

## **The Promise of Israel in Cinema**

**JST 4936**

**LIT 4930**

**Spring 2024**

**Instructor: Professor Dragan Kujundzic**

**dragan@ufl.edu**

**Tuesday, 10 (5:10 PM - 6:00 PM)**

**Thursday, 10-11 (5:10 PM - 7:05 PM)**

**TUR 120K (Center for Jewish Studies Seminar room)**

## **The Promise of Israel in Cinema**

Cinema in Israel had from the outset of the first Zionist pioneer settling at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century both a civilizing mission and a Promethean construction of the country as the Promised Land. It thus combined a social message about collective labor with a messianic aspiration, sometimes at odds with each other, sometimes conflated and blended in a cinematic narrative. The leading exponents of early Israel cinema were also witnesses of and participants in the Russian Soviet Revolution, which thus permeated early Zionist cinema with Russian songs, images of the Revolution and socialist ideology (films by Nathan Axelrod and Baruch Agadati). I anticipate tying this research into the origins of the early Israeli cinema with my long-term interests in Russian and Soviet Modernism as well.

The Zionist mission also inflected the projections of foreign films in Israel. A Hollywood film, *The Bible* (1920), was re-edited in Israel for the screenings in 1932, and the Zionist and socialist message inserted into the film. After the King Solomon episode in the film, *The Bible*, the Hebrew voice said: "And the people of Israel were exiled from their land . . . but the day of redemption is near, and the sons will return to the land" it was followed by a short film lauding Zionist progress in the Promised Land. The lyrics of a pioneer song were added, encouraging the spectators to sing along, enthusiastically applauding the first sounds of Hebrew in a movie theater. Hollywood's version of the Bible, then, was also made to reinforce Zionist teleology (c.f. Shohat, 1989).

Of particular interest is to establish a relationship between the early Zionist cinema (*The Land of Promise*, 1924, Yaakov Ben-Dov) and the

subsequent tradition it inspired (selected films): (*Land of Promise*; Judah Lehman, 1934), after WW2, establishing the State of Israel, *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer* (1955, Thorold Dickinson); *Exodus* (1960, Otto Preminger), the Six Day War, the rise of anti-Israeli terrorism, *Operation Thunderbolt* (Menachem Golan, 1976), *Munich* (Steven Spielberg, 2005), *Walk on Water* (Ethan Fox, 2004), the “Bourekas” films and film parodies (*Sallah Shabbati*, 1964), to modern times (films by Amos Gitai, and the rise of the strong trend of Israeli women filmmakers, e.g. Ronit Elkabetz).

There will be screenings outside the class during the Jewish Film Festival (to be announced), and students will be asked to attend.

The syllabus may change to adjust to the festival program, new films available, and add films for home screening.

The class discussions and presentations will form 40% of the grade, attendance, film screening offline and reports, and class participation and attendance 10%, and one midterm and one final paper 50% (25% each). No final exam. All readings in English, and films with English subtitles. The exact readings will be provided for each class by the instructor over the list serve and/or canvas. No books or textbooks to purchase. There will be however some minor costs involved in streaming films not available in the library, (via Amazon, Hulu). The exact readings will be provided for each class by the instructor over a listserv.

**Midterm and Final paper (three single space pages each paper, 25% of grade each), group presentations (30%), individual presentations (10%) due on the days indicated in the syllabus and on Canvas. Attendance and participation 10% of the grade. The syllabus may change to accommodate the reading and screening time required and benefit the students. All changes will be announced on Canvas and via list serve in a timely manner. The course is screening intensive. If a student misses an in classroom screening, they are responsible and required to view the film at home and make up.**

## SCHEDULE OF CLASSES, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS AND SCREENINGS

The exact topics, assignment, and format of presentation will be given in class and via email as well as the canvas in a timely manner. The syllabus may be adjusted to accommodate student participation, the rhythm of reading or an ad hoc visiting lecture, and new films available. *Assignments specified and in detail for each class, in class, online and via canvas, each week.*

Additional home assignments to screen films will be made as well as films provided, and announced via canvas and listserv..

