

# Teaching Religion and Gender with THE COHEN'S WIFE (IL 2000)

## Where, Why, How, and What?

### Abstract

In this contribution, I reflect on my experiences teaching the short film THE COHEN'S WIFE (ESHET KOHEN, Nava Nussan Heifetz, IL 2000, 23') to critically analyze the constructedness of media as well as of gender and religious identities, and their mutual, complex relationships. I briefly present the context in which I teach with this film and discuss my choice of it as a "teaching partner" and the pedagogical approaches and tools I use to work with it in the classroom, before elaborating on some details of what the film teaches my students. I conclude with some ideas for future changes when teaching with THE COHEN'S WIFE, based on my experiences so far.

### Keywords

THE COHEN'S WIFE, Construction of Media, Construction of Gender, Construction of Religious Identities, Short Film as Teaching Partner

### Biography

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## Introduction: Short Films in the Classroom

While most people think "feature" when they hear "film", and feature-length films dominate the industry, film theory and most people's cinematic experience, short films have a number of advantages in the classroom. Quite pragmatically, the shorter duration (although length can vary considerably)

usually makes it possible to both watch and discuss a film in one class session. However, a short film is not simply shorter than a feature film; its brief duration requires clarity and focus in presenting the problem it addresses, while at the same time opening up possibilities for innovative storytelling that encourage formal analysis and multiple interpretations.<sup>1</sup> Thus the short film's form promotes focused discussion of the topics it presents and also provides an opportunity to address the constructed nature of media, thereby encouraging students to develop skills in critical media literacy.<sup>2</sup>

I draw on these advantages of the short-film form when I use *THE COHEN'S WIFE* (*ESHET KOHEN*, Nava Nussan Heifetz, IL 2000, 23') to analyze the constructedness of media as well as of gender and religious identities, and their mutual, complex relationships. In this contribution, I will briefly present the context in which I teach with this film, discuss my choice of it as a "teaching partner", and the pedagogical tools I use to work with it in the classroom. I then elaborate on some details of what the film teaches my students and conclude with some ideas for future changes when teaching with *THE COHEN'S WIFE*, based on my experiences so far.

## Academic Context: Where Do I Teach the Film?

As academic cultures, and their pedagogical expectations and practices, vary considerably, I want to briefly situate my teaching with the film in its academic setting and the context of the course. I use *THE COHEN'S WIFE* in an upper-level undergraduate course entitled "Religion, Media and Gender", which I have taught twice at Villanova University, a private Catholic university on the East Coast of the United States with a predominantly white, (upper-)middle-class, Christian student body. The course aims at enabling students to think critically about the mutually formative relationships between religious gender norms and media representations, and the ways in which media shape the identity, actions, and relationships of individuals at the intersection of religion and gender. The course encourages a constructivist understanding of media, gender, and religion, which requires students to take a critical perspective on media representations and to seek out possible resistant (and possibly unexpected) meanings in media texts, to analyze

1 Sundquist 2010, 129.

2 De Abreu 2019.

them with regard to how they produce gender and religious identities in line with or resistant to dominant ideologies, and how mediated religious and gender identities are shaped by relationships of power and inequality – all of which are important aspects in the field of religion, media, and gender, as Mia Lövheim points out.<sup>3</sup> The course also aims at introducing students to a range of global religious traditions, and it attends to the different ways in which religious and gender identities intersect with race and sexuality in different cultural contexts.

Because the course fulfills two requirements in the undergraduate core curriculum (upper-level theology and diversity), students come from a variety of majors, often with little or no prior knowledge in media theory, gender studies, or religious studies. Thus the early sessions of the course are dedicated to introducing them to some prominent theories, concepts, and methods of analysis in these fields, and to equipping them with the tools of critical analysis as we begin to trace their connections. We discuss *THE COHEN'S WIFE* in one of these early sessions. Through the readings required for this session<sup>4</sup> and a brief introductory lecture, students are familiarized with basic concepts and questions in religion and gender: What do we mean by “gender” and how has it been theorized? How can we think of gender as constructed and what does that mean for possibilities to undo unequal gender orders? How does the gender order impact religious institutions, values, theologies, and the daily lives of their followers, and vice versa, how do religions shape gender identities and roles? What are some salient questions in the study of religion and gender? Our critical analysis of the film offers the opportunity to apply some of these theories and concepts to the interpretation of characters, their actions, and their motivations.

