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QUINZAINÉ
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
CANNES 2014

LA GETT

THE TRIAL OF VIVIANE AMSALEM

A FILM BY RONIT & SHLOMI ELKABETZ



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LA GETT THE TRIAL OF VIVIANE AMSALEM

A FILM BY RONIT & SHLOMI ELKABETZ

WITH
RONIT ELKABETZ, SIMON ABKARIAN,
MENASHE NOY AND SASSON GABAY

2014 / FRANCE - ISRAËL - GERMANY / 1.85 / 5.1 / 115 MIN

SYNOPSIS

The trial story of Viviane Amsalem's five year fight to obtain her divorce in front of the only legal authority competent for divorce cases in Israel, the Rabbinical Court. Viviane and her lawyer must face the uncompromising attitude of Elisha, the husband, who doesn't even respond to the rabbis convocations. When he is finally obliged to come to court, he keeps refusing the divorce (gett) even though they've been separated for years. Witnesses are called, the procedure drags on, while Viviane is still unable to recover her dignity.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

The trial story of Viviane's five year fight to obtain her divorce in front of the only legal authority competent for divorce cases in Israel, the Rabbinical Court. Viviane faces the uncompromising attitude of her husband, who refuses the divorce (gett) even though they've been separated for years.





AN INTERVIEW WITH RONIT AND SHLOMI ELKABETZ

/ The title announces a trial, what is the dispute in question?

Viviane, exhausted by her marriage, left the marital home several years ago and now wants a divorce in due form in order not to be made a social outcast. Civil weddings still do not exist in Israel; only religious law applies, which stipulates that only the husband can grant a separation. However, Viviane wants to count on the justice system, on the Law, to obtain what she considers to be within her rights. Elisha stubbornly refuses this divorce and Viviane obstinately wants it.

/ Does this conflict apply to a specific community? Or a specific time period in the past?

Today in Israel, everyone's marriage is governed by religious law irrespective of which community they come from, or whether the couple is religious or completely unreligious. When a woman says "Yes," under the nuptial canopy, she is immediately considered as potentially "deprived of *gett*," in other words the right to divorce,

because only the husband has the right to decide. The Law gives this outrageous power to the husband. The rabbis claim that they do everything to help the wives, but the fact is, within the closed hearings of the legal proceedings, the reality is much different, for it is the rabbis' sacred duty to do everything possible to preserve a Jewish household, and they are reluctant to put the personal wish to end a marriage above religious duty.

/ During what time period does 'Gett, the Trial of Viviane Amsalem' take place?

Today. As this law has never evolved, the question isn't to know "when," but "over how much time" the procedure will take place. Precious time wasted for the women asking for a bill of divorce, without this holding any importance in the eyes of their husbands, the rabbis and the Law.

This lost time only has a value for the poor woman who is begging for the right to return to a normal life. For as long as she is not for-

mally separated, a woman living outside the marital home will never be able to start a family again, and the children she might have outside of her marriage will be stigmatized with the “mamzer” status (the equivalent of a bastard, having no legal status or protection). Moreover, this law forbids the woman any social life at all, for she would risk being suspected of having an affair with a man, which would forever prevent her from receiving a decree of divorce, if the husband still persists in his refusal. A woman who is waiting for her divorce decree is condemned to a sort of prison.

/ How did you approach the courtroom genre from a filmmaking standpoint? What were your guiding principles on the shoot?

In our eyes, staging a trial inevitably asks the question of knowing how a man and a woman are defined in view of the Law, the court, and in relation to one another. As a result, a rather extreme directing decision became self-evident: never film from the position of the director who is observing, but only from the protagonists’ perspective. The camera is always positioned in the POV of one of the characters who is looking at another character. Characters who are not being looked at by another character can’t be seen. We, the directors, are not telling our story by imposing a single point of view on it, but through the multi-faceted prism of the people presented in the space before us. It is a subjective point of view in a place that is supposedly objective.

/ How does your staging differentiate itself from the two previous chapters of your trilogy?

‘To Take a Wife,’ where the conflict was between the individual and herself, essentially used close-up shots; ‘7 Days’ was filmed with wide-angle lenses that encompassed dozens of characters in a shot, for it was the family “clan” that Viviane was confronting. In ‘Gett, the Trial of Viviane Amsalem,’ Viviane is facing the State through its applicable law. For our staging, we needed to reproduce the narrative space in which the story takes place, in other words, this rabbinical courtroom, capturing the multiplicity of convictions and emotions being expressed and circulating within this enclosed space. We also wanted our characters to be “bare(d)” faced with the Law: they face a blank wall, stripped of all artifice.

