.

Therefore, this class is broken into three subsequent sections. First, we will study internally in order to more effectively and compassionately engage with what we are to witness on the ground, for it is our obligation to do the necessary emotional, mental and spiritual preparation work in order that our bodies be agents of decolonization rather than further colonization when we arrive in the land. Secondly, we will travel to Israel/Palestine, where we will continue to learn, this time through active engagement, witness, prayer and action. Lastly, we will return to our homes, our communities and our roles as burgeoning religious leaders to take collective action for greater justice for our comrades, for study and witness are only righteous if they lead to ethical action in solidarity with our partners in the struggle.

Learning Objectives:

Through this course, students will:

- Study history and modes of religious pilgrimage to the Holy Land throughout history.
- Learn about the present political reality and its impact on the physical, material, emotional, mental, spiritual and religious lives of those living under military occupation and systems of apartheid.
- Learn decolonial theory and think about religious tourism and pilgrimage through a decolonial lens.
- Travel to Israel/Palestine for study and prayer as well as to bear witness to injustice and build relationships of solidarity in the ultimate pursuit of future action.

- Take collective action in response to learning in order to participate in efforts for justice and liberation of all those impacted under the current systems of power and oppression in the Holy Land.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will develop a personal and spiritual relationship to the Holy Land as it is as opposed to how it exists in the religious imaginary.
- Students will build lasting relationships with partners fighting for justice and liberation on the ground.
- Students will be agents of transformation and change in the struggle for collective liberation in relationship to the Holy Land.

Learning Styles and Access Needs

With an understanding of the ways that everyone learns differently, learning in this course will come through a variety of different modalities, including reading, partner study, multimedia engagement, lecture, class discussion, prayer, ritual, experiential field-based learning and embodied exercises. Students with any access needs should contact the instructor, preferably before the first day of the course, to make the instructor aware of these needs and the instructor will make the appropriate accommodations.

Course Assignments:

Preparatory Sessions:

- 1) **Weekly assignments:** Students are expected to come to class prepared, having read and/or engaged with the assigned course materials.
- 2) **Pilgrimage Mind Map:** Throughout the course of the six weeks prior to departure, students will mind-map the concept of pilgrimage within their religious tradition, within the religious traditions we are studying, in relationship to the Holy Land and in their own personal practice to contextualize the work we will be doing on the ground.
- 3) **Intention Setting:** In Judaism, there is a practice called *kavanah*--direction of the heart. It is understood that rote prayer recitation is meaningless without directing one's heart toward the divine in all the various ways one can do so. As we are about to engage in a 10-day prayer-grimage, it is important that we set our *kavanot*--our intentions--prior to departure, and return to them throughout the trip as amulets and as touch-stones.

Post-Pilgrimage:

- 1) **Final Project:** Students will collectively plan and execute a project, derived from our learning on the ground and any asks made of us by partners, that will utilize their unique positionality as developing religious leaders to contribute in efforts toward collective liberation in the Holy Land.

Grading:

This 3-4.5-credit, graduate level course will be assessed on a credit/no-credit basis, in keeping with Starr King School for the Ministry's educational philosophy of educating to counter oppressions and build just and sustainable communities. The amount of credits received within this range is at the discretion of the student.

The most essential element to receiving credit is engagement with the course content and engagement with the learning community. Students are expected to attend all classes unless they have notified the instructor ahead of time with good reason. Students are expected to actively engage in the pilgrimage as well as actively participate in the collective final project at the end of the semester. If a student wishes to take the class for a letter grade, please advise the instructor of this preference.

Required Texts:

- [*Wujood II: The Grassroots Guide to Jerusalem*](#), Grassroots Al Quds
- [*Theologies of Liberation in Palestine-Israel: Indigenous, Contextual, and Postcolonial Perspectives*](#), edited by Nur Masalha and Lisa Isherwood

All other course material will be accessible via Moodle. All assigned texts, listed below, are to be read before the class for which they are listed in order for students to come to class prepared. Texts are subject to change.