## **THE COHEN'S WIFE: Why (This) Short Film?**

*THE COHEN'S WIFE* is Nava Heifetz's graduation film at the Ma'ale School of Television, Film and the Arts, a school that “was founded in Jerusalem with the primary purpose of providing religiously observant Jews with the opportunity to receive the appropriate training that would prepare them to

3 Lövheim 2013b, 17.

4 Required readings are King 2005; Lövheim 2013b; optional readings Gill 2007; Clague 2005; Lövheim 2013a; Clark/Chiou 2013.

become engaged in the world of Israeli film and television production in a manner that is informed by the spirit of religious Zionism”.<sup>5</sup> This production context is important to keep in mind as we reflect on how the religious or secular commitments of a director might impact their engagement with and representation of tensions surrounding gender and religious traditions.

The film is set in a strictly Orthodox (*haredi*) community in Israel and introduces the issue that will drive the story in the very first frame, a title card explaining the marriage restrictions applying, according to Jewish law, to a cohen, a descendant of the priestly family. It is thus immediately obvious that gender relationships, the religious laws governing them, and the roles, rights, and obligations of women and men in Judaism are going to be a source of tension in the film. It tells the story of a young woman, Rivke, who is raped by a stranger when she gives him charity. Because her husband, Motl, is a cohen, and according to the law she has been defiled by sexual contact with another man, he has to divorce her. As Rivke is recovering from the trauma at her sister’s house, Motl urges the rabbinic court to find a solution that allows them to remain married. Eventually, after much study and discussion, the rabbis come to the conclusion that since there is no valid witness to the rape (women do not count as a witness according to rabbinic law), it is as if it had not taken place, and the couple may stay together. In the final scene, Motl comes to see Rivke to ask her for forgiveness and to come home to him. She is hesitant at first but then turns toward him. At that point, the film cuts to the girl who had witnessed the rape earlier and now observes Motl’s attempt at reconciliation. The girl’s soft smile suggests that he is successful, but because we are not able to see for ourselves if Rivke accepts Motl’s apology, the ending remains open.

The film offers much material to discuss gender relations in strictly Orthodox Judaism, how religious gender identities are constructed and performed, and questions of equality, authority, and agency. One of the main reasons I choose the film is that it critiques gender-based inequality in religious traditions but at the same time complicates assumptions about religious traditions as (only) patriarchal and androcentric. The film rejects the notion that women in such a community are simply oppressed and powerless victims

5 Jacobson 2004, 31. The film has been screened at several film festivals (e. g., Religion Today, Trento, Italy; Toronto Jewish Film Festival). It is available at <https://vimeo.com/133428255> (Yiddish with Hebrew subtitles) and at some libraries in the United States and Australia with English subtitles. I am grateful to my friend Davide Zordan, the late president of the Religion Today festival, for bringing the film to my attention.

and that their only way to express agency is to leave the community. Instead, it traces how the gender order shapes both men's and women's identities and lives and offers a view of the law as subject to multiple interpretations in negotiation with concrete life for the benefit of those involved. The film also attributes significant agency to Rivke, as it is she who decides about reconciliation with Motl. As *THE COHEN'S WIFE* deals with the tensions arising from the religious gender order, it draws on resources from within the tradition, a strategy it shares with other graduation films of the Ma'ale film school: "for the most part", David Jacobson notes, "these films attempt to resolve challenges to the Jewish tradition in such a way as to affirm traditional Jewish values; but, in so doing, they do not necessarily put to rest all aspects of the challenges they raise".<sup>6</sup> Thus the film encourages a nuanced and by no means uncritical analysis of gender and religion in Judaism, as well as self-critical reflexivity with regard to students' own assumptions about these issues and how such assumptions are created also through the media.

As a graduation film, *THE COHEN'S WIFE* arguably is more like a mini-feature in terms of narrative and character development,<sup>7</sup> but it nevertheless represents some of the formal aspects of the short film that provide the opportunity to critically analyze *how* its view on gender and religion is constructed through images, sound, and editing. Short films tend to focus on a limited set of characters dealing with a specific, clearly circumscribed situation, conflict, or event, which is represented in a compact fashion in a "thickening of time".<sup>8</sup> This requires making efficient use of sound and image, employing objects for their symbolic meaning, and allowing for significant gaps to be filled in by the audience. Their shortness requires both clarity in setting out the central issue and allusiveness, which together create empathy with the characters and encourage viewer engagement.<sup>9</sup> *THE COHEN'S WIFE* realizes these formal aspects in a highly effective way and thus provides a good opportunity for introducing some tools of critical film analysis, such as the interplay between sound and image, the significance of spaces, colors, and objects, the relationships among characters, and *mise-en-scène* (I will return to some of these aspects below).

