

WHEN I SAW YOU

(Lamma shoftak)

a film by

Annemarie Jacir



NETPAC Prize Berlin Film Festival 2013

Palestine / Jordan / United Arab Emirates / Greece / 93 min / Arabic with
English subtitles / Cert 12A

Opens June 6th 2014

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SYNOPSIS

Following on the acclaimed *Salt of this Sea*, writer and director Annemarie Jacir proves with *When I Saw You* that she has become a leader in Palestinian contemporary cinema. This heartfelt and moving film, Palestine's entry for the 2013 Academy Awards, is suffused with a distinct sense of this revolutionary time and place.

1967. The world is alive and ripe with possibility--new music, style, hope. But in Jordan, thousands of refugees from Palestine are held waiting for their right to return to their homeland. Eleven-year-old Tarek is stranded in the Harir refugee camp with his mother Ghaydaa. Palestine is not far away, but it's as out of reach as his father. The adults have installed themselves among the tents and improvised dwellings, more than used to waiting. The boy hates the tight quarters, the dumb teacher, the slimy food ... and the patience of the others.

When an older woman tells him she's been in the camp for more than twenty years, he knows the time has come for him to leave. He wants to go home, to his father. He takes off and finds his way to a rebel camp in the forest nearby. Tarek is only half the size of the cool, bearded men with long hair, weapons, and PLO scarves, who listen to rebel music and are determined to fight. When Ghaydaa finally finds Tarek, at first it's only her son's stubbornness that compels her to stay there with him. But the mother's relationship to her son changes with each day in the camp, and both of them can sense that a new dawn is breaking, not only in Jordan and Palestine. *When I Saw You* tells of a child's ability to prevent adults from becoming resigned to their situation when hope for change still exists.

More details and downloads at www.newwavefilms.co.uk

Photos at www.newwavefilms.co.uk/press.html



CREW

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Written and directed by | Annemarie Jacir |
| Produced by | Ossama Bawardi |
| Cinematographer | Helene Louvart |
| Art Director | Hussein Baydoun |
| Editors | Annemarie Jacir, Panos Voutsaras |
| Sound | Kostas Varibopiotis, Raja Dubayeh |
| Music | Kamran Rastegar |
| Costumes | Hamada Atallah |
| First Assistant Director | Rami Yasin |
| Executive Producers | Annemarie Jacir, Christos V. Konstantakopoulos |
| Co-producers | Rami Yasin, Sawsan Asfari, Maya Sanbar, Tarek Al Ghussein |
| Production | Philistine Films, |
| Co-production (Jordan/Greece/UAE) | Lamma Shoftak LLC, Falero House Productions, Asfari Foundation, Cactus Films |
| With the participation of | Abu Dhabi Int. Film Fest (SANAD Fund) Graal Post Production House Visions Sud Est Tribeca Film Institute/Tribeca All Access The Arab Fund for Arts & Culture Dubai Film Connection Thessaloniki Int. Film Festival Global Film Initiative Louverture Films |
| With the support of | The Khalid Shoman Foundation Graal-Kodak Award and Danny Glover Joslyn Barnes |

Palestine / Jordan / UAE / Greece 2012/
93 mins / Arabic with English subtitles

CAST

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|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Tarek | Mahmoud Asfa |
| Ghaydaa | Ruba Blal |
| Layth | Saleh Bakri |
| Abu Akram | Ali Elayan |
| Majed | Firas Taybeh |
| Zain | Ruba Shamshoum |
| Toussaint | Ahmad Srour |
| Mr. Nasser | Anas Qaralleh |
| Asad | Ahmad Massad |
| Waleed | Waleed Ramahi |
| Organization Recruiter | Jawhar Salim |
| Jihan | Fadia Abu Ayash |
| Jawad | Ossama Bawardi |
| Amal | Shereen Zoumot |
| Imwas Refugee | Hamada Atallah |
| Peasant Woman | Hala Shishany |
| City Girl 1 | Nadine Zureikat |
| City Girl 2 | Emna Ben Rejeb |
| City Boy 1 | Mahmoud al Hayek |
| City Boy 2 | Ahmad Almuheisan |
| Hopeful Man | Rami Yasin |
| George al Nabulsi | Yahya Alabdallah |
| Abu Hadeed | Yazan al Rousan |
| Abu Shibreyeh | Sushi Firas |

FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

World Premiere, Toronto Film Festival 2012

Forum, Berlin Film Festival 2013

Opening Film, Birds Eye view Film Festival, London 2013

Winner, Netpac Award, Best Asian Film - Berlin Film Festival

Winner, Best Arab Film - Abu Dhabi Film Festival

Winner, Special Jury Prize - Oran Festival of Arab Cinema

Winner, Jury Prize - Cairo International Film Festival

Winner, Tunisian Film Critics Don Quixote Award, Carthage International Film Festival

Palestine's 2013 Oscar Entry For Foreign Language Film

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Annemarie Jacir is a filmmaker and screenwriter living in Jordan. Named one of *Filmmaker Magazine's* 25 New Faces of Independent Cinema, several of her films have premiered in Official Selections at the Cannes and Venice Film Festivals. Her first feature film, *Salt of this Sea*, won numerous awards and was Palestine's Official Oscar Entry for Best Foreign Language Film. It was also the first feature film directed by a Palestinian woman.

