Overview

We are a ragtag cast in an epic motion picture whose plot we do not understand and cannot grasp. The script writer went mad. The director ran away. The producer went bankrupt. But we are still here, on this biblical set. The camera is still rolling. And as the camera pans out and pulls up, it sees us converging on this shore and clinging to this shore and living on this shore. Come what may. (Ari Shavit, *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel*, 419)

With this wonderful image of Israel as a film-in-progress, Avi Shavit concludes his recent book about Israeli history. Shavit’s book, which we will read this semester, has been praised for illuminating the country’s triumphs and tragedies, as well as the “complexities and contradictions of the Israeli condition.” These complexities are immediately apparent to those who engage in a serious way with Israeli culture—poetry; fiction; media; and film.

This course does not offer a history of Israeli cinema. Rather, it treats a selection of films as lenses through which to gain perspective on, an insight into, life in Israel. We begin with the two early classics *Hill 24 Doesn’t Answer* and *Sallah Shabbati*—propaganda films that are also surprisingly ambiguous, ironic, and (in the latter case) humorous. The subsequent films are grouped according to four broad topics—immigration; religion; the memory of the Holocaust; and Arabs and Israelis—in order to provide multiple ‘takes,’ from different time periods, on the central themes, character types, and social issues in modern Israel. Yet no film can be reduced to a single social theme; each one touches on many topics, personal, national, and universal, and will be discussed as such.

It goes without saying that a film is first and foremost a work of art. An additional objective is to learn to interpret and communicate effectively about films using basic vocabulary and methods of film analysis. Students will respond in writing to each film and will have a chance to refine these skills further in a range of written assignments. Weekly readings provide background and historical context. For each film, we will compile lists of keywords and other references that require explanation. I am happy to provide further background or context at any point. By bringing your knowledge, experiences and questions to our discussion, you will enrich the course immeasurably.

Films. We will discuss one film each week. Links to the films will be usually be found in the folder for that particular week. It is a requirement of this course that you will watch the film in its entirely once through first, before responding to the discussion.
questions. Often I will ask you to watch a few scenes again and analyze them. Other
types of questions will address the themes, characters, plot and other aspects of the film.

Readings: In order to appreciate the films in their social and historical context, there will
be a variety of other sources assigned each week. These may include short readings, film
criticism, songs, YouTube videos, online interviews, maps, etc. Aside from the two
books required for purchase, the readings will be posted on schoology. I expect you to
refer to these sources in our discussions and in your papers. Some readings are optional,
and students will receive extra credit for referring to them.

Keywords: For each film, our class will compile a list of terms, names, and references
that will add to our class “encyclopedia.” In this way we will build up general
knowledge about Israeli history and culture.

Discussions: The discussion board is the heart of our course. Plan for two rounds of
discussion each week, with an initial set of questions to be answered before Tuesday
evening, and some follow up questions for the latter part of the week.

In our weekly discussions, comments should be one or two paragraphs in length. Try to
use details and specific examples, and please make an effort to respond to other people’s
question and comments – since this is, after all, a class discussion. If you are inclined to
write an extensive response, feel free to send it on to me in a personal email.

Chevruta: We will have the opportunity to see and speak with one another in small
groups for 30-45 minutes each week. Chevruta sessions will sometimes be assigned a
particular question. A volunteer from chevruta will summarize its discussion for the rest
of the class.

Assignments:

Worksheet on the vocabulary of film analysis
Film review (2 pages)
Short interpretive essay (3-4)
Personal writing exercise
Final paper (4-5 pages) Options:
  1. Film Analysis
  2. Create a curriculum or lesson plan using one or more films

Sources: Recommended for Purchase

- Ari Shavit, My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel.
- Timothy Corrigan, A Short Guide to Writing about Film. 8th ed.
Sources: Optional

- Talmon and Peleg, *Identities in Motion*

Further Guidelines: All work that you submit in the course must be your own. While there are many online film reviews to be found, and while you may do some research for background, you will be expected to formulate your own interpretations and responses to each film; to relate the films to one another; and to relate the films to the readings. When using secondary sources, whether in your discussion posts or in essays, give page numbers for each quotation and include the source in parentheses or (in the case of an essay) on a Works Cited page.