6 Jacobson 2004, 44.

7 For the distinction between short films and graduation films, see Raskin 2014, 29.

8 Hesselberth/Poulaki 2017, 1. For specific formal elements of the short film and their analysis, see Raskin 2014; Wippler n. d.

9 Raskin 2014.

The film represents a combination of the familiar and unfamiliar for my students: its narrative is relatively linear, and its form, while complex – for example in its layering of sound and image – uses conventional elements familiar to my students. For most students, the Israeli *haredi* setting provides a glimpse into a different religio-cultural context, although for some, the strictly Orthodox community might also be familiar from their neighborhoods in New York or New Jersey. Thus the film piques my students' curiosity, broadens their horizons, and challenges them without overwhelming them.

## Critical Engagement: How Do I Teach the Short Film?

In teaching with this short film, I try to move in steps that enable students to actively engage in critical analysis while acknowledging the pleasure of the film experience and attempting to expand this pleasure to the discovery of new insights, all of which are important elements of media literacy education.<sup>10</sup> In order to contextualize the film in terms of production and setting, I begin with a brief introduction to the film and the *haredi* community. We then view the film together, which lays a shared foundation to our conversation in the communal experience of the film and, quite pragmatically, ensures that all students present in class have seen the film. A brief plenary after the viewing serves to clarify questions of understanding or provide additional information as needed.

The main processing of the film then takes place in small groups which discuss a set of pre-formulated questions that guide the students' analysis of the film's representation of gender roles and relationships, men's and women's religious agency, the impact of film language on what viewers learn about gender in the *haredi* community, and religion's ambivalent role in affirming unequal gender relations but also challenging them. By working in small groups, the students are encouraged to participate actively in the discussion and to contribute with the different competencies they have, given their varied academic and personal backgrounds. Not least, I use small-group work to give students an opportunity to get to know each other better, especially this early in the term, and thus to develop a sense of community that promotes their learning. Feedback I have received from students suggests that they appreciate work in small groups for these reasons.

10 De Abreu 2019, 32.

In the plenary conversation following the small-group work, each group begins by presenting its insights on one of the questions, with the other groups adding their own observations to what has been said. Because students have had time to process in the small groups, the plenary discussion is usually lively and students are forthcoming in sharing what they discussed in their group and adding new ideas that arise from the conversation. In this part, my role as instructor is both to moderate the discussion and to ensure that important aspects are covered. Because at this point students are still unfamiliar with the language of gender and religious studies and film analysis, I also supply concepts or categories (such as the gendering of private/public, the role of dress in religious gender identity, the significance of symbolic objects, the role of editing, or the effect of *mise-en-scène*) and encourage students to substantiate their ideas with evidence from the film or readings. At the conclusion of the session, I ask students to write down on index cards one or two open questions that they discuss with their neighbors and then submit to me, which gives me a sense of how students have processed the material and if there are any larger issues we need to address at the beginning of the next session before moving on.

## Complicating Assumptions: What Does *THE COHEN'S WIFE* Teach?

One of the main reasons for choosing this film is that it provides the opportunity to complicate students' assumptions about religious gender identities, norms, and agency, to think about how these assumptions have been constructed, and to begin to develop a more nuanced understanding of gender in/and religion. Rather than offering a full interpretation of the film here, I will highlight just a few of the aspects we discuss in class, in terms of the issues the film deals with in its narrative and how it represents them formally.

At a first glance, and in line with most of my students' expectations, the film critically represents the lives of *haredi* Jews as governed by a patriarchal, androcentric gender order upheld by religious laws that place men in the position of religious authorities, whereas women remain without voice.<sup>11</sup> The fact that a woman does not even count as a full witness to her own rape can be seen as an instance of the devaluation of women and the

11 King 2005, 3298.



Fig. 1: Rivke working in her home. Film still THE COHEN'S WIFE (ESHET KOHEN, Nava Nussan Heifetz, IL 2000), 00:01:28.



