

News from the AJS Film Committee,

By Dalit Katz, Chair of Film Committee, Wesleyan University

The film committee has been at work throughout the year selecting films for our program from among dozens of submissions. We contacted AJS members to participate on panels and give talks, secured screening spaces, organized a pedagogy panel on teaching through film, and negotiated with film distributors for screenings at the upcoming annual 49<sup>th</sup> Annual AJS conference in Washington D.C. In addition, two members of the film committee, Olga Gershenson and Dalit Katz, attended the International Jerusalem Film Festival last July, (<https://www.jff.org.il/en/10018>) and brought back fresh ideas, blogging as well about the films on Facebook and in other venues.

This year we will continue to follow the successful model from last year's AJS film program, adding a new feature. *The 49<sup>th</sup> AJS Annual Film Festival* will consist of two separate and complementary parts. The first evening screening highlights feature films and shorts from around the world with varied themes and genres catering to our diverse AJS constituency. Each screening will be introduced by a scholar with relevant expertise. The second evening is devoted to a recent documentary followed by a panel discussion with the film director and other AJS members. The second part of the program is a pedagogical session on teaching with film. We have followed last year's structure while adding a new theme.

The first evening's screening will include the Israeli documentary *Dimona Twist* (directed by Michal Aviad, Israel, 70 minutes, 2016), introduced by Dalit Katz, Wesleyan University. The film is based on interviews with women who immigrated to Dimona, a desert city in Israel, from different parts of the world in the 1950s and 1960s, intercut with segments from public and private archives. Through their vibrant stories, the viewer encounters internal conflicts experienced by Israelis facing the challenges of that period. Next, there will be a program of shorts, introduced by Catherine Portuges, University of Massachusetts Amherst. The program includes the eloquent short, *EL Hara* (directed by Mo Scarpelli and Margaux Fitoussi, Tunisia/France, 16 minutes, 2016), which explores Albert Memmi's recollections growing up in the Jewish neighborhood of El Hara in Tunis and his ambivalent response to it as a Jew and a colonized Tunisian. *Keys*, (Directed by Hadar Reichman, Israel, 12 minutes, 2016): concerns the complications that arise when Aziz, a Palestinian, is asked by his Jewish neighbors to act as a "Shabbos Goy" by moving their blocked car. *Ana Min Al Yahud /I am One of the Jews* (directed by Aharon Shem Tov and Nir Hachlili, Israel and Morocco, 18 minutes, 2017) is based on a story by Almog Behar, one of Israel's most original contemporary writers, about a young teacher possessed by his dead grandfather forcing him to choose between his identity as an Iraqi Arabic Jew and an Israeli Jew. *Lido* (directed by Ori Smoly, Israel, 15 minutes, 2016) is a poetic short about the political complexity of the Lido restaurant situated by the Dead Sea. *Brutus* (directed by Konstantin Fam, 35 minutes) based on a novel by the Czech writer, Ludvik Ashkenazy, focalizes the Holocaust through the eyes of a German Shepard dog named Brutus who is separated from his beloved Jewish owner and was trained to be a killer dog in a concentration camp.

The second evening program will be devoted to the screening of *The Last Laugh* (directed by Ferne Pealstein, United States, 88 minutes), as an interrogation of whether the Holocaust should be off-limits topic for comedy. The film interweaves interviews with Holocaust survivors and influential comedians

(Mel Brooks, Sarah Silverman, Joan Rivers) as well as authors such as Etgar Keret, Shalom Auslander and Abraham Foxman. The film will be followed by a panel discussion with the film's director and other AJS members including Menachem Feuer (moderator), Monica Osborne (discussant) and Jarod Tanny (discussant).

For the pedagogy session, the film committee collaborated with the Pedagogy Division to present a panel on teaching with film. This year's theme is *Teaching about Antisemitism through Films*. The panel will explore the pedagogical tools and educational strategies of using films to teach about antisemitism. Catherine Portuges will present on *1945: A Hungarian Film Reckons with Antisemitism*. Jonathan Skolnik (UMASS) will explore the pedagogical issues pertaining to antisemitism and racism in historical and contemporary contexts in *Kaddish for a Friend*. Steven Carr will examine the use of the documentary, *We Accuse*, in *Teaching the Holocaust*. The panel will consist of hands-on demonstrations in teaching including the screening of short clips and modeling a classroom discussion.

We hope that you will join us for both the festival screenings and the pedagogical session. We value your feedback and appreciate your thoughts on films and formats you might like to see included in future sessions.