



Rethinking Politics and Religion in the Mediterranean

MDES-3000 (3 credits / 45 hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:

Tunisia and Italy: Politics and Religious Integration in the Mediterranean

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus represents a recent semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Description

This interdisciplinary seminar addresses ways in which politics and religion are being rethought, re-conceptualized, and approached in Tunisia and across the Mediterranean. The succession of revolutions in the MENA region and ensuing disintegration of authoritarian political systems, the accentuation of human mobility across North Africa and Europe, the rise of the global threat of ISIL, and the entanglement of politics and religion with the discourse on violence have urged policy makers, political scientists, and religious scholars to rethink conceptual frameworks, design, and strategies to appraise transnational politics and political linkages, democracy and democratization processes, subjectivity, religious affiliation, and radical expressions of Islam. The seminar explores the role of state and civil society in the democratization process and the reorganization of the religious landscape in Tunisia, examines the impact of secular politics and Sufi Islam in curbing the discourse of violence and intolerance circulated by radical groups, and assesses the importance of affiliation and belonging to transnational political spaces in the formation of subjectivities, affiliations, and collective identities.

Learning Outcomes

The “Rethinking Politics and Religion” seminar comprises 45 class hours of instruction (3 credits). Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Gain factual knowledge of the geopolitics of the Mediterranean basin;
- Identify various forms of conflict and cohesion between the different polities, cultures, and religions in the region;
- Recognize the manifest and discrete modes of resistance against the dissemination of radicalism and extremism;
- Recognize the role of political Islam in Tunisia’s democracy-building process;
- Gain direct comprehensive knowledge of the role of Tunisian civil society organizations in the success of democratic transition;
- Formulate an informed, culturally appropriate and intellectually rigorous paper in which you address an aspect of politics and/or religion in the Mediterranean.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English. Students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and locales.

Course Schedule

*Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.

Module I: Mediterranean Revolutions and Geopolitics

This module is designed to familiarize the students with the concept of Mediterranean history and culture, exploring common political, social, religious, and economic features. Salient among these features today is the Arab Spring revolutions and the recent success of democracy-building in Tunisia and its impact on regional geopolitics and on specific countries on both shores of the Mediterranean.

Session 1: Conceptualizing the Mediterranean

In this session the students will explore the idea of a Mediterranean culture, dwelling both on the similarities and the differences, continuities and disruptions between the different national "cultures" on the Mediterranean shores.

Required Readings:

Abulafia, David (2013) *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean*. London: Oxford University Press. ISBN-13: 978-0199315994

Brown, Kenneth (1993): *Mediterraneans/Mediterranéens Review*. Manchester, UK: Didsbury Press.

Norwich, John Julius (2006) *The Middle Sea: A History of the Mediterranean*. London: Doubleday. ISBN-13: 978-1400034284

Theroux, Paul (1996) *The Pillars of Hercules: The Grand Tour of the Mediterranean*. London: Ballantine Books. ISBN-10: 0449910857

Session 2: The Arab Spring and Mediterranean Geopolitics

This session explores the impact that the Arab Spring has had on the geopolitical relations in the Mediterranean. In particular, the session analyzes the Euro-Mediterranean partnership in light of pressing migration trends and increasing security concerns.

Required Readings:

Mahmoud, Abdeselem (2015) Social Movements in Tunisia and Egypt: A Tale of Two Revolutions. *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, 3:3.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273458960_Social_Movements_in_Tunisia_and_Egypt_A_Tale_of_Two_Revolutions

Carty, Victoria (2014) Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt: The Impact of New Media on Contemporary Social Movements and Challenges for Social Movement Theory. *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology*, 51:1, 51-80.

Session 3: Tunisia and Italy: Shared Itineraries

This session provides a historical overview of the intertwined relationship between Tunisia and Italy while focusing on politics and religious integration. The session looks in particular at the ways in which Italy has been impacted by the Arab Spring.

