



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
OFFICIAL SELECTION
IN COMPETITION



THE ~~2003~~ TIMES
BFI 53RD LONDON
FILM FESTIVAL
14 - 29 October 2009

The time that Remains



a film by Elia Suleiman



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THE TIME THAT REMAINS

A film by **Elia SULEIMAN**

with

ELIA SULEIMAN

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Palestine/France – 2009 – 35mm – color – 1.85
Hebrew/Arabic – 1h45

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SYNOPSIS

THE TIME THAT REMAINS is a semi-autobiographical film, in four episodes, about a family, my family, from 1948 until recent times.

The film is inspired by my father's private diaries, starting from when he was a resistance fighter in 1948, and by my mother's letters to family members who were forced to leave the country.

Combined with my intimate memories of them and with them, the film attempts to portray the daily life of those Palestinians who remained and were labelled "Israeli-Arabs", living as a minority in their own homeland.

A CONVERSATION WITH ELIA SULEIMAN

What have you been doing since DIVINE INTERVENTION?

First of all it took me at least two years to calm down after the promotion of DIVINE INTERVENTION. The film enjoyed a commercial release throughout the world despite the fact that it was an independent, art house film. It was necessary to meet audiences to be able to guide them through, and I decided to accompany the launch of the film. All that took much longer than expected.

Then I went through an inevitable period of euphoria. When you're in that state, you wish it would go on forever; when you come down from it, you thank God! From the experience of my first two films I learned that first I had to live in order to write. This relates to the semi-autobiographical nature of my films, which draw inspiration from the direct observation of reality. I always carry a notebook with me in which I record small details of everyday life, like the wind in a particular tree. This accumulation of notes creates a compost of images in which my films can take root. If I want to be sincere to myself and the audience, I can't make more films than I do.

Each of my films contains several themes, any one of which could give birth to its own film. I refuse to repeat myself, to make variations on a single theme. To some extent, each one contains three or four. I refuse to repeat myself, to make variations on a theme. I am not only referring to my desire as a filmmaker but rather to a moral commitment to share with the audience a moment of truth and not the comfort of what's expected or already seen.

I should add that once I had written the screenplay it took me three years to find someone who would take the risk of financing it. Producers love my films once they're finished, but finding the funds was a real adventure!

Is THE TIME THAT REMAINS more political than your previous films?

My films are inspired by my everyday life. When you live in a sensitive area like my country, politics are simply a part of life. It happens that Palestine has been subject to overexposure in the media which has left it open to ideologues on the Left and the Right. I felt my challenge was to deviate from this simplistic approach by making a film in which there is no history lesson to be learned. I focussed on moments of intimacy of a family, hoping for nothing more than to give pleasure to the audience and to achieve a certain cinematic truth. If I reach this goal, the film becomes universal and the world itself becomes Palestine. If this should trigger a feeling of involvement with the political dimension, the audience can go to a bookshop or the library - instead of watching TV - and learn more about the lives of the characters that have moved them. I do not doubt that poetry is universal. But today, another phenomenon reinforces this feeling of familiarity with the world, albeit in a perverse and illusory way. I am talking about globalization. Nonetheless, perhaps this can encourage some to stop thinking of Palestine in a fetishistic way and help me shed my 'Palestinian director' label.

Originally, the film was meant to take place in two different parts of the world. But once I had completed the writing, I realized that the story should not expand horizontally but vertically, not superficially but at a deep level. I chose to concentrate on one location and to devote myself to a meditative research on tiny moments of the story; to give them a real depth and a weight that would allow me to make them universal. While writing you tend to feel insecure and to rely on a strong theme, a story with strong, clear landmarks you can cling to. But then you realize that taking risks is an integral part of the creative process. Poetry is about a moment of trembling. You reach that moment or you don't, but you can't prepare for it or provoke it. This became very clear to me as I was shooting the first part of the film set in Nazareth, in 1948.

Have you matured politically?

A change has certainly taken place. I can stand at a distance from myself now. I have noticed that as time passes and your experience grows, you can go beyond yourself. Sometimes you resort to certain options purely out of intellectual interest. But when you truly share the life experience, once you enter the moral territory of others, with their suffering, regardless of sex or nationality, you become conscious of the pleasure, not only of being yourself, but of living in others' skins, of all colours. There is a great pleasure in this otherness. That is when you understand that in order to be free you need to be an outsider. Wherever you are, it is the status of outsider that sets you free to understand and feel others. This is when your poetry becomes truthful and sincere.

