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FESTIVAL DE CANNES

PERSONAL AFFAIRS

MAJDAL Films presents **أمور شخصية** A Film by MAHA HAJ

AMER HLEHEL DORAID LIDDAWI MAHMOUD SHAWAHDEH SANA SHAWAHDEH
HANAN HILLO MAISA ABD ELHADI ZIAD BAKRI JIHAN DERMELKONIAN

costume designer Hamada Atallah make up RASHA SULIEMAN sound RAJA DUBAYAH 1st ad EHAB BAHOUTH
casting AMER HLEHEL original music HABIB SHEHADEH HANNA sound designer MICHAEL GOOREVICH cinematography ELAD DEBI
editor VERONIQUE LANGE line producer LAURA HAWA co producers EHAB ASSAL MUNTHER HAJ
produced by BAHER AGBARIYA written and directed by MAHA HAJ



FILMS Boutique



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PERSONAL AFFAIRS

(OMOR SHAHSIYA)

A FILM BY MAHA HAJ

2016 / Israël / 1h28 / color / language : Arabic / VOstFR / image : 1.85 / sound : 5.1

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OFFICIAL SCREENINGS

THURSDAY 12th MAY 14H30 **PUBLIC SCREENING** (*press/industry*)
THURSDAY 12th MAY 22H00 **OFFICIAL SCREENING** SALLE DEBUSSY
FRIDAY 13th MAY 16H15 SALLE BAZIN



SYNOPSIS

Nazareth today: an old couple lives wearily to the rhythm of the daily routine. On the other side of the border, in Ramallah, their son Tarek wishes to remain an eternal bachelor, their daughter is about to give birth while her husband lands a movie role and the grandmother loses her head ... Between check-points and dreams, frivolity and politics, some want to leave, others want to stay but all have personal affairs to resolve.

INTERVIEW WITH MAHA HAJ

Tell us about your experience before this first feature film?

Before *Personal Affairs*, I directed two short films and I worked on a number of film shoots as art director. That's how I fell in love with the world of cinema. I never went to film school; I studied Arab and English literature. I never really thought about becoming a film director, but I seized the opportunity when it was given to me. The first time I worked in movies was for Elia Suleiman's *The Time that Remains* as head set decorator. I was at once thrilled and terrified, but I jumped in the deep end and the immersion was invigorating. I realized that it was what I wanted to do when I grew up – except that I was already almost forty years old! Every film I worked on as art director was a schooling in filmmaking for me. From one film to the next, I acquired experience, and at the same time I never stopped writing for others and myself. I started working on the screenplay for *Personal Affairs* four years ago while continuing my activities as art director and raising my two children. Meanwhile, I was accumulating experience, knowledge and a certain wisdom.

What sparked the story for *Personal Affairs*?

Scenery. My eldest brother owns a cabin in the middle of the woods in the north of Sweden. I went with my family to spend New Year's. It was so cold that the lake was frozen. Everything was white, quiet, majestic and incredibly beautiful. But I was in the depths of a depression and entirely impervious to the surrounding beauty. I then wondered what impact this place would have had on my parents who have been married for more than fifty years. When my brother offered to invite them the following summer, I thought it wouldn't be a good idea: this place had had such a strong impact on me, what impact would it have on a couple married for so many years? The film was inspired by my family, but the similarities stop there. The rest is my imagination.

How did you find the actors?

After a number of auditions, I was left with the feeling that something was missing. So I decided to work with non-professionals. And I followed my intuition by approaching a couple of friends about playing the parents. They have been living together for over thirty years and could identify with their characters. As for the grandmother, she is played by one of my mother's friends. Non-professionals make up the majority of the supporting cast.



In your movie the way you treat space – or rather spaces – is impressive by its specificity. The directing is adapted according to each different environment.

The space mirrors the characters. They have very different personalities, even if they belong to the same family. I wanted to translate that into images. Hicham, who lives in Sweden, is in harmony with his environment. The country's quiet whiteness sharply contrasts with the noise that prevails in Nazareth and Ramallah. Tarek is dynamic and somewhat neurotic. He is much more like Ramallah. In Nazareth, the parents are also affected by their daily rut. Domestic space acts like a mirror here as well. I wanted to highlight these diverging situations through composition in the frame and colors.

Although sharing the same space, the old couple aren't united; they remain separated by screens that are like invisible boundaries inside the domestic space. Was the notion of boundaries at the heart of your project?

Absolutely. The husband and wife are completely isolated because they have been married for such a long time. Marriage can have that effect on a couple. They really don't have any grievances against one another; it's simply that life has led them to drift apart. They no longer communicate. The children were the bond that held them together. Now that they are gone, what do they have to talk about? The husband still tries to engage his wife in conversation, mentioning things he's read on the Internet. But it doesn't interest her. She's completely stuck. They are very lonely, like most of the characters in the film.



Besides their solitude, your characters are all confined within their respective environments. It's only at the end that they manage to free themselves.