Required Reading:

Paoletti, Emanuela (2014) The Arab Spring and the Italian Response to Migration in 2011: Beyond the Emergency. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 2:2, 127-150.

Session 4: Rural Tunisia and the Arab Spring

This session will be devoted to studying and assessing the role that rural Tunisia played in the January 2011 Revolution and which it continues to play in the ongoing democracy-building phase. The session will be timed to coincide with an onsite visit to *I-Lead* in Sidi Bouzid and *Promo-Thala*, youth associations for rural development and self-empowerment.

Required Readings

Akkari, Abdeljalil, Bouthaina Azami, and Sobhi Tawil (2010) Education, diversité et cohésion sociale en Méditerranée occidentale. *Report*. UNESCO.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001883/188331f.pdf>

Chomiak, L. (2011) The making of a revolution in Tunisia. *Middle East Law and Governance*, 3. 68-83

Session 4: Secular Trade-Unionism and Civil Society

This session analyzes the role played by various minority groups organized in civil society association that operate as watchdogs for democracy consolidation in Tunisia, chief among which but not exclusively are the vigorous trade unions. Students will examine in this session the UGTT historical role in the post-revolutionary democratic transition “national dialogue” (which earned it the Nobel Peace Prize); women’s association both secular and Islamic, and the thriving minorities associations: LGBT, Jewish, Amazigh, Tunisians of sub-Saharan origin

Required Readings:

Baker, Veronica (2015). The Role of Civil Society in the Tunisian Democratic Transition. Boulder CU scholar. [scholar. scholar.colorado.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2212&context=honr_theses](http://scholar.colorado.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2212&context=honr_theses)

Charrad, Mounira M. and Amina Zarrugh (2013) The Arab Spring and Women’s Rights in Tunisia. e-*International Relations*. <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/09/04/the-arab-spring-and-womens-rights-in-tunisia/>

Stepan, A. (2012) Tunisia’s Transition and the Twin Tolerations. *Journal of Democracy*, 23:2, 89-103.

Beinin, Joel (2016) Political Economy and Social Movement Theory Perspectives on the Tunisian and Egyptian Popular Uprisings of 2011. Middle East Centre Paper Series: 14.

http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/65291/1/_lse.ac.uk_storage_LIBRARY_Secondary_libfile_shared_repository_Content_LSE%20Middle%20East%20Centre%20Papers_Beinin_Political%20economy%20and%20social%20movement%20_2016.pdf

Session 5: Group discussion and reflection on thematic content of the module

Module 2: Political Islam and Democracy in Tunisia

The module examines the crucial role that political Islam and various social and cultural movements played both during the revolution of January 2011 and the subsequent democracy consolidation phase. Mainly, the module will trace the transformation of Islamism from radical ideological movement advocating the reinstatement of the Caliphate into a political party abiding by the rules of democracy; and it will appraise the numerous social movements and civil society organizations, arguing that without them democracy remains a fragile process.

Session 1: Islam and Democracy

This session discusses the much debated issue regarding Islam’s “compatibility” with democracy and Islamist political organization’s capacity and readiness to integrate democratic mode of governance. The session focuses on the transnational role of Islam and the impact of women’s NGOs and feminist discourse in reconciling tradition and modernity.

Required Readings:

Haugbølle, R. & Cavatorta, F. (2012) Beyond Ghanouchi: Islamism and Social Change in Tunisia. *Middle East Report*, 262, 20-25.

Bowen, John (2004) Beyond Migration: Islam as a Transnational Public Space. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30:5, 879-894.

Franks, Myfanwy (2005) *Islamic feminist strategies in a liberal democracy: how feminist are they?*
Comparative Islamic Studies.

Session 2: Ennahda Party: Rethinking Politics and Islam

This session will focus, within political Islam, chiefly on its moderate and democratic expression, Ennahda Party. The session will trace the party's progress since its inception in the early 1970 as a local chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood, to its access to power and power-sharing with secular political formations in the elections of 2011 and 2014. The students will learn to identify the internal revisions as well as the external geopolitical pressures behind this Islamist party's ideological transformation.