When I watch my other films I notice seams I did not mine fully, signs of distancing, which I put down not to a lack of sincerity but simply to an unwillingness to venture into emotional territory that did not seem viable for me... But in *THE TIME THAT REMAINS* I truly went naked! I went as deep as possible into my private, intimate life, with all the joy and pain that involves. I don't think it is a film you have to understand but one you have to feel, to become emotionally involved in. When I watched it I was myself deeply moved by the scene where the whole family is gathered in the kitchen. There is a remembrance of something forever lost, something Proustian. The kitchen reminds me of something which in turn reminds me of something else. It's not about trying to seduce the spectator but about inviting him, by means of tiny, intimate details, to return to his own childhood - even if the surroundings were different - wrapped in the same warmth, the same protective tenderness I felt when sitting with my father and mother, even at the height of the conflict. I felt this only when I watched the film, not when I was making it.

You give us a surprising vision of your relationship with your parents.

I had a very particular relationship with my parents. As a child, I was a bit of a street kid. Then I left the country and when I came back the relationship I developed with my parents was much more of a friendship. My father and I went for walks, we went fishing together: we did all sorts of things. He introduced me to the music I used in the film. He loved those songs, while I was a Led Zeppelin freak at that time, a drummer in a rock band, and I didn't like his music. But little by little he taught me to appreciate it, giving me tapes and buying me books about Arab music. It was the same thing with clothes. If he liked something I wore, he would take it. After he died I opened his wardrobe and found it was filled with my clothes. And I have to admit a lot of the clothes I wore were his.

It is difficult to imagine that the screenplay was so directly inspired by your own family history.

When the story takes place at a time I have known, I write what I live, what I see, smell and taste, and then adapt it to my aesthetic tastes. For 1948, I had to call upon the memories of my father. In a way, he became my co-screenwriter. When he grew ill I asked him to keep a diary, which I then adapted as I would have done with a novel. It was very important that he gave me precise descriptions. I was worried about falling into a classic narrative form but finally I kept my own method to bring my father's memories to life on screen. Admittedly it is about his youth but it is also a coded departure point for the film which corresponds to a historical 'big bang'.

What was the situation in Nazareth at the time?

Nazareth was more or less spared at the time and for very precise historical reasons. In its conquest of the North, the Haganah bypassed Nazareth, after dumping the mass of refugees that had been expelled from the other villages. Ben Gourion had asked that they avoid Nazareth because of its churches: he knew the bells would be heard all the way to the Vatican, thus exposing them to the entire world. To start with, the Haganah had intended to colonize the whole of Palestine, the Israel of today, the West Bank, Gaza and the Syrian Golan Heights, all the way to the Litani River in Lebanon. This would in fact have been Israel. They achieved their aims in 1967 when they took the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights. They took the Litani in 1982 but had to withdraw. There was a precise plan drawn up in Tel Aviv by Ben Gourion and his entourage. A clear ethnic purification project. That is why they bulldozed 500 villages to the ground in order to build *kibbutzim* and *moshavim*. Each building, each village you see today has been built on the ruins of another.

How do you portray the Palestinian Resistance?

In fact, a resistance movement was born amongst Palestinians like my father but they had no means whatsoever. My father had to adapt an English gun he found in order to make it work with German bullets because that was all you could buy on the black market! Don't forget that the Haganah had been trained like an army by the British. What can you do against a trained army? The resistance was made up of neighbours and villagers,

whose weapons were shotguns used for hunting or for protecting their land, whereas the Haganah were working from a plan which had been prepared in advance. Intelligence reports had been made in every village, taking advantage of the inhabitants' hospitality and trust. When they arrived they already had all the names of the anti-colonialists, the nationalists, the left wing activists - anyone who was politically motivated. And they carried out numerous summary executions based simply on these lists.

What was your experience of making an historical film?

I wanted to make an epic movie unlike any other. I wanted to make a personal and intimate film that would relate historical facts but one that would also spark intense emotion without being manipulative. Some of the events depicted took place in an extremely brutal and chaotic fashion. I myself will always be marked by memories of this era. But I wanted to present this chaos as a ballet where violence is suggested emotionally and not shown. The challenge was to translate the violence in a cinematographic language devoid of any sensationalism. The violence of this period was extreme, but my aim was to hint at it, not to depict it.

One important dimension was financial. To make a period epic requires sets and accessories. At the beginning our conditions were such that each day when I arrived on set, my dear friend and partner Avi Kleinberger would come to see me to make a list of what we didn't have so we could adapt ourselves to what we had.

My first reaction was frustration. I perceived these constraints as impossibilities, obstacles to my creative process. Paradoxically I had to learn sobriety, to make the most with the least. This experience reaches beyond a question of cinema. This monastic attitude helps one to become a better human, one who would rather give than take.

It was a lesson in life for me, it taught me a real generosity.

This makes me confident for the future. I will be more precise with the small moments, the very details that turn out to be what touch the audience most.

Silence is one of the distinctive features of your style.

