Immigration, Politics, and Religion in the Euro-Mediterranean Space

MDES/EURO 3500 (3 credits)

Tunisia and Italy: Politics and Religious Integration in the Mediterranean

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description
Mass migration across the Euro-Mediterranean region has refocused the debate on Europe’s absorption capacity and immigrant integration. This interdisciplinary seminar takes Sicily as a case study to analyze the underpinnings of EU “open-door” policy and its impact on immigrant and religious “integration” and social cohesions in Europe. Students critically interrogate the viability of the nation-state as an integrative political category, analyze ways in which immigrant religious identity interacts with the idea of a laic Europe, and revisit conceptual articulations of the notions of citizenship and multiculturalism in light of political and cultural hegemonies based on the exclusion and marginalization of “otherness.” Lectures and field visits will also allow students to examine pressing issues of language and identity, Islam and religious affiliation as they interact with European secular modernity and impact subjectivity, political engagement, and integration. Contra the assimilationist discourse about exclusion, students are encouraged to think through counter-hegemonic ethics of inclusive solidarities. This seminar is delivered during the program’s 3-week excursion to Italy.

Learning Outcomes
Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Explain immigration and integration policies in Italy and in Europe;
- Enumerate the challenges facing immigrant integration in Italy and Europe;
- Analyze the complexities of immigrant integration of Islam as a ritual practice and as a public marker of identity in Italy and the EU space;
- Outline the trends of assimilationist and isolationist ideologies on a possible reconfiguration of European space;
• Analyze in a thesis the potential and challenges of an inclusive European space and a design for immigrant integration.

Language of Instruction
This course is taught in English. Students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content as well as the nuances of politics and religion through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

Instructional Methods
SIT’s teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; “knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners.

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 1: Italy and EU Migration Policy
This module provides an overview of Italy’s history with migration and migration policy. Once an emigration country, Italy stands today as an important host of immigrants and refugees from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The module assesses the strength of the country’s immigration and integration policies by incorporating the views of NGOs working with directly with immigrants and refugees and examines the stereotyped representation of Southern Italians’ emigration to Northern Italy by their fellow northerners. The module also examines the impact of EU general orientation towards the refoulement (deportation) of undocumented immigrants, cuts in immigrant benefits, and politicians’ desire to make their countries “less appealing to refugees” on immigrant integration and human rights protection.

Sessions address:
• Overview of Italy’s Migration Policy: From Emigration to Host Country
• The Palermo Accord and Immigrant Protection
• Immigration Laws and Immigrant ‘Punishment’
• How Immigrants Are Adapting to the Legal Migration Framework?
Session 1: The EU Immigration and Political Asylum Legislation
The session charts the genesis of the European legislations and regulations regarding immigration. Though the legal corpus is vast and complicated, by the end of the session the students will acquire a precise knowledge of the main texts organizing immigration and asylum seekers in the European Union, namely the Geneva Refugee Convention (1951), The Dublin Regulations (2003), and the Common European Asylum System, CEAS (2005).

Required Readings:

Session 2: Italian State’s Efforts at Immigrant Integration
In this session the students will learn how the EU immigration laws and regulations and common policies are implemented by Italy and especially by the local government of Sicily. Given the variety and multiplicity of the laws and policies (and sometimes their contradictory nature), the implementation will be shown to be rather full of twists and turns. More importantly, the students will learn directly about the complexity of the migrant/administration issues through the study of first-reception “hotspots”, repatriation (“refoulement”) measures for irregular economic migrants, SPRAR Project (Protection System for Refugees and Asylum Seekers), and the lengthy duration and unpredictability of asylum seekers’ court decisions.

Required readings:

Session 3: Italian Civil Society’s Efforts at Immigrant Integration
This session consists in a series of on-site presentations and field visit to civil society associations dedicated to immigrants’ integration. The associations range from ecclesiastical to secular; from Santa Chiara diocesan center for youth to the Sportello Astalli and Ragazzi Harraga and the multicultural and multiethnic cooperative, Moltivolti. Through these visits and
presentations, and also by meeting and interacting with migrants from African, Middle Eastern and North African origin, students learn both of the difficulties migrants have endured when coming to Sicily, and still endure, as well as of the needful work done by volunteer organizations.

