

INTRODUCTION



1882

- ◆ The First Aliyah; publication of *Autoemancipation* by Leon Pinsker.

1897

- ◆ The first Zionist Congress, organized by Theodor Herzl, is held in Basel, Switzerland.

1904

- ◆ The beginning of the Second Aliyah of socialist Zionists from Russia and Poland.

1909

- ◆ The first kibbutz, Deganyah, is founded.

1909

- ◆ Tel Aviv is founded.

1917

- ◆ The British issue the Balfour Declaration, supporting a Jewish national home in Palestine.

1920

- ◆ The Haganah, a Jewish defense organization, is founded.

1920

- ◆ The first two chief rabbis, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (Ashkenazic) and Rabbi Jacob Meir (Sephardic) are appointed, and rabbinical courts are given legal status with

THE STATE OF ISRAEL is a modern phenomenon with ancient roots, a reality that emerged from an age-old dream, a political entity aspiring to prophetic ideals. It came into being as a result of a movement founded in the nineteenth century to achieve political rights and self-determination for a persecuted people. This secular, nationalist movement—Zionism—eventually fulfilled a quest based in religious tradition and chanted in numerous prayers.

The Zionist enterprise succeeded in bringing Jews from all over the world to the Land of Israel. It established a thriving, independent Jewish state with a dynamic, complex, often contradictory culture. Today, Israel is a secular society wrestling with the relevance and validity of the religious laws of Judaism, a bastion of Western democratic values surrounded by authoritarian Middle Eastern regimes, a nation with a remarkable ethical tradition confronted with the harsh tests of terrorism and war.

Zionist ideology was never monolithic. Different social movements and political parties, as well as individual thinkers, leaders, poets, and artists have offered differing, and often conflicting, interpretations of the relationship (and accompanying obligations) between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. From the birth of Zionism to the present, ideological debates—based on interpretations of the history, destiny, or vocation of the Jewish people—continue, with unusual intensity.

Two views are of particular relevance to this debate. On the one hand is a vision of Israel as a nation with a historical destiny embodied in the concept of “a people that dwells apart, Not reckoned among the nations” (Numbers 23:9). The Jews are, according to this idea, unique in their mission of serving God; they are a people, but they are different from other peoples. Their nationhood, and difference, has brought them near

jurisdiction over religion and matrimonial law.

1922

- ◆ Palestine becomes a British League of Nations protectorate.

1925

- ◆ The Hebrew University opens in Jerusalem.

1928

- ◆ The Habimah Theater relocates from Moscow to Tel Aviv.

1930s

- ◆ The flow of Jewish immigrants to Palestine increases with the rise of Nazism and the persecution of Jews in Europe.

1939

- ◆ Britain severely limits Jewish immigration to Palestine.

1939-1945

- ◆ World War II, the Holocaust.

1945

- ◆ The Arab League is founded.

1946

- ◆ Members of the Irgun attack British headquarters at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem.

1947

- ◆ The ship Exodus, carrying 4,500 Holocaust survivors to Israel, is attacked by the British near the shore of Palestine and forced to return to Europe.

1948

- ◆ The State of Israel is created as a national homeland for Jews.

1948

- ◆ The Altalena, a ship carrying arms for the Irgun, is set afire by order of David Ben-Gurion, resulting in casualties.

1948-49

- ◆ In the first Arab-Israeli war, Israel repulses invasions by Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

1949

- ◆ After Israel holds its first national elections for the Knesset, David Ben-Gurion is installed as Prime Minister.

1949

- ◆ Israel is admitted as a member of the United Nations.

destruction and quasi-miraculous revival. On the other hand is a vision of Israel embodied in the phrase “light unto the nations” (Isaiah 49:6), with an ethical mission to the world grounded in the prophet Isaiah’s condemnation of ritual observance without ethical conduct. The Jews of this idea are an equal member in the family of nations but with the highest of moral standards; it is through the example of their conduct rather than historical destiny that they wish to be recognized. The first of these might be termed a nationalist and the second a universalist vision. While not always clear-cut and not necessarily contradictory, these two visions in many ways inform the current division between the Right and the Left within Israel, as well as the Diaspora.

In modern Israel, external threats to security also account for internal divisions between so-called “doves” and “hawks.” The former, on the Left, tend to advocate compromise with the Arabs, while the latter, on the Right, are skeptical about the possibility of peace. (Of course, there are degrees in between.) In the light of six wars in the past fifty years and almost daily incidents of border clashes or terrorist attacks, disputes between people on opposite sides permeate all areas of Israeli life, from political circles to newspaper articles to family gatherings. In terms of negotiations with the Arabs, the Israeli political climate combines strategic considerations with highly emotional and ethical arguments. These debates involve not only analyses of contemporary situations and possibilities, but also references to Jewish history, religion, and culture as the sources for political positions in the present.

