



WHEN ARABS DANCED
AU TEMPS OU LES ARABES DANSAIENT

JAWAD RHALIB

Official Selection

tiff

Toronto International
Film Festival 2018



Une production R&R Productions

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R&R PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS

WHEN ARABS DANCED

JAWAD RHALIB

Song of existence, Dance of resistance



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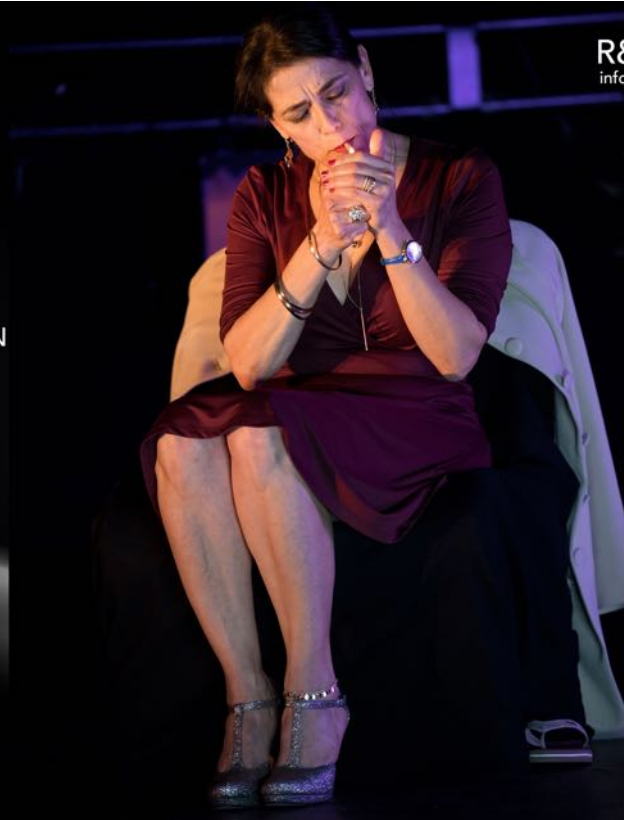
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Synopsis

A fundamentalist hates life. For him, it presents temptation, a moving away from God and a loss of time before the celestial paradise with its rivers flowing with milk of eternal taste, its streams of wine, its delights and its virgins. Life is the product of disobedience and this disobedience is the work of the ARTIST. The fundamentalist resents the artist, who gives life to matter and leads pure souls away from paradise with sick ideas, a devilish drawing, a bewitching song or an evil dance... The artist is, therefore, the devil and in order to be able to kill him, the fundamentalist labels him the enemy of Allah. Formerly carefree, the Arab-Muslim world has now become the epicenter of a blind and often violent fundamentalism. Pressure from the fundamentalists overwhelms that of the moderates. The voice of reason struggles to be heard. In the face of this hopeless realization that is threatening our most basic freedoms, Jawad Rhalib questions Islamic Fascism and allows the voice of reason to speak in order to break what is now: "Be an artist and shut up!"

Statement of intent of the author- director



The Islamic fundamentalism, the emergence of the actual Muslim radical movements, the reislamisation of the young European Muslims, the anti-Semitism, the Islam phobia, the jihadists... Each one goes according to his analysis, his commentaries and his beliefs. Here is mine. The young Muslims, here and elsewhere, fantasize about their past. They follow the footsteps of the Prophet, imagining living like him, dressing like him, doing the same gestures like him, behaving like him and interpreting the world like him. As a result, children, young, and the not so young, here and elsewhere tune in with fervor to the extremist TV channels (almanar, iqra...) and social networks which impart misleading and hateful interpretation of the texts. The Quran is a holy book for more than 1 billion 400 million followers in the world. It consists of 6236 verses but only 20-25% Muslims read Arabic. Of this 20-25%, only 5-10% truly understands the texts.

When I talk to all those who have had a chance of visiting the Arab countries from the beginning of the 60s to the end of 70s, most of them tell me that it seemed to them that the Arab world was close to the west. On the streets of Cairo, Algeria, Rabat, Beirut.....the women left their homes without veils, dressed like Europeans, without the supervision of a male. The men and the women dated in the cafes, bars, beaches. What made the Arab world charming after a hard earned independence was the sun, the joy of living, the lively conversations, the bright future, and almost a child like insouciance. Everything indicated that the freedom of behavior benefitted the thinkers, writers, cinema, theatre ... to artistic fulfillment. The creative spirits bubbled with hope. Today we know that the appearances were fallacious. The traditionalist and fundamentalist impulses began to undermine the depths of happiness, which we did not know then, was fragile.

