

Cinema Sabaya

Movie Guide

Cinema Sabaya

Director: Orit Fouks Rotem

Release Date: 2021

Runtime: 1h 31m

Content Warnings: Audio depiction of domestic violence, discussion of domestic violence and PTSD, discussion of homophobia.

Accessing the Movie

Cinema Sabaya can be streamed for free on [Kanopy](#). Access Kanopy with a public library card or university log-in. It can be rented or purchased on [Amazon Prime Video](#), [Apple TV](#), [Google Play Movies & TV](#) and [YouTube](#).

Movie Guide

This guide provides content that may be helpful in understanding the film and additional interesting information. We also recommend reviewing IATF and iCenter's worksheet Exploring the Topics of Arab Citizens and Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel for introductory background information on Arab Citizens of Israel. The source sheet companion is here.



Character List

- **Awatef** (*Marlene Bajali*) - Arab. 73-year-old retiree who worked for the municipality for 28 years and currently volunteers. Originally from Jerusalem.
- **Carmela** (*Liora Levi*) - Jewish. Ecology projects manager, lives on a yacht, identifies as bisexual.
- **Eti** (*Orit Samuel*) – Jewish. Head of HR for Hadera Municipality.
- **Gila** (*Ruth Landau*) - Jewish. Librarian at a public library, lives in Hadera. Divorced and remarried.
- **Nahed** (*Aseel Farhat*) - Arab. Student, 22, from Baqa. In the municipality, she completes wall painting projects with teens.
- **Nasrin** (*Amal Murkus*) – Arab. Lawyer and legal advisor in municipality. Volunteers at human rights organization with political prisoners. Originally from the Galilee, lives in Kafr Qara.
- **Rona** (*Dana Ivgy*) – Jewish. Teaches the course. A filmmaker from Tel Aviv.
- **Saoud** (*Joanna Said*) - Arab. Has been living in Baqa al-Gharbiyye since she got married. Originally from Banh. 35, works in the association for the elderly in Hadera as a caregiver.
- **Yelena** (*Yulia Tagil*) - Jewish. Works in the municipal tax department, 38. Divorced and living with her mother.

Real-Life Connections

- *Cinema Sabaya* is based on director Orit Fouks Rotem's real-life experiences
- Rotem hosted groups like the one depicted in the film, intending to create a documentary about the experience. She pivoted after the women who attended her filmmaking class [expressed opposition](#). Rotem fictionalized their stories and based Rona on herself.
- She was [quoted](#) saying that “...working with Arab and Palestinian actresses made her ‘aware to the fact that I can’t really tell their story.’”

Movie Information

- *Cinema Sabaya* was the Ophir Awards' Best Picture winner, automatically making it Israel's selection for submission to the 2023 Academy Awards.
- Hadera is a predominantly Jewish working-class city between Haifa and Tel Aviv with 1,044 Arab citizens and over 100,000 Jewish citizens.
- The character Eti references suicide bombings in Hadera. She is likely referring to bombings that occurred in Hadera during the second intifada.
- "Sabaya" means a group of young women. As explored in the film (4:26-4:50), if pronounced slightly differently it can mean "prisoner of war."
- Most Arab citizens learn Hebrew as a second language, and few Jews speak Arabic fluently. Limited Hebrew abilities creates barriers to socioeconomic mobility for many Arab citizens.

Shared Society

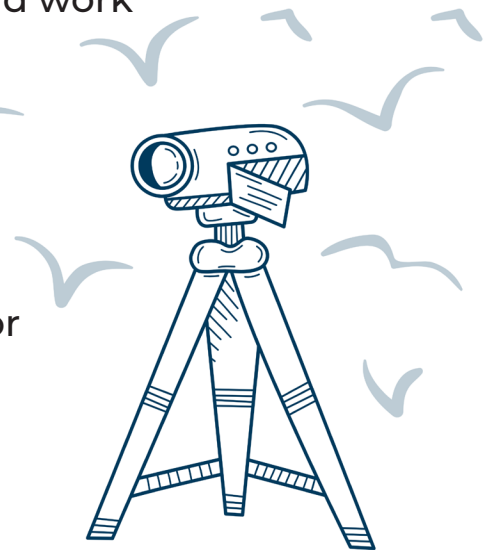
Cinema Sabaya takes place at the fictional Center for Social Equality at the Coexistence Center. The program run in the film is considered a "shared society" program.



Shared society refers to a cohesive and inclusive society where communities with different **ethnic, national, and religious** backgrounds have equitable access to resources, power, and work in partnership.



It requires **long-term engagement** to promote **social and economic inclusion** and **political participation**. In a shared society framework, **diversity** is a source of strength for a country and community.



Discussion Questions

1. How do identities (ethnicity, gender, class, religiousness) inform the character's experiences? How does it shape their group experience? Why was it important for them to see into each other's lives?
2. What languages were spoken in the film? When and why do characters switch languages? How do you think this affects intergroup relations?
3. What images or moments were particularly memorable for you?
4. How did the group navigate conflict and tough conversations? Did any of the disagreements challenge or shift your thinking?
5. What did you learn about Jewish-Arab relations in Israel from the film? How do you think the realities outside of the classroom and the participants' previously held beliefs and experiences shaped their interactions with each other?
6. Cinema Sabaya takes place at the fictional Center for Social Equality at the Coexistence Center. The program run in the film is considered a "shared society" program. Review the definition of shared society above and discuss the following:
 - i. Were you previously familiar with the concept of "shared society?" How do you see the characters in the film navigating this concept and related issues?
 - ii. What were the goals of the shared society program? Do you think it was successful? Why or why not?

Further Resources

- [Podcast: 'Cinema Sabaya' director tells making-of story behind award-winning film - Times of Israel - Jessica Steinberg - 12.23.2021](#)
- [Jewish Israelis are heading to Arabic class — and learning a bit more about Palestinians - The Forward - Eetta Prince-Gibson - 9.1.2022](#)
- [Meet the Palestinian Feminist Fighting for Arab-Jewish Cooperation in Israel - Haaretz - Eness Elias - 3.28.2019](#)