**Required readings:**

**Recommended readings:**

**Session 4: Group Discussion and Reflection on the Thematic Content of the Module**

**Module 2: Muslim Immigrants, Gender, and Secularism in Europe**
This module addresses the pressing issues of gender equity and Islam and their interaction with European secular modernity. Europe has maintained an ambivalent relationship with Islam and Muslims over centuries. Muslim immigrant interventions in the public sphere challenge Europe’s dominant narratives of secularism, gender equity, and cultural identity. While the debate often embeds forms of xenophobia and Islamophobia, it also opens up Western systems of modernity to alternative forms of representation.

Sessions address:
- Muslims in the Western Imagination: Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism
- Media Representation of Muslim Men in Europe
- Refugee Women and Violence
- Islam and the Public Sphere in Europe
- Gender Equity and Refugee Integration

**Session 1: Islam in Europe**
In this session, students will be introduced to the vast and variegated subject of the status and presence of Islam in Europe. The introduction will not be made through the historical perspective, but synchronically, by examining the reception of Islam and Muslims today in Europe. Two topics will be treated in particular: the persistence of Orientalist attitudes in European culture and politics; and the ongoing debate whether Islam, qua religion and culture, is compatible with secular democracy.

**Required Readings:**
Session 2: Islam in Italy
In this session students will focus on the condition of Islam in Italy, especially in Sicily, with special attention to Muslim immigrants.

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:

Session 3: Islam and Gender
In this session the students will examine one of the most problematic issues concerning Islam and modernity in Europe, namely the gender issues. Both the traditional attitudes towards the female body and status, and the resurgence of a new Islamic feminism will be studied, especially in light of the Muslim community integration in European culture.

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:

Session 4: Group Discussion and Reflection on the Thematic Content of the Module
Module 3: Immigrant Integration and the “Populist Wave”
This module analyzes the rise of radical right and populist ideologies across Europe and examines its impact on the future of Europe as an integrative space and its relation with its southern neighbors and the rest of the world. While the radical right has been gaining momentum as an electorate force since the 1990s, in particular in Italy, the recent mass migration has further propelled populism and assimilationist ideologies as a force to reckon with across Europe. The module will address the impact of radical right agenda on EU immigration public policy and the future of an integrative European space. Students will be encouraged to draw parallels between European populism, the populist platform of Islamist parties, and the rise of right-wing politics in the US.

Sessions address:
- Geographies of Xenophobia: Radical Right and the Question of Immigrants
- Immigrant Integration in the Context of Right-Wing Politics
- Right-Wing Politics and Democracy
- Neo-Fascism, Memory, and the Politics of the Present
- Ideology and Transnationalism: Right-Wing Politics in Europe and in the US

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:

Session 1: The Rise of Populism in Europe and Other Countries
In this session, the students will focus on the rise, in the beginning of the new millennium, of populist ideologies throughout Europe and other countries, including the USA. Particularly stressed will be the view that populism can appear and flourish only in representative democracies, seemingly to address its failures, and that, if left to implement its own political agenda, will lead to what has been called an “illiberal” form of democratic rule.

Required Readings:
Retrieved from: [https://www.slideshare.net/tigan7788/download-what-is-populism-janwerner-mller-pdf-free](https://www.slideshare.net/tigan7788/download-what-is-populism-janwerner-mller-pdf-free)
Session 2: Ultra-right and Populist left in Italy
In this session students will focus on Italian partisan politics in the past decade, examine in particular the rise of the North League and the Five-Star Movement. Students will learn what these two seemingly antagonist political ideologies have in common: a populist view of political culture.

Required Readings:

Session 3: Populism and Immigrants’ Integration in Italy
The students will examine in this session the Italian populist approach to immigrants’ integration. What differentiates the policies of the North League from the Five-Star Movement even as they are currently sharing power.