Course Schedule:

February 7 The History of Pilgrimage, Mission Trips and Religious Tourism in the Holy Land

Required Texts:

- [“What ‘Holy Land’ Tours Miss”](#) by Jessica Moore
- [“A Rejected ‘Travelogue’ of Singapore, the Philippines, and Vietnam”](#) by Monique Truong
- [“How a Mark Twain Travel Book Turned Palestine into a Desert”](#) by Michael Press
- [“Pilgrims or Tourists?”](#) by Frank Fahey
- *Wujood II: The Grassroots Guide to Jerusalem*, “Why Wujood” page 13-15, “Tourism” 128-133

February 14 The Holy Land: History, Power and Indigenous Rights

Required Texts:

- “The Historian as Curandera” by Aurora Levins Morales
- “Preface” in *Jerusalem: The Biography* by Simon Sebag Montefiore
- *Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life* by Sari Nusseibeh, chapters 1-3
- “Using Indigeneity in the Struggle for Palestinian Liberation” by Ahmad Amara and Yara Hawari
- “Chapter 1: How Palestine Became Important to American Indian Studies” in *Inter/Nationalism: Decolonizing Native America and Palestine* by Steven Salaita

February 21 Zionism and Nakba

Required Texts:

- *Wujood II: The Grassroots Guide to Jerusalem*, “Historical Context” 69-79
- “Global Anti-Semitism in World-Historical Perspective: An Introduction” by Lewis R. Gordon, Ramón Grosfoguel, and Eric Mielants
- “Christian Zionism” by Paul Kivel
- “Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims” by Edward Said
- “Introduction” in *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* by Nur Masalha
- “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims” by Ella Shohat

Suggested Texts:

- Excerpts on “The Zionist Movement, Youth Movements and Parties” from [Ciechanowiec-Bialystok District; Memorial and Records](#)
- [“The Israeli Declaration of Independence: An Annotation”](#) by Faryn Borella
- “Review Article: Revealing the Past--Breaking with Silence: The Yemenite Babies Affair and the Israeli Media” by Claris Harbon
- “The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management, and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel” by Aziza Khazzoom

February 28 Facts on the Ground: Occupation and Discrimination

Required Texts:

- “Epilogue” in *Jerusalem: The Biography* by Simon Sebag Montefiore
- *Wujood II: The Grassroots Guide to Jerusalem*, “Which Jerusalem: Borders and Lines” 80-85, “Legal Issues” 86-111, “Education” 113-119, Economy 120-127, “The Politics of Foreign Aid” 136-140
- [“Being Black and Jewish: Ethiopians Bear the Brunt of Israeli State Racism”](#) by Efrat Yerday
- [“Recognizing the Discrimination Ethiopian Jews Face in Israel is a Step in the Right Direction”](#) by Efrat Yerday
- “‘The Coloniser Who Refuses’: Co-Resistance and the Paradoxical Reality of Israeli Solidarity Activists” by Leanne Gale

Suggested Texts:

- “The Right to Maim” by Jasbir K. Puar

March 6 Liberation Theologies: Palestinian (Christian), Islamic and Jewish

Required Texts:

- “Chapter 6: Liberation Struggles and the Jewish Community” in *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation: 3rd Expanded Edition* by Marc H. Ellis
- “Chapter 10: Civil Liberation Theology in Palestine: Indigenous, Secular-Humanist and Post-Colonial Perspectives” by Professor Nur Masalha in *Theologies of Liberation in Palestine-Israel: Indigenous, Contextual and Postcolonial Perspectives*
- “Reflections on Sabeel’s Liberation Theology and Ecumenical Work (1992-2013)” by Dr. Naim Ateek in *Theologies of Liberation in Palestine-Israel: Indigenous, Contextual and Postcolonial Perspectives*
- “The Quest for Peace with Justice in the Middle East: Christian Zionist and Palestinian Theologies” by Rosemary Radford Rueter in *Theologies of Liberation in Palestine-Israel: Indigenous, Contextual and Postcolonial Perspectives*
- “Chapter 6: Toward a New Diasporism” in *The Colors of Jews: Racial Politics and Radical Diasporism* by Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz

March 13 Decolonizing Travel: from Birthright to occu-tourism

Required Texts:

- [“Visa Triple Story: Shoshana complains to all the Palestinians at the party about her expired tourist visa and other adventures”](#) by Shoshanna Austerlitz

- “Sharing Sacred Space: Holy Places in Jerusalem Between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam” by Ora Limor
- “Deploying Tourism” in *Tours that Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage and Israeli Birthright Tourism* by Shaul Kelner
- “Holy Land Pilgrimage Guidelines” by Committee on International Justice and Peace, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- [“The Walled Off Hotel: The Struggle for Decolonization”](#) by Jamil Khader
- [“Banksy’s Bethlehem Hotel is an Example of how Tourism can be Political”](#)

March 20-29 Pilgrimage to Palestine/Israel

April 3 Reflection and Integration

April 10 *School closed (Good Friday & Passover)*

April 17 From Witness to Action: What do we do now?

April 24 Collective Action Planning

May 1 Collective Action Planning

May 8 Collective Action Planning