



NEW RELEASES

Bye Bye Tiberias

Bye Bye Tiberias

A film by: Lina Soualem
©: Beall Productions, Altitude100 Production, Philistine Films, Doha Film Institute
Production Company: Beall Productions
in co-production with: Altitude100 Production, Philistine Films
Presented by: Beall Productions
Produced by: Jean-Marie Nizan
Written by: Lina Soualem, Nadine Naous
in collaboration with: Gladys Joujou
Director of Photography: Frida Marzouk
Additional Images: Thomas Brémond, Lina Soualem
Special Effects: Jerome Heuberger
Editor: Gladys Joujou
Colourist: Christophe Bousquet
Original Score by: Amine Bouhafa
Sound Recordists: Ludovic Escalier, Lina Soualem
Sound Mixers: Julie Tribout, Benoît Biral
Sound Editor: Gervaise Demeure
With:
Hiam Abbass
France-Palestine-Belgium-Qatar 2023
82 mins
Digital

A TAPE Collective release

The screening on Fri 28 Jun 18:00 will be followed by a Q&A with co-writer Nadine Naous

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As a child, Lina Soualem spent her summers visiting her mother's family and swimming in the waters of Lake Tiberias. Those waters flow through Soualem's quietly absorbing documentary *Bye Bye Tiberias*, from opening scenes in which faded VHS captures the young Lina swimming to present-day images of Lina's mother, the actor Hiam Abbass, gazing across the shore at the mountains beyond.

Tiberias, which lies near the borders of Syria, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan, is also known as the Sea of Galilee. It has a potent history closely tied to war, colonialism, mythology and faith – it's where Jesus reputedly walked on water. No wonder the filmmaker is drawn to the lake, especially given its symbolic importance to her family. As Soualem recounts in voiceover, 'My mother took me swimming in a lake as if to bathe me in her story.'

In this achingly melancholy film, Soualem invites us all to bathe in that story. *Bye Bye Tiberias* has a fragmentary feel, as Soualem juxtaposes archive, newsreel and photographs with intimate footage of her mother returning to her childhood home. To fill in the gaps, Abbass reads a text written by Soualem, 'a story of vanished places and disappeared memories', in which she speculates about the lives of her great-grandmother, grandmother, mother and aunt, 'women who learned to leave everything and start anew'.

Family archive documentaries are plentiful, but *Bye Bye Tiberias* is elevated by the unforced way it uses these individual women's memories to illuminate the larger history of Palestinian displacement. The family's lives collide with momentous events, such as the 1948 Palestine war, which forces Soualem's relatives to leave Tiberias and permanently separates Abbass's mother Um Ali and her sister Hosnieh, divided by the Israeli-Syrian border. Their story is echoed years later, when Abbass leaves to pursue her career in Europe, exiling herself in her pursuit of freedom.

Complex feelings of estrangement and reunion are beautifully evoked throughout. In one anecdote, Abbass recalls meeting Hosnieh in Syria, where she has been living in exile: when the two women meet, they run to one another, 'pressing together like two magnets', as Hosnieh inhales her niece's scent, revelling in the smell of her lost homeland. It's not all devastation though – there's a mischievousness to scenes in which Abbass's sister laments that she never got to join her in Hollywood, or when the family wonder how Um Ali managed to conceive ten children. Fittingly for such a tender, timely film, these moments remind us of the resilience of the human spirit in the face of great suffering – sparks of joy in the darkest of places.

Rachel Pronger, *Sight and Sound*, July 2024

Lina Soualem on 'Bye Bye Tiberias'

Your debut film Their Algeria was about the paternal side of your family, now with Bye Bye Tiberias it's about the maternal side of your family – when did you decide to do this?

Everything I experienced with my first film, *Their Algeria*, led me to *Bye Bye Tiberias*. Both films explore exile and transmission, how information gets passed down through generations. I'm half Algerian, half Palestinian, born in

NEW RELEASES

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From Fri 7 Jun

I Used to Be Funny

From Fri 14 Jun

Àma Gloria

From Fri 14 Jun

Green Border Zielona granica

From Fri 21 Jun

Bye Bye Tiberias Bye Bye Tibériade

From Fri 28 Jun + Q&A on Fri 28 Jun 18:00

Sleep Jam

From Fri 12 Jul

About Dry Grasses Kuru Otlar Üstüne

From Fri 26 Jul

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From 7 June

The Small Back Room

From 7 June

Network

From Fri 28 Jun

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From Fri 5 Jul

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France. On the Palestinian side of my family, we survive through speaking; passing on our story is central. On the Algerian side, silence is preferred; we hide our truths deep within us. It's for this reason I had to make *Their Algeria* first. I needed to break this silence to reconcile us with our past and to reconstitute and reclaim our history. This time it felt like I was making a film as a young woman who has the experience and courage to tell a story about women in Palestine, a place which, at least politically, is a trickier subject to essay. The story of the colonisation of Algeria by France tackled in *Their Algeria* at least is in the history books. It was harder to make *Bye Bye Tiberias* as it's an ongoing history, with Palestine and Palestinians still being erased today.

Was there a sense that after making a film with your dad, Zinedine Soualem, you had to make a film about your mother, Hiam Abbass?

My mum kept joking: when will you make a film about us? I didn't think I would ever have the courage and strength to tell intimate personal stories about the women of my family against the backdrop of this collective tale of an unrecognised Palestine. But the process of making the first film and the positive reception from audiences gave me the confidence to tackle my maternal family's story.

Can you explain the importance of transmission and exile in your work?

As a descendant of immigrants, I wanted to undertake the urgent yet daunting task of addressing the questions of colonial trauma, exile and transmission through creative writing, building imaginary territories and unpicking and documenting the indelible suffering of uprooted individuals. Transmission is an essential matter for families coming from diasporic backgrounds because it's more likely that the generation gap between the parents and children leads to a cultural gap, especially when some members of the family are born far from the customs and cultural traditions of their parent's or grandparent's home country. Reconnecting with your family history is not always a natural process. You face obstacles depending on how much you know the native language or how much the family is attached to traditional values. Exile has an emotional and cultural impact because the bonds with your native home are broken, you're uprooted, and you must find new roots. I feel people like me, born in Europe, tend to have difficulties finding our place in the West because we sense there's a collective memory that's not part of our daily life. It feels like something is missing, something in our history that is incomplete, as if we don't fully know or understand ourselves.

Interview by Kaleem Aftab, production notes