



# TEL AVIV ON FIRE

A FILM BY SAMEH ZOABI





### SCREENING SCHEDULE

#### VENICE ORIZZONTI

SAT. 1, 7:45 PM @ SALA CASINO (P&I)

SAT. 1, 10:15 PM @ SALA VOLPI (P&I)

SUN. 2, 2:00 PM @ SALA DARSENA (PUBLIC)

MON. 3, 1:15 PM @ PALABIENNALE (PUBLIC)

#### TIFF DISCOVERY

SAT. 8, 9:00 PM @ SCOTIABANK 6 (P&I)

SUN. 9, 1:30 PM @ SCOTIABANK 3 (PUBLIC)

TUE. 11, 9:15 AM @ SCOTIABANK 8 (P&I)

THU. 13, 9:30 PM @ TIFF BELL LIGHTBOX 3 (PUBLIC)

SUN. 16, 6:45 PM @ SCOTIABANK 10 (PUBLIC)

# TEL AVIV ON FIRE

A FILM BY SAMEH ZOABI

Starring

KAIS NASHIF  
LUBNA AZABAL

Runtime: 97min – Luxembourg, France, Israel, Belgium – 2018 – 1:85 – 5.1

INTERNATIONAL SALES  
INDIE SALES COMPANY

Sales - Nicolas Eschbach (neschbach@indiesales.eu),  
Clémentine Hugot (chugot@indiesales.eu)  
& Simon Gabriele (sgabriele@indiesales.eu)

Festivals & Sales - Martin Gondre (mgondre@indiesales.eu)

INTERNATIONAL PRESS  
THE PR FACTORY  
[www.thepfactory.com](http://www.thepfactory.com)

Barbara Van Lombeek - [barbara@thepfactory.com](mailto:barbara@thepfactory.com)  
+ 32 486 54 64 80  
Marie-France Dupagne - [mariefrance@thepfactory.com](mailto:mariefrance@thepfactory.com)  
+32 477 62 67 70

Julie Vanderhaeghen - [julie@thepfactory.com](mailto:julie@thepfactory.com)  
+32 473 37 38 07





## SYNOPSIS

Israel/ Palestine, today.

Salam, a charming 30-year-old Palestinian living in Jerusalem, works as an intern on a popular Palestinian soap opera, "Tel Aviv on Fire," which is produced in Ramallah. Every day Salam must pass through an arduous Israeli checkpoint to reach the television studios. He meets the commander of the check-point, Assi, whose wife is a huge fan of the show. In order to impress her, Assi gets involved in the writing of the show.

Salam soon realizes that Assi's ideas could get him a promotion as a screenwriter. Salam's creative career catches fire, until Assi and the soap's financial backers disagree on how the soap opera should end. Squeezed between an Army Officer and the Arab backers, Salam can only solve his problems with a final master stroke.



## INTERVIEW WITH SAMEH ZOABI

*Tel Aviv On Fire* is a comedy. What does it mean, making a comedy in Israel when you are a Palestinian?

It's a big challenge to make a comedy dealing with the Palestinian and Israeli reality. People take the region and the conflict very seriously, and any attempt to make a comedy can easily be misunderstood as not strong or not serious. But I believe that comedy allows the freedom to discuss very serious issues in a more subtle manner. In my films, I try to entertain but also to speak truthfully about the human condition of where my characters live.

My first feature, *Man Without A Cellphone*, was inspired by my upbringing; I was not necessarily seeking to make a comedy, but rather to be truthful to a reality I grew up with as a Palestinian. A constant sense of despair hovers, yet there is spirit and a sense of humor around the dinner table. With *Tel Aviv On Fire*, the story deals directly with this idea of conflicting perspectives. Similar to my previous film, the tone is comedic – not to make light of a situation that is more dire than ever before, but rather to use the insights

that comic exaggeration can bring. As Charlie Chaplin put it, "To truly laugh, you must be able to take your pain and play with it."

*Salam*, your main character, is working on an Arab soap opera produced in Ramallah. Why a soap opera?

Soap operas are a big deal in the Middle East. People watch them and are fully taken by them as well. What I find interesting is that the people who watch soaps find the acting and straightforward dialogue more believable than the subtle acting and dialogue of feature films. The soap opera medium allowed me to explore things that I may never be able to do otherwise in cinema. For instance, in the opening scene of the film, which I find quite political, the Palestinian characters in the soap express how they feel about the approaching 1967 Arab-Israeli war. They talk about their hopes, history and fear of the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem. They speak emotionally, without filters, but because this scene takes place inside a soap opera, it provides a different twist.