Jacir lived in Saudi Arabia until the age of sixteen, moving between Bethlehem and Riyadh. She then studied in the United States. She began working in the theatre, first in set design and then writing and directing plays. Her career in cinema began as an assistant on various sets. She then worked as an editor and camerawoman before attending Columbia University in New York to obtain a MFA degree in Film.

Jacir co-founded Philistine Films, an independent production company, focusing on productions related to the Arab world.

She is the co-founder and chief curator of the ground-breaking *Dreams of a Nation*, a project dedicated to the conservation and promotion of Palestinian cinema. In 2003, she organized and curated the largest travelling film festival in Palestine, which included the screening, for the first time on Palestinian soil, of archival Palestinian films. Along with her work as a filmmaker, Jacir is also a poet, a film curator and a lecturer in filmmaker and has also taught at Columbia University, Bethlehem University, and Birzeit University as well as in refugee camps in Palestine, Lebanon and currently in Jordan. She is a founding member of the Palestinian Filmmakers' Collective, based in Palestine.

When I Saw You is her second feature film.

FILMOGRAPHY

FEATURE FILMS

When I Saw You (2012, 93 min)

Salt of this Sea (2008, 104 min, 35mm)

SHORTS

Sound of the Street (2006, 3 min, Color, DV)

An Explanation : (and then Burn the Ashes) (2005, 6 min, Color, 16mm)

A Few Crumbs for the Birds (2005, 26 min, Color, DV)

Until When (2004, 76 min, Color, DV)

Like Twenty Impossibles (2003, 17 min, Color, 35mm)

Palestine is Waiting (2001, 10 min, Video)

The Satellite Shooters (2001, 16 min, Color, 16mm)

Two Hundred Years of American Ideology (2000, 12 min, Color, Video)

A Revolutionary Tale (2000, 9 min, Color, Video)

A Post-Oslo History (1998, 8 min, Color, Video)

Interview (1994, 4 min. Color, Video)

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Since I have not been able to return to Ramallah, my understanding of exile and of being torn from one's home has taken on more dimensions and deeper meanings. Being so close by living in Amman has not made it easier – only more difficult, more painful. A short drive and I can see Palestine from here. Over the valley I see the hills, even recognize cities. My friends, my family, my apartment in Ramallah is there – but I can no longer reach it. Palestine is becoming a memory and I struggle to hold the visuals, the reality of my life there as close to me as I can.

This is how *When I Saw You* was born. The striking visual awareness of being so close to home and yet it being an impossible dream. The reality of seeing what you want but being unable to reach it. This film is about the depth of that landscape, its beauty and its cruelty. It's also about how hope keeps us alive and an important time period in our history where regular, every day people felt they could do something to change their lives, an infectious feeling full of dreams and change. Tarek can't understand the reality of borders and places being forbidden. But in actuality, the question is to be asked – who is really naïve? Tarek is a boy with such a beautiful sense of freedom, a desire to express himself, to live in a world where he is safe, and where he loves and is loved. He is different from other kids somehow and his mind tends towards logic and therefore the illogicality of borders is something he cannot comprehend.

For Ghaydaa, she has become serious and realistic in order to survive and protect herself and her loved ones, but there's still a small spark inside her, that fire that was extinguished long ago, which remains. It takes Tarek's denial of all conventions, his own way of being and thinking, to bring her back to a place where she once was. *When I Saw You* is a portrait of hope – of that very specific moment in a person's life when the whole world opens up. It is brief, it is specific to time and circumstances... maybe it's gone by morning. But it's there – it's there for that one moment where your heart feels like exploding and everything is possible.



INTERVIEW WITH ANNEMARIE JACIR

You chose to set your new film *When I Saw You* in 1967. Can you tell us why we have never seen an Arab film dealing with this time period?

I don't know because it's a tremendously important year for us. I never lived 1967 but I grew up hearing about it all my life. Although that year was a great tragedy for my family, it was also a time of great hope in the world. Like the late 60s everywhere, people were going through a kind of rebirth, an infectious sense of hope that they could change their own lives. Student movements, anti-colonial movements, civil rights, ... I wanted to tell a story about this important time, not to be nostalgic but rather because it is so relevant. I started writing the script at a time where I was in need of hope in my own life, and in what I saw going on around me, in my own generation.

