

Press Kit

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presents

# Looking Awry

## Chawal

A film by Sobhi al Zobaidi

Palestine 2001

## Synopsis

Awry: with a turn or twist to one side; askew. Away from the expected or proper direction, amiss, wrong.

A Palestinian filmmaker is commissioned by an American organisation to make a documentary film, which is to depict Jerusalem as a city of peace and coexistence between Jews and Arabs.

But and while making the film, the filmmaker keeps running into situations that are very different from what he is trying to depict. The reality of things on the ground, proves to be much stronger than its representation. It reaches a point where the filmmaker decides that he is unable to finish the film.

*Palestine 2001, Sobhi al-Zobaidi, 29 min, colour, Video, Arabic with English subtitles*

## Credits

Written and directed by	Sobhi al-Zobaidi
Director of photography	Ihab Abul Asal
Editing	Saed Andouni and Rabab Haj Yehia
Music	Samir Jubran
Actors	Sobhi al-Zobaidi, Tamam Qanembou, Musa al-Qawasmi, Basim Nasir, Fuad al-Mothaffar, Amer Khalil, Yaqub abu Arafe and Hayyan al-Jubeh

Produced with financial assistant of Goteborg Film Festival Film Fund  
Bethlehem 2000 Project.  
Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation

## Festivals

International Documentary and Video-Festival Kassel/Germany, 2002; Calgary International Film Festival 2002; Arab Film Festival San Francisco 2001; Film Fest Augsburg 2001; World Wide Video Festival, Amsterdam 2001; MedFilm Festival, Rome 2001; Arab Film Festival Rotterdam 2001; Mediterranean Film Festival Montpellier 2001; Goteborg Film Festival 2001

## The filmmaker Sobhi al-Zobaidi

Sobhi al-Zobaidi was born in Jerusalem in 1961 and grew up in Jalazone refugee-camp near Ramallah in the West Bank. In 1986 he received his BA in economics from Bir Zeit University (West Bank). He moved to New York where he studied film. In 1991 he got his Diploma in Film and Video production from New York University, followed by a MA in Cinema Studies in 1994. In 1996 he, as many other artists and intellectuals, returned to the Palestinian territories, now partly governed by the Palestinian Authority.

He founded reFugee camp productions, which aims at offering creative space for local talents interested in film-making.

In 1998 he was awarded for best short documentary by the Biennale du Cinema Arab in Paris for his film *My Very Private Map*.

Sobhi al-Zobaidi is also working as artist and writer.

## Filmography Sobhi al-Zobaidi

- 1998 *My Very Private Map*
- 1998 *Women in the Sun / Nisa fil Shams*
- 2000 *Light at the End of the Tunnel / Al Daw Akhir al-Nafq*
- 2001 *Looking Awry / Chawal*
- 2002 *Crossing Kalandia*

## Interview with Sobhi al-Zobaidi

*How did the making of the film come about; when did the idea come to you and when was the film actually made, and over how long a period? (was it made some time after the Intifada started)*

I had this idea years ago. But I only started making the film after the Intifada.

*Does the fact that it is a relatively short film mean it was made for a specific occasion or to a specific commission – e.g. Bethlehem 2000?*

I wrote it as a short film from the beginning.

*The film has the feel of a personal documentary, presumably it's a mixture of fact and fiction; how would you classify it.*

I call it 'a fiction that is very real' and sometimes I call 'dramadocula' (a mixture of drama, documentary and Dracula (the thing that sucks life of someone)).

*How close is the film to actual events?*

Almost everything in the film is true (has happened). In 1994 I was approached by the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC to work on a film on Jerusalem as part of a whole cultural program they were preparing. The people in charge wanted a flashy, cheesy, simplistic film that would depict Jerusalem as a city of peace and love especially between Arabs and Jews. It was shocking to me the way they see things and the way they want people to see things. There was a huge gap between how they wanted to see things and the reality. And in fact this is what you find in American media when it comes to Palestine. I didn't do the film for the Smithsonian of course, but the experience left me with the desire to make something about it, and that's in a way *Looking Awry*.

*I assume, the fate of Musa was a narrative device in the film and not an actual event - please confirm this is the case.*

In the opening scene in the film (the wedding) there is a young black man who dances slow with the bride, his name is Osama and he was killed on the first day of the Intifada when he was on his way to donate blood. Osama is a relative to my wife and yes, Musa is a narrative device that is soaked in reality.

*Was there something in particular that triggered the idea for the film? E.g. an experience, as in the film, of working with a foreign production company or whatever to produce a film on Jerusalem?*

Good guess.

*The film seems to run on two levels, one the story of actually making a film that is meant to show certain images of Jerusalem on the line of the meeting point of three religions, peaceful place etc while at the same time we see the authentic images of Jerusalem which don't fit with the usual conventional images. The tension and violence is of course one aspect, but there are others, such as the jazzy oud music with the girl singing and the black Palestinian community. It will probably come as a surprise to many Western viewers that there is a black community in Palestine. Where did it originate, where does it mainly reside?*

That is a careful reading of the film. I wanted to point in few ways as to how Westerners see us as a non-differentiated mass. They see us in a certain image, while in fact we are richer, more diverse, more cultured than what they know about us. I also wanted to pick on our

practices as indigenous filmmakers or artists when we fall in the traps of the Western system of representation. It does happen, especially with the fact that there is no local money for films, it is always foreign money, and it does come with conditions.

*Where has the film been screened so far and what has audience reaction been? Is this the most humorous of your films to date?*

One screening in Ramallah and yes the audience did say very interesting things about it. Especially that the film speaks a local language (inside jokes, characters, locations, subject, ...etc.) They got the sarcasm in the film, and I think that they appreciated it. And yes it is the 'most humorous' film I made so far.

*Interview with Sussanah Tarboush (London based writer) on 25.9.2001*