

# What is One World Week?

One World Week is an annual opportunity to join a worldwide movement of people taking action for justice locally and globally.

One of the stated objectives for this year is "Make a promise to make a meaningful difference in your community by October 2006. Work across boundaries with new communities towards peace and justice, both locally and internationally."

*The above statements have been taken from the One World Week website*

## Yadon ilaheyya (Divine Intervention)

France: Morocco: German: Palestine / 92mins / 2002 / cert 15

**Director and Writer** Elia Suleiman

**Stars** Elia Suleiman, Manal Khader, Nayef Fahoum Daher, Menashe Nov, Emma Boltawski, Salman Nattori

With this week having seen the concluding episode of the fascinating BBC series "Israel and the Arabs: Elusive Peace" tonight's film offers an unusual perspective on that combustible situation.



Subtitled, "A Chronicle of Love and Pain," ***Divine Intervention*** follows ES, a character played by and



clearly based upon the filmmaker himself. ES is burdened with a sick father, a stalled screenplay and an unrequited love affair with a beautiful Palestinian woman (Manal Khader) living in Ramallah. An Israeli checkpoint on the Nazareth-Ramallah road forces the couple to rendezvous in an adjacent parking lot. Their relationship and the absurd situations around them serve as metaphors for the lunacy of larger cultural problems, and the result is palpable, bottled personal and political rage.

Suleiman's wry chronicle sketches his hometown of Nazereth (65,000 people on 2,750 acres of land) as a place consumed by ferocious absurdity, where residents harbour feuds, dump garbage into neighbours' yards, and surreptitiously block access roads. Characters transgress rules with abandon - stealing forbidden cigarette breaks in a hospital corridor, for example. Yet the film's acerbic, absurdist sense of humour and Suleiman's directorial interventions, are what earned him the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes.

Don't expect a conventional linear story or plot in "Divine Intervention" - it is more like a rapid-fire series of comments and observations about the life of Palestinians in Israel today. Most of the ideas are conveyed in scenes that would be right at home in a silent comedy, and on the few occasions when the characters talk, they say nothing more than what could be handled in a title card.

Perhaps as a result critics have suggested Buster Keaton and Jacques Tati as possible inspirations. "Which is funny, because I've never seen any of their films," says Suleiman. "My films have a silent movie aspect only because I don't know much about making films, so there is a naiveté and a literalness that's similar to the comedies of the silent era. But because of all my cultural baggage, I suppose that I make films that are complicatedly simple, as opposed to simply complicated."



The way the director tells it, the making of *Divine Intervention* was a weird mix of guerrilla opportunism and harmonious collaboration. Many of the cast and crew were Israeli, including Suleiman's line producer (and close friend) Avi Kleinberger. This helped smooth things over with the authorities. But on other occasions, Suleiman was forced to resort to hit-and-run tactics, showing up, filming a scene and then piling back into the van. "It was very difficult. Once the authorities know that you're a Palestinian and that the M16s the actors are carrying are real, then forget it. East Jerusalem was terrible to film in and Nazareth even worse, with all the trouble there. Whenever we started shooting, they started shooting." It is disappointing to note that the reporter failed to ask why the actors were carrying real guns.



With the well-recorded events in both the Palestine-Israel dispute and the Iraq situation, I was surprised and disappointed to discover that tonight's film is being promoted in other countries by the use of the attached poster. I think that it presents a very different image of the film to the poster used in the UK (copy on display in the foyer tonight) and would query what impression the distributor in the countries concerned seeks to convey.

Equally however it is alarming to think the decision has been made that the audiences in those countries have such entrenched viewpoints on the Palestine-Israel situation that the film would only succeed with such a poster.

However I believe that the reality of the film is that *Divine Intervention* provides a rare opportunity to listen to someone who has pain about what is going on in his country, but has decided to pick up a camera rather than a gun.

It's less of an overall attack on the Israeli occupation than it is a chilling reflection of lives that are so affected by day-to-day violence that it has become background noise. Suleiman is Palestinian and much of the film is spent taking jabs at the way Israel is running things, although he is no kinder to his own people, for example showing petty disputes and complaints that seem to preoccupy the locals.

The director spins out his tale with biting irony and an unusual combination of grounded reality and quirky fantasy, occasionally slipping into puzzling obscurity. If *Divine Intervention* occasionally lapses into propaganda, at least it does so with a sense of humour.

"Answer me this," the director says. "How is it that, even with all the different cultural codes in the world, people will always laugh at exactly the same time in a film?" Do they, though? "Oh, they do. I know they do, because I've stood at the back of the cinema during every screening and I've heard them. And remember that every spectator is different from the one sitting next to him. But there must be some communal ritual at work. I'm not sure what it is, but if it gives everyone a sense of togetherness, if only for a moment, then it must have a good consequence. That's what makes me happy. It's not about getting people to learn about Palestine, because I think that they learn about Palestine when they laugh. They become a little bit Palestinian, just by that."

The film was so well received around the world that it seemed likely to get an Oscar nomination, but was rejected by the Motion Picture Academy apparently because entries must be nominated by their nation of origin, and Palestine is not a nation. That's the sort of Catch-22 that Suleiman might appreciate.