Week 1. February 2. Introduction.

Introduction. Sample film clips.

Read: Stuart Klawans, “Israeli Cinema has finally come into its own.”

A *Short Guide to Writing About Film*, “Writing about the Movies” and “Beginning to Think, Preparing to Watch, and Starting to Write” (1-35).


(Monday: last day to add/drop a course)


Read one of the following critical essays:
- Talmon, “From Hill to Hill,” 43-58

Week 3. February 16. President’s Day. **Immigration: Mizrachim in the 1950s**

Film: *Sallah Shabbati* (Efraim Kishon, 1964)

Tom Segev, *1949, the First Israelis*: “Nameless People,” “Codfish with Everything”

Efraim Kishon, short stories

Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* (excerpt)

Shohat, “The Bourekas and Sephardi Representation,” 136-155

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Week 4. February 23. **Immigration: Moroccan and Indian Immigrants in the 1960s**

*Film: Turn Left at the End of the World* (Avi Nesher, 2004)

Read: A *Short Guide to Writing about Film*, “Film Terms and Topics…”, pp. 36-57.

Song: Ninette Tayeb, “Until the End of the World”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCJXyqOVbgE


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Week 5. March 2 **Immigration: Ethiopian Jews in the 1980s and 1990s**

*Film: Live and Become* (Radu Mihăileanu, 2005)

Continue reading chapter 3 in A *Short Guide to Writing about Film*, “Film Terms and Topics…”, pp. 57-82.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cM0qalCNV5U. Ethiopian-Israeli Yityish Aynaw becomes Miss Israel 2013”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63gMMsDOm8Y. Protest against racism and discrimination at the Knesset (Jan. 2012).


Lyons, *The Ethiopian Jews of Israel: Personal Stories of Life in the Promised Land*. (excerpts)

(Thursday, March 5, Purim)

Film: *Time of Favor* (Joseph Cedar, 2000)

Shavit, “Settlement: 1975,” 201-225

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Film: *Fill the Void* (Rana Burshtein, 2013)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Co5ifWUAQqM.

DP/30 Interview with Rana Burshtein and actress Hadas Yaron).


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Week 8. March 23. **Returning to the Sources I: Legends about Bruriah**

Film: *Bruriah* (Avraham Kushner, 2008)

Rachel Adler, ”The Virgin in the Brothel and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Bruriah,” *Tikkun*.

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Week 9. March 30. **Returning to the Sources II: A Woman teaches Talmud in the Knesset**

“MK Ruth Calderon’s maiden Knesset speech”

Ruth Calderon, *A Bride for One Night. Talmud Tales.* (excerpts)


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Friday, April 3 – Friday April 10. Pesach, no classes.

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Week 10. April 13. **After the Shoah: Survivors and their children**

Film: *The Summer of Aviya*  (Eli Cohen, 1988)

Nurith Gertz, “Space and Gender in the New Israeli and Palestinian Cinema.”

Week 11. April 20. **Survivors in Haifa: Dwarfs, Matchmakers, and other Misfits**

Film: *The Matchmaker* (Avi Nesher, 2012)

Ka-Tzetnik, *House of Dolls* (excerpt)

Week 12. April 27. **German-Israel Connection I: Revenge and Redemption**

Film: *Walk on Water* (Eytan Fox, 2004)

Raz Yosef, “Phantasmic Losses: National Traumas, Masculinity, and Primal Scenes in Israeli Cinema—Walk on Water.”

Week 13. May 4. **German-Israel Connection II: The Third Generation Returns**

Film: *The Flat* (Arnon Goldfinger, 2012)


Personal Essay due: Family Secrets (2-3 pages)

Week 14. May 11. **Israelis and Arabs: Men**

Film: *Waltz with Bashir* (2008, Ari Folman)


Week 15. May 18. **Israelis and Arabs: Women**

Film: *Lemon Tree* (2008, Eran and Ira Riklis)

Esther Fuchs, “The Evolution of Critical Paradigms in Israeli Feminist Scholarship.”


Final Paper due