



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

THE DUPES (Al-Makhdu'un) (15)

Director: Tewfik Saleh

Starring: Mohamed Kheir-Halouani, Bassan Lofti Abou-Ghazala, Saleh Kholoki
Syria, 1972, 1 hour 47 minutes, Arabic + English subtitles

Based on the novella *Men in the Sun* by Ghassan Kanafani – a militant intellectual assassinated by Mossad in 1972 – this allegorical statement on the Palestinian struggle makes for urgent viewing

Three refugees from the 1948 dispossession of Palestine, men from three different generations, try to cross into oil-rich Kuwait looking for work. Eventually they come together and find the means, a truck with a willing driver and an empty tank, but the journey is fraught with danger. We have found out about their individual circumstances through flashbacks and have come to care about what happens to them.

There is the lanky schoolboy Marwan (Saleh Kholoki), who has to support his mother and younger siblings, while Abu Qays (Mohamed Kheir-Halouani) is a mature peasant farmer with a wife and two young children. As'ad (Bassan Lofti Abou-Ghazala), by contrast, is a charismatic political fugitive wanted for his militant activities in Jordan.

“One of the seminal works of the Syrian cinema, *The Dupes* was shot by one of Egypt's finest filmmakers, based on a work by an acclaimed Palestinian author set largely in Iraq. Tewfik Saleh (*Street of Madmen, The Rebels*), adapting Ghassan Khanafani's 1962 novella together with its author, creates a dense interweaving of past and present, fiction and documentary in this harsh condemnation of the treatment of diaspora Palestinians by their fellow Arabs.”– **Electronic Intifada**

This is where Saleh stands out; he is, like Sembène, a true Marxist filmmaker for whom making a film is a true political act. Here is what he himself told me about *The Dupes*: “I worked on the adaptation of *Men in the Sun* by Ghassan Kanafani – a militant of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine assassinated on 9 July 1972 in Beirut by the Zionist secret services (Mossad) – from 1964 to 1971. My intentions and my interpretation of the novel and its characters changed in light of the tragic events that took place in the region in June 1967 and September 1970. In the latest version, I wanted to emphasise the element of escape that characterises the Middle East at this time. Three characters from three different generations, representing three phases of the same collective problem, decide to flee their situation in search of what each considers or hopes to be their individual salvation. But the end is very different from their expectations; there is no individual salvation from a collective tragedy. And this is the lesson that history teaches us every day”. **Tahar Cheriaa, Tewfik Saleh, in *Dossiers du cinéma: Cinéastes*, edited by Jean-Louis Bory, Claude Michel Cluny, Casterman,**

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Notes compiled by Jo Comino