

Focus on Film

The Cousin

Comedy
Israel

Wednesday, May 15, 2019 @ 4:00 p.m.

Director: Tzahi Grad, 2017 Israel

Running time: 93 minutes, Hebrew with English subtitles

Is Co-existence Possible?

Tzahi Grad, writer-director-actor in *The Cousin*, portrays in this film, Naftali, the “good Israeli Samaritan” attempting to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from an individual point of view. He is resolute to hire a Palestinian worker whose task is to renovate his TV studio located in the backyard of his home. Suspicion mounts as his wife, Yael, and Grad’s *own children* (casting as Naftali’s children with Yael), suspect the Arab. Fear and accusations mount toward Fahed, after a neighborhood teenaged girl is sexually assaulted. Convinced that Fahed is innocent, Naftali pays his bail and brings him back home to continue working on renovating his deteriorated workroom. Despite Naftali’s generous act, and the mention of their ancestral origins, as both point to their shared forefather, Abraham (thus, the film’s title), fear and hostility spread in this unnamed Israeli village (a metonymy for the entire Israeli/West Bank region), engaging the neighborhood enraged at both Naftali’s insistence of keeping Fahed, and the latter’s “audacity” in staying. The film ends with a farce-like scene where Naftali is the one

taken to the police station suspected at assaulting his own wife. This planted episode slightly diverts the audience’s attention from the real question brought forth in this film, namely: Is co-existence possible? As Naftali draws on his computer screen a possible scenario for a peace arrangement between the two sides, it’s Fahed (the Arab) who comments on Naftali’s naïve proposal, and it’s, inversely, Naftali (the Jew), who responds by saying: “Ze lo Ba’shamaim”, meaning: “it’s not in the sky”, alluding to a possibility for an eventual peaceful breakthrough. Other quotes such as: “Ha’Adama Zaza” (“The earth shifts”), or “Yesh Sdakim Ba’Ritzpa, Sdakim Adumim”, (There are cracks in the floor, red cracks), vividly communicate to the audience the fragile co-existence between Jews and Arabs in this unsettled land. Words such as pressure, racism, Israeli-Arabs, Palestinian Arabs, and even Palestinian Jews (referring to the Jewish Community, *The Yishuv*, during the Turkish and British Mandatory Palestine), infiltrate this semi-comedic film. The issue of peace remains evasive, ambiguous and remote despite Naftali’s best intentions, and Fahed’s insistence on finishing his job.

Reviewed by Edith Covensky

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