This freedom only comes into play once they have made the decision to cross actual borders. Borders don't only hem them in physically or politically, but also psychologically and spiritually. Take Tarek and Maysa for instance: she is clearly in love with him, but he still doesn't have feelings for her. They cross the border that leads them from Palestine to Jerusalem (which is now part of Israel). This crossing is metaphoric. Maysa goes beyond the limits she had set for herself. Tarek had described her as a timid, uptight and conservative woman. Yet at that moment, she connects with herself and has access to her femininity. Tarek then truly discovers her.

The sea is another boundary in the film. George lives in Ramallah. Most people from the West Bank have never seen the sea, because they don't have a permit, especially the younger generation. Once he has crossed the border, George feels as free as air and wants to dive into the sea. In a way it's like a baptism. He also feels terribly alone and subjected to the pressure of getting married. Seeing the sea takes him back to his childhood. It's not just George's story, but the story of an entire nation. The third border crossed by the older couple radically changes their environment. Something about their daily lives, their daily surroundings, is holding them prisoner. They have to leave to find freedom. I'm not saying that everyone should leave Palestine. I'm just saying that it is a place where it can sometimes be difficult to live.



The grandmother is the only person who isn't able to overcome the numerous obstacles that life has set in her path. What purpose does this character serve?

Indeed, she is the only character who can't leave her house – in an obvious way, because she is senile. She has lost her sense of direction and can't find her bearings when in an open space. Her story is very sad, even if it is injected with a certain dose of humor. She represents the Palestinian people. She is shut away in her own house, which should be the place where she has chosen to be, a place of freedom. But she doesn't have the choice because of her psychological condition. She is stuck in her past and vividly remembers the time in her life when she was afraid of being abandoned. I was tempted to come up with another story for her, but I wanted to be true to the title, *Personal Affairs*, to the fact that the film would be about personal stories. This "personal story" is much more a reflection of her sadness than that of a nation whose inhabitants have been chased from their homes.

Did you want to make a political film?

Metaphorically speaking, yes. I don't have a direct approach. I play with context. Where I come from it is impossible to escape politics. It's a harsh reality that is blatantly visible at every street corner and at every checkpoint.

Interview by Sandrine Marques

MAHA HAJ

BIOGRAPHY :

Maha Haj grew up and lives in Nazareth.

She wrote the screenplay for the post-apocalyptic feature film EXISTENCE.

She also wrote and directed the short film ORANGES and the documentary WITHIN THESE WALLS.

She works in Nazareth as a screenwriter, script doctor and Art director.

She just finished directing her feature film PERSONAL AFFAIRS.

FILMOGRAPHY :

2014	PERSONAL AFFAIRS (Feature Film in post-production)	Script Writer and Director
2011	ELVIS OF NAZARETH (Short Film of Rani Massalha)	Co-scriptwriter
2010	EXISTENCE (Feature Film in pre-production)	Script Writer
2010	WITHIN THESE WALLS (Documentary)	Script Writer and Director
2009	ORANGES (Short Film)	Script Writer and Director

AWARDS :

Audience Award - Festival du film de Montpellier - ORANGES

Audience Award - Rencontres Films Femmes Méditerranée de Marseille - ORANGES

OFFICIAL SELECTION :

- 2010 Festival Nouv.o.monde de Rousset-Pays d'Aix
- 2010 Rencontres Films Femmes Méditerranée de Marseille
- 2010 Film Festival Los Angeles
- 2010 Festival international du film de Tiburon
- 2010 Festival de cinéma « Immagini » in Sant'Antioco
- 2009 Haifa International Film Festival
- 2009 Festival du film de Montpellier
- 2009 Festival de l'autre cinéma israélien in New York

SCRIPT DOCTOR :

- 2014 **3000 NIGHTS**, by Mai Masri (Feature Film)
- 2013 **GIRAFFADA**, by Rani Massalha (Feature Film)

HEAD OF SET DESIGN :

- 2009 **THE TIME THAT REMAINS**, by Elia Suleiman (Feature Film)
- 2011 **ELVIS OF NAZARETH**, by Rani Masalha (Short Film)
- 2011 **THE ATTACK**, by Ziad Fouri (Feature Film)
- 2011 **AMAZING LOVE**, by Kevin Dawnes (Feature Film)
- 2012 **ARABANY**, by Adi Adwan (Feature Film)
- 2013 **ABOVE THE HILL**, by Raphael Nedjari (Feature Film)

CAST

Nabeela
Saleh
Tarek
Samar
Hisham
George
Maysa
Grandmother

Sanaa SHAWAHDEH
Mahmoud SHAWAHDEH
Doraid LIDDAWI
Hanan HILLO
Ziad BAKRI
Amer HLEHEL
Maisa ABD ELHADI
Jihan DERMELKONIAN

CREW

Director / Scriptwriter
DOP
Sound
Editing
1st AD
Costumes
Production designer
--
Production
Producer
Co-producer
Line producer

Maha HAJ
Elad DEBI
Raja DUBAYAH
Véronique LANGE
Ehab BAHOUS
Hamada ATALLAH
Rabia SAFITI
--
MAJDAL FILMS
Baher AGBARIYA
Ehab ASSAL – Monther HAJ
Laura HAWA

PERSONAL AFFAIRS



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