I find silence very cinematic. Silence is wonderfully subversive. All governments hate it because it is a weapon of resistance. When you read a poem, for example, breathing plays a fundamental role. Many people feel intimidated by silence because it destabilizes them, dispossesses them of their identity. Look at commercial narrative films: you beg

for a moment of silence, and when the films are over you realize that nothing has been said; nothing has been given for the spectator to reflect on.

Silence makes you question things - it makes you uncomfortable.

Is silence the breathing of cinema?

It is much more than that. It is a moment of sharing, and of participation. It is the spectator's privilege to put this silence into words, to take part in the creation of the image.

It is an moment of darkness lit solely by the glow of a cigarette and the presence of a dear friend. It is the sight of a smile that makes you aware of having loved life. It is the natural and intuitive return to the origins of cinema.

One could attempt to define it with a multitude of words but that would do silence a terrible injustice.

CHRONOLOGY

Notes

Palestinians have been dispersed since the creation of Israel in 1948. Together, they comprise three large groups:

Arab Israelis: these are Palestinians who live in Israel and who were able to obtain nationality. This group comprises 1.3 million people in total – to which one must add 150,000, representing the number of “present-absentees” who live in Israel but who are being refused nationality by the authorities.

Palestinians in the occupied territories – the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem – estimated at 3.5 million.

Expatriate refugees, the majority of whom live in neighboring countries (Syria, Lebanon and Jordan). There are several million in total but their exact number is difficult to estimate.

PALESTINE-ISRAEL

November 29th, 1947: The United Nations General Assembly adopts a plan in favor of partitioning Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states.

April 9th, 1948: The Deir Yassin Massacre. Zionist militias kill two hundred Palestinians. Several similar massacres are committed during the war. 700,000 Palestinians are transformed into “refugees”.

May 14th, 1948: Declaration of the Independence of the State of Israel. Armies from several Arab states move into Palestine.

December 11th, 1948: United Nations General Assembly Resolution which allows refugees who want to return to their homes to be able to do so as quickly as possible.

1949: Signature of the Armistice Agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The Arabs that stayed on in Israeli territory are stripped of Israeli nationality and submitted to the military administration that limits their freedom of circulation. This regime lasts up until 1956.

October 29th, 1956: The Kfar Kassem Massacre: 49 Arab Israelis are killed by Israeli border police under the pretext that they were out in the streets when a curfew had been imposed.

1959: The Palestinian liberation movement is created in Kuwait, (Fatah) led by Yasser Arafat.

May 1964: The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) is created in Palestine.

January 1st, 1965: Fatah carries out its first military operation against Israel.

February 1969: Yasser Arafat becomes president of the PLO's executive committee.

March 30th, 1976: Six Arab Israelis are killed by police during a protest on Land Day. Arab Israelis had assembled to protest political discrimination and the confiscation of their land.

June 24th, 1987: Arab Israelis go on strike for equal rights.

December 9th, 1987: Explosion of the first Intifada (rebellion) in Gaza, which rapidly spreads to the West Bank.

September 13th, 1993: Washington Oslo Accords are signed between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin.

July 1st, 1994: Yasser Arafat moves to Gaza and takes on leadership of the Palestinian Authority.

November 4th, 1995: Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin by an Israeli extremist.

September 2000: Explosion of the second Intifada.

October 2000: Israeli Palestinians protest in solidarity with the occupied territories. The police kill thirteen protestors. The legal proceedings brought against those responsible are later abandoned.

December 2008-January 2009: Israeli war against Gaza. January 2nd, tens of thousands of Arabs protest in solidarity with Gaza.

February 2009: Victory of the right and extreme right in Israel. Avigdor Lieberman, head of the Yisrael Beiteinu party, who believes that Arab Israelis should sign a loyalty oath, becomes Minister of Foreign Affairs.

THE ARAB WORLD AND IRAN

July 23rd, 1952: The “Free Officers” led by Gamal Abdel Nasser take power in Egypt.

August 19th, 1953: Fall of Mossadegh’s government in Iran following a coup d’état orchestrated by the British and American secret services.

November 1st, 1954 : Beginning of the Algerian rebellion, led by the National Liberation Front (FLN).

July 26th, 1956: Nasser declares the nationalization of the Suez Canal. A few months later, France, the United Kingdom and Israel attack Egypt.

July 14th, 1958: The Republic in Iraq is created. American and British military intervention in Lebanon and Jordan.

June 1967: The Israeli-Arab war. Israel takes control of the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, Syrian Golan Heights and The Egyptian Sinai Peninsula.

September 1970: The Jordanian army crushes the Palestinian resistance (Black September).

September 30th, 1970: Death of President Nasser who had spent his last days trying to find an accord between the PLO and the King of Jordan.

1971: The Fedayin are expelled from Jordan, the PLO takes root in Lebanon.

