



The Night (al-Leil)

a film by Mohamad Malas



The Night (al-Leil) الليل

Content

In the destroyed city of Quneitra is the grave of a resistance fighter for Palestine. His son, the director, tries to restore the dead man's history by mixing echoes of his mother's memory and his desire to give his father a more honorable death. Through the daily lives, dreams, fears and hopes of its citizens, Malas chronicles his hometown Quneitra in the Golan Heights between 1936, the year of the first revolts against the British and Zionists in Palestine until the year of the city's destruction. He seeks to exorcise a feeling of shame and humiliation that long accompanied the image of his father and also his town, occupied by Israelis in 1967.

Credits

Syria 1992, color, wide screen, 116 min, Arabic with English, German or French subtitles

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|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Director | Mohammad Malas |
| Script | Mohammad Malas & Ossama Mohamad |
| Director of Photography | Yussef Ben Yussef |
| Editor | Kais Al-Zubeidi |
| Musical arrangement | Vahe Demergian |
| Sound | Sophie Bastein |
| Mixing | Thierry Sabatier |

Cast

Sabah Jazairy, Fares Helou, Rafik Sbei'l, Riad Charhrour, Omar Malas, Maher Sleibi, Hazar Awad, Raja Kotrach, Abdulilah Dawleh | Production National Film Organization, Damascus – Syria | Maram for Cinema & Television, Beirut – Lebanon | Co-Production La Sept Cinema, France, Channel 4, England



From the press

Rightly the main award of the festival was given to the Syrian film AL LEIL by Mohamad Malas. (NZZ)

From the interwoven layers of time extremely deep images, which also visually always symbolize a clear view to something else, unearth details of a much more complex biography in which the history from below irrefutable unmask the history from above as well as the individual and national life lies. (Film Dienst)

In the end, there are only fragments of memory, says the son. THE NIGHT pieces them together using a visual language of extraordinary potency, combining a range of oriental metaphors with intimate human portraits. Everyday life and fortunes of a city and its people.. all this and more is captured by the impressive cinematography. Like a cook at an eastern banquet, director Malas has concocted a rare feast of politics and poetry, with a unique spicing of piquant humour". (Berlinale Journal, February, 15th 1993)

Strikingly staged but largely impenetrable, this Syrian feature (the first to be presented in the NYFF) is a subjective, episodic, highly stylized account of a half-century of conflict in the Modest. (Daily News, October, 1st 1993)

From «Exodus» on, the creation of the state of Israel has often been recounted from a western P.O.V. "THE NIGHT" fascinates because it looks at this historic event from the Arab perspective, a real and a symbolic defeat. Malas highly pictorial style is unique. Image by image, block after block, Malas brings the period to life. The film leaves a strong final impression, but remains hard to pin down. (Variety, February, 15, 1993)

"Richard Pena, the director of the New York Film Festival said: You'll see several films that could be called personal epics. These are films that take an ambitious look at a broad swath of history but filter it through one person's experience".

"The Night" a Syrian film, looks at the struggle of Arabs in southern Syria to establish a sense of identity was one of these examples". (The New York Times 8. 4. 1993)

Several main features have already unspooled at other major fests, including Venice, Cannes and Locarno. Gregor says simply, "Some especially important films have been taken because they deserve it, even though they've been screened elsewhere." ... Some of the more eclectic films this year come from the Middle East. Syrian director Mohammed Malas "The Night" is a story both autobiographical and political. (Variety, Feb. 8, 1993)



Film-maker Mohamad Malas

Mohamad Malas was born in 1945 in Quneitra on the Golan Heights. He is a prominent Syrian filmmaker whose films garnered him international recognition. Malas is among the first auteur filmmakers in Syrian cinema.

Malas worked as a school teacher between 1965 and 1968 before moving to Moscow to study filmmaking at the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (VGIK). During his time at VGIK he directed several short films. After his return to Syria Malas started working at the Syrian Television. There he produced several short films including Quneitra 74, in 1974 and al-Zhakira (The Memory) in 1975.

Along with Omar Amiralay he co-founded the Damascus Cinema Club.

Between 1980 and 1981 Malas shot the documentary, al-Manam (The Dream), about the Palestinians living in the refugee camps in Lebanon during the civil war.

