



PARADISE LOST



A film by **Ebtisam Mara'ana**



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Paradise Lost

Synopsis

Arab Israeli filmmaker Ebtisam Mara'ana grew up in Paradise (Fureidis in Arabic), a small fishing village overlooking the Mediterranean. One of few Arab villages remaining after the 1948 War, Paradise became culturally and politically isolated as Jewish settlements sprung up around it. Today, it is a place defined by silence and repression - a village whose men are unemployed, whose women tend to household chores, and where the Islamic Movement builds its strength among disheartened youngsters.

As the director attempts to recreate the lost history of her village, she is met with strong resistance from family and friends. She's warned not to be like Suaad, the infamous village bad girl who was accused and imprisoned as a PLO activist in the 1970's. Many villagers felt Suaad's actions a threat to their safety; however, she also became a role model for many young women who took pride in their Palestinian identity. The film follows the director to the UK as she seeks out her childhood hero, Suaad George, now a Doctor of Law, but still haunted by her village and her past. PARADISE LOST, a rare film by an Arab Israeli, is a poignant look at issues of national identity and womanhood within traditional Arab village life.



About the Filmmaker

Ebtisam Mara'ana, a Palestinian Israeli citizen, was born in Paradise in 1975. She graduated the school of cinema and television at the Jewish-Arab academic center of Givat Haviva. She directed a number of reports for the "Feminine Outlook" and "Arabeska" programs on Israel's Channel One. Her documentary on unrecognized Arab villages "Wake up to the Native Land" was aired on Israel's Channel Two. Mara'ana was the assistant director in the films made by Simon Bitton, Ram Levi, and Duki Dror. "Paradise Lost" is her first full-length film. Her filmography includes WAKE UP TO THE NATIVE LAND, the story of the unrecognized Palestinian villages inside Israel (1999).



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Festivals and Awards

DocAviv International Documentary Film Festival - *Best Debut Documentary, Best Cinematography*

London Human Rights Film Festival

San Paolo Film Festival

Munich Documentary Film Festival

New York Human Rights Watch Film Festival

International Women's Film Festival, Israel

Taiwan International Film Festival



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Credits

Israel • 2003 • 56 Minutes • Color

Director
Ebtisam Mara'ana

Producer
Duki Dror

Director of Photography
Nili Aslan

Editor
Sara Solomon

Line Producer
Yael Shavit

Assistant Director
Ebtisam Mara`ana

Sound Recording
Rami Yatzkan

Original Music
Allah el Fahres

Commissioning Editors
Sinai Abet, Rudy Buttignol

Production Company
Zygote Films

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High-resolution photos are available to download at
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Background Information

The Palestinian citizens of Israel are a national minority in a state where 82% of the population is Jewish. The Palestinians, who constituted the majority of the inhabitants of historic Palestine before the establishment of the State of Israel, became a minority as a result of the 1948 war, when 84% of the Palestinian population was exiled. Of a pre-1948 Palestinian population of 950,000, some 800,000 were expelled. Today they number approximately 5 million. Of the remaining 150,000, 25% were displaced from their homes. These displaced Palestinians are known as "internal refugees" or, as Israeli legal parlance would have it, "present absentees." Today the remaining Palestinians—all citizens of Israel—number some 1 million, and the internal refugees among them number 250,000.

Until recently, the State of Israel has not sought to assimilate or integrate its Arab citizens. Rather, it has tended to marginalize them (the Arab citizens of Israel were subject to a separate military government from 1948-1966). Furthermore, the Arab minority has not been permitted to control its own political, economic, or educational affairs and create alternative institutions to compensate for this neglect. Thus, the highest unemployment, illiteracy, infant mortality, crowding, and poverty rates in Israel are found among its Arab citizens.

In October 2000, the turmoil accumulated through half a century of suppression exploded in widespread riots in many Arab villages in Israel. In these riots 13 young protestors have been killed by the police. A national investigation committee was appointed and the state of Israel, for the first time, had to deal seriously with its responsibility toward its Arab citizens.

Yet, since 1948, the Palestinian citizens of Israel have been forcibly cut off from the surrounding Arab environment. Caught between a Jewish State that categorically excludes them, and a Palestinian national movement that doesn't include them, the Palestinian citizens of Israel could be said to be a politically "orphaned" group.



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Director's Statement

I can't remember when I first met Suaad or heard of her. She has been well known in our village for as long as I can remember. We have often discussed her. In 1979 Suaad was imprisoned for the first time. They said she disgraced her family, making the village infamous. As for me, Ebtisam, she always seemed greater than life, the life of our small village.

Suaad and I were born and bred in the same village. My bedroom window overlooks the Mediterranean. Bending palm trees, fishermen selling their night's capture, thrilling sunsets. One might believe that my village lives up to its name - Paradise. At times I do believe it was once a real Paradise, but Paradise is a sealed and conservative place, haunted by its past and futureless. After the 1948 War, especially after the neighboring Arab villages were wiped, and their villagers evicted, our village remained isolated from continuous Arabic population. Over the years more Jewish settlements were built around it, adding to its cultural and political isolation. This is a village whose men are unemployed, the women tend to the household chores, and the Islamic Movement builds its strength among the disheartened youngsters. Paradise is my home.

She was born in 1957 in Paradise. In 1975, the year I was born, she founded the village's theatre circle. In 1979 Suaad joined the Black