Fig. 2: Motl studying in the *shul*. Film still THE COHEN'S WIFE (ESHET KOHEN, Nava Nussan Heifetz, IL 2000), 00:01:35.

centering of men as the normative human being. The understanding of a woman as being “defiled” by rape (whereas the crime of the rapist is not considered) and thus forbidden to her husband, reflects a view of women’s bodies and sexuality as problematic encountered frequently across religious traditions.<sup>12</sup> Gender roles are clearly distinct, with women being active in the home (Rivke is shown cooking and folding laundry, fig. 1) and men participating in public religious life (Motl studies Talmud at the synagogue, fig. 2).<sup>13</sup> These different roles are clearly marked by settings (the home vs.

12 King 2005, 3300.

13 Stepping out of the world of the film into the context of its production, it is worth noting that roles are also gendered with regard to media production: Jacobson notes in



the *shul* as place of worship and study), colors (lighter colors mark the women's sphere, whereas the men's sphere is darker, more somber), and dress (women wear modest dress in muted colors and head coverings, the men traditional hats, dark suits, with full beard and side curls), all of which are ways in which the identity of strictly Orthodox Jewish women and men is performatively established and naturalized.

Yet, as the film critiques this unequal religious gender order, it also complicates the secularist bias of religion as oppressive of women. First, it challenges the dichotomy of men as oppressors and women as the oppressed by parallelizing Rivke and Motl. Both are placed primarily in confining indoor settings, and both are shown behind barred windows looking out. And while Rivke does not have a voice in the decision about her marriage because she is a woman, neither does Motl, because he is not a rabbi. His voicelessness in legal matters is compounded by his voicelessness in emotional matters: several times, Rivke asks him to speak to her, and he is shown struggling for words to express his feelings in this situation. Thus the film underlines that the religious gender order organizes, or even constrains, the lives and possibilities of both men and women, even if in different ways.

Second, while the religious law is shown to be androcentric and misogynist (women are "lesser", not valid witnesses; their sexuality is a source of impurity) and exclusively men are its authoritative interpreters, the film also stresses that the law is always the subject of interpretation, never simply given, and that interpretations may vary widely: while Motl's uncle curtly states that the law clearly demands divorce, the rabbinical court eventually arrives at a different conclusion. In addition, the rabbis draw on the tradition in order to resolve the situation with the interests of those concerned in mind, interpreting the law in the context of the situation rather than schematically applying the rules without consideration of their effects. Thus, as the film distinguishes between systemic sexism (the law) and individual sexist behavior (which is not displayed by Motl or the rabbis), it also underlines the precarious nature of that system and thus points towards possibilities of change from within.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, in the end it is Rivke who decides if she will continue her relationship with Motl. While the male rabbis decide

his study of the Ma'ale school that it has more female graduates because work in media is considered "women's work" in the religious Zionist circles in which the school was founded, with this work being "of less importance than the male-dominated activities that support the spiritual and political missions of religious Zionism" (Jacobson 2004, 41).

about her marriage and communicate their decision to Motl, another man, who then passes the news on to Rivke, the final choice what to do with their decision is hers. Motl can but offer his love and ask Rivke to take him back. While she does turn towards him in the end, the film does not show clearly if she accepts him back.<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that the film does not explore what choosing against reconciliation would mean for Rivke. But within the film's framework, its construction of this conversation at least complicates questions of agency of men and women.<sup>15</sup> The film shows that while (some) men have authority in "official" religious matters from which women are excluded, women have agency in the way in which they negotiate and actualize these regulations in the concrete lives of their families. This view challenges the western, individualized notion of women's agency as (only) resistance and suggests an understanding of agency as "doing" subjectivity and identity within the framework of the religious gender order.<sup>16</sup> This is a particularly challenging insight for my students, who generally focus on the oppressive aspects of a religious gender order and have difficulties perceiving agency within its structures.

The film also provides the opportunity to think more closely about different dimensions of religion and how they create understandings of gender and, in turn, are shaped by the gender order: its sacred texts and laws, written and interpreted primarily by men, its rituals and practices where men and women have their respective roles to play (Rivke is responsible for giving charity or keeping a kosher kitchen, Motl for studying the Torah), the ways in which religious norms organize relationships, spaces, or tasks through which individuals make their worlds and performatively construct their religious gender identities, and so on. Through the discussion of these aspects, my students note that religions are realized also in informal, everyday practices and not only in formal rituals or the teachings of "experts", and that there might even be some contradiction among these various dimensions of a religious tradition and how they are experienced.

