

FILM CLINIC presents



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Orizzonti

AMIRA

A FILM BY **MOHAMED DIAB**



SYNOPSIS

Amira, a 17-year-old Palestinian, was conceived with the smuggled sperm of her imprisoned father, Nawar. Although their relationship since birth has been restricted to prison visits, he remains her hero. His absence in her life is overcompensated with love and affection from those surrounding her. But when a failed attempt to conceive another child reveals Nawar's infertility, Amira's world turns upside down.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The fact that there exists some form of immaculate conception in the most sacred and divided place on earth, is fascinating yet surreal. AMIRA is a micro-cosmic exploration of the division and xenophobia that exists in today's world. In the process of unraveling our heroine's identity, the film begs the question, is hatred nature or nurtured?

INTERVIEW WITH MOHAMED DIAB

Where did the idea for this film come from?

Directly from the news! I learned from the newspapers that Palestinian couples were able to conceive children even though the husband was a prisoner in Israel. A trafficking system allowed sperm to be smuggled out of the prison. The story stayed in my head, I imagined possible developments, the twists and turns that could be grafted onto the process... Above all, I found in it existential extensions that went well beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and could be applied to all conflicts, raising quasi-philosophical questions: what happens in the head of a young man or woman who was first conceived as an idea? Where do his/her beliefs come from, how does he/she inherit them?

How was the scriptwriting process?

I write as a family, with my sister, my brother and my wife, who is also a producer. The four of us threw ideas around. The trigger for the film was to imagine that Nawar is not Amira's father. His wife is treated as the wife of a hero, his daughter as the daughter of a hero. But if the hero is not the father, what happens to the wife and daughter?

It could be a Shakespearean drama, but this story takes place today in Palestine, in a city adorned with portraits of freedom fighters - heroes, say the Palestinians, terrorists, say the Israelis. Honouring the fighters is at the heart of the Palestinian cause, the children conceived in this way - about a hundred of them, today - are a symbol of the struggle against oppression, a symbol of the Palestinian spirit. A way of saying that these fighters will never give up. If they are killed, their children will take their place, the source of their struggle will never dry up.

Is that when you chose to make Amira the heroine of the film?

It is through her point of view that the story takes on its full meaning. It is Amira who is primarily concerned: even before she was born, she was made a symbol. Her path has been mapped out, her convictions almost forged for her. And now she has to go back and redefine herself. This concerns all of us: we all think we are free, and we probably are to some extent but 70% or 80% of our identity has been chosen for us. And finding your own path takes time, energy, and courage. Little by little, the story came together, like a puzzle.

The challenge was to know exactly when to deliver the successive information and that was very interesting. Suspense had to be measured out. Everything fell into place through the rewrites: sometimes we realized that we were saying too much, too soon. And the last rewrite was the editing.

Where exactly does Amira take place?

In any city in Palestine. I don't think it's useful to point to one. I am Egyptian: my advantage is to see this story through the eyes of a foreigner, to have a fresh look at the greatest conflict of our time, which has been going on for eighty years. I did a lot of research, I met a lot of Palestinians, I read everything I could find on the subject.

I wanted to gather a crew of Palestinians who know their country, the details of daily life. I needed to have a Palestinian producer and I am glad it was Hany Abu-Assad, who was my guide and my eyes in this story. I had to make this film with the greatest respect, never forgetting that I was an outsider. That's why we make films: to approach other cultures, to see the world differently. It's a chance to have been able to immerse myself for three years in the making of Amira, to have been able to try to get into the spirit of both sides. It's a great experience as an artist and as a human being.

How did you find the intense actress who plays Amira?

I did a very broad casting. And as soon as I saw Tara Abboud, I knew it would be her. Her audition was great, and she has this incredible, angelic face. She's innocent and fierce at the same time. She was 19 when we shot, at the end of 2019, and she had already been in a Jordanian show with Saba Mubarak, who plays Warda, her mother. Both are Jordanian-Palestinian (70% of Jordanians are of Palestinian origin). Regarding the male actors, they are Palestinian.

You film Amira in a symbolic way: sometimes with her face flooded with light, sometimes blurred in the back of a bus. What were your principles and what do these symbols mean?