Today, whether they are Sunnis or Shiites, most schools of fundamentalist interpretations produced a series of theories and prohibitions, authorizing a stranglehold of theology on all aspects of the life. The theories and the prohibitions which affect, in the first place, the art and the artist, the symbols of freedom, romanticism and life. Why?

The fundamentalist detests the life. For him, life is only a temptation, separation from the God and the sky, a waste of time before the eternity and the paradise with its rivers of divine tasting milk, its rivers of wine, its delicacies and its virgins. The life is the product of anarchy and this anarchy is the work of the artist. The Islamist wants, like an artist, who gives life a meaning in colors perpetuates the world, and distances the good souls of the paradise by unhealthy ideas, a diabolic art, a bewitching song, an evil dance...The artist is therefore the devil and to be able to kill him, the fundamentalist declares him the enemy of The Allah.

Hatred of intelligence, of creation, of liberty, of sexuality, of body.... of free thinkers, all mingled sexes are threatened by the menace of religious extremism which adopts a nightmarish vision of Islam in total contradiction to our modern societies. The radicals limit our liberties in the name of Allah.... an Allah of hatred? An assassin Allah? An Allah of prohibition? Then this is not the same Allah as that of majority of peaceful Muslims. A majority, unfortunately silent, leaves the ground free for a fundamentalist minority which kills, menaces, stones, harasses, intimidates, violates and plunders.

I would prefer that the Arab intellectuals, believers or convinced atheists, and the secular and modern Muslims, whether they wear a hijab or a designer tie, I would prefer that they take up a clear stand about the mechanism of Fatwas issued against the artists, to the backwaters at the end of the world, that will help us to know who is with whom. Why are our Arab intellectuals so silent when the rabid (diseased) kill for a simple pen stroke.

Secular and moderate Muslims exist. But they will truly exist only when they express loud and clear, and more strongly than the fundamentalist voices, their indignation, their anger, their "secular fatwa" relating to fundamentalist dogma. Let the light absorb the darkness. Let the modernity swallow archaism. Let life triumph over death.

All the religions have their flaws, their discrepancies, their fanatics of God, their super conservatives and fundamentalists. When the Belgian director Vincent Lannoo decided to address the theme of pedophile in the catholic milieu with his film 'Au Nom du Fils' - ' In the name of child', the catholic fundamentalists wanted to crucify him. The film 'Noe', the Hollywood adaptation of the story of the Flood by Daron Aronofsky, was sharply criticized by the responsible American Christians.....but neither Vincent nor Daren had recourse to 24x7 police protection. On the contrary, Salman Rushdie, Taslima Nasreen, the cartoonists and journalists of Charlie Hebdo, the Moroccan filmmaker Nabil Ayouch, for his film, 'Much Loved' and the Algerian writer Kamel Daoud for his call for a reinterpretation of Islam live in fear.

I am uncomfortable each time I have to speak or put forth my personal beliefs or non beliefs. But the current context forces me to express myself as secular Arabic Muslim filmmaker. What does a filmmaker like me who, in the course of his work, had to endure the anger of the fundamentalists, think? It is time that I take a stand with regard to this intellectual Sharia and the extremely strong psychological and physical pressures that the Arab artists experience when they oppose today's dominating Islamic dogmas.

The pressure of fundamentalist ideas is not going to halt my film making works from manifesting themselves. I will endure them like I did as a child. In Morocco, during the end of 70s, when I was 12 years old, a dancer was regarded as a prostitute and being treated as a son of dancer is the worst insult. I was 'son of dancer' and hence 'son of a bitch'. My mother danced, she liked her art. She liked her body and she didn't know anything about what I endured in the streets or at school.

