Invitation

Thursday, 15 April 2010, 6 pm

The Return of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel

Lecture by Gabriel Piterberg

In this original and wide-ranging study, Gabriel Piterberg examines the ideology and literature behind the colonization of Palestine, from the late nineteenth century to the present. Exploring Zionism’s origins in Central-Eastern European nationalism and settler movements, he shows how its texts can be placed within a wider discourse of western colonization. Piterberg revisits the work of Theodor Herzl, Gershom Scholem, Anita Shapira and David Ben-Gurion, among other thinkers influential in the formation of the Zionist myth, to break open prevailing views of Zionism. He demonstrates that it was in fact unexceptional, expressing a consciousness and imagination typical of colonial settler movement. Shaped by European ideological currents and the realities of colonial life, Zionism constructed its own story as a unique and impregnable one, in the process excluding the voices of an indigenous people— the Palestinian Arabs.

“This thoroughly researched and engaging book provides an intellectual, cultural and literary fulcrum from which Zionist ideology and practice can be read afresh. ...This book is essential reading for everyone who is interested in the history of Zionism as well as the history of nationalist movements.” — Yehouda Shenhav, Professor of Sociology, Tel-Aviv University

Gabriel Piterberg teaches history at UCLA, and has taught at St Antony’s and Balliol Colleges, Oxford. His previous books include An Ottoman Tragedy: History and Historiography at Play. He writes for the New Left Review and the London Review of Books.

The discussion will be moderated by Prof. Marc Baer (ZMO).
The sovereign settler versus the conscious pariah: Theodor Herzl and Bernard Lazare -- The Zionist colonization of Palestine in the comparative context of settler colonialism -- The foundational myth of Zionism: politics, ideology and scholarship -- Myth and history on Mount Scopus -- Gerhard-Gershom Scholem's return to history -- The Bible, the Nakba and Hebrew literature. Politics in Israel is dominated by Zionist parties. They traditionally fall into three camps, the first two being the largest: Labor Zionism, Revisionist Zionism and Religious Zionism. There are also several non-Zionist Orthodox religious parties, non-Zionist secular left-wing groups as well as non-Zionist and anti-Zionist Israeli Arab parties. Golda Meir, Prime Minister of Israel from 1969 to 1974, once joked that "in Israel, there are 3 million prime ministers". The particular version of Note - The Zionist movement developed against the background of events in Palestine/Israel and influenced those events. This account of Zionism is meant to be read together with the brief history of Israel and Palestine and History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict since the Oslo Accords.  "Shivath Tzion" is one of the traditional terms for the return of Jewish exiles. "Zionism" is not a monolithic ideological movement. It includes, for example, socialist Zionists such as Ber Borochov, religious Zionists such as rabbi Kook, revisionist nationalists such as Jabotinsky and cultural Zionists exemplified by Asher Ginsberg (Achad Haam).