Israeli Cinema: Window on Society

The evolution of Israeli cinema has reflected the evolution of Zionism itself, with its ongoing, energetic debates about the nature of the Jewish state and the destiny of the Jewish people. In the modern era, films have become contemporary myths that give expression to the many layers of society. All films contain ideological messages or subtexts, but the history of Israeli cinema relates especially closely to the nation’s political reality. Like other texts of Hebrew culture, Israeli films played a role in the historical

1949

- ◆ The Knesset enacts the Defense Service Law, requiring military service for men and women.

1950

- ◆ Israel enacts the Law of Return, enabling immigrant Jews to receive automatic citizenship.

1950

- ◆ Operation "Magic Carpet" brings 50,000 Yemenite Jews to Israel.

1950-51

- ◆ In Operation "Ali Baba," 120,000 Iraqi Jews are airlifted to Israel.

1951

- ◆ King Abdullah ibn Hussein of Jordan is assassinated because of his willingness to negotiate with Israel.

1951

- ◆ The 23rd Zionist Congress, held in Jerusalem, defines the task of Zionism as "the consolidation of the State of Israel, the ingathering of the exiles in Israel, and fostering the unity of the Jewish people."

1952

- ◆ Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany sign an agreement providing for reparations for confiscated Jewish property and for the exploitation of Jews as slave laborers during the Nazi era.

1953

- ◆ The Knesset adopts the Law for the Supreme Institute for the Hebrew Language.

1956

- ◆ In the Sinai war, Israel captures the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip. Yielding to pressure from Eisenhower, they withdraw from most of Sinai later that year, given "assurances" that the peninsula will not be used to launch war against Israel.

1961

- ◆ The trial of Adolf Eichmann, Nazi SS officer, for crimes against the Jewish people and humanity, opens in the Jerusalem District Court.

1964

- ◆ The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is founded in Cairo with Yasir Arafat as chairman.

development of Zionism, cultivating a distinctive cultural expression, offering a contribution to the endeavor of nation-building, and providing critical reflections on social imperfections or political distortions. In the past sixty years, Israeli films have chronicled the political status of Zionist ideology, with the nation's periodic wars serving as catalysts for ideological changes, transformations, and, eventually, revisionism.

Three Dramatic Conflicts

Three types of dramatic conflict appear frequently in Israeli films, reflecting ideological tensions inherent in the history of modern Israel: (a) internal conflict regarding the degree of personal commitment to collective goals; (b) external political conflict with the Arabs; and (c) the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora, with its implications for national identity.

Zionism involved not only dedication to the principles of an ideology, but also adoption of its ideals as a new way of life—which demanded individual change and personal sacrifice for the sake of the national endeavor. Thus, one typical feature of these cinematic narratives revolves around the conflict between the individual and the collective, with changes in the dramatic presentations of this conflict over time conveying changing degrees of commitment to Zionism.

The attitudes of Zionists and Israelis toward the Arabs have gone through changes paralleling the historical evolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Attitudes have included: a romantic embrace of the indigenous population; a naive belief in shared biblical roots; an ignorance of Arab national inspirations; a colonial, condescending view of the underdeveloped natives; and, finally, a fixation on entangled connections that lead to fantasies of harmonious coexistence or visions of apocalyptic disaster. These have been represented in both literature and film over the course of Israeli history.

Finally, the overriding issue of identity has been defined in terms of Israeli attitudes toward Jewish history and Judaic heritage. The drive for return, settlement, and Hebrew culture was rooted in Jewish tradition and the legacy of historical experience. But the quest of many

1967

- ◆ Israel emerges victorious from the Six-Day War.

1970

- ◆ Four airliners are hijacked and blown up by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

1973

- ◆ Israel is attacked by Egypt, Syria, and Iraq on Yom Kippur, and manages to beat back all three armies.

1975

- ◆ The United Nations General Assembly adopts Resolution 3379, declaring that Zionism is a “form of racism and racial discrimination.”

1976

- ◆ An Air France plane en route from Israel to Paris is hijacked by Palestinian and pro-Palestinian German terrorists and flown to Uganda; Israeli commandos fly to Entebbe to rescue the hostages.

1977

- ◆ President Sadat of Egypt visits Israel.

1978

- ◆ Begin and Sadat are jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

1979

- ◆ Israel and Egypt sign the Camp David peace accords.

1981

- ◆ Israeli warplanes destroy Iraq’s Osirak nuclear reactor near Baghdad.