So I put up with it and was fighting at the slightest insult thrown at me. This is how I arrived at a point where I could not support the dancer mother, 'free and liberated'; I took the only way out- lock and veil. I was ashamed. But then the Egyptians entered into our lives and our homes, our television stations in black and white and in the cinema halls of Meknes, my birthplace. I

discovered then, Taha Hussein, brilliant forerunner of liberty and secularism, the freethinker Naguib Mahfouz, Youssef Chahine, the fervent defender of freedom of expression, who gave me the desire idea of making cinema. I fell in love with the actress Faten Hamama, with the singer Asmahane and the dancer Samia Gamal. I did not know where to head. They were so beautiful, liberated and carefree. Throughout a part of my childhood, I lived on the enchanting rhythms of Egyptian films, with their magic, their tinsel decorations. The actors sang, danced, loved each other in front of our eyes.... belly dance was the center of attraction, of film, of family. The belly and belly buttons were places where our fascinated gazes would fall. I saw my father applaud my mother who wiggled on the rhythms of the musicals.

That same mother, I had seen her at the end of a cultural evening, isolating herself to spread out her mat and say her prayers in silence, in private, a veil over her head and facing only her Allah. The Egypt presented itself lavishly on the televisions sets of millions of Arabic audience. From Rabat to Baghdad, passing through Tunisia and Algeria, the whole world shared the same passion for Egyptian belly button. The artists were the Gods. Our gods. In my neighborhood, we started speaking Egyptian, imitating the actors and the singers, playing ' tahtib' (a dance with sticks). The mockeries and insults suddenly ceased. I was relieved at not having to endure the horrible pressure anymore. My mother became my absolute heroine. The Egyptians saved me.

Now, in the face of Islamic intimidations, what should the free world do? This is the fundamental question. The societies, Muslim or western, reject Islam. But the leadership of the Muslim countries or those of western democracies does not know which attitude to adopt against this fascism that is Islamism. In effect, it is clear that until they are affected by the phenomenon, particularly the western leadership, they adapt themselves easily enough to Muslim fundamentalism. So long as they are considered to be moderates by them, there is no more any problem. So long as their fundamentalist cuts his beard and wears a suit with a tie and pretends to disgrace Daech and other terrorist branches, it is sufficient for some of our leaders to close their eyes when faced with aggressors of secular principles.

When an Islamist, considered moderate, demands a responsible politician to withdraw a poster, presumably provocative and giving a bad name to Islam, that Islamist also undermines the foundation of freedom of expression. And when the responsible politician accedes to the demand, he forcefully becomes an accomplice in the despicable act against secularism. The responsible politician passes the law of God before the law of the men. This was the case last time for the release of my film '7, Rue de la Folie'- street of madness. The member of a mosque- openly Salafist demanded rejecting my permission of screening. Therefore, my display was rejected on the communal advice because it was adjudged too bold and provocative. The mayor and his council became accomplices in an act aimed at undermining of fundamental principle of our democracy, freedom of expression and the right- yes, the right to criticize religion and dogmas, all the religions and all the dogmas.

The art and its decapitation by the Islamists is not the only example of annihilation of our most basic liberties. There is little the local authorities of Welkenraedt (province of Liege- Belgium) decided to shut down an exhibition censoring through history. They feared an act of violence. But the cultural center hopes to reschedule that exhibition when the atmosphere is peaceful. But when will the atmosphere be calm? The motto of the fundamentalists sums up their ideology – the god is our goal, the prophet our chief, the Quran is our constitution, jihad our way and the martyrdom our biggest hope.

From my infancy, my parents have taught me about Islam. They permitted me to study a Quran with liberty of conscience, equality among humans irrespective of their beliefs. The freedom of expression is one of the characteristic features of rights of a man in Islam. This liberty is recognized, guaranteed and defended by two main sources of an honorable Muslim- the Quran and the Sunna or the tradition of Prophet Mohamed. Hence faced with such extremism which beats upon our thinkers, our intellectuals, our artists, here like in other end of the world, how

should we react? By retorting more strongly than the other? That will escalate matters. Agree and go along with the fundamentalists. That will be the end of our freedom. Stay indifferent? That is submission and hence loss. If we do not have recourse to arms, agreement or silence, what is left? Which is medium at the disposal of the silent and peaceful majority for combating against the belligerent and shrieking minority? I think we ought to go back a few steps to understand better the present and apprehend the future. Go back to a discussion openness and tolerance “to you, your religion; for me, my religion”. It is most percussive that a missile which only nourishes hatred of the other.