He directed his first feature film, Ahlam al-Madina (Dreams of the City), in 1983. The autobiographical coming-of-age film received the first prize both at the Valencia and the Carthage Film Festivals.

In 1995 Malas, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of cinema, shot with Omar Amiralay Nur wa Zilal a documentary film about Nazih Shahbandar whom he described as Syria's first filmmaker. The film was banned by Syrian authorities and could only be screened one time in 1993 at the American Cultural Center in Damascus.

Malas's second feature film, al-Lail (The Night), was realized in 1992. The autobiographical film is set in Quneitra in the years between 1936 and the Arab–Israeli War of 1948. It forms, along with Ahlam al-Madina, the first and second parts of a yet unfinished trilogy. Both films were shown at Berlinale's Forum section. Al-Lail received international recognition and won first prize at the 1992 Carthage Film Festival. However, the film was banned in Syria until 1996. In 2013 Ahlam al-Medina was among the top 10 of the "100 Greatest Arab Films List", which film professionals from the Arab World and associates of Dubai International Film Festival voted for.

Another collaboration between Malas and Omar Amiralay is the 1996 documentary film Moudaress about the Syrian pioneer painter Fateh Moudarres.

Bab al-Makam (Passion), released in 2005, was Malas's third feature film, it won the Special Jury Award at the Marrakech International Film Festival. Sullam Ila Dimashq (Ladder to Damascus), released in 2013, premiered at the 2013 Toronto International Film Festival and was screened in more than 50 festivals since.

Mohamad Malas' 1991 book "The Dream. A Diary of the Film" was translated into English and published by the American University of Cairo Press in 2016. A monograph on Mohamad Malas will be published at Palgrave MacMillan by the end of 2017.



Texts about the film

World cinema. The 10 best ... The 10 best Arab films - *The Guardian*, 6 July 2013

Fifty years of movie magic, from Tunisia to Iraq, as chosen by Omar al-Qattan, film-maker and chair of Shubbak – A Window on Contemporary Arab Culture

The Night (Al-Lail) Mohammad Malas, 1993

A great Syrian film. It is about the director's home town of Quneitra, on the borders of the Golan Heights, which was almost completely destroyed by the Israelis after the 1967 war and remains in ruins. The film is a historical-autobiographical epic of three generations, taking you from the Syrian fight for independence against the French in the 1930s, through the 1948 war with Israel, and into recent times. Malas is probably the most highly regarded living Syrian director – he is still based in Damascus as far as I know – and this film is heavily influenced by Tarkovsky in the use of long, contemplative dream and memory sequences where time is as important an expressive element as space, dialogue or movement.

This Dream we call Cinema - by Zachary Najarian-Najafi for *cinephildreams.blogspot* on June 13, 2014

Al-lail (1992) aka The Night

Like Tarkovsky's *The Mirror*, and Terayama's *Pastoral: To Die in the Country*, Mohamed Malas's *The Night* is about confronting the past, and attempting to overcome the sweet nostalgia, and the bitter tragedy. Starting with a series of abstract recollections narrated by Malas's alter-ego, and his mother, Wissal, the film settles down into the story of his parent's marriage, his father's political activism, the coup-ridden birth of independent Syria, and everyday life in the now largely destroyed town of Quneitra. His father died humiliated and tortured by his inner demons after the Arab-Israeli War, and for Malas, his hometown evokes feelings of shame and longing for many Syrians, especially those who lived there (as well as the hundred or so holdouts who still do). Malas himself has said, "I've experienced things and places that are no longer there, no longer visually accessible; but in my head they are so vivid and I want to share them with the world. As a filmmaker, I see this as a responsibility; a calling." His images are lyrical in the best sense of the word, and have a kind of golden glow to them, even the horror comes through in soft-focus, laced with a longing for a time and place forever gone. But Malas is not detached from reality, there is real anger here, anger towards the people's failure to stand up for themselves, and anger at the authorities, both international, and national, for abusing and suppressing the legitimate desires of the people. *The Night* is also a eulogy for a lost childhood, and a cry of sorrow at the loss of his beloved father. But ultimately, this a hopeful film, the people who populate it are a hopeful people, and there is a belief in the future, that maybe, things will get better.



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