Required Readings:

Piser, Karina (2016) How Tunisia's Islamists Embraced Democracy. *Foreign Policy*, March 31.

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/31/how-tunisias-islamists-embraced-democracy-ennahda/>

Marks, Monica (2015) *Tunisia's Ennahda: Rethinking Islamism in the Context of ISIS and the Egyptian Coup*. Washington: Brookings Institution.

Session 3: Field Visit to Ennahda Party and the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID)

This session will consist of a field visit to the headquarters of the Ennahda Party where students can meet with top party officials and to the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, an institution devoted to the study of the relationship between Islam and democracy.

Required Reading:

McCarthy, Rory (2016) How Tunisia's Ennahda party turned from its Islamist Roots. *The Washington Post*,

May 23. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/05/23/how-tunisias-ennahda>

Session 4: Religious Integration in the Context of Jihadist Islamism

This session will examine the impact of radical Islamism and its militant "Jihadist" form on religious integration in Tunisia and across the Mediterranean. Going beyond the usual distinction between "scientific Jihadism" and "armed Jihadism," the session will explore the linkage today between the collapse of authoritarian governments, often associated with modernist reformism, and the use of violence to install a new polity, "The Caliphate." The session will also assess the impact of Jihadist Islamism on religious integration in Tunisia and the Mediterranean.

Required Reading:

Hamid, S. (2011) The rise of the Islamists: how Islamists will change politics, and vice versa. *Foreign Affairs*, 90: 2, 198-213.

Discussion 5: Discussion and reflection on thematic content of the module.

Module 3: Civil Society and Social Movements

This module assumes that the fundamental challenges of the ongoing democracy-consolidation phase in Tunisia are social and economic development and the institutional founding of democratic system. Whereas the first challenge aims mainly at circumventing the very causes that triggered the January 2011 Revolution, the second one aims at shoring democracy from the return of authoritarianism. The module argues that in the response to both challenges the role of civil society and social movements is crucial. Students will therefore examine how traditionally marginalized constituencies in Tunisian society, namely women, youth, LGBT, and ethnic minorities are engaging in civic action and social transformation.

Session 1: Youth, Globalization, and the Arab Spring

This session will be devoted to the examination of the rapport between the younger generation, the availability and use of social media and global communications, and the series of uprisings across MENA region.

Required Readings

Hoffman, M. and Jamal, A. (2012) The youth and the Arab spring: cohort differences and similarities. *Middle East Law and Governance*, 4.

United Nations Development Program (2010) *Arab youth strategizing for the millennium development goals*. NY: UNDP publishing

Session 2: Youth and Social Engagement

The session will chiefly examine the paradox that consists in having, on the one hand, youth playing an essential role in the revolution, and on the other, by a very modest presence in engaged social action. The weakness of the notion of community or social service is to be linked to deficiencies in school curricula and political culture.

Required Readings

Chomiak, L. and Entelis, J. (2011) The making of North Africa's Intifadas. *Middle East Report*, 259, 8-15.

Parker, E. (2013) Tunisian youth: between political exclusion and civic engagement. *Tunisia Live*. June 4.

Session 3: Social Movements and Political Transformation in Tunisia

This session analyses ways in which social movements contribute to ongoing social and political transformation of Tunisia society. The focus is on women's and LGBT movements. The session also addresses the impact of new and social media in facilitating the discussion around gender equity and TGBT rights.