Now that our problem is largely and clearly expressed, commented and analyzed... it is time for me to express my sentiments. Armed with my background of Arabic Muslim, of my defeats, of my background, I am going back to the track and focus on the Egyptian belly button so dreaded ‘cover it so that I cannot see’ I will put my hand in the sludge and take part in the combat which leads the members of reason, free thinkers, to challenge the Islamists any divine power. It is time for me to defend my freedom of thinking, a freedom which stays, to quote Nietzsche – (like a delicate thread over an abyss).

Away from all the emotional hype, shocking image, without any provocation, I have a bias towards this documentary, that of a Belgian filmmaker of Arabic Muslim origin, which we are trying to make quiet (shut up).

A filmmaker who perceives the political, cultural and social issues as rise of Islamism in our modern societies. A filmmaker who features the legitimate right to criticize the religions and dogmas. A filmmaker who wishes to give voice to artists whom they try to obscure and kill.

Through this film, I also take the gamble to escape the stronghold of our Arabic Muslim world surrounded by the ‘seven heavens’. According to the Quran, there will be 7 heavens where there is no place for either the Aphrodite (Goddess of Love) or for Apollo (God of clear sunlight, of reason, of song) who packed with hypocrite amnesia have nevertheless been affected by collective grace of North Africa and Middle East before being hidden by the thick fundamentalist veil. “Times When the Arabs Danced”- I want it like a distant echo of freedom of expression.

I will be the narrator of this film to declare the time for a cry for existence and a dance for resistance, my attachment to art and artists... Nothing is never achieved. The barbarism will not disappear with my film. But I hope to participate in its annihilation Insha’Allah. Finally, the art will triumph.



BIO
& Selective filmography

As an author and a director, Jawad Rhalib has oriented his work on social realism. He wrote and directed short, medium and full length films and feature length documentaries.

His movies: « El Ejido, the law of profit », « The damned of the sea », « The turtle's song », « the swallows of love », « when Arabs danced », have been selected for competitions in prestigious festivals. He won the great prize for the movie: « El Ejido, the law of profit » at FESPACO, the audience award for « The damned of the sea » at Vision du Réel Nyon, the great prize at Monte-Carlo international festival, the great prize EcoCamera at Montreal international film festival – RIDM and a nomination at the European Academy Awards...

In 2014, he made his first feature fiction film: « Madness » with selections at Montreal world film festival, Seminci – Valladolid International Film Festival, FIFF Namur, the Festival cinéma d'Agadir where the film won the prize of the best scenario and the prize for the female interpretation ...His second feature fiction film : « Rebellious girl » won the jury's prize at Marrakech International Film Festival FIFM. His last movie « when Arabs danced » won the audience award and best film award in the section : "Grand Angle" at Vision du Réel- Nyon 2018. «When Arabs danced » is selected at Toronto international film festival TIFF 2018.

Feature films :

2016 : Rebellious girl

2014 : Madness

Feature-length documentaries :

2018 : When arabs danced

2016 : The swallows of love

2013 : The turtles song

2008 : The damned of the sea

2006 : El Ejido, the law of profit

2000 : Vietnam Now.

2000 : El insecto asesino

1999 : In the name of the coca



“Quand le monde entier reste silencieux, une seule voix peut faire la différence.”

Malala Yousafzai



Religion is now the first obstacle to women's advancement. Religion pulls human beings backwards, it goes against science and progressiveness. Religion engulfs people with a fear of the supernatural. It bars people from laughing and never allows people to exercise their choice.

— Taslima Nasrin —



Technical crew



- DOP :** François Schmitt
- Editing :** Stijn Deconinck
- Music :** Simon Fransquet
- Sound engineer:** Lionel Halfnants
- Sound design :** Pierre Castin
- Grading :** Blaise Jadoul

Cast



Mourade Zeguendi

Sachli Gholamalizad



Hiam Abbass



Farah Bakkali



La Diva Live

Technical information

Shooting location : Maroc, France, Égypte, Iran, Belgique

Year of production : 2018

Languages : français, anglais, néerlandais et arabe

Duration : 85'

Subtitles languages : français, anglais et néerlandais

Ratio : 1.85

Sound : 5.1

teaser : <https://vimeo.com/261041487>

Photos & vimeo link : Info.rrprods@gmail.com / www.rrprods.eu

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