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STARRING

HIAM ABBASS…Salma Zidane
ALI SULIMAN…Ziad Daud
RONA LIPAZ-MICHAEL…Mira Navon
DORON TAVORY…Defense Minister Israel Navon
TARIK COPTY…Abu Hussam
AMOS LAVIE…Captain Jacob
AMNON WOLF…Leibowitz
SMADAR YAARON…Tamar Gera
AYELET ROBINSON…Shelly
DANNY LESHMAN…Private Quickie
LIRON BARANES…Gilad
LOAI NOFI…Nasser Zidane
HILI YALON…Sigi Navon
MAKRAM J KHOURY…Abu Camal
MICHAEL WARSHAVIAK…Attorney Braverman

BEHIND THE CAMERA

CASTING Yael Aviv
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS Moshe Edery, Leon Edery, David Silber
CO-PRODUCER Ira Riklis
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER Marcia Riklis
SUPERVISING LINE PRODUCER Ayelet Imberman
LINE PRODUCER Uzi Karin
SOUND RECORDIST Ashi Milo
SOUND DESIGNER Gil Toren
SOUND MIXER Hervé Buirette
COSTUME DESIGNER Rona Doron
PRODUCTION DESIGNER Miguel Merkin
COMPOSER Habib Shehadeh Hanna
EDITOR Tova Ascher
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Rainer Klausmann (bvK)
SCREENPLAY Suha Arraf, Eran Riklis
PRODUCERS Bettina Brokemper, Antoine de Clermont-Tonnerre, Michael Eckelt, Eran Riklis
DIRECTOR Eran Riklis

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Salma, a Palestinian widow, has to stand up against her new neighbour, the Israeli Defense Minister, when he moves into his new house opposite her lemon grove, on the green line border between Israel and the West bank. The Israeli security forces are quick to declare that Salma's trees pose a threat to the Minister's safety and issue orders to uproot them. Together with Ziad Daud, her young Palestinian lawyer, Salma goes all the way to the Israeli Supreme Court to try and save her trees.
Her struggle raises the interest of Mira Navon, the Defense Minister's wife, who is trapped in her new home and in an unhappy life. Despite their differences and the borders between them the two women develop an invisible bond, while forbidden ties grow stronger between Salma and Ziad. Salma's legal and personal journey lead her deep into the complex, dark and sometimes funny chaos of the ongoing struggle in the Middle East, in which all players find themselves alone in their struggle to survive.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The Middle East is constantly changing although when you really think about it, perhaps it isn't… hope, optimism, pessimism, breakthroughs, new horizons, a new day, the future, the past – all words used on a regular basis to describe the situation in a region that has seen it all. Trees have always been around to witness what mankind has been doing, and although when thinking of this area people tend to think about olive trees, this story is about lemon trees that become a threat to national security, a title that lemon trees are not too used to…

When I made THE SYRIAN BRIDE, I thought it pretty much contained my view of the situation around me as I came to know and observe it as a filmmaker and as a citizen of Israel and the world. But the fact is that these issues continue to haunt me in many ways and when I wrote the story Salma's war, I couldn't resist it and decided to once again create a film that will go one step ahead with my views of Middle East madness (on all levels) and will possibly be the film to end all films as far as my statement on the matter goes (but never say never…)

Now this may sound a bit ambitious but it's not really as Lemon Tree is a simple story about people who find themselves fighting over matters that could have been resolved quite easily if they would just listen to each other. but simple expectations are a big step as we have seen in so many parts of the world and the heat in this particular region, not to mention the burden of history, blood, religion and other eternal matters do not help make things just a bit easier…

But, with all due respect to the above, this is really a film about solitude as it is reflected in the lives of two women – Salma on the Palestinian side and Mira, the Defense Minister's wife, on the Israeli one, and I guess that is what really drew me to it as well as all the other characters involved who somehow represent so many issues and subjects but all of them suffer from a kind of loneliness which is part of their lives on a personal and national level.

And not unlike my approach in THE SYRIAN BRIDE and CUP FINAL, I take to the absurd mix of humor and drama, tragedy and comedy (a bit anyway…), and the impossible chaos that comprises the colorful yet very dark story of Israelis and Palestinians.
Eran Riklis

STORY OUTLINE

Salma Zidane (Hiam Abbass), a 45 years old widow from a small Palestinian village in the West bank, finds herself at war with the Israeli Minister of Defense (Doron Tavory) who built his house on the green line border between Israel and the occupied Territories on the edge of Salma's lemon grove.
Soon enough the Israeli security forces claim that the grove is a threat to the safety of the minister and issue orders to uproot the lemon trees. Salma, whose son is in America and daughter live far away from her, decides to fight for her trees.

