

The Cinema and Literature of Israeli Religious Communities

Yael Shenker

Over the past two decades there has been a growing phenomenon of artists identified with religious communities in Israel. They work in a variety of art forms, including cinema, music, prose, poetry, dance, theatre, and plastic art. This phenomenon is interesting not only because it reveals changes unfolding within Israeli religious communities, but also because it reflects serves changes in the relationship between religion and nationalism. Also, of great interest are the changing perceptions of gender inside and outside of the religious communities. The course deals with literary and cinematic texts that were created by those identified with religious communities in Israel and those who live on the borderline between religious and secular. Through our discussion of a number of critical themes in Israeli religious discourse (sexuality, gender, relations with the secular world, etc.), we will also consider the borders of Israeli religious discourse, as well as the alternative and critical voices both within and outside the community.

Student outcomes

Students examine the complexities and continual transformations of religious discourse in Israel.

Students come to understand the ways in which films both reflect as well as often challenge religious life and ideas

Students consider the way in which religious directors struggle with the limits of representation

Students will study how feminism has begun to challenge religious life and ideas

Students will consider the complex connections between religion and nationality in Israel

Course requirements

- Attendance and participation (10%)
- Written commentary on the weekly readings (20%)
- Two five-page papers (35% each)

Course program

Introduction. Creation in Israeli religious communities and discourse boundaries

Indursky, Yehonatan. *Driver*. Israel, Sam Spiegel Film School, 2009 (film).

The evolution of film in the religious community: first steps

Hefetz, Nava Nosan. *Cohen's Wife*. Israel, Maale School, 2000 (short film).

Jacobson, David, "The Ma'ale School - Catalyst for the Entrance of Religious Zionists into the World of Media Production." *Israel Studies* 9,1 (2004): 31-60.

The religious community from the perspective of feminist criticism

Zuria, Anat. *Mekudeshet*. Israel, 2004 (documentary).

Zuria, Anat. *Tehora*. Israel, 2002 (documentary).

Ronit and Shlomi Elkabetz, *Gett: The Trial of Viviane Amsalem* (2014)

Hartman Tova. Introduction, *Nashim*, Issue 17, 2009

El-Or, Tamar. *Next Year I Will Know More: Identity and Literacy Among Young Orthodox Women in Israel*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002. (chapter 1)

Irsai, Ronit. "Toward a Gender Critical Approach to the Philosophy of Jewish Law." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26, 2 (2010): 55-77.

Ross, Tamar. "Modern Orthodoxy and the Challenge of Feminism." *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 16 (2000): 3-38.

Homoeroticism in the religious community

English-language scholarship has addressed Judaism and homosexuality, whereas Hebrew scholarship has dealt with homosexuality in the Israeli religious community. (There are differences between these topics, and I am still deliberating on the scholarly reading list for the lesson.)

Ben Baghi, Ariel. *Urim Vetoimim*. Israel, 2011 (television series).

Elbom, Haim. *And Thou Shalt Love*. Israel, 2007 (film).

Shapirah, Eliezer, and Divon, Havah. *Srogim*. Israel, 2008-2012 (television series, three seasons).

[Sandi Simcha Dubowski](#), *Trembling Before G-d* (2001)

Roth, Menachem. *Pursued*. Israel, 2012 (documentary).

Ethnicity and the religious community

Hasfari, Shmuel, and Hasfari, Hanna Azoulay. *Sh'Chur*. Israel, 1994 (film).

Yaesh, Meny. *Ha-Mashgihim*. Israel, 2012 (film).

Haziza Natalie, Faith (2006)

Leon, Nissim, "Ethno-Religious Fundamentalism and Theo-ethnocratic Politics in Israel." *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 14, 1 (2014): 20-35.

Leon, Nissim, "The Political Use of the Teshuva Cassette Culture in Israel." *Contemporary Jewry* 31, 2 (2011): 91-106.

Goldberg, Harvey, 1977. "Introduction: Culture and Ethnicity in the Study of Israeli Society," *Ethnic Groups* 1:163-186.

_____, 2001. "Ethnic and Religious Dilemmas of a Jewish State: A Cultural and Historical Perspective. In Akira Usuki (ed.) *State Formation and Ethnic Relations in the Middle East*. Osaka: Japan Center for Area Studies, National Museum of Ethnology, 47-64

Peleg, Yaron. "Marking a New Holy Community: God's Neighbors and the Ascendancy of a New Religious Hegemony in Israel" *Jewish Film & New Media* 1, 1(2013): 64-86

Territory, biblical rights, national home and private home

Bashan, Hadar. *In The Freiman's Kitchen*. Israel, 2007 (film).

Hazani, Menorah, *The Skies are Closer in Homesh*. Israel, 2004 (film).