And why focus on a young boy and his mother?

Because I like stories about regular people who are thrown into unusual circumstances. Tarek and his mother are exactly that, and because of a situation out of their control, they are thrown into a political condition they never asked for. And during this time period full of a spirit of resistance infused with great hope, I wanted to tell a personal story, that of a young mother trying to protect her son and a boy whose spirit has not been broken yet. They are also like anyone else in the world, where Tarek is looking for his own independence from his mother, not to be treated as a child by her. At the same time, the adult world cannot offer him any answer to his questions.

How much research do you do before writing?

A lot. Research was key, especially as I did not live the time period. I collected hundreds of images and footage from people, organizations, news and film archives. Documentaries, archival photos and films were crucial to "see" the look of the refugee camp, the people, the fighters and their training sessions. My past work in locating the lost Palestinian film archives of the Palestinian revolutionary cinema was a big part of it too. Books like Genet's memoir, and also unrelated literature and films of the period, as there's also something of a homage to the period, one of the reasons for the freeze frame at the end. The research for each department, like art, wardrobe, and hair, was a lot of fun too. I also conducted several interviews, mostly in Jordan, with people who were involved in the resistance. Of course there were larger questions but also questions like, "What brand of cigarettes did you smoke?", "What was your favorite song?", "What did you wear at night?"....

Would you say then that your vision of the period is realistic?

Absolutely not. This film is very much my fantasy, and the fantasy of a little boy, and how he sees the world from his point of view. It's a romantic vision, not a documentary. It's also very much about feelings, a mother's obsession to protect her child in the face of war, and the moment in a boy's life between childhood and manhood, and finding his own personal independence.

Music plays a large role in the film. Can you tell us more?

In the late 1960's Palestinians were very much connected to what was happening all over the world – they were listening to Arabic classics, and also creating a new kind of music, influenced from both their East and their West, and pushing boundaries, as in their own lives. I worked with long-time collaborator Kamran Rastegar on the original track and also researched and discovered a lot of obscure musicians and bands of the time; Lebanese rock, Armenian fusion, Egyptian jazz, Moroccan avant-garde *Gnawa*, some really fun stuff, and that is what we hear on the radio most of the time in the film, other than the constant news broadcasts. In terms of the film's live music, the first piece, around the fire, is an original song written for the film, sung by Ruba Shamshoum, a new jazz singer. There was certain magic in the time before TVs and computers, and when people were together they would sing. I wanted to break the rhythm of the film with this unusually long sequence, to change the pace so we would linger on the faces of these young men and women, each with their own stories, depth, nostalgia, madness; people so famously absent from the media normally. And finally coming back into Tarek with his half-scared, half-confused world starting to descend into images and feelings he cannot understand ... The second piece which leads into the dancing is one of the most famous Palestinian resistance songs, "Akka's Prison", written in 1930 against British rule, as a commemoration of three men who were hanged, and a call to continue the struggle for freedom.



Why did you use non-professional actors?

I like finding people whose own lives are close to the role, I like the element of freshness they bring to the film and how together we create another reality. The casting process was intensive. We cast a wide net. But I also chose several professional actors like, for example, Tarek's mother, Ruba Blal. Ruba is amazing and I wanted to work with her for some time. As is Saleh Bakri who I cast for my first feature when he was still new. We have both changed so much since then and I like growing together.

Is it true you made your actors go through actual military training?

Of course! The film has a romantic vision of the fighters ... Imagine how stupid they'd look if they couldn't shoot a Kalashnikov or climb the ropes? They went through weeks of intense training. At the same time I was very easy on them because to be true, these men and women were not in an organized army and didn't have real training. They were young people from the refugee camps, volunteers, who chose

this path to liberation. I also asked the cast to sleep in Dibeen forest, to listen to the sounds of the night, to develop relationships with each other and with nature, to become part of the landscape. In fact, I never showed them the script but rather worked on who they were and how they got there rather than the story itself.

We don't hear about a lot of Arab films shot in Jordan. How was shooting there?

Jordan is still far away from having a real independent cinema scene and shooting there is very difficult unless you are a big budget, commercial film. If you don't have money, the right last name or the right politics, unfortunately it's very difficult to find support as a low-budget, local film. We are trying to change that. For me, it's very important to work locally, and not bring in all your crew from abroad. It's part of what we need to do to build a self-reliant, independent cinema.

One would imagine with a film with this subject that you might have also encountered political problems in Jordan?

