

Published in *As Sharq Newspaper*, 26 April 2007

Roots

Film by female Palestinian Director Wafa' Jamil

An open discussion on the issue of identity and land!

Doha - report by Mohamed Salah

The Palestinian female director, Wafa' Jamil, narrates the distress of a people who had tried to kill the spirit of hope inside but instead launches a cry that, "it is the time that Palestinians use the keys of their houses." It is the same phrase on the tongue the priest Mathew, the South African, one of the heroes of the film *Roots*.

Wafa' Jamil moved me with the atmosphere of Palestine; with her smooth words and controlled tears, with the Palestinian woman who guarantees the survival and struggle for the sake of maintaining the roots. The film is created by the heroes of her story who were caught through their participation in a conference on "Shaping Communities in the Time of Crisis" that was held in Palestine. The conference was hosted by the Anglican Church locate near the Nativity church in Bethlehem; the place of Jesus, and the land of peace, olives, and prophets.

The film's director says, "Roots is an open discussion about the subject of identity, the land, and the meaning of this trouble for all who live in our land. So, the actions have been placed on the tongues of the major characters, Mathew the South African who has suffered from racial discrimination and Sama Alshibi a Palestinian who came from America, holding her nationality as one who has suffered from its loss, and looking for her roots."

"The film I came up with is a reflection of the light on the Palestinians' daily suffering. At the end, Sama discovers her roots. It indicates that we are not struggling only for land but we fight in order to deepen the concept of identity," Wafa' adds.

Concerning the character of Sama with an Iraqi father and Palestinian mother who holds American nationality, Wafa' says, "I existed inside this character or she inhabits inside me. I believe that when Sama returns to her grandmother's house and cries, it is as if I return to my house in the suburb of Sheikh Abdallah in Akka, as I unconsciously want and long to

do, and without doubt it affects my imagination for any action I perform. It is here that Sama knows what it means to have a Palestinian origin.”

Wafa’ Jamil considers films as a way to keep our history for Arabs and especially for Palestinians. This is particularly important for the Palestinians who face a Zionist project that tries to erase their identity and also face the silence and complacency of the rest world.

Wafa’ Jamil has focused on the importance of participating in the Aljazeera festival, saying that “participation is important because of the number of attendants, their views, their beliefs and nationality. The reward for each director is the number of viewers who have watched his or her films.

She clarified that although Roots film has been shown in many places - Munich in Germany, Amman in Jordan – “my aim is still what I said and confirmed when I went to Qatar. I met Abbas Arnaout and, while I do not know him personally, he asked me about my name and when I told him, his reply was ‘the director of Roots.’ Before I could reply, he said ‘Congratulations on this film.’ This was a badge of honor for me. I have no aim except this.”

Wafa’ continued by adding, “this is my case with works, such as ‘A Martyr under Legal Age’” that received a silver prize at the Second Annual Al-Jazeera Film Festival in 2005 and the Golden prize in the Tunisia festival. “I felt satisfied and honored that I had conveyed my ideas to those I wanted and they interacted with it positively. This is itself a crown for each honest work.”

Although the film was not intended for a large sector, “Roots” has gotten prizes and recognition because of the importance of the issues it raises. In the production of the film, the limited funding did have an effect but it did not effect the communication of the idea. We must admit that there is a shortage in financing abilities because there is no Palestinian partner through which funding of film production or its screening abroad is available to a director. The director incurs all costs to participate in festivals in order to show the film. We do not have a syndicate that embraces us or an authority that supports these works on behalf of a director. This in addition to our sufferings in the Arab countries, such as bureaucracy and we must also admit that, in general, there is no official Arab attention given to documentary films. In addition, there is no awareness or support from the institutions that arrange for festivals in Palestine.

Wafa' concurred saying, "The West initiates supporting these films and I was chosen to participate in the Spanish Film Business School. The first workshop will be held in Morocco and I was chosen with participants from all over the world."