REL 213 Refugees & Exiles: Religion in the Diaspora
Instructor: Yaniv Feller (yfeller@wesleyan.edu)
Meeting Times: Wed., Fri. 10:50-12:10, Religion Seminar Room
Office Hours: Tue. 15:30-17:00; Wed. 13:30-15:00 (171 Church Street, Religion Department #207)

Course Description:
The recent years have seen the on-going tragic refugee crises, with millions of people being displaced due to war and ecological disasters. That this crisis also has religious overtones is evident by the so-called “Muslim Ban” in the United States or the language used by right wing leaders across Europe.

This course deals with the meaning of refuge, exile and diaspora through three perspectives: literary, philosophical, and historical. A variety of examples—including the contemporary refugee crises in the Middle East, the black transatlantic, and the destruction of the temple in the Hebrew Bible—will raise for us the question about the theological presuppositions underpinning our understanding of diaspora and exile. What does it mean to be violently forced to leave one’s home? How is it possible to make sense of such a tragedy? What ethical responsibility do we have toward refugees? Throughout the course, each student will explore the consequences of different answers to these questions by focusing on a case study.

Course Outcomes: By the end of this course, you will acquire,

- A better understanding of a few of the refugees’ crises that shaped our world
- The ability to make fine analytical distinction between different categories
- A recognition of religious themes in the discussion of a “refugee crisis”
- The ability to look at contemporary discourse about refugees from various perspectives
- Philosophical and analytical tools to discuss the relation between exile, refuge, and diaspora

Texts:

- J.M. Cotezee, Waiting for the Barbarians
- Jonathan Lear, Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation
- Carl Schmitt, The Concept of the Political
- All other readings will be provided on Moodle and are available in the course reserves.
Methods of Evaluation:

Active Participation and Weekly Response Papers (20%): This class is based on your active participation. You are expected to come to class prepared, having read the texts and thought of at least one or two topics you wish to discuss. Once per week, you are required to submit a one page reading report. This should include a summary of the argument in the reading(s), as well as analysis, e.g. clarification questions, critique of the reading, or comparison with previous readings. In addition, once during the course you will be expected to present a text and critical questions. **Due**: Response papers are to be posted on Moodle by midnight before the relevant class so that I will be able to read them. A list for the oral presentation will be given at the start of the semester.

Choice of Refugee or Diasporic Experience (5%): Which contemporary issue relating to refugees and diaspora would you like to explore throughout this course? It does not have to be one we will discuss in this course as long it is a contemporary event for which you can find news articles. For this assignment, you are required to give the main contours of the event, the reasons why it interests you and three to five newspaper articles that are relevant. **Due**: Feb. 9

Opinion Piece (20%): After having done more research, you are required to write an opinion piece, up to 1000-words, as if to be ready to be sent to a leading newspaper. We will discuss how to write it in class. **Due**: Mar. 7

Waiting for the Barbarians Analysis (20%): 5-7 pages. You are required to analyze themes from the book using materials from the readings. You are encouraged to connect it to other materials relating to the event you are working on, such as comparisons with books by other authors or examining if and how this literary work highlights similar concerns. Please consult me before doing that so we will make sure you are on the right track. **Draft**: Mar. 30; **Due**: April 6

Final Paper Proposal (5%): This is the next step after picking the event. What exactly do you want to write about? Which sources will you use? What might an outline of the argument be? Don’t worry if that later changes – this is natural. Feel free to explore the topic in non-traditional, artistic ways **Due**: Apr. 20

Final Paper (30%): This should be related to the event you chose. You are welcome to further develop a point you have made in one of the posts or previous assignments for this course, for example expanding the opinion piece or response papers and relating the event to the readings.

Bonus Events (up to 3%): There are many events pertaining to our course’s subjects throughout the semester. Participation in these events is highly recommended. A list will be available on Moodle and updated regularly. If you see a relevant event on campus, please let me know. A bonus of one point for the final grade will be given following the submission of a one page response paper. **Due**: One week after the event.

Late Submission Policy: No late submission will be accepted for weekly assignments (bonus, responses) but a make-up opportunity might be given depending on the reason. For all big
assignments, a penalty of a third letter grade will be assigned for each day past the deadline, including weekends. If you have a valid, documented reason for late submission, please let me know as soon as possible.

Course Policies

A Note on Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is essential to the scholarly pursuit and the success of the learning process. Ensuring the proper academic conduct also guarantees that a degree from Wesleyan University is reflective of each individual student’s achievements. Please review the Honor Code carefully (http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/StudentHandbook.pdf). If you have any doubts or uncertainties in this regard, do not hesitate to contact me. Accessibility and Accommodations: Students with diverse learning needs are welcome in this course. Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. Please note that in order to receive accommodations, you must have a recognized and documented disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible. You can find more information here: http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities/Student/academic-accommodations.html Do not hesitate to talk to me in person and I will do my best to assist.

Office Hours and E-Mail: Please feel free to come by my office and talk to me. If you cannot make it to the office hours, but would like to meet – let me know and we will find time. You can also contact me by email. In this case, please use your university email account (other accounts may land in the spam folder) and include a topic-line, your name, and the question(s) you have. Please do not email questions for which the answers can easily be found by reading the syllabus (“When is the essay due?” “What’s the reading for next week?” etc.). I try to respond quickly, but please note that emails will receive a reply within two working days. This means that if you send me an email on the weekend, or if you send a request for extension in the last minute, they might be answered only later, and the penalty incurred will be implemented.

Electronic Free Zone: Electronic devices are great, but they are also a distraction. There is now evidence that students who use electronic devices in class, as well as people who sit next to them, tend on average to receive lower grades. I therefore ask you not to use laptops, phones or other disturbing electronic devices during class. Please bring the readings in a printed form for every class. If there are any accommodation concerns, do contact me and we will find a solution.
Schedule

Unit I: Preliminaries


Unit II: The Paradigm of Jewish Exile and Return

Feb. 2: Bavli Gittin 55b-56b


Feb. 9: Daniel Boyarin, A Traveling Homeland, 9-32

Choice of Crisis Assignment due


Unit III: The Nation State and Its Enemies

Feb. 16: How to Read and Write an Op-Ed

Feb. 21: Carl Schmitt, Political Theology, 1-15, 36-52


Feb. 28: Hannah Arendt, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man” The Origins of Totalitarianism, 267-302

Unit IV: Waiting for the Barbarians

Mar. 2: J.M. Cotezee, Waiting for the Barbarians, chp. 1-2; Opinion Piece Deadline

Mar. 7: Cotezee, chp. 3 (until the return of the soldiers);

Mar. 9: Cotezee, finish

Mar. 10-27: Winter Break

Unit V: The Black Atlantic


**Unit VI: The Current Moment**


**Unit VIII: Representations and Reparations**


*Highly recommended bonus event*: Migration and Mobilities (2-6pm)


**Unit VII: The Inner Exile of Plenty Coups**

Apr. 25: Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope*, chp. 1;

Apr. 27: Lear, chp. 2

May 2: Lear, chp. 3

May 4: Concluding Discussion Final Paper Draft Submission