She embarks on a legal journey all the way up to the Israeli Supreme Court. Salma is joined by a young Palestinian lawyer, Ziad Daud (Ali suliman), who fights against a wall of clever military lawyers who have the backing of the government. Ziad, 34, divorced from a Russian woman he met

while attending law school in Moscow, falls in love with Salma. Their love affair is a complicated and dangerous one as Palestinian widows are not free to do whatever they like, certainly not fall in love, certainly not with younger men…

Salma realizes that she has inner strengths that allow her to continue her lonely quest, despite the pressures put on her from both sides – Israeli and Palestinian. Salma is fighting for trees that were planted by her father over 50 years ago, trees that have absorbed blood, sweat and tears like the whole region. She will not let them be cut down just to satisfy absurd security requirements.

On the other side of the grove, Mira Navon (Rona Lipaz-Michael), the Minister's wife, is also undergoing a major change in her life. After fulfilling her duties for so many years, and despite the new house and her husband's new and powerful job, she feels unhappy. The clock is ticking away and there must be more to life than her share so far. The events around her invisible new neighbor gradually raise her awareness to her husband's approach to the whole affair and she finds herself defying what is expected of her. A virtual bond is created between the two women, each of them discovering a new life ahead of them, each in her own territory across the seamless yet deep borders between them.

Lemon Tree is about struggles. Struggles to protect what is yours, struggles over principles, humanity, land, history, years of bad blood and bloodshed, all through one woman's struggle to protect her lemon trees. It is a story about solitude, about the loneliness of all the people and issues involved in this region and beyond.

ONE ON ONE WITH ERAN RIKLIS

WHEN AND HOW DID THE IDEA FOR LEMON TREE ORIGINATE?

Following the success of The Syrian Bride I felt two things: one was that I want to direct Hiam Abbass again and give her a central role, two that I want to get "closer to home" in dealing with the situation in the Middle East, i.e. move from the relative comfort of the Golan Heights to the explosive situation between Israel and the Palestinians. So I started looking for a story and came across several accounts of Palestinians going to court against the state of Israel. I found this intriguing on several levels. First of all the fact that the Palestinians can go all the way to the supreme Court says something good about the Israeli justice system. Secondly, despite this system (and disregarding the various court decisions at the end of the process) there is a deep sense of injustice and more so of numbness which is a result of so many years of the occupation. Bad things happen on both sides, there is no black and white but a story about trees becoming a threat to national security just because they happen to be close to the house of the person who is charge of that security – seemed to me like the perfect set up for what I want to tell. And the fact that thousands of stories like this one happened and will probably happen in the future, made my decision even more poignant. Like one of the characters in the film says: "Lemon Trees… a Defense Minister… a lethal combination…"

IS LEMON TREE A POLITICAL FILM?

I don't believe in the term and find it outdated. Everything is political in this day and age and whatever you say, do or think has some kind of political impact or feedback. Decisions taken by distant policy makers have an immediate effect on people everywhere, in particular when you live in a "danger zone" like the Middle East – but also if you live in New York, Paris or Berlin for that matter. So Lemon Tree is not political – it is about people trapped in a political deadlock. The Defense Minister, his wife, Salma, her lawyer – they are all trapped within their own life, within their own personal and public situation and frame of mind. It is not political because it does not try to impose any view on you – it tells a story, it shows emotions, it glides through a complex, delicate situation in an explosive setting. And I emphasis the word story as above all I wanted to tell a moving story that would be accessible to a wide audience around the world.

TELL US A BIT ABOUT WORKING WITH THE ACTORS AND CREW.

I want to start with Rainer Klausmann, a great DOP and a great guy. It was our first collaboration and quite quickly we understood that we are making an honest, eye level film and are not judging anyone. Lemon Tree is a very much a result of this view that we shared. Rainer is Swiss, he brought with him three German crew members who joined an all Israeli crew, my co-producers – Bettina, Michael and Antoine – are German and French (second collaboration between us after The Syrian Bride), my co-writer Suha is Israeli-Palestinian, my actors are Israeli, Israeli-Palestinian, Palestinian – and they are all people who shared one wish – to make this story work. Now about my actors: Hiam

is like a part of me and I hope I was a part of her, I'm sure I was. Actors and directors have to be one to reach the level of intensity, vulnerability and frankness needed to convey a believable and moving situation. And this applies to all the others too – Rona, Ali, Doron, Tarik and all the rest of the wonderful cast which allowed me to share with them being at once a Minister, a lawyer, a peasant or a lonely soldier in a watchtower overlooking the lemon grove.

