



OUTSIDERS AND INTEGRATION INTO ISRAELI SOCIETY

Israel is an improbable melting pot of diversity for people of all religions and races. You don't have to look hard to find people with different frames of engagement with the country. Just walking down the street, you may encounter tourists, people who moved to Israel from other countries—and also those with family history in Israel going back for generations.

One technique for critically examining a society is to view it through the eyes of an “outsider,” someone with no previous frame of reference for the civilization suddenly engulfing him. Since he has yet to become habituated to the society's ways, such an outsider is viewed as more objective than anyone who is a part of the society. At first, he may not even fully comprehend all that goes on around him. Through his process of discovery, the audience can “discover” their own culture with a fresh perspective.

The two movies in this unit, *Sallah* and *James' Journey to Jerusalem*, each visualize an interaction between native Israelis and people from other lands. In *Sallah*, the “outsiders” are new immigrants to Israel (*olim chadashim*), Jews from Arab countries (Sephardim) who poured into Israel in the decade following its establishment in 1948. The movie explores their relationship with the resident population, predominantly Ashkenazim (Jews from European countries). In *James' Journey to Jerusalem*, which takes place in the contemporary period, the “outsider” is an African Christian pilgrim to Israel who comes in contact with Israelis along his journey.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

- 1 Different art mediums can be used to express or explain social or historical issues. What qualities unique to cinema make it well-suited to bring to life the meeting of different cultures? What are its limitations as an art form?
- 2 What characteristics are always true of someone called an “outsider”? Which characters in these movies display these characteristics, and in what ways? Do you think these characteristics are the product of stereotypes, or is there some truth in them?
- 3 If you have been to Israel, did you ever feel like an outsider while you were there? What do you think it would take for you to integrate into Israeli society?
- 4 Do you think perceptions of cultural outsiders have changed in Israel in any way in the 40 years between these two films' production? If so, how?