Focusing on Palestine/Israel, this course explores a wide range of theoretical questions about religion and nationalism, drawing from disciplines as diverse as history, theology, politics, ethnography, literature, cultural studies, and diaspora studies. Over the semester, we will address the history of the making of sacred spaces and sites from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perspectives. Students are thus invited to analyze specific sites and rituals associated with religious congregations and ceremonial practices, and study them within their local, regional, and national contexts. Looking at the complex relationships between religious-political movements and institutions within predominantly Jewish and Muslim societies, we will also be delving into the various attempts to secularize (and theologize) Jewish and Palestinian communities and their discontents.

Rather than emphasize the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, this course is a journey into the history and present of the land and its diverse political communities. For example, we will examine cemeteries, shrines, synagogues, mosques, churches (and trees and caves) in the region as complex physical spaces. And yet, the course does not focus on a single religion but on what happens when one looks at the interactions between religions in that particular region. In other words, the themes and spatial questions are considered within their local and regional contexts. This approach invites students to think comparatively across apparently separate religious traditions, offering a fresh and much-needed look at how the region has been produced, imagined, “scripturalized,” and memorialized.