

## Current Event Stage 1

Excerpt from *Traditions in World Cinema*, (Israeli Persecution Films: 1977-2003: Outer and Inner Persecution in a Threatened, Split Society page 170- 173)

According to Nitzan Ben-Shaul, the history of Israeli films is reliant on the repeated persecution and torment experienced by the Israeli people, both externally from the Arab world and internally on various levels. The more successful films draw on the Israeli experience, the Arab-Israel conflict, Holocaust-related topics and so on, rather than on themes of a broader, more universal nature because that experience is. The themes focused on by Israeli films are important to the study of film, because it is a national cinema that is highlight political and reflects the views of a besieged nation such as Israel. War is the central driving force behind these films and acts as a kind of center-piece for society, with the ultimate conclusion that war is both inevitable and unavoidable and the only way to escape its grasp is through death or acceptance. Characters in these films attempt a half- hearted evasion of the realities of war, but these attempts are never successful because Israeli culture has been based on the prevalence of warfare in the nation and the history of its people's persecution throughout the years. Because Israeli cinema tends to focus on imprecision and ambiguity, there is never an "in your face" propagandistic opposition presented to war in films, but rather a look at the dizzying effects war has on all those involved. The doubt and uncertainty many people felt throughout the past 30 or so years, both in regards to their own government as well as the long withstanding persecution from the Arabs, is expressed in film. This anxiety over the well- being of the nation occurred with political and government changes. Film makers feared that with a right-winged government after 1977, but this time period was an important one in Israeli film because there was plenty of government support and little censorship during this era, allowing for highly politicized films to be produced.

These films produce a vague critique of society and culture in Israel, but are presented in such a way that, combined with a cinematic reality of persecution, undermines itself in a way. *Kippur* (2000), possibly one of Amos Gitai's best works, was a deeply uncommon war film, one more focused on the disorder caused by war, and its dispersal of peacetime pursuits, than the traditional combat movie. This film presents the director's own experiences during the War of Atonement. Its disorganized style presents the chaos and haphazard nature of war. Like many Israeli films, visual configurations and unexpected editing patterns produce a feeling of agoraphobic surprise in *Kippur*. The protagonists launch several unsuccessful rescue attempts in closed spaces present a further feeling of claustrophobic intent. Out of the film arises an indistinct, not clearly defined opposition to war and the hellish qualities that accompany it. The protagonist, after experiencing "the outside" is drastically changed at the end of the movie, having gone through the tumultuous and chaotic incidents that highlight the futility and confusion war establishes. This highly political film serves as a reflection of the views of Israel, which is an important aspect of any film culture.

## Current Event Stage 2

<http://movies.netflix.com/WiPlayer?movieid=60026543&trkid=7852267&t=Kippur>

Netflix: *Kippur* (2000) sequence from: 1:33:30 until 1:40:00

[This sequence shows a rescue unit of the Israeli army during the Yom Kippur war, shortly after a failed rescue mission, a shaky handheld camera runs behind the protagonists as they run towards their helicopter. A long shot sweeps over the decimated landscape, no more than a muddy, ruined terrain. This seemingly endless, claustrophobic close-up in the helicopter is suddenly cut short when a missile hits their copter and a crash landing occurs, leaving us with a smoking, destroyed aircraft. ]

By analyzing *Kippur*'s formal structure, a theme of persecution is culturally ingrained in Israel and thus can be extracted from various sequences in the film. The director, Amos Gitai, based parts of the film on his experience in a helicopter rescue unit during the Yom Kippur war of 1973. Syria and Egypt attacked Israel on the holiest day in the Jewish faith, setting up an obvious stage to highlight the persecution Israelis have faced as a people even in the modern age. The examination of this persecution is vague in *Kippur*, resulting in a dizzying display of wartime and is extremely different from many battle films, because there is no clear victor in the war and only an inexplicit opposition is presented to war. The sequence from 1:33:30 until 1:40:00 is a chaotic, circular portrayal of wartime efforts. It begins with a long shot of the rescue unit, shortly after a failed attempt of bringing a wounded soldier with them, as they run towards their helicopter. The beginning of the shot uses a shaky, handheld camera to follow the men and it immediately cuts to a long, meandering take showing the total ruin created by the war. On the ground the ruin is even worse, the camera pans over bombed buildings, coupled with an ominous chopping noise in the background, along with threatening music. The helicopter follows a circular, snaking route, which gives the feeling of a seemingly never-ending path, reflecting the futile and sometimes interminable atmosphere of war. An atmosphere of claustrophobia is also presented in the recurring close-ups of the protagonists' faces in the extremely tight, enclosed space of the helicopter. These close-ups are highly contrasted by the recurring use of long battlefield shots typical throughout the rest of the film. War is portrayed as an unidentifiable, nameless threat in this film, circular and futile in nature. It stems from a history of persecution in Israel, but a modern lens has challenged the persecuted people's sole victimhood in war. It takes a more ambiguous stance, instead contending that war leaves no victor in the traditional sense. The scene of this seemingly inescapable war is cut short by the sudden force of an enemy attack on the helicopter. This disorienting shot is followed by a sharp cut to the totally destroyed aircraft that is completely gutted and smoking, as well as the bleeding men inside the helicopter. In a typical war film, great soldiers are seen taking control and mastering an area, which is consistent with the Western, more specifically American, view of our ability to reinvent the world as free agents. However, in Gitai's film, there is no master, rather everyone is linked and everyone suffers., which is closer to the reality of war. This modern

national Israeli film links Israelis, “the persecuted”, with the Arabs, “the persecutors”, with one another, which is a powerful message promoting peace and the end of war everywhere.