### Week one, 01/9-01/11

1. **Introduction.** The Promise of Israel in Ancient and Modern History and Film
2. The Promise of Israel in Ancient and Modern History and Film, cont. **Screen clips**, Cecil B. DeMille, *Ten Commandments*. DreamWorks Animation, *Prince of Egypt*, Mel Brooks, History of the *World Part One*. Berkowitz:  
<https://reformjudaism.org/blog/what-does-next-year-jerusalem-really-mean>

### Week two, 01/16-01/18

1. The Promise of Israel in Modern History. Zionism. Excerpts from Herzl, handouts.
2. Theodor Herzl, *It is No Dream*, **screen**;

### Week three, 01/23-01/25

1. Discuss, Herzl. **First and Second group presentation.**
2. *The Land of Promise*, screen, discuss

**Week four, 01/30-02/01**

1. *The Land of Promise*, **Third Group Presentation**
2. *Avodha*, **screen**

**Week five, 02/06-02/08**

1. Immigration to Israel, Topol. Fiddler on the Roof, excerpts. Sallah Shabati
2. Screen: *Sallah Shabati*

**Week six, 02/13-02/15**

1. *History of Israeli Cinema*, **screen excerpts**
2. *History of Israeli Cinema*, **screen excerpts**

**Week seven, 02/20-02/22**

1. *Why Israel*, excerpts
2. *Why Israel*, excerpts. **Fourth Group Presentation.**

**Week eight, 02/27-02/29**

1. Women of Israel, Introduction
2. *Dimona Twist*, **Screen**

**Week nine, 03/05-03/07**

1. Golda Meir, Introduction, **screen** excerpts from documentary
2. Golda, **screen**

**Week ten, 03/12-03/14**

## Spring Break

### Week eleven, 03/19-03/21

1. *Midterm Presentations individual and group.*
  2. *Midterm presentations, individual and group.*
- MIDTERM DUE ONLINE, 03/21 by evening.**

### Week Twelve, 03/26-03/28

1. *Women's Balcony*, introduction
2. *Women's Balcony*, **screen.**

### Week thirteen, 04/02-04/04

1. *Women's Balcony*, **discussion.** *Aviya's Summer*, **introduction**
2. **Screen:** *Aviya's Summer*

### Week fourteen, 04/09-04/11

1. *Aviya's Summer*, discussion. *Kiss Me Kosher*, introduction.
2. *Kiss Me Kosher*, **screen**

### Week fifteen, 04/16-04/18

- 2 *Final project presentations, individual and group*
  - 1 *Final project presentations, individual and group*
- Concluding remarks**

### Week sixteen, 04/23 (Passover)

**2 Classes End. Paper due, April 25 by 17:00**

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ben-Shaul, Nitzan S. 1997. *Mythical Expressions of Siege in Israeli Films*. Lewiston, N.Y., and Ceredigion, UK: Edwin Mellen Press.

Klinger, Barbara. 1984. "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism' Revisited: The Progressive Text." *Screen* 25(1): 30–44.

Kronish, Amy. 1996. *World Cinema: Israel*. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

Loshitzky, Yosefa. 2002. *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Naaman, Dorit. 2001. "Orientalism as Alterity in Israeli Cinema." *Cinema Journal* 40(4): 36–54.

Schechter, Madeleine. 1994. "Defining the Grotesque: An Aesthetics of Liminality." PhD dissertation. Tel Aviv University.

Shohat, Ella. 1989. *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Talmon, Miri. 2001. *Israeli Graffiti: Nostalgia, Groups, and Collective Identity in Israeli Cinema* [Bluz Latzabar Ha'avud: Khavurot Venostalgia Bakolno'a Hayisra'eli]. Tel Aviv and Haifa: Open University of Israel Press and Haifa University Press.

Tzimmerman, Moshe. 2003. *A Hole in the Camera: Studies in Israeli Cinema* [Khor Bamatzlema: Iyunim Bakolno'a Hayisra'eli]. Tel Aviv: Resling.