



Israeli and Palestinian go from enemies to brothers

31.10.2012 | Shelley Hermon

Tel Aviv, Israel - It was noon on a hot September day in Tel Aviv and I was on my way to the Tel Aviv Cinematheque for the world premiere of my film *Within the Eye of the Storm*, which tells the amazing story of Bassam Aramin and Rami Elhanan – a Palestinian and an Israeli who, against all odds, go from being enemies to brothers.

Our team chose International Peace Day, 21 September, to launch the film, as we wanted to deliver a message of hope to the world and show the possibility of another way, which is so vitally needed at this time.

We planned simultaneous screenings in every cinematheque (small, independent movie theatre) in Israel, as well as showing the film in the Norwegian parliament in Oslo, a Philadelphia movie theatre and a French cinema. The movie was also shown on two television channels: France 5 TV and Chello Multicanal in Spain.

But as I walked towards the Tel Aviv Cinematheque, feeling the build-up to the conclusion of the five-year process of making this film, it dawned on me that right here, where the message of the film is so desperately needed, it remains unknown to most. Will anyone even care enough to come? I wondered. Among the majority of fed up Israelis and Palestinians has the word “peace” become so passé and so “uncool” that our efforts will fall on deaf ears?

I am Israeli-born, but I moved to London at the age of eight, and grew up there. My perspective and horizon widened there, but here is where my heart always remained. For years I struggled to understand why this bitter conflict between Israelis and Palestinians still persists; why it claimed the life of my grandfather, who stood for tolerance and understanding; why the number of victims continues to grow and why we keep approaching it in the same manner, which doesn't seem to work.

Five years ago I finally made the decision to move back here, which was accompanied by a quest to find other people who didn't accept violence as a normal and justifiable response to the current situation. I searched for people on both sides who had succeeded against many odds to transcend the conditioning by their respective societies and cultures. That is how I learned about Aramin and Elhanan and how I came to tell their remarkable story.

Within the Eye of the Storm, a feature documentary that I directed and co-produced along with Nisan Katz, follows the journey of Aramin and Elhanan, who were once dedicated fighters willing to kill and be killed by one another for the sake of their nations. Yet each one of them came face to face with the price of war when their daughters were killed in the conflict. Left with the excruciating pain of bereavement, they chose to do the unexpected. Resisting the urge to retaliate, they set out jointly on a journey to humanise the very enemy who had taken a dear member of their family away from them. Along the way they reveal the friendship and humour that keeps them alive.

As the crowds began to pile in and fill the entire cinema down to the last seat, I grew more certain that the message of the film would be delivered and received after all.

As I got up on stage to talk about the film following the screening, there was not a single pair of dry

eyes in the hall. The silence that had created the intense and emotional atmosphere was broken by a loud round of applause. When Aramin joined me on stage, every member of the audience was on their feet.

That day when I got home, I received reports from the various screenings, endless phone calls, texts and emails from audiences scattered across the globe, especially from viewers here. As I read about their gratitude for sharing this story, for giving them hope, for broadening their perspective and showing them another possibility, I understood that when we are able to crack the armour of fear and scepticism and look beyond, even for a moment, we can actually see the “other” and discover a shared desire for a better future.

It may be a drop in the ocean, but even if a few people left that hall with faith in humanity and dialogue restored, that drop will send out a ripple, which may become a wave.

<iframe width="560" height="315" frameborder="0"
src="http://www.youtube.com/embed/k9xidxlkmUs?rel=0" allowfullscreen=""></iframe>

Shelley Hermon is a freelance producer, director and cinematographer. The trailer and full version of Within the Eye of the Storm is available online for a limited time at <http://www.withineyeofstorm.com>. Those interested in screening the film can email shelley@firefly-pictures.com.

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