

EGYPT, A LOVE SONG

(dir. Iris Zaki, 2022)

Viewer Discussion Guide

This discussion guide will...

highlight the core concepts of this feature documentary film, and lead viewers to examine their connections to the topic.

Synopsis

Director Iris Zaki takes her father on a journey that spans generations and continents, unpacking the complex relationship of Jewish-Arab identity and culture, as they follow in the footsteps of her grandmother's remarkable story. Souad Zaki was a celebrated Jewish Arabic singer in 1940's Egypt who starred in films alongside Umm Kulthum and became famous throughout the Arab world. She married renowned Muslim musician Mohamed Elakkad with whom she had a son. After Mohammed abandoned her with their child, Souad fled to Israel, where she was consigned to live a double life of cleaning lady by day and singer by night. EGYPT, A LOVE SONG brings Souad's tempestuous story to life in a sweeping project that crosses cultures, religions and generations. The extraordinary saga of the Zaki family unfolds through a combination of recreated scenes from Souad's life, rare archival materials, and an intimate father-daughter journey that cuts deep into family dynamics through unfiltered conversations.

KEY THEMES:

- Intersecting identities
- Cross-cultural narratives
- Generational dynamics
- Immigration and identity
- Feminism
- Jews of Arab descent in Israel
- Music



About Jewish Story Partners

Jewish Story Partners stimulates and supports the highest caliber independent films that use fresh, nuanced perspectives to tell stories about the diverse spectrum of Jewish experiences, cultures, and encounters.

Discussion Questions

- How do you define your own identity? In what ways does the film challenge stereotypes and preconceptions about the intersections of religion, culture, and identity?
- What does home mean to you? Is it a country, a city, an actual dwelling, wherever your family is, or something else? What do you think home might have meant to Souad Zaki and do you think she felt “homesick” for Egypt? Has watching this film affected your views on what constitutes home?
- What kinds of barriers do refugees and immigrants typically face in their new countries? How does Souad Zaki’s experience immigrating from Egypt to Israel demonstrate some of these barriers?
- Identify some of the ways that Souad’s religion and gender affected her experiences both positively and negatively. What might her journey have looked like if she were not a Jewish woman?
- Although Souad, Moshe, and Iris all share a cultural and familial history, they each take a unique approach to navigating their individual identities within this context. How and why do perspectives on identity and culture shift from generation to generation, even within one family?
- Iris Zaki, the director of this film, is not an outside observer but a member of the family being documented. How does her insider perspective enhance the storytelling?
- This film combines scripted scenes, archival materials, and intimate conversations. How does this blend of storytelling techniques contribute to your understanding of the narrative?

For Further Reading:

- "The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity" - Yehouda Shenhav ([link](#) to book)
- "Three Worlds: Memoirs of an Arab-Jew" - Avi Shlaim ([link](#) to book)
- "Jews and Muslims in the Arab World: Haunted by Pasts Real and Imagined" - Jacob Lassner, Selwyn Ilan Troen ([link](#) to book)
- "Arab Jews in Israel" - Anis Mustafa Al-Qasem ([link](#) to article)
- "The Invention of the Mizrahim" - Ella Shohat ([link](#) to article)
- "Rethinking Jews and Muslims: Quincentennial Reflections" - Ella Shohat ([link](#) to article)

For Further Watching:

- "Life Sentences" (2013) - Directors Nurit Kedar and Yaron Shani ([link](#) to film)
- "Women in Sink" (2015) - Director Iris Zaki ([link](#) to film)