/ Then it’s a film about words: in good or bad faith, tricks and ruses, testimony, pleas...To each his own truth?

Indeed, to each his own. But we also play with the different levels of language: profane versus sacred language. Comedy versus tragedy. In the courtroom, the formal language feels strange when used to evoke everyday facts before the court. This strangeness is almost contemptuous for the community members who have come to this place to express themselves. Moreover, we also used this distortion for the actors: the formal court language forced them to use particular gestures behind which they could hide.





What also very much guided us during the writing process and when creating the characters was to try and arouse compassion. Despite the uncompromising rigor of the Law enforced by rabbis who may appear inhuman, we wanted to have moments when they give in to a bit of humanity, when we can notice their feelings of distress and confusion, aware that this situation could one day concern them as well, as it may touch their wives, their daughters, their neighbors, their Aunts...

/ Ronit, how do you envision your character?

The rabbis have the mission to save every Jewish household. It's the "shalom bayit" commandment, "domestic harmony." So this woman's wish to divorce threatens the established order; but she is also threatening them on a personal level, because they don't want to be complicit in ending a marriage.

And because she is a woman, her voice counts less than a man's. She has no weight or leverage. She is constrained to silence by the power of the Law and those who enforce it, the rabbis. Yet, Viviane learns to use this constraint to unremittingly continue the proceedings that everybody wants to stop. Even if it is imposed upon her, this silence is also a reflection of her inner strength.

The leitmotiv which inspired Viviane's character is her determination, her inner peace of mind, her silence, which is the silence of someone who has seriously prepared herself and profoundly reflected on what she was doing before launching herself into this lion's den.

She is also a woman who is capable of violent outbursts, but she knows that if she gives in to the smallest fit, she will weaken her position in comparison with a man. If she doesn't control herself, she will immediately be kicked out of the trial, and be permanently discredited.

She isn't fighting on equal terms with her husband Elisha, who has the Law on his side. Even worse: he has the power. And he behaves accordingly, confidently. Nevertheless, his situation is more complex than a simple power struggle: he sincerely wants to keep Viviane by his side.

And that also worsens Viviane's situation: although she is a woman who brings about trouble, in particular because she goes against the sacred commandment to preserve a "Jewish home," her husband still wants to save her, despite herself, and to bestow upon her the honor of being his wife. Elisha's will and desire further soften the rabbis towards his position.

/ One of the strong points of Ronit and Simon Abkarian's acting is in their looks and expressions...We are almost in the category of silent film, or Hollywood films of yesteryear by Carl Dreyer, Robert Bresson...We are equally led to study the rabbis' faces...

These references are very important to us, notably classical films in which the tension relies upon a forthright issue. Here for example, Viviane wants her freedom, which she is refused. And

also, a complication is added: the defendant at the trial is also the person who has the power to determine the verdict. It's a fascinating set-up.

In our minds, the power of cinema lies in the point of view. In a frame, the eye is first attracted to the actors' and actresses' eyes. Then we look for what the actor is seeing, we dissect his soul through his vision. Thanks to these perspectives, the film exists beyond the dialogue.

These alternating perspectives also create the movement: a metaphor that we had in mind at the beginning of our work was that the trial would take place like a tennis match. Your head would turn from left to right, following the exchange of the balls, there would be a set won, a set lost, until the final victory.

The only thing left to do in such a situation is to lead a war of expressions in their eyes. Elisha's eyes are not devoid of suffering, but he also displays composure, self-confidence and inflexibility. Unlike Viviane, whose expression encompasses a much more complex universe. Her eyes conceal pain, fear, despair, will and obstinacy, vigilance, and many things she would like to express as well as others that she prefers to keep to herself.

/ In the film's opening shots, the heroine is invisible. Her husband and her lawyer however are speaking about her - while she remains off screen. Is that to show that her existence is being denied?

Given the visual language we have chosen for the film, we are supposed to see her when her lawyer and husband are looking at her. But in order to shed a light on this woman's transparency from the very beginning, and the denial of her existence within a masculine judiciary system, we decided to begin with her absence. Afterwards, her presence will become permanent, because she is the one fighting, she is the one asking, she is the one who is dismissed. And she is one who carries the story forward, from hearing to hearing. It's her fate that is on trial. We wanted the audience to see her for the first time when she hears that she is refused the gett. The word "no." From that precise moment, faced with this refusal, and the denial of her being, she starts to exist on screen.

