Jewish Life Cycle through Israeli Film
Anthropological Perspectives
Dr. Chen Bram
Office hours: Walker Hall, Tuesday 11:30-13:00; 13:30-14:00, or by appointment

Rethinking issues such as Marriage and Love among the Jews! Jewish life in Israel and Jewish Diasporas! The plurality of Jewish rites and experiences; & anthropology and rites de passage!

Language: English (Hebrew or any other language is not needed for this course)

The course will examine life-cycle and holiday celebrations and as they have been recorded by ethnographers and as they are portrayed in contemporary Israeli feature films. We will discuss different rituals and celebrations relating phases in a person life cycle (birth, education, marriage, various social and cultural phases, and death), as well as to movement through the Jewish calendar and Jewish holidays.

Lastly successful Israeli films suggested fresh look on Jewish life cycle celebrations and rituals. They imply multicultural approach, combining a colorful portray of traditions from different Jewish Diasporas (such as Georgian, Moroccan, Ultra-Orthodox communities etc), with an updated and critical observation of Jewish and Israeli society. While offering an interesting and fun experience to Israeli and international audience, these films also took life-cycle celebrations as an anchor to relate to central themes: Identity, family and community, complexities of Israeli society, and the place of religion in modern society. These issues were central also in anthropological discussions of Jewish “Rites de passage” and holidays. The course will use both perspectives: we will watch relevant Films and discuss rituals and celebrations of Jewish life cycle (birth, education, marriage, death etc) and holidays.

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The readings and class materials will reflect changes in these celebrations that have taken place over time, as well as how they fit into Jewish life in Israel and in different parts of the world. Discussions will also show how these celebrations are linked to communal institutions and to other practices such as pilgrimages. Another theme will be the very appearance of the notion of "life-cycle" as a major axis around which Jewish life is organized. This will lead to a consideration of recent developments such as the growing place of women in life-cycle rituals, and the emergence of the individual in Jewish consciousness.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation and attendance (30%) (Further explanations under “Assignments”, below)  
A class presentation (20 %)  
Final assignment/ final exam (50%) {we will discuss this in details in class};  
(Graduate students will write a paper in lieu of a final exam)

REQUIRED READINGS

Reading requirements will include 1 to 2 compulsory article(s) for each lesson. one assignment (20%, see below) and a final exam/ assignment (50%). There is an option of up to 10% bonus for introducing an article in class (from the additional literature list). No former knowledge is required for this course.

H. Goldberg book (see below) will serve as a reader (a few copies of e-book was invited by the library, students can choose if they want to use them or by the book), but there will reading from other sources as well.


Detailed List of subjects and reading to be announce at the beginning of the term; see below some of the readings and list of films. We will watch at list 7 films (every second week) during this course.
Introduction and first two chapters of Goldberg (2003) book are the reading material for the first 2 weeks.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Please not that the list below is not final – some items might be replaced. Final list of compulsory reading and additional reading will be announced.


Contact: chen.bram@huji.ac.il
Cooper, Alanna E. “Rituals of Mourning among Central Asia’s Bukharan Jews: Remembering the Past to Address the Present.” In Revisioning Ritual: Jewish Traditions in Transition. Edited by Simon Bronner, 290-314


Films
Halakhe / Avigail Shferver 2008 (50 min.)
Campfire / Joseph Sider 2004
Shivaa – Seven days of mourning / 2008 103 min. Ronit Elkabatz and Shlomi Elkabatz
Bar- Mitzvah / Boris Thomashefsky 2009
“Late Marriage”/ Dover Kosashvili (2001)
Ushpizin / Gidi Dar 2004 90 min.
Passover Fever / Shemi Zarkhin 1995
Shchor / Shmoel Haspary 1994

Additional Bibliography
Goldberg, Harvey E. “Coming of Age in Jewish Studies, or Anthropology Is Counted in the Minyan,” Jewish Social Studies (n.s.) 4:29-64, 1998.
Kugelmass, Jack. The miracle of Intervale Avenue: the story of a Jewish congregation in the South Bronx (New York: Schocken, 1986), pp. to be determined

Additional Films
Turn left at the end of the world / Avi Nesher 2004 108 min.
Sweet Mud / Dror Shaul 2006
Coming of Age- Adult Bar Mitzvah / Bonnie Burt 1988
White walls/ Meital Abuksis 2005 (50 min.) Sapir collage Graduate films 2004- 2006
Pinhas / Pini Tavgar
Srugim 2008 (TV film)

ASSIGNMENTS
Active participation - 30%
Each student will submit remarks regarding the compulsory reading material. This can relate to additional questions that one have after reading; thoughts/ analysis of the reading etc. Length of each remark should be 3-5 sentences. The assignment will be sent by mail to professor (mail address for this will be given in class). In addition, all students are required to actively participate in class (but there is place also for shy students…!) and to write remarks about reading
In addition, students will write twice a course feedback (1/2 to 1 page), in the 5th week and the 10th week of class. Feedback essay will include in short: (a) what “works” for you and what does not in this class; (b) Suggestions how to improve the class. The idea behind this is to bring more students involvement and dialogue during class.
A class presentation (20 %)
This assignment can be done also together with another student (in pairs).
Students will present in class one item from the complementary reading list (after discussion with professor). The presentation should include reference to at least one additional bibliographical item. The length of the presentation should be 10 to 15 minutes- not more. In addition to the presentation the students should send the presentation by mail to professor and submit a one-page written summary of the questions raised by that item, as discussed in class, and one question relating to an issue that remains unclear, in his/her view.

Final assignment/ final exam (50%)
Detailed instructions will be given following discussion in class.
(should be hand to Professor during the last week of class).