Yes, although the film is not meant to be realistic and is told from a child's point of view, we discovered it's still a very sensitive topic in Jordan, even after so many years. This "political" tension was felt by our crew and also our cast, who are made up of a lot of young people, some of them the children of fedayeen, and who experience this tension often. We also faced occasional obstacles with the authorities during the production which caused setbacks, but we also found a lot of support. Thanks to this support we persevered.

Did you use only natural sets?

We had two main locations for the film. The first was the Harir Refugee Camp, which is entirely constructed. Between 1967 and 1968, "emergency camps" as they were called, were set up all over Jordan and Syria in order to house the influx of refugees. Of course they were meant to be temporary and as we know the refugees were never allowed to return. So these camps today still exist but look nothing like they did then. So with a lot of visual research, we built the whole set.

The second major location is Dibeen forest, where the fighters live. This is the actual location of where the Palestinians hid and trained for years. Scouting there was an incredible experience. We found remnants of the time period everywhere; bullets, shell casings, and canned food. The tunnels you see in the film, where they hide and where they store supplies, are the actual tunnels the fighters made. We discovered the most intricate tunnels, connecting to each other, a whole underground world. We even found the tunnel where they built a hospital! Deep in the mountains, you enter a small hole to discover seven or eight large rooms, and inside all the remnants of the former hospital, including medicine, bottles, IV bags, and other supplies.

Can you tell us about the title? Where does it come from?

The film is about moments in person's life where things change. For me, the title is about when a person sees something or someone for the first time, whether they have seen them a million times already, but this time they are truly seeing, as if for the first time. It could be a person or a place. It could be seeing your homeland across the border, or a loved one, or that realization of seeing your own life for what

it is, or what it could be. It's the moment you understand something that you didn't before. Sometimes something is right in front of you but you don't see it. Or you don't see the possibilities.

And also you've mentioned before your experience of seeing Palestine from Jordan...

Exactly. All my life I had what I call "the privilege of Palestine" – that is the ability to be there, to live there, unlike 75% of my people, who are forbidden from that. For three decades I have been crossing the borders. When I was no longer allowed to return, and I could only see Palestine from across the Jordan valley, I understood something, or rather felt something, I had never known before. Like so many people who have been displaced, the hardest part is standing somewhere and actually seeing it; looking into the distance and seeing a land you recognize and know so intimately, which has now been denied to you. And trying to wrap your brain around the stupidity of borders, the illogicality of human beings being separated from each other because someone now says there is a line in the earth there called a "border"

Notes on cast and crew

Tarek: Mahmoud Asfa

Thirteen year old Mahmoud, lives with his family in Irbid refugee camp. His family is originally from Palestine and became refugees in Jordan, unable to cross the border where their homeland lies just across the valley. *When I Saw You* is his first acting role. He enjoys playing football and his pet birds.



Ghaydaa: Ruba Blal

Ruba Blal is a Palestinian actress living in Jaffa. Film credits include *Miral and Atash*, Cannes FIPRESCI winner. She has also been actively involved in the Palestinian theater scene with performances in *Al Jidareeya* (Hawawati Playhouse), and *Umm Daya* where she received the Best Actress award.

Layth: Saleh Bakri

Saleh Bakri is a Palestinian actor born in Bina village in the Galilee in 1977. His mother is from Jaffa and his father, the well-known actor Mohammed Bakri, is from Bina. He has performed regularly in theatre. *Salt of this Sea* (2008) was his debut performance in an Arab film. Other films include *The Band's Visit*, *The Time That Remains*, and *La Source des Femmes*.

Producer: Ossama Bawardi

Ossama Bawardi is an independent producer based in Palestine and Jordan. Bawardi has been involved in various Palestinian productions and has been a guest participant of the Tribeca All Access Program in New York, as well as the Thessaloniki Film Festival's Crossing Borders Film Market. He has been invited to speak on several panels regarding film production in the Middle East including with Michael Moore's Traverse City Film Festival. He also directed and produced the short film *Haneen* (2010).

Cinematographer: Hélène Louvart

Hélène Louvart is the DOP of films by Sandrine Veysset, Marc Recha, Dominique Cabrera, Christian Vincent among many others. And most recently Pina – the latest film by Wim Wenders. When I Saw You is her first collaboration with Annemarie Jacir.

Production Company:

Philistine Films aka Lamma Shoftak LLC was founded in 1997, an independent production company, focusing on productions related to the Arab world. Productions include *like twenty impossibles* – which was an Academy awards qualifier and is cited as one of the most successful short Arab films to date, and which was an Official Selection of the Cannes International Film Festival winning more than 15 prizes at film festivals across the globe. Philistine Films co-produced the feature film *Salt of this Sea* making it their second film to debut as an Official Selection at the Cannes Film Festival. The film won 17 international prizes and has since been sold to more than 30 countries.