### Did you watch soaps?

When I was growing up inside Israel, disconnected from the Arab world, there were only two TV channels. The Arabic-language shows were mostly from Egypt. They had the best soap opera series, particularly in the month of Ramadan; even Israelis watched. The show I created in my film is an homage to one famous show I grew up with. Nowadays, the reality has changed. There are hundreds of Arab TV channels and many shows from Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and even dubbed ones from Turkey and India. Soaps are watched everywhere. It's a universal medium. Recently, I was watching a soap with my mom. I was laughing at an emotional moment because of its over-dramatized acting and camera work, but my mom was holding a tissue, crying. This experience inspired me when writing and directing the film.

### How did you approach the film visually?

Visually, the film works on the contrast of two realities: the magical, colorful world of the TV soap opera and the daily, gritty reality outside the studio. We shot the soap scenes mostly in studios, using over-dramatic framing, lighting that heightened the mise-en-scène, vivid colors and, of course, dramatic camera movements. As for the

daily reality outside the TV show, cinematically it was closer to cinema *vérité*. The camera work was more fluid and we shot on real locations with available lighting, except for the checkpoint which we had to create for the film.

### Please talk a little about your casting process.

In the past I worked with a mix of professional and non-professional actors. In this film, because the story is more complex and the scenes are fully scripted, I decided to work with professionals only. I chose several members of the cast during the writing process, like Lubna Azabal, Nadim Sawalha, Salim Dau and Maisa Abd Alhadi, whom I had worked with or whose work I knew.

A big challenge in casting the film was to find the best match of energy and chemistry between my main character, Salam, and his antagonist, Assi. Their dynamic relationship stands at the core of the film. I found that the nuanced, minimalist acting by Kais Nashif as Salam, alongside the very energetic Yaniv Biton as Assi, gave me the most comedy. Yaniv comes from a more comedic background while Kais has done more dramatic roles, such as *Paradise Now*. It was a risk to cast him







in a comedy, but Kais brought a deeper, more complex, melancholy side to Salam than is in the script, which helped create a more interesting arc to his character.

**Can you talk a little more about the different levels in *Tel Aviv On Fire*?**

When I showed my previous films, I saw how easily cinema can bring out the Palestinian - Israeli clash of narratives. There were those who thought my films were too Palestinian/insufficiently Israeli or the total opposite. These conflicting perspectives provide the underlying theme of *Tel Aviv On Fire*.

On a personal level, the film deals with an artist (an aspiring writer) who struggles to find his voice within such a contested political reality. I am drawn to people just like Salam who have not yet developed a full idea of themselves. They try to manage and find their place in their world while facing constant challenges and disturbances. I am attracted to characters who strive to change and improve their lives but are not sure how. Eventually they find their voice through the journey of the film.

On a broader level, the film has two political lines: First, there is the history of war as told through the soap and presented by Bassam, the producer and creator of the show, who is also Salam's uncle. Bassam belongs to the older generation of Palestinians who fought in the 1967 war, but also signed the Oslo Peace Accord. And second, there is the daily reality of the checkpoints, which is directly related to this history. Eventually, the soap and the narrative's reality start to connect and merge. As a young Palestinian man, Salam finds himself struggling with these two realities. Salam's life and his dynamic with Assi are reflected in the soap and give it a different meaning. To put it simply, Assi, "the occupier," wants to dictate his own narrative of a rosy reality on Salam, "the occupied." As Salam's confidence grows, he realizes that this is impossible and he needs to stop it. Nothing can change in Palestine and Israel until both people are equal. This is the only way to move forward.



## “TEL AVIV ON FIRE” THE SOAP OPERA

Tel Aviv, in the fateful year 1967. Rumors of war are everywhere. Manal, a glamorous Arab woman, is planted as a spy in the heart of the city, calling herself Rachel, a Jewish immigrant from France. Her mission: to befriend and seduce one of the most powerful military figures in Israel, Yehuda, in order to learn the Israeli war plans.