Viviane wears dark colors during practically the entire film, thus further emphasizing the one scene where she is dressed in red. A scene where she takes down her hair...

In Judaism, a woman's voice and her hair are considered the most scandalous tools of seduction. That's why women don't have the right to sing, and married women have to cover their heads with a scarf or a wig (and for some orthodox, after having shaved their head). In this scene, Viviane is exhausted, possibly also because she is desperate. Up until this moment, nothing has been moving her request forward. Unconsciously, she puts on a red dress; red which translates the need for rupture, and her enormous weariness. She no longer wants to play this game. The moment when she takes down her hair is almost a reflection of her unconscious state.



As if, at this point, she's letting herself go. Taking down her hair in front of the rabbis is an extremely impudent act. In Judaism, a woman's hair is even compared to her sexual organs. She doesn't do it on purpose, she is not looking to provoke them, but, at this instant, she no longer cares. She has been sitting on this chair for such a long time...she's practically at home. In the scene that follows, the Law and the men who apply it will quickly call her back to order.

/ Part of the movie's strength comes from its alternating tones. Why did you decide to combine tragedy, comedy, revolt and farce?

The very essence of this story is tragic. What takes place is absurd, and at times ridiculous. The comedy arises from this contrast.

The existence of this law is absurd: a religious law that applies to everyone, whether they are religious or not. Even we simply can't believe that in 2014 in our supposedly democratic society, a woman may be considered to be her husband's property. And there is also something absurd in the rabbinic judges' determination to waste time, to delay debates and unhinge the plaintiff so that she will give up, renouncing her will and thus "saving" another Jewish household from "disaster."

/ From Mrs. Evelyne Ben Chouhan to Rachel, including the couple who are their neighbors - the husband being very en-

lightening about men and women's relations - the choice of witnesses overall is a sketch of social customs. The judges seem at times to be watching a play when faced with these characters.

There are a few legal grounds that would allow the judges to order a husband to grant his wife a divorce: if the husband is unable to clothe his wife, or fulfill her dietary and sexual needs. It is from this perspective that the judges have summoned members of the couple's community and the couple's neighborhood. Yet, once called in to testify, they can't refrain from taking this opportunity to make it about themselves. Viviane's brother, his wife, a fifty-year-old bachelor, a friend from the synagogue, the neighbors: this gallery of realistic characters brings a multitude of points of view, perspectives from the outside, from towns and cities, their traditions, the synagogue. But can they actually give the judges a valid legal reason to order Elisha to grant his wife a divorce?

Three languages are spoken in the film: Hebrew, Arab, and French. When and why do the characters switch from one language to the other?

People in Israel who come from North Africa often speak a jumble of Hebrew, Arab and French. Just like the people who come from Europe pepper their language with Yiddish or their mother tongue.

This phenomenon is dying out with the younger generations.

Our generation rarely uses any other language besides Hebrew. But our parents' generation used Arab and French when their honor or their secrets were involved. A language is a haven. When you feel more comfortable saying something in a certain language, you switch over to that language. This allows for a certain comfort level and creates intimacy among family members. When Viviane's brother comes to testify, and he addresses her in Arab, it's to soften the unexpected blow he is going to deal her when he admonishes her in front of everybody.

Elisha himself is very stubborn when it comes to Hebrew. He understands it perfectly of course, but he consistently chooses not to use it. Firstly, he can't express himself as well in Hebrew as he can in French, the language he was brought up in. Secondly, he, like the pious men, believes that Hebrew is a sacred language and it should not be used for commonplace, everyday conversations.

/ Ronit, do you believe that Viviane is forever forbidden to all men, other than her former husband?

When Viviane accepts this ban, she is buying her freedom at the price of her own liberty. It's a very heavy price to pay. What she will decide to do with her life depends upon her integrity and her ethics. I can't give you an answer because I don't know what she might do. But something is obvious to me: it's a choice that displays a great confidence in life. From her point of view, making this choice will open all the doors for her, even if it means remaining faithful to this

man for the rest of her life... It's an important success and a victory, despite all. It's the victory of the spirit – mind over matter. From that moment on, a great realm of possibilities is opened for her.

/ 'Gett, the Trial of Viviane Amsalem' is thus anchored in the reality of Israeli society, and results from your desire to recount this struggle for freedom. How much of your personal experience is found in these situations and these characters?

All the facts and character traits we used to tell our story are plausible.

