



Lemon Tree (Etz Limon)

106 minutes, 2008, Israel/Germany/France

Director, Eran Riklis

Cast: Hiam Abbass, Doron Tavori, Ali Suliman

Synopsis

Salma, a Palestinian widow - living there for decades - has to stand up against her new neighbour, the Israeli Defence Minister, when he moves into his new house opposite her lemon grove, on the green line border between Israel and the West Bank. The Israeli security forces are quick to declare that Salma's trees pose a threat to the Ministers safety and issue orders to uproot them. Together with Ziad Daud, a young Palestinian lawyer, Salma goes all the way to the Israeli Supreme Court to try and save her trees. Her struggle raises the interest of Mira Navon, the Defense ministers wife, trapped in her new home and in an unhappy life. Despite their differences and the borders between them the two women develop an invisible bond, while forbidden ties grow stronger between Salma and Ziad. Salma's legal and personal journey lead her deep into the complex, dark and sometimes funny chaos of the ongoing struggle in the Middle East

Review, Tom Dawson Channel 4 Film

Written and directed by Israeli filmmaker Eran Riklis, *Lemon Tree* explores the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through the story of a Palestinian widow seeking to protect her lemon grove. Although based on several real-life cases, *Lemon Tree* has the feel of an allegorical story.

Writer-director Riklis has stated that he wanted to show "people trapped in a political deadlock", and *Lemon Tree* provides a plausible context for his characters' actions. Salma, for example, incurs the displeasure of a Palestinian elder (Makram J Khoury) for becoming romantically involved with her attorney Ziad. The wife Mira (Rona Lipaz-Michael) of the Israeli minister is torn between her sense of loyalty to her husband and her unease at what is being done to Salma, admitting that "I wish I could be a better neighbour to her". Troubled families are to be found on either side of the political divide.

If at times *Lemon Tree* can feel slightly schematic in its construction, with the supporting characters representing a spectrum of opinions, its humanity is encapsulated in the dignified performance of Abbas, who so impressed in *The Visitor*. "I 'have had my share of grief", explains Salma, but the actress subtly conveys how despite being ground down by life's hardships, she retains her pride. For much of the time she appears to conceal her emotions beneath a wary facade, which makes moments such as a tear falling down her cheek or a gentle smile all the more memorable. Just the way Abbas takes off or puts on a headscarf reveals Salma's state-of-mind.

Never getting bogged down in legal procedures, Riklis is also alert to ironic details within his story: at the lavish Israeli housewarming party, it's Arab musicians who provide the musical accompaniment, and Arab (albeit kosher) food on the menu. Visually the themes of entrapment and confinement are conveyed by the recurrent images of concrete walls (including digital video footage of Israel's controversial 'security wall'), doors, shutters and blinds, and there's a magical moment when a kiss between Salma and Ziad is bathed in light.

Director Eran Riklis

Eran Riklis has been active in the movie world since 1975. After graduating from Beaconsfield National Film School in England, he made his first film in 1984, "On a clear Day you can see Damascus", a political thriller based on a true story. Seven years later, he shot "Cup Final", later hailed by international critics and selected in several film festivals (among which were Berlin and Venice). In 1993 "Zohar" was a big hit in Israel. His 1999 "Vulcano Junction" is the filmmaker's tribute to rock and roll. His last, "The Syrian Bride", has been acclaimed on a worldwide scale, and not only in festivals. On the other hand, Riklis has directed shorts, commercials and TV series. He is married, has two children, lives in Tel Aviv but regards himself not only as an Israeli but as a world director

Directors statement (extract) *"The Middle East is constantly changing although when you think really think about it perhaps it isn't – hope, optimism, pessimism, breakthroughs, new horizons, a new day, the future, the past – all words used on a regular basis to describe the situation in a region that has seen it all. Trees have always been around to witness what mankind has been doing, and although when thinking of this area people tend to think of olive trees, this story is about lemon trees that become a threat to national security, a title that lemon trees are not used to.*

This is really a film about solitude as reflected in the lives of two women – Salma on the Palestinian side and Mira the Defence Minister's wife , on the Israeli one, and I guess that is what drew me to it as well as all the other characters involved who somehow represent so many issues and subjects but all of them suffer from a kind of loneliness which is part of their lives on a personal and national level."