Manal is a master chef and has opened the best French restaurant in Tel Aviv. Rachel's restaurant is located across from the Israeli Army headquarters. From there, she can meet Yehuda, and her sweet delicious French pastry catches his attention. As the weeks pass, “Rachel” and Yehuda become lovers. The secret to a powerful man is his stomach. But has Manal really fallen in love? Has she forgotten her Palestinian cause? That she is the daughter of a refugee family from Jaffa? And most importantly her lover, Marwan, the resistance fighter who sent her into danger?





## FILMOGRAPHY & BIOGRAPHY SAMEH ZOABI

Sameh Zoabi was born and raised in Iksal, a Palestinian village near Nazareth. He graduated from Tel Aviv University in Film Studies and English Literature, then received a Fulbright Fellowship to pursue an M.F.A. in Film Direction from the School of the Arts at Columbia University. He's also the recipient of prestigious residencies at the Cannes Festival Cinefondation as well as the Sundance Screenwriters Lab.

Zoabi's unique voice was recognized by *Filmmaker Magazine* and he was named one of the "Top 25 New Faces of Independent Cinema." His work has been shown and has won awards at many international film festivals, including Cannes, Toronto, Locarno, Sundance, Karlovy Vary, New Directors/New Films and the New York Film Festival.

### As Director:

TEL AVIV ON FIRE (second feature film) – Sameh Zoabi (2018)

UNDER THE SAME SUN (TV Film) – Sameh Zoabi (2013)

MAWSEM HISAD – (Documentary) – Nassim Amaouch, Mais Darwazah, Erige Sehiri and Sameh Zoabi (2012)

MAN WITHOUT A CELL PHONE – Sameh Zoabi (2010)

BE QUIET (Short) – Sameh Zoabi (2005)

### As Writer:

THE IDOL - Hany Abu-Assad (2015)





## CAST

Salam..... KAIS NASHIF  
Tala..... LUBNA AZABAL  
Assi..... YANIV BITON  
Bassam ..... NADIM SAWALHA  
Mariam ..... MAÏSA ABD ELHADI  
Atef..... SALIM DAW  
Yehuda..... YOUSEF SWEID  
Nabil ..... AMER HLEHEL  
Marwan..... ASHRAF FARAH  
Maïsa..... LAËTITIA EÏDO



# CREW

Director ..... Sameh Zoabi  
Writers ..... Dan Kleinman and Sameh Zoabi

Producers ..... Amir Harel - Lama Films / Film From There (Israel)  
..... Miléna Poylo & Gilles Sacuto - TS Productions (France)  
..... Bernard Michaux - Samsa Film (Luxembourg)  
..... Patrick Quinet - Artémis Productions (Belgium)

Associate Producers ..... Alice Bloch, Ayelet Kait, Jani Thiltges, Claude Waringo

Co-producers ..... Arlette Zylberberg, Philippe Logie

Director of Photography ..... Laurent Brunet, AFC  
Editor ..... Catherine Schwartz  
Music ..... André Dziezuk  
Sound Engineer ..... Alain Sironval  
Sound Editor ..... Pia Dumont  
Dialog Editor ..... Mourad Louanchi  
Re-recording Sound Mixer .. David Gillain  
Production Designer ..... Christina Schaffer  
Costume Designer ..... Magdalena Labuz  
1st Assistant Director ..... Laurence Rexter-Baker  
Continuity ..... Leenda Mamosa  
Soap and Film Credits ..... Laurent Brett  
Production Manager ..... Solveig Harper





Post Production Managers.. **Delphine Passant, Jean-Luc Zehnter**

Shooting language..... **Arabic, Hebrew**

International Sales..... **Indie Sales**

With the support of ..... **Film Fund Luxembourg, Israel Film Fund, Eurimages**  
 Funded by..... **Audience Design Fund/TorinoFilmLab**

With the support of ..... **The Creative Europe Media Programme of the European Union**  
 In coproduction with..... **RTBF (Télévision belge), VOO & BE TV, Shelter Prod**

In association with..... **Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Taxshelter.be & ing, The tax shelter incentive of the Federal Government of Belgium, Indie Invest, Blaq Out/ Universciné, United King Films, yes.**

With the support of ..... **Gesher Multicultural Film Fund, Fohs Foundation, Israel Lottery Council for Culture & Arts**





INDIE | SALES

[WWW.INDIESALES.EU](http://WWW.INDIESALES.EU)

 [facebook.com/indiesales](https://facebook.com/indiesales)