Viviane, the heroine of our trilogy is as much inspired from elements of women's lives from our entourage as well as that of our mother, who never stepped into a rabbinical court, and never expressed the desire for divorce, even though she may have thought about it.

/ So you are sketching a portrait of Israeli society rather than one of your family?

Yes, 'Gett...' isn't just Viviane's story, but it is like a metaphor for the condition of women in general who see themselves as serving a "life sentence" because of this law. Consequently, 'Gett...' represents the condition of women throughout the world, in all the places where – merely because they are women - they are considered by the law and by men as being inferior to men.

Interview by Jean-Luc Douin

SHLOMI ELKABETZ

Writer - Director - Producer

2014 - **GETT, THE TRIAL OF VIVIANE ANSALEM (GETT)** a film by Ronit & Shlomi Elkabet

2011 - **TESTIMONY (EDUT)** • 2010 - **THE RAN FOUR**, TV series, 15 episodes

2008 - **7 DAYS (SHIVA)** a film by Ronit & Shlomi Elkabet

2004 - **TO TAKE A WIFE (VE'LAKHTA LEHE ISHA)** a film by Ronit & Shlomi Elkabet

GETT, THE TRIAL OF VIVIANE ANSALEM

*Directors' Fortnight,
Cannes 2014*

TESTIMONY

*Venice Days 2011
FIPA 2012, closing film*

7 DAYS

*Critics' Week
Opening Film, Cannes 2008*

TO TAKE A WIFE

*Winner of the Critics' Award for Best Film, Venice 2004
Winner of the Critics' Week Audience Award, Venice 2004*





RONIT ELKABETZ

Writer - Director, and playing Viviane

2014 - **GETT, THE TRIAL OF VIVIANE AMSALEM (GETT)** by Ronit & Shlomi Elkabetz • 2012 - **ZARAFÁ** by Rémi Bezancon and Jean-Christophe Lie (Voice) • 2011 - **INVISIBLE (LO ROIM ALAICH)** by Mihal Aviad • **THE FLOOD (MABUL)** by Gai Native • **TESTIMONY (EDUT)** by Shlomi Elkabetz • 2010 - **FREE HANDS (LES MAINS LIBRES)** by Brigitte Sy • **TURK'S HEAD (TÊTE DE TURC)** by Pascal Elbe • 2009 - **ASHES AND BLOOD (CENDRES ET SANG)** by Fanny Ardant • **JAFFA** by Keren Yedaya • 2008 - **THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN (LA FILLE DU RER)** by André Téchiné • **7 DAYS (SHIVA)** by Ronit & Shlomi Elkabetz • **ZION AND HIS BROTHER (ZION VE AHAV)** by Eran Merav • 2007 - **THE BAND'S VISIT (BIKUR HA-TIZMORET)** by Eran Kolirin • 2004 - **MY TREASURE (OR)** by Keren Yedaya • **TO TAKE A WIFE (VE'LAKHTA LEHE ISHA)** by Ronit & Shlomi Elkabetz • 2003 - **ALILA** by Amos Gitaï • **LATE MARRIAGE (HATUNA MEUHERET)** by Dover Koshashvili • 2001 - **MADE IN FRANCE (ORIGINE CONTRÔLÉE)** by Ahmed Bouchaalaet Zakia Tahri • 1996 - **METAMORPHOSIS OF A MELODY (MILIM)** by Amos Gitaï • 1995 - **TZALEKET** by Haim Bouzaglo (co-written by Ronit Elkabetz) • 1994 - **SH'CHUR** by Shmuel Hasfari • 1992 - **EDDIE KING** by Giddi Dar • 1990 - **THE APPOINTED (HAMEYU'AD)** by Daniel Wachsmann



