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


**The religious community from the perspective of feminist criticism**


**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.)

*Sandi Simcha Dubowski*, *Trembling Before G-d* (2001)
Ethnicity and the religious community


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

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


**National religious community**

Eliezer Shapiro and Hava Divon, *Sruggim* (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)


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


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


Uprooting, secularization, nationalism and the male privilege of uprooting oneself 11/ 22 29

Baron, Devorah. *The Thorny Path and Other Stories*. Translated by Joseph Shachter.
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