TO CONCLUDE – WILL LEMON TREE CHANGE THE WORLD?
For sure, can't you feel it? but like the song says – lemons are pretty but they are also impossible to eat… and so I guess I will be satisfied with just adding my modest contribution to the way people view things, possibly breaking some stereotypes and giving some food for thought…

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Eran Riklis is one of Israel's leading film makers. His films include The Syrian bride (2004), winner of 18 international awards, released world wide, Cup Final (1992, presented in Venice and Berlin and in numerous other festivals), Zohar (1993, the biggest Israeli box-office success of the '90s),
Temptation (2002, based on an Israeli bestseller), the nostalgic, rock & roll film Vulcan Junction (2000) and his first film on a Clear Day you Can see Damascus (1984).

Riklis directed and produced many Tv films, major series and documentaries, including Room service, The Truck, Cause of Death: Murder, Me and My Family, Lucky, Lethal Money, The Poetics of the Masses, borders and more. He also produced films such as Three Mothers, burning Mooki, Until Tomorrow Comes and more. born in Jerusalem, raised in the UsA, Canada and Brazil, Riklis graduated from The National Film school, Beaconsfield, England in 1982.
Married to Dina (a filmmaker too), father of Tammy (a committed journalist) and Jonathan (a jazz pianist), lives in Tel Aviv and works with the world.

Filmography

2008 Lemon Tree
2008 burning Muki (producer)
2006 Three Mothers (producer)
2004 The syrian bride
2003 The Truck (series)
2002 Temptation
2000 vulcan Junction
1999 borders (documentary)
1998 Cause of Death: Murder (series)
1997 The Poetics of the Masses (series)
1996 Lucky (Tv film)
1993 Zohar
1992 Cup Final
1984 on a clear day you can see Damascus

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

Hiam Abbass

IN THE ROLE OF SALMA ZIDANE
Following their successful collaboration in The Syrian Bride, Riklis chose Hiam for the leading role of Salma Zidane in Lemon Tree. Born in Nazareth, Hiam started out in various theatre roles in Israel until she moved to London in 1988 and then to Paris where her cinema acting career started. Among her films are: The syrian Bride, Satin Rouge, La Porte du Soleil, Munich, Disengagement, Free Zone, Paradise Now, The Nativity story, Dialogue Avec Mon Jardinier, Un Roman Policier, La Fabrique
Des Sentiments, The visitor and more. Hiam lives in Paris with her husband and two daughters.

Rona Lipaz-Michael

IN THE ROLE OF MIRA NAVON

Graduated in 1998 from the yoram Lewinstien Acting studio in Tel Aviv. Appeared in various theatre plays at the Habima National Theatre and The beer sheva Theatre. Rona had a leading role in the successful TV series "The bourgeois".

Ali SuLiman

IN THE ROLE OF ATTORNEY ZIAD DAUD

Born in Nazareth. graduated from the Yoram Levinshtine Acting studio in 2000. Ali appeared in various stage productions in Israel and Europe. Among his film roles are: The Syrian Bride, Paradise Now, Mahraja, The Kingdom, Body of Lies and many more.

Doron Tavory

IN THE ROLE OF DEFENSE MINISTER ISRAEL NAVON

Born in Haifa, 1952. over 50 leading parts on most of Israel's theatre repertory stages, remarkably: Hamlet (director Steven Berkoff), Blood Knot (Fugard), Saved (Bond), Caretaker (Pinter), Soul of a Jew and Ghetto by Sobol (original Haifa Productions, as Weininger and Kittel, Edinburgh, Chicago, Theatertreffen Berlin), an all male Twelfth Night, Waiting for Godot, Le Tartuffe, Bent (Sherman), Moliere (Bulgakov), Ghosts (Ibsen), The Orestes Trilogy as a one man show, The Changeling (Middleton) and Jud Suess (Kornfeld, both with director Robert Woodruff), The Maske tetralogy (Die Hose, Der snob,1913, Das Fossil by Carl Sternheim) and many more. Doron is currently the artistic and managing director of the Interdisciplinary Arena in Jerusalem.

Tarik Kopty

IN THE ROLE OF ABU HUSSAM

63 year old Tarik was born in Nazareth (the third in our cast to be born there....) where he also gained his first acting roles in the local theatre. over the years Tarik appeared in many films including The Band's Visit, It's Now or never, The Smile of the Lamb and more.