



# My Name is Not Ali

a film by Viola Shafik



## My Name is Not Ali (Jannat Ali) جنة علي

### Content

His anti-racist film *Ali, Fear Eats Soul* (1973) gained German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder international acclaim. The protagonist, an Arab foreign worker, was played by Moroccan El Hedi Ben Salem M'barek Mohammed Mustafa, Fassbinder's lover at that time. While the film itself courageously deals with the racism of post-war German society, its makers reproduced the insensibility and invention of the Other, fantasizing their own 'Salem'. Collage-like, through interviews and archive material, *My Name Is Not Ali* uncovers the invention of El Hedi Ben Salem by the Fassbinder troupe, an image not revised by most of its members till today.

### Credits

Viola Shafik, Egypt/Germany 2011, 93 min, German/Arabic/French with English ST

Viola Shafik	director, writer, camera, sound
Doreen Ignaszewski	editor, sound designer
Bassam Elelaimy	sound editor
Ahmed Gaber	sound mix
Noureddine Ben Redjeb	voice over Ben Salem's letters
Renate Leiffer	research consultant
Majdi El-Omari	dramaturgy consultant
Zazou Röver	dramaturgy consultant
Onsi Abou Seif	producer
Bärbel Mauch	production consultant
Mathies van Eendenburg	legal consultant
Andreas Duckert	IT support
Maggie Morgan	editing subtitles
trickWILK GmbH (Th. Wilk)	DV transfer

### Film-maker Viola Shafik

Viola Shafik grew up in Germany and Egypt. She is a free-lance film-maker, curator and film-scholar. Viola Shafik studied Visual Arts, Middle Eastern Studies and Film Studies in Stuttgart and Hamburg. From 1998 till 2005 she taught Video Production, Film Studies and History of Arab Cinema at the American University Cairo. Since 2007 she is a member of the selection committees of al-Rawi Screenwriters Lab (Royal Film Commission, Jordan), the World Cinema Fund (Berlinale), and Dubai Film Connection.



#### Publications (Selection)

Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity, AUC Press, Cairo, 1998 (& 2007)

Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class and Nation, AUC Press, 2007.

#### Filmography

Scent of Revolution (Arij) (2014)

My Name is Not Ali (2011)

The Journey of a Queen (2003)

The Mother of Light and Her Daughters (1999)

The Planting of the Girls (1998)

The Lemon Tree (1993)

## From the Press

**My Name Is Not Ali, Jannat Ali, (Documentary - Egypt-Germany) - by Dennis Harvey for Variety, August 2012**

A Diogenes Film production in association with Barbel Mauch Film. (International sales: mec film, Berlin.) Produced by Onsi Abou Self. Directed, edited by Viola Shafik.

With: Renate Leiffer, Irm Hermann, Karl Scheydt, Rudolf Waldemar Brem, Hans Hirschmuller, Abd El-Kader Jarray, Zeina Jarray, Reqaya Zkoura, Najat Ghribi, Chadhila Zkoura, Ahmed Lecomte, Hafsia Mellaim, Hamdan Jarray, Zakia Jarray, Nikolaus Notter, Marie Odile Notter, Thea Eymesz. (German, Arabic dialogue)

El Hedi Ben Salem M'barek Mohammed Mustafa, star of "Fear Eats the Soul: Ali," and among the more tragic figures swept up in, and discarded by, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's creative clique, is afforded a postmortem appreciation of sorts in "My Name Is Not Ali." Yet its subject remains a frustrating enigma in Viola Shafik's documentary, which interviews former co-workers and North African relatives in an attempt to shed light on a figure it seems few got -- or bothered -- to know well. Nonetheless, this footnote to Fassbinder's oeuvre should intrigue the many arthouse types still fascinated by the director's films and life.

The man primarily known as Salem was a well-born Moroccan who'd already fathered three children by a wife he'd married at 15 (she was two years younger) when he decided to seek his fortunes in Europe. At a Paris cafe in 1972, he met Fassbinder and members of his already notorious, incestuous entourage. The dark, handsome, reserved stranger quickly became Fassbinder's new lover and the latest addition to that floating creative ensemble.

Over the next three years Salem appeared in several of the group's films and plays, most notably playing the titular figure in 1974 anti-racism drama "Ali." But he quickly became a victim of -- and party to -- his benefactor's drug- and alcohol-fueled rages. Amid all this, Salem inexplicably brought his two young sons north, to their mother's still-unforgiving grief. Thrown into foreign cultures without language skills or any other preparation, one of the boys



soon returned home, while the other was simply bounced irresponsibly from one temporary roof (including a reformatory) to another.

The most heart-rending material here is hearing that now middle-aged son recount without rancor what must have been a truly miserable formative experience. Eyebrow-raising moments come via the often surprisingly unenlightened racial attitudes aired even today by veterans of the Fassbinder circus who've lived to tell the tale (albeit in contradictory versions). Still invested in preserving their own roles in a now-legendary era, several seem eager to belittle supposed bit players like Salem (who nonetheless figured large enough that Fassbinder dedicated "Querelle" to him several years after severing ties). Meanwhile the subject's relatives prefer to sanitize and sanctify his memory.

Somehow, amid all the chatter, the man himself remains a total cipher -- it's still unclear whether he was gay, bi or simply a sexual opportunist. Likewise, no one seems sure if his 1982 death in a French prison was due to suicide or a heart attack. (A written epitaph subscribes to the latter.)

The tech package, including myriad vintage film clips, is a tad unfocused and ramshackle, but serviceable.

Camera (color, HD), Shafik; sound, Ahmed Gaber. Reviewed at Montreal World Film Festival (Documentaries), Aug. 28, 2012. Running time: 93 MIN.

Source: <http://variety.com/2012/film/reviews/my-name-is-not-ali-1117948182/>

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