Hazani, Menorah, *Hitnaari*. Israel, 2007 (film).

Cohen, Eliaz. *Poems*. [My selection]

Unsettling Gaza: Secular Liberalism, Radical Religion, and the Israeli Settlement Project.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Chapters 1-4

Dalsheim, Joyce. Settler Nationalism, Collective Memories of Violence and the
'Uncanny Other', *Social Identities*, Volume:10,2 (2004) 151-170

Don-Yehiya, Eliezer, "Messianism and Politics: the Ideological Transformation of
Religious Zionism." *Israel Studies* 19, 2 (2014): 239-263.

Orkibia, Eithan. "Judea and Samaria in Israeli Documentary Cinema: Displacement,
Oriental Space and the Cultural Construction of Colonized Landscapes." *Israel Affairs*
21, 3 (2015): 408-421.

Newman, David. "Gush Emunim and the Settler Movement." In *The Routledge Handbook
on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, edited by Joel Peters and David Newman, 256-266.
London & New York: Routledge, 2013.

Shenhav, Yehouda. *Beyond the Two States Solution: A Jewish Political Essay*. London:
Polity Press, 2012. [An earlier version was published in Hebrew: Am-Oved Press, 2010].

Shenker, Yael. "On the Necessity of Wilderness." *Jean and Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic
Studies*. University of Michigan, 2008. (essay).

National religious community

Eliezer Shapiro and Hava Divon, *Srugim* (television series)

Shenker, Yael. "A Room of His Own: On Men and Masculinities in Television Series
About the Religious Community in Israel" (in the process of publication).

Ultra-Orthodox femininity and community

David Volach, **My Father My Lord**, 2007 (film)

Rama Burshtein, **Fill the Void**, Israel 2012 (film)

Gidi Dar, **Ha-Ushpizin** 2004 (film)

El-Or, Tamar. *Educated and Ignorant: Ultraorthodox Jewish Women and their World*.
Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994.

Hakak, Yohai. "Haredi Male Bodies in the Public Sphere: Negotiating with the Religious Text and Secular Israeli Men." *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spiritualities* 3, 2 (2009): 100-122.

Hakak, Yohai. "Youthful Bodies Rebel: Young Men in Current Israeli Haredi Yeshivas." *Young*, 17, 3 (2009): 221-240.

Hakak, Yohai. *Young Men in Israeli Haredi Yeshiva Education: the Scholars' Enclave in Unrest*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2012.

Shenker, Yael, "Choosing One's Life: Identity-Swapping Plots in Popular Fiction by Israeli Haredi Women" (under review).

Nationalism, secularization and Hebrew culture

Pillar of Fire (documentary), Israel Broadcasting Authority, 1981

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London & New York: Verso, 1991.

Biale, David. "God's Language and the Making of Secular Jewish Culture." In *Jewish Secularity: the Search for Roots and the Challenges of Relevant Meaning*. Edited by David M. Gordis and Zachary I. Heller, 55-68. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2012.

Raz-Krakotzkin, Amnon, "Fearing the religious : national colonial theology, Tikkun; a Bimonthly Jewish Critique of Politics, Culture and Society. Oakland, CA 14,3 (1999) 11-16

Raz-Krakotzkin, Amnon, "Exile, history, and the nationalization of Jewish memory : some reflections on the Zionist notion of history and return." *Journal of Levantine Studies* 3,2 (2013) 37-70

Uprooting, secularization, nationalism and the male privilege of uprooting oneself
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Baron, Devorah. *The Thorny Path and Other Stories*. Translated by Joseph Shachter.

Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1969.

Berdichevsky, M.Y. *Miriam & Other Stories*. Edited and with an introduction by Avner Holtzman. New Milford, CT: Toby Press, 2004.

Indurski, Yehonatan, and Elon, Ori. *Shtisel*. Israel, 2013 (TV Series).

Jelen, Sheila E. "All Writers are Jews, all Jews are Men: Dvora Baron and the Literature of 'the Uprooted'." In *Hebrew, Gender, and Modernity*, 189-200. University Press of Maryland, 2007.

Conclusion: religious identities in Israel 12/ 1-6

Pereg Nira, SABBATH 2008, ABRAHAM ABRAHAM SARHA SARAH(2012) ISHMAEL (2015)

Fischer, Shlomo. "Fundamentalist or Romantic Nationalist? Israeli Modern Orthodoxy, Dynamic Belonging." In *Contemporary Jewish Collective Identities*, edited by Harvey E. Goldberg, Steven M. Cohen and Ezra Kopelowitz, 91-111. New York: Berghahn Books, 2012 .

Fischer, Shlomo. "Radical Religious Zionism: from the Collective to the Individual." In *Kabbalah and Contemporary Spiritual Revival*, edited by Boaz Huss, 285-309. Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2011.