1982

- ◆ The Sinai is turned over to Egypt as part of the peace treaty signed in 1979.

1982

- ◆ Israel invades Lebanon and forces evacuation of PLO militiamen.

1986

- ◆ Natan Sharansky, a leading Soviet refusenik, arrives in Israel.

1988

- ◆ The *Intifada* begins, with 293 Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in the first year, and 16 Israeli Jews dead as a result of *Intifada* violence.

1989

- ◆ Beginning of wave of immigration

Zionists—to create a “new man,” a “new Jew,” who is supposed to be the antithesis of Diaspora Jews—involves an innate contradiction between the sources of Zionism and its goals. Paradoxically, the complete success of such a program undermines the very foundation of Zionism by stressing the notion of Israeli identity as an alternative, or even a contrast, to Jewish identity. We will address this issue in relation to the changing interpretations and representations of the Holocaust in Israeli culture, as illustrated in a number of significant films.

The Films in this Course

The films in this course were chosen to illuminate key aspects of Israeli history and culture. They examine the principles, dilemmas, and conflicts inherent in the Jewish state through personal stories presented by Israeli filmmakers. The curriculum is designed to help viewers appreciate the films and the society they both reveal and reflect. In addition to the specific themes and issues of each film and each unit, the course will call attention to the three major conflicts outlined above.

Israeli films can tell us a great deal about the status of Zionist ideology in Israeli society, its principal preoccupations and anxieties, memories of the past, perceptions of the present, plans or aspirations for the future. Israeli cinema also has its own history, defined by the evolution of technical and financial resources, relationship with the public, the cultivation of creative talent, and the influences of other cinematic movements in the world. In the Appendix, each film is placed within the context of the history of Israeli cinema and the relationship between the medium and the national ideology at the time that it was made.

For each film, an introductory essay outlines the thematic issues, followed by an analysis of the film. Each chapter includes preview questions, for review before watching the film, and discussion questions, to be considered afterwards.

The chapters and films featured are as follows:

One. Zionism: The Bond Between People and Land
Hill 24 Doesn’t Answer (1955)—a drama of the War of

from Russia and former states of the Soviet Union that will bring more than one million Jews to Israel.

1991

- ◆ Israel is attacked by Iraqi SCUD missiles during the Gulf War.

1991

- ◆ In "Operation Moses," 14,000 Ethiopian Jews are airlifted to Israel.

1993

- ◆ Israeli-Palestinian accords (the Oslo Agreement) are signed on the front lawn of the White House.

1994

- ◆ A peace treaty between Israel and Jordan is signed.
- ◆ Rabin, Peres, and Arafat share the Nobel Peace Prize.
- ◆ Terrorist attacks by Palestinian suicide bombers target Israeli civilians.

1995

- ◆ Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin is assassinated. Shimon Peres becomes Prime Minister.

1996

- ◆ Benjamin Netanyahu is elected Prime Minister.

1999

- ◆ Ehud Barak is elected Prime Minister.

2000

- ◆ At Camp David, Barak offers a peace agreement based on Israeli withdrawal from territories and shared rule in Jerusalem; Arafat rejects the offer. The Palestinians launch a war of terror which they call the "Al Aksa" *Intifada*.

2001

- ◆ Ariel Sharon is elected Prime Minister of Israel.

Sept 11, 2001

- ◆ Arab terrorists hijack airliners and attack Washington and New York, killing thousands. President Bush declares War on Terror.

2002

- ◆ Since the beginning of the "Al Aksa" *Intifada*—from September 2000 through June 2002—more than 550 Israelis have been killed and more than 4,000 wounded in suicide attacks.

Independence that celebrates the Zionist vision while mourning the human cost of its achievement.

Two. Ancient Homeland, Modern State

Sallah (1964)—a satire about how the dream of returning to Zion turned out in reality, as hundreds of thousands of immigrants from many different cultures had to be integrated into a new society.

Three. The Legacy of the Holocaust

Operation Jonathban (1977)—a salute to the Israeli soldiers who rescued Jewish hostages held by terrorists and a statement about the need for vigilance after the Holocaust.

Four. The Army and Military Experience

The Wooden Gun (1979)—a questioning of the emphasis on military might as expressed by children playing war games, and its implication for morality, community, and personal fulfillment.

Five. The Arab in Israeli Culture

Fictitious Marriage (1988)—in the increasingly prosperous, Americanized society of contemporary Israel, a man confronts two dilemmas: responsibility versus pleasure, and trust versus suspicion of the Arabs.

Six. Israel and the Diaspora

Over the Ocean (1990)—a dramatic comedy told through the eyes of a young Israeli boy, whose parents are tempted to leave Israel in search of a better life.