October 1973: The Israeli-Arab Yom Kippur War or Ramadan War.

April 1975 Start of the Lebanese Civil War, in which Palestinians participate.

November 19th-21st, 1977: Egyptian President Anouar El-Sadate visits Jerusalem, leading, later on, to the Camp David Accords of September 17th, 1978 and peace between Egypt and Israel on March 26th, 1979.

February 1979: Return of Ayatollah Khomeini in Teheran. Fall of the Shah.

1980-1988: War between Iraq and Iran.

June 1982: The Israeli army invades Lebanon and arrives at Beirut. The Sabra and Chatila Massacres take place in September.

August 2nd, 1990: Iraq invades Kuwait.

May 2000: Israel withdraws from South-Lebanon after a more than 20-year long military operation.

March 2003: The United States invades Iraq and overthrows Saddam Hussein’s regime.

July-August 2006: War between Israel and Hezbollah.

WORLD

March 5th, 1946: Winston Churchill gives the Fulton speech, considered the beginning of the Cold War.

1947: The United Kingdom withdraws from India. Partition of India and Pakistan.

October 1st, 1949: The Communists announce The People’s Republic of China.

1950-1953: Korean War.

March 5th, 1953: Joseph Stalin dies.

1954: The French are defeated at Dien Bien Phu. Geneva Accords.

April 1955: The Bandung Conference marks the birth of the Non-Aligned Movement.

1956: Soviet troops crush the uprising in Budapest.

1960: Several African countries achieve independence.

1965: America escalates the situation in Vietnam.

1968: The “Prague Spring” rebellion is crushed.

1973: Summit of the Non-Aligned in Algiers who demand a new international world order. Raising of oil prices and the beginning of nationalization of production by producing countries.

1975: The rebels win in Vietnam; the country is re-unified.

1975-1976: Fall of the Portuguese dictatorship. Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau achieve their independence.

December 1979: Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

March 1985: Mikhail Gorbachev becomes Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

November 11th, 1989: Fall of the Berlin wall.

December 26th, 1991: The USSR is dissolved.

1994: First free elections in South Africa. Nelson Mandela becomes president.

September 11th, 2001: Attack on the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington. President George W. Bush announces the “war against terrorism”. The United States overthrows the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

COMPLETE FILMOGRAPHY

AS DIRECTOR

- 2009** THE TIME THAT REMAINS
- 2007** TO EACH HIS OWN CINEMA
- 2002** DIVINE INTERVENTION (Yadon ilaheyya)
- 1999** CYBER PALESTINE
- 1996** CHRONICLE OF A DISAPPEARANCE (Segell ikhtifa)
- 1993** THE GULF WAR, WHAT NEXT? (Harb El Khalij wa baad)
- 1990** INTRODUCTION TO THE END OF AN ARGUMENT

AS SCREENWRITER

- 2009** THE TIME THAT REMAINS
- 2002** DIVINE INTERVENTION (Yadon ilaheyya)
- 1999** CYBER PALESTINE
- 1996** CHRONICLE OF A DISAPPEARANCE (Segell ikhtifa)

AS ACTOR

- 2009** THE TIME THAT REMAINS
- 2007** TO EACH HIS OWN CINEMA
- 2006** BAMAKO
- 2002** DIVINE INTERVENTION (Yadon ilaheyya)
- 1993** THE GULF WAR, WHAT NEXT? (Harb El Khalij wa baad)

CAST

E.S
Fuad
Mother 1970-80
Mother today
The neighbor
E.S as a child
E.S as a teenager
Jubran
Thuraya
Nadia
Anis
Rose
Mayor

Elia SULEIMAN
Saleh BAKRI
Samar QUDHA TANUS
Shafika BAJJALI
Tarek QUBTI
Zuhair Abu HANNA
Ayman ESPANIOLI
Bilal ZIDANI
Leila MOUAMMAR
Yasmine HAJ
Amer HLEHEL
Nina JARJOURA
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CREW

Directed by
Screenplay
Producers

Elia SULEIMAN
Elia SULEIMAN
Michael GENTILE
Elia SULEIMAN
Hani FARSI
Jérôme BORENSTEIN
Avichai HENIG
Marc-André BATIGNE
Sharif WAKED
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Pierre MERTENS
Christian MONHEIM
Véronique LANGE
Avi KLEINBERGER
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Jacques ROYER
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FRANCE 3 CINEMA (France)
ARTEMIS PRODUCTIONS (Belgium)
RTBF (Belgium)
BELGACOM (Belgique)
BIM DISTRIBUZIONE (Italy)
CORNICHE PICTURES (United Kingdom)

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1st Assistant directors

Director of Photography
Set designer
Costume designer
Sound engineers

Editor
Associate producers

Production manager
Co-production

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