

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

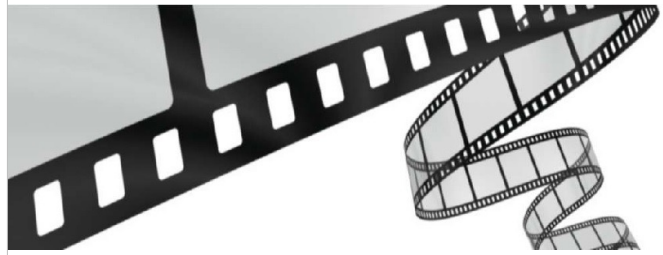
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IN BETWEEN

Dir: Maysaloun Hamud

Cast: Mouna Hawa (Leila); Shaden Kanboura (Noor); Sana Jammeliéh (Salma)

Riyad Sliman (Quais); Samar Qupty (Rafif)

Mark Kermode, *The Observer's* film critic, heaped much praise on this debut feature movie....

“....a spiky treat, an empowering tale of three Palestinian women living in Tel Aviv, each fighting their own battles for independence and fulfilment. Balancing tragicomic relationship blues with sharp sociopolitical observation, Hamoud’s slyly subversive drama draws us deep into an often hidden world. As the title suggests, these women occupy a liminal space, caught between freedom and repression, religion and secularism, the past and the future. Theirs is a world in flux, in which the drugs and partying of the underground scene stand in stark contrast to the strict hypocrisies that dominate the cultural landscape. As one of them tells her devout father: “Some people live in palaces, but God knows what their life is like inside...”

Laila is a force of nature, a chain-smoking, leather-jacketed lawyer who can drink and snort the boys under the table and takes pride in overturning the conventions of her profession and her gender. She lives with Salma, an aspiring DJ who works long hours in kitchens and bars and whose strict Christian parents don’t know she’s gay. When strait-laced and studious Nour arrives from Umm- al-Fahm in northern Israel, the ultra-conservative Muslim lifestyle she leads is out of step with that of her new flatmates. No wonder Nour’s sanctimonious fiancé, Wissam (Henry Andrawes), worries about their influence, eager to bring the marriage forward and remove his bride from such corrupting company.

Seemingly having very different goals and ambitions, scratch the surface of these women’s lives and the problems each face are not so dissimilar. Each feels the need to conform to the agendas of the significant others in their lives, be they prospective husbands or fathers and mothers.

In a *Sight and Sound* magazine interview, Hamoud called this “an authentic picture of a kind of invisible life that we live here as a younger generation of Palestinians”, a claim that seems to ring true. Nothing about the lives of these women seems false or phoney, even when the narrative takes credibility-checking detours into contrived revenge drama. Anchoring it all is a terrific ensemble cast that mixes experienced actors with first-time performers: Jammaliéh, for example, is a real-life DJ and graphic designer, playing a character close to home.

The photography of Itay Gross ensures the environment remains a core part of the drama and there is a thrumming, heady and infectious soundtrack by Palestinian hip-hop band DAM. Critical allusions have been made with Lena Dunham’s *Girls* and *Sex and the City*, but this has more in common with the feistiness of Pedro Almodovar’s early, anarchic friendship fable *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls Like Mom*. Hamoud claims to have been influenced by Ken Loach and Many Abu-Assad and identifies herself as part of a new wave of realist Palestinian cinema, looking beyond the conflicts of the West Bank and Gaza, and putting women proudly centre stage. But there is a price to pay for freedom - the closing shot of *In Between* is a masterful (‘misstressful?!) exercise in ambiguity, as enigmatic as the final moments of *The Graduate* or *The Long Good Friday*, in which the characters’ silence speaks volumes. And Hamoud has paid the price, too: criticised for taking Israeli state funding, then the subject of death threats and fatwas from fundamentalists, accused of corrupting or disparaging Muslim women. Isabelle Huppert presented Hamoud with the Women in Motion Young Talents award at this year’s Cannes festival, saying that “the free spirited and joyful women [Hamoud] portrays ... are the true heroines of our time”.

Our next presentation: *Call Me By Your Name* on Monday 12 November