### **Current Event Stage 3: Conflict in Ukraine**

Israeli persecution films are rooted in a historically ingrained sense of discrimination felt by an entire nation that has been segregated and threatened for its entirety, both from within and also from external forces. The theme of constant war being ready to erupt is similar to the protests in Ukraine taking place currently. The Ukrainians embody a threatened, divided society that is being framed by conflict presently. Citizens fear police and their own government, but they are divided along political lines like many Israelis were historically and still are. Not unlike later Israeli films, in some ways the riots and unspecified conflict in Ukraine almost grant coherence and unity to the cause and the plight of the persecuted individuals in their country. The struggle itself is chaotic and messy, but their intent and cause is strengthened by that turmoil. Their fight for individualism and freedom mirrors the same struggles experienced by Israelis in the past, but an important difference lies in the way that Ukrainians are more proactive presently than Israelis were due to their immense religious, class, ethnic and other political differences. This is why some modern Israeli films and filmmakers even suggest that Israelis may be responsible for their persecution, or ridicule the idea of a persecuted people all together.

As far as the portrayal of this struggle, many parallels can be drawn from the images arising from Ukraine and the deliberate features of Israeli films. Powerful images of utter chaos and confusion are circulating the internet, and embody the disjointed, confusion inducing narratives of Israeli films. A few images create a powerful account of the suffering and anguish of a persecuted group. Memorials of anti-government protestors have been captured, along with the brutality on the streets. It is apparent that deep doubt and uncertainty afflict the Ukrainians about the future status of their nation, not unlike the deep anxiety people felt about their own well-being and the Israeli state as a whole after the 1977 national elections that brought the Likud Party to power and challenged the status quo in the nation at the time. This sense of doubt is articulated in various ways through rapid montage sequences and shaky camera use, which is similar to the actual footage being produced in the Ukraine by protestors trying to capture the reality of what is happening there. In some sense, Israeli films still manage to promulgate the approach that life can still persist even through the continuing constant threat of warfare or political upheaval. However, it is difficult to assess whether or not Ukrainians hold this attitude as well, because they are still too deeply involved in the discord and their situation is still ongoing. A disconnect arises between the personal and political in Israeli films as well as in everyday life; however, they are also inextricably linked to one other because the political is personal for so many people.

Photos from Ukraine: <http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/19/world/gallery/ukraine-protests-0218/>

#### Current Event Stage 4

One of the primary similarities between *Kippur*(2000) and the present situation in Ukraine is the focus on an extremely volatile political landscape. The protestors' motives and techniques for achieving their goals are not the same, however, as the soldiers in *Kippur*; their missions are entirely different. Videos online depict the protests in Ukraine, with riot police and other armed military personnel quickly descending on protest sites to shut down the opposition. Tensions are captured on low-quality films that oddly share some similar qualities with *Kippur*, such as the handheld cameras (used by onlookers and other protestors) to capture the Molotov cocktails being hurled at riot police and armed guards tormenting prisoners from the opposition. The central focus I found the same in *Kippur* and articles/images about Ukraine is the struggle of an oppressed people; however, the differences between two pretty different situations is clear-cut in the analysis of both the film and the images circulating from the current situation in Ukraine.

Certain features or themes are shared in the depiction of both events, but *Kippur* obviously maintains a more formal depiction because it is an actual scripted film whereas the videos showing the events in Ukraine are unedited, raw footage. The utter chaos and disorder is shared between events in both Israel and Ukraine currently such as those from the protests and the dizzying portrayal of legitimate wartime events in the film. The differences are fairly obvious when you consider that the Yom Kippur War was an actual attack launched on Israel by Egypt and Syria and the conflict in Ukraine is the result of the people getting fed up with a variety of factors, both economic and political. Both situations are rooted in political turmoil and the uncertainty that is linked to these disruptions (somewhat entrenched in the idea of the "persecuted people"). In addition, both situations involve foreign nations trying to flex their power over their respective regions and maintain a sort of regional supremacy. The Arab states did this when they surprise attacked Israel, as depicted in the film *Kippur* and currently Russia is employing deliberate shows of force, sending the message that they are in fact ready to go to war with Ukraine if necessary. The resentment that is upheld by both "persecuted" groups is clear and undeniably felt in both instances. However, in the film it is expressed more through the futility of war and its incessant nature. I had never thought about how their reactions were portrayed and what the different effects are depending on how they are captured. Seeing the real photos and videos from the Ukrainian protests have a more immediate impact than the film because they are so authentic and unedited, but the film also impresses its own particular message, but that message in *Kippur* is much more vague. The political nature of both situations is what makes them so related because it links two

groups of people going through very different challenges on a way that is easily identifiable by an audience.