Many of the principles come from the script and particularly from Amira's passion for photography, which her father passed on to her. She makes family photos, thanks to Photoshop, which are all as artificial as her own life is or as artificial as her mother's wedding: her mother married an image, a photo of Nawar, already in prison, who never came out of jail since.

With my cinematographer Ahmed Gabr, who lit my three films, we worked according to the locations, with precise ideas. When she learns the truth, Amira is literally blinded by the light. Further on, we see her in the back of the bus that brings her back from prison: she is blurred as her identity. Only the wall between Israel and the West Bank is clear and this wall is now the pivot of her existence. She is also seen several times

behind fences, which is a metaphor for Palestine and herself. Even their apparent freedom is a prison.

Amira has all the ingredients of a melodrama: revelations, twists and turns. But the film retains the dryness of tragedy...

We Egyptians are melodramatic people. We speak loudly, with big gestures. Every time I write a film, I want to hold back my horses. This story could have been a long melodrama lasting six hours! But I wanted some mystery and not too many outpourings. The characters helped me achieve this: Amira and her mother are women strong enough not to give in to despair. They fight, standing up. It's also a question of survival. Warda has her maternal intuition, and she is the only one who knows how Amira was really conceived. She's ahead of the other characters. She realizes how dangerous the situation is for her daughter and she has to control her emotions.

Hani, the teacher, and Ziad, Amira's lover, are the only ones who tell the young woman that nothing changes, that whatever happened she is still herself...

It doesn't matter how they see her, what matters to Amira is how she sees herself. It is she who carries the weight of the identity crisis. It is her inner conflict that drives the story forward...

How did you shoot the singular love scene between Warda and Nawar?

What kind of world pushes people into such situations? Of all the love scenes I have filmed, this is my favorite. What they are experiencing is far beyond sex. They don't want a child without feelings. But it's not easy. They are embarrassed, we are embarrassed for them, we would like to hug them because they cannot hug each other. We shot the scene with Saba Mubarak first, then three weeks later, with Ali Suliman. I think it helped that both were not on the set the same day, it brought awkwardness, intimacy, truth.

What reactions do you think the film will get?

People might have different opinions. I have seen with my previous films, which also dealt with sensitive issues, that some viewers stick to their position, but others were challenged. Many viewers outside Egypt saw Clash as their own story... This story about Amira is universal.



MOHAMED DIAB'S

BIOGRAPHY

Mohamed Diab is a prominent Egyptian filmmaker who began his career as a screenwriter. His work has achieved commercial success in the Middle East as well as international acclaim. In 2010 he made his directorial debut CAIRO 678, about a trio of female vigilantes who fight sexual harassment on the streets of Cairo.

In 2016, he followed up with the Cannes Un Certain Regard opener CLASH (2016), an action-packed political thriller shot entirely from within the confines of a police truck. His latest film AMIRA (2021) centers around the phenomenon of Palestinian prisoners conceiving children through smuggled sperm. The Disney+ and Marvel Studios series Moon Knight marks his US directorial debut.

FILMOGRAPHY

- **Cairo 678** (2010)
- **Clash** (2016)
- **Amira** (2021)
- **Moon Knight** (series, 2022)



CAST

Warda	Saba Mubarak
Nuwar	Ali Suleiman
Amira	Tara Abboud
Said	Waleed Zuaier
Basel	Ziad Bakri
Ziad	Suhaib Nashwan
Grandmother	Reem Talhami

CREW

Director	Mohamed Diab
Script	Mohamed Diab, Khaled Diab, Sherin Diab
Image	Ahmed Gabr
Editing	Ahmed Hafez
Music	Khaled Dagher
Production Designer	Nael Kanj
Sound Supervisor	Julien Perez
Sound Designer	Alexis Durand
Producers	Mohamed Hefzy, Moez Masoud, Mona Abdel Wahab, Hany Abu Assad, Amira Diab, Sarah Goher
Co-producers	Rula Nasser, Youssef AlTaher
Executive producer	Hisham El Araby
Associate producer	Daniel Ziskind
Production companies	FILM CLINIC, AGORA AUDIOVISUALS, ACAMEDIA PICTURES
Co-production companies	AL TAHER MEDIA PRODUCTION, THE IMAGINARIUM FILMS
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