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:

Session 4: Group Discussion and Reflection on the Thematic Content of the Module

Module 4: Immigrant Integration and the Politics of Language
This module focuses on the politics of language as they related to immigrant integration. Viewed as an important marker of integration, the language of the immigrant functions as an ambivalent site where the immigrant subjectivities and trajectories are reconstructed as they interact with the language and cultural field of the host community. The immigrant often inscribes in the language of their host culture traces of their own ethnicity, mother-tongue accent, and worldview. Their inscriptions implode the linguistic and cultural field of the host...
language just as they themselves undergo transformative cultural transformation. Also, while a mastery of the language of the host country is often a required skill for [good] employment, the immigrant’s mother-tongue language embodies the immigrant’s ethno-cultural identity and ties to the country of origin.

Sessions address:
- Is Immigrant Integration Possible Without Language Learning?
- The Arabic Language and Immigrant Religious Identity
- Second-Generation Immigrants and Language Use
- Language and Ties to the Country of origin

Session 1: Language Use and the Politics of Integration in Italy
In this session, the students will learn how efforts at immigrants’ integration in Italy focuses on language use and language learning. While in Palermo, they will attend a language class for immigrants organized by the NGO Moltivolti.

Required Readings:

Session 2: Language Use among Second-Generation Immigrants in Italy
The students, in this session, will be introduced to the perennial issue of language use among immigrant families, namely the conflict between the parents use of their native language to convey tradition and cultural norms and their children’s aspiration to speak the language of the host country used by their peers, and which is also a significant element of their identity construction. Another lesson to be learned from this session is that language reception by migrants is by no means linear, but is rather dialectical as immigrants change and invent words and expressions and new forms of discourse, for their own use, that ultimately seep back into the national tongue.

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:


**Session 3: Group Discussion and Reflection on the Thematic Content of the Module**

**Module 5: Reimagining Euro-Mediterranean Relations**

This module aims to revisit the idea of Europe through the lens of diversity and inclusion not only from within the space of its member states but also from the perspective of its southern neighbors. Students reflect on the viability of the nation-state as an integrative political category and the dominance of the discourse about exclusion (Brexit; economic insolvency; refugees) and think through alternative ethics of solidarity and inclusion. The objective is to map new borderland spaces of inclusion, belonging, and interaction that are emerging from within ‘Fortress Europe.’

Sessions address:
- Whose Europe is it Anyway? Migration and Historical Constructions of Europe
- Immigrant Integration and the Politics of Exclusion and Inclusion
- Cultural Identity and Belonging in a New European Landscape
- Spaces of Diversity and Inclusion: Culture and the Arts

**Session 1: A brief History of the Mediterranean**

This session will attempt a brief overview of the centuries-old exchanges across the Mediterranean Sea, dwelling on the present-day situation, defined by the rise of nation-state in the nineteenth century and its consequences; colonialism and its legacy, among which immigration. Beyond the existing extraordinary diversity of cultures, languages, religions, polities, and life-forms, the session will argue that there is such a thing as a common Mediterranean cultural space.

*Required Readings:*

**Session 2: Suspicion or Solidarity across the Mediterranean Today?**

In this session the students will learn how, despite conflicts, tensions, and suspicion, the economic, political and human reality tells a different picture; and that the overwhelming majority of exchanges in the Mediterranean occur between its northern and southern shores.

*Required Reading:*

Recommended Readings:

Session 3: Group Discussion and Reflection on the Thematic Content of the Module

Assignments and Evaluation
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.

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1) Critical Paper (50%)
During the semester, students will be required to write one critical paper to discuss aspects of immigrant life in Italy and Europe. The paper should be about 6 pages long.

2) Design for Immigrant Integration (30%)
Students will also think through a creative approach to immigrant integration. This project can either document an existing program in Italy or the blueprint of a project thought through and proposed by the student.

3) Oral Presentation of Immigrant Integration (10%)
Students will provide a 10-to-15-minute presentation of the design for immigrant integration project.

4) Attendance and Participation (10%)
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%
Design for Immigrant Integration - 30%
Oral Presentation of Immigrant Integration - 10%
Attendance and Participation - 10%

Grading Scale:
94-100% 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

Program Expectations

• 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.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and the Policies section of the SIT website for
all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all
published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic
integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field
study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and
disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important
resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as
Library resources and research support, Disability Services, Counseling Services, Title IX
information, and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion resources.