SIMON ABKARIAN

Elisha

2014 - **GETT, THE TRIAL OF VIVIANE AMSALEM (GETT)** by Ronit & Shlomi Elkabetz • 2013 - **THE CUT** by Fatih Akin • **COLT 45** by Fabrice Du Welz • **THE MARCHERS (LA MARCHÉ)** by Nabil Ben Yadir • **ANGÉLIQUE** by Ariel Zeitoun • **LES INVICIBLES** by Frédéric Berthe • 2012 - **ZERO DARK THIRTY** by Kathryn Bigelow • 2010 - **DE FORCE** by Frank Henry • **TURK'S HEAD (TÊTE DE TURC)** by Pascal Elbe • 2009 - **ARMY OF CRIME (L'ARMÉE DU CRIME)** by Robert Guédiguian • **RAGE** by Sally Potter • 2008 - **THE WEDDING SONG (LE CHANT DES MARIÉES)** by Karine Albou • **7 DAYS (SHIVA)** by Ronit & Shlomi Elkabetz • **A DAY AT THE MUSEUM (MUSÉE HAUT, MUSÉE BAS)** by Jean-Michel Ribes • **SECRET DÉFENSE** by Philippe Haim • **KHAMSA** by Karim Dridi • 2007 - **RENDITION** by Gavin Hood • **TRIVIAL (LA DISPARUE DE DEAUVILLE)** by Sophie Marceau • **PERSEPOLIS** by Marjane Satrapi • 2006 - **CASINO ROYALE** by Martin Campbell • **ARMENIA (LE VOYAGE EN ARMÉNIE)** by Robert Guédiguian • **THE SNAKE (LE SERPENT)** by Eric Barbier • **PETITES RÉVÉLATIONS** by Marie Vermillard • 2005 - **A FEW DAYS IN SEPTEMBER (QUELQUES JOURS EN SEPTEMBRE)** by Santiago Amigorena • **I SAW BEN BARKA GET KILLED (J'AI VU TUER BEN BARKA)** by Serge Le Peron • **ZAÏNA, CAVALIÈRE DE L'ATLAS** by Bourlem Guerdjou • **THE DEMON STIRS (LE DÉMON DE MIDI)** by Marie-Pascale Osterrieth • **GAMBLERS (LES MAUVAIS JOUEURS)** by Frédéric Balekdjian • 2004 - **TO TAKE A WIFE (VE'LAKHTA LEHE ISHA)** by Ronit & Shlomi Elkabetz • **YES** by Sally Potter • 2002 - **ARARAT** by Atom Egoyan • **ARAM** by Robert Kechichian • **THE TRUTH ABOUT CHARLIE** by Jonathan Demme • **NOT FOR OR AGAINST (NI POUR, NI CONTRE (BIEN AU CONTRAIRE))** by Cédric Klapisch • **ALMOST PEACEFUL (UN MONDE PRESQUE PAISIBLE)** by Michel Deville • 1999 - **LILA LILI** by Marie Vermillard • 1997 - **J'IRAI AU PARADIS CAR L'ENFER EST ICI** by Xavier Durringer • 1996 - **LE DERNIER DES PÉLICANS** by Marco Pico • **WHEN THE CAT'S AWAY (CHACUN CHERCHE SON CHAT)** by Cédric Klapisch • 1994 - **TIME HAS COME (ANA EL AWAN)** by Jean-Claude Codsì • 1992 - **RIENS DU TOUT** by Cédric Klapisch • 1989 - **LA NUIT MIRACULEUSE** by Ariane Mnouchkine



CAST

Viviane Ronit **ELKABETZ** • Carmel Menashe **NOY** • Elisha Simon **ABKARIAN** • Shimon Sasson **GABAY** • Main Judge • Eli **GORSTEIN**
Clerk **Gabi AMRANI** • 1st Deputy **Rami DANON** • 2nd Deputy **Roberto POLLACK** • Donna **Dalia BEGGER** • Meir **Albert ILLUZ**
Shmuel Avraham **SELEKTAR** • Galia Keren **MORR** • Evelyn Evelyn **HAGOEL** • Rachel Rubi **PORAT SHOVAL** • Ya'akov Shmil **BEN ARI**
David **David OHAYON** • Simo **Ze'ev REVACH**

CREW

Directors **Ronit ELKABETZ, Shlomi ELKABETZ** • Screenwriters **Ronit ELKABETZ, Shlomi ELKABETZ** • Producers **Marie MASMONTAIL**
Sandrine BRAUER Shlomi ELKABETZ • Co-producers **Denis CAROT Michael ECKELT** • Production Manager **Efrat BIGGER** • Production
Coordinator **Iana TSIKANOVSKY** • Location Manager **Itay MINTZ** • 1st Assistant Director **Orna LIBKIND** • Script Supervisor **Sivan LAVY**
Casting Director **Yuval AHARONI** • Director of Photography **Jeanne LAPOIRIE** • Sound **Tully CHEN Oded RINGEL** • Production Design
Ehud GUTTERMAN Hagai GALIMIDI • Costumes **Li ALEMBIK Naomi BAR OR** • Make-up **Ziv KATANOV Maria TRIFU** • Set Photography
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