Thus *THE COHEN'S WIFE* offers a complex, layered view of religious (specifically, Jewish) gender norms, which is enhanced by how it tells its story

14 Jacobson's interpretation (2004, 50) assumes that the two do reconcile (with conventions of modesty preventing the film from showing them embrace), but I am more hesitant about this interpretation because Rivke does not accept the necklace back, a gesture that would symbolize reconciliation without violating norms of modesty.

15 King 2005, 3300.

16 Lövheim 2013b, 21; 27.

formally. I will focus here on just three aspects of the film's form: the relationship of sound and image; the use of symbolic objects and characters; and the *mise-en-scène* of the concluding scene.

Focusing on storytelling in short film, Richard Raskin notes that it is important to “make the action as interesting to the ear as to the eye by making sound an integral part of the action itself”.<sup>17</sup> Heifetz does this in a highly effective manner in the opening sequence, which from the very beginning layers the images and sounds of two different spaces – Rivke's home, where she is cooking, and Motl studying at the synagogue – with the sounds of these spaces mixing and crossing over the cuts, connecting their separate spheres. As the stranger arrives at Rivke's door, a woman comes to ask for Motl to repair her alarm clock, and when he begins to fiddle with it, the alarm goes off right as we see the stranger invading Rivke's home. The sound seems to travel across the distance between the two settings, representing the close emotional connection between the two characters: startled by the alarm, Motl looks up and into the distance, as if he feels that Rivke is in danger. A shot across the city a little later underlines the close relationship between Motl and Rivke in spite of their physical distance. The complex layering of sound and image in this sequence undercuts the spatial and symbolic segregation of men and women in the *haredi* gender order and instead represents the couple as closely connected.

A second strategy of compelling and efficient storytelling in short films is the use of symbolic objects.<sup>18</sup> In *THE COHEN'S WIFE*, these are the clock that raises the alarm when Rivke is raped and her necklace that breaks during the rape (fig. 3), which Motl then repairs at night and in the final scene offers to Rivke as a sign of his love and hope for the “repair” and healing of their relationship.

The film also includes a symbolic character in Hannele, who represents the film's viewers and issues of spectatorship. The girl is first shown playing in front of Rivke's house, and she is the only witness to the rape. Hannele also observes Rivke and Motl's conversation at the end of the film, and significantly, both times, viewers are not shown what she sees. On a meta-level, the girl can be interpreted as a stand-in for the viewer, self-reflexively thematizing issues of spectatorship, seeing, and knowing, which are worth discussing both from a film theoretical perspective (viewers as voyeurs or

17 Raskin 2014, 32–33.

18 Raskin 2014, 33.



Fig. 3: The broken pearl necklace as a symbol of violation and – perhaps – healing. Film still *THE COHEN'S WIFE* (ESHET KOHEN, Nava Nussan Heifetz, IL 2000), 00:05:45.



Fig. 4: Visualizing uncertainty and liminality in the final sequence, with Hannele watching Rivke and Motl. Film still *THE COHEN'S WIFE* (ESHET KOHEN, Nava Nussan Heifetz, IL 2000), 00:19:50.

witnesses, the meaning of a director's decision to show or not show something, the impact of the unseen vs. the seen on viewers, etc.) and a religious studies perspective (who counts as witness for the rabbinical court in the narrative, and why).

Finally, the *mise-en-scène* of the concluding scene is carefully constructed to express the emotional complexity of Rivke and Motl's relationship after the rabbis' decision (fig. 4). The scene is set in the courtyard of Rivke's sister, a rare outdoor setting that represents a somewhat liminal space, not quite out in the public but not indoors either, just as Rivke's marriage is at a liminal point between divorce or reconciliation. Lines with white laundry fluttering in the wind crisscross the frame diagonally and seem to reflect

Rivke and Motl's unsettled emotional state. The laundry lines also provide a precarious separation between the two, easy to cross if they want to. As the conversation unfolds, Rivke and Motl move between the lines, retreating and following, until they end up on the same side: while the ending ultimately remains open, their position now suggests a rapprochement if not reconciliation. Significant is also Rivke and Motl's dress in this scene: while Rivke wears a white blouse (together with her dark hair covering), blending into the white of the laundry, Motl's dark suit and hat make him stand out as a foreign body in Rivke's space, underlining his position as petitioner in this situation and thus Rivke's agency regarding the future of their relationship.