Required Readings

Zollner, Barbara (2016) The Metamorphosis of Social Movements into Political Parties during Democratic Transition Processes. A Comparison of Egyptian and Tunisian Movements and Parties.
https://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/conference/papers/2016/Zollner%20Metamorphosis%20PSA%20submission_1.pdf

Connell, Tula (2016) Tunisian Women: Sustaining the Fight for Equal Rights. Policy Brief. Solidarity Center.
<http://www.solidaritycenter.org/tunisian-womensustaining-the-fight-for-equal-right/>

———— (2013) Working Women Empowered: Making Democracy in Tunisia. Solidarity Center, March 5.
<http://www.solidaritycenter.org/working-womenempowered-making-democracy-in-tunisia/>

[Khedim](#), Manel (2016) Exist: Tunisia's Overlooked Gay-Rights Groups Speak Out, April 1.
<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/04/01/we-exist/>

[Mzalouat](#), Haifa (2016) LGBT rights in Tunisia: The fight will be televised, June 17.
<https://www.boell.de/en/2016/06/17/lgbt-rights-tunisia-fight-will-be-televised>

Session 4: Field Visits

This module integrates experiential learning through field visits to a number of NGOs and associations including: "Nissa Tounes" (women's association), "Chouf" (LGBT), "Mnemty" (Black consciousness-raising), Nawat (independent media), and Women Voters Association. During field visits, students meet with social and political actors and discuss the role of civil society in social and political transformation.

Session 5: Group discussion and reflection on thematic content of Module 3

Module 4: Mobility, Citizenship, and Security in the Mediterranean

This module focuses on the context of mobility across the Mediterranean and ways it impacts definitions of citizenship both in the host country and country of origin. The module also looks at the impact of mass migration and refugee flux and related security concerns on Mediterranean crossings. Discussions started in this module would continue during the excursion to Italy and students have the opportunity to see how issues such as security and citizenship play out in physical space and help reconstruct the social and cultural life-world of European societies.

Sessions include:

- Citizenship and the Nation State: Shifting Categories in a Changing Social and Cultural Environment
- Immigrants, Asylum Seekers, and the Question of Borders

- Youth radicalism in the Mediterranean and Beyond
- Can Europe Close its Borders to Humans Fleeing Zones of Conflict?
- Onsite visits to Italian associations concerned with immigrant integration

Readings:

Andrijasevic, Rutvica (2010) From exception to excess: detention and deportations across the Mediterranean space. De Genova, Nicholas and Nathalie Peutz. Eds. *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 147-165.

Klepp, S. (2010). "Contested Asylum System: The European Union between Refugee Protection and Border Control in the Mediterranean Sea" *European Journal of Migration & Law* 12(1), pp.1-21.S

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Timely completion of all assignments is expected. Late hand-ins will be penalized. All assignments are evaluated according to organization, analytical quality, depth of understanding, argumentation, and presentation of evidence.

Description of Assignments:

- During the semester, students will be required to write one critical paper that analyzes an aspect of political or religious transformation in Tunisia. Students are also encouraged to extend the analysis to the Mediterranean region. The paper should be at least about five pages long.
- Students will also do a critical assessment of a social entrepreneurship project. This project can either appraise the reach and efficiency of an existing project or the blueprint of a project thought through and proposed by the student.
- Students will provide a 10 to 15 minute presentation of the social entrepreneurship project.
- Attendance during the thematic seminar is mandatory and your grade will reflect your involvement in class and during other activities and excursions.

Assessment:

Critical Paper	50%
Appraisal / Design of Social Entrepreneurship Project	30%
Oral Presentation of the Entrepreneurship Project	10%
Class Attendance and Participation	10%

Grading Scale:

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64%	F

Expectations and Policies

- Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.

- Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (those of classmates, lecturers, and local constituents). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

Disability Services: Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services at disabilityservices@sit.edu for information and support in facilitating an accessible educational experience. Additional information regarding SIT Disability Services, including a link to the online request form, can be found on the Disability Services website at <http://studyabroad.sit.edu/disabilityservices>.

Academic Policies: SIT prides itself on providing students with an experientially based program; we hold ourselves, and our students, to the highest of academic standards. Students are asked to refer to the **SIT Study Abroad Handbook** for policies on academic integrity, ethics, academic warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process.