

## In Between [15] 2017|Israel/Palestine/France|103 min

UK release date	<b>22<sup>nd</sup> September 2017</b>
Director	<b>Maysaloun Hamoud</b>
Screenplay	<b>Maysaloun Hamoud</b>
Cinematographer	<b>Itay Gross</b>
Cast	<b>Mouna Hawa</b> (Leila Bakhr); <b>Sana Jammalieh</b> (Salma); <b>Shaden Kanboura</b> (Noor); <b>Mahmud Shalaby</b> (Ziad Hamdi); <b>Henry Andrawes</b> (Wissam); <b>Ashlam Canaan</b> (Dounia)

This bittersweet debut feature from Maysaloun Hamoud is a spiky treat, an empowering tale of three Palestinian women living in Tel Aviv, each fighting their own battles for independence and fulfilment. Balancing tragicomic relationship blues with sharp sociopolitical observation, Hamoud's slyly subversive drama draws us deep into an often hidden world. As the title suggests, these women occupy a liminal space, caught between freedom and repression, religion and secularism, the past and the future. There is a world in flux, in which the drugs and partying of the underground scene stand in stark contrast to the strict hypocrisies that dominate the cultural landscape. As one of them tells her devout father: "Some people live in palaces, but God knows what their life is like inside..."

Laila (Mouna Hawa) is a force of nature, a chain-smoking, leather-jacketed lawyer who can drink and snort the boys under the table and takes pride in overturning the conventions of her profession and her gender. She lives with Salma (Sana Jammalieh), an aspiring DJ who works long hours in kitchens and bars and whose strict Christian parents don't know she's gay. When strait-laced and studious Nour (Shaden Kanboura) arrives from Umm al-Fahm in northern Israel, the ultra-conservative Muslim lifestyle she leads is out of step with that of her new flatmates. No wonder Nour's sanctimonious fiancé, Wissam (Henry Andrawes), worries about their influence, eager to bring the marriage forward and remove his bride from such corrupting company.

At first glance, these women have very different goals and ambitions. Yet scratch the surfaces of their lives and the problems each face are not so dissimilar. Laila is in a whirlwind romance with Ziad (Mahmood Shalabi), who embraces her free spirit but becomes critical of the way she talks, dresses and smokes when his family are around. Salma may have found love in the arms of trainee doctor Dounia (Ahlam Canaan), but only as long as they can keep their relationship secret from Salma's mother, who is desperate to marry her off, and her father who threatens her with talk of the madhouse. As for Nour, she discovers in horrifying fashion just what is expected of the wife of an apparently upstanding citizen in a gruelling sequence that is made all the more alarming by Hamoud's sensitive directorial discretion.

Hamoud identifies herself as part of a new wave of realist Palestinian cinema, looking beyond the conflicts of the West Bank and Gaza, and putting women proudly centre stage. Yet she is not afraid to portray the price of freedom in a patriarchal world – the closing shot of *In Between* is a masterful exercise in ambiguity, as enigmatic as the final moments of *The Graduate* or *The Long Good Friday*, in which the characters' silence speaks volumes.

Hamoud, has been criticised for taking Israeli state funding, and found herself the subject of death threats and fatwas from fundamentalists. Elsewhere, *In Between* has been rapturously received, with Hamoud receiving the Women in Motion Young Talents award at this year's Cannes festival.

After: **Mark Kermode, The Observer, 24 September 2017**

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