While the film provides plenty of food for thought in itself, as I hope has become clear from this brief discussion of some of its formal and thematic elements, it also raises broader questions that we pursue in the remainder of the course, such as the ambivalence of religion with regard to gender equality, the creation of assumptions and their disruption, the challenge of non-western traditions to notions of subjectivity or agency, and the ways in which the particular form of media shapes the meaning they construct.

In our discussion of the film, I notice in particular how my students' different backgrounds impact their reaction to the film and how they work with it. Students without prior experience in film or media studies tend to find the analysis of the film's formal elements challenging and instead focus on plot and narrative. Those with little knowledge of theories of gender often assume an essentialist understanding of gender identity and struggle with the notion of "doing gender" (also) through religious practices. And students with little exposure to the critical study of religion see religions as homogenous traditions defined by their elites and are surprised when we note how the Jewish tradition is present and realized in Rivke and Motl's everyday life and recognize the multiple voices that participate in the continued reinterpretation of Jewish traditions.

## What Next?

### Some Practical Insights from Teaching with THE COHEN'S WIFE

As a teacher, I, too, am a learner: I certainly learn from my students' insights and reactions to the film (such as a certain secularist bias I note in them regarding the possibilities of women's agency in traditional religious contexts), and I also learn from what works and what doesn't work pedagogi-

cally to help me achieve my goals for the session. My experience in teaching *THE COHEN'S WIFE* shows that the film works very well as an opportunity to question assumptions about how religion and gender interact and begin a more nuanced analysis of their relationships, which is then deepened throughout the rest of the course. With its highly structured form, the film also allows for the development of critical media literacy, creating an awareness for how media messages are constructed through the specific formal language of the medium and how they can be decoded in various ways.

However, my experience also shows that my students struggle to move from the description of what they see to the analysis of what that means for them and how this meaning is achieved. In addition, the film's use of Yiddish (and thus the need for subtitles) and its condensed structure make it difficult for students to relate and engage. Given the complexity of the film and my students' (relative) unfamiliarity with gender studies, the study of religion, and critical film analysis, the conversation often remains somewhat superficial.

Based on these experiences, in the future, I plan to adjust my pedagogical approach to the film in several ways. First, to make the strange world of *haredi* Judaism, and the film itself, more accessible, I will provide students with a "fact sheet" with a brief explanation of the context, specific terms, and practices, and a list of characters and their relationships. Since I and most of my students are outsiders to the world of the film in that we are not Jewish, let alone strictly Orthodox, I will spend a moment to discuss with them the choice of the film, insider/outsider perspectives, potential issues of exoticism, etc. Second, because of the complexity of the film, I will assign its viewing as homework, and then we will watch it again together in class. This means that (most of) the students will have seen it twice and thus will be better able to attend to formal elements and the details of its story, while we will still share the communal experience of film viewing with its own benefits on an affective level for the class community. Third, to practice critical film analysis, I will use the opening sequence as an example and watch it repeatedly (with only sound, only visuals, then both together) to discuss with students the effects of layering sound and images, the role of *mise-en-scène* and editing, and the function of symbolic objects and characters.

And finally, I will reformulate the guiding questions for the group discussion to help students dig more deeply into the complexity of the relationships between gender order and religious symbol system and to attend more closely to the formal means used to represent these relationships.

Instead of the quite general questions I have used before (e. g., “How are gender and gender relations shaped by religion in the film?”), I will formulate more specific questions such as, “How do Jewish traditions shape the everyday life of men and women in terms of clothing, duties, etc.? What impact does Jewish law have on the relationship between Rivke and Motl? Which religious and/or everyday roles or functions are accessible only to men, which are limited to women in the film?” In addition, to encourage thinking not just of “what” the film tells them about gender and religion but also “how”, I will ask students to provide evidence from the film in the form of screenshots or short clips. I will also share the guiding questions (together with the fact sheet) ahead of time, so that students have them available for their first screening of the film and can begin to reflect on the questions and take notes, and thus come prepared for the discussion in class. This will hopefully encourage more reserved students to contribute and lead to a more substantial conversation.

As I hope has become clear, the film has a lot to teach in the context of my course. But in order for it to be able to do so, I need to take more time to address its various aspects. Like most teachers, I suspect, I tend to overload my syllabus, and yet less is so often much more. Spending more time with the film will also benefit our discussions in later sessions of the course, when we can draw on the analytical tools acquired through the work with the film and return to issues such as religious agency and empowerment that we discussed through the film.

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## Filmography

THE COHEN'S WIFE (ESHET KOHEN, Nava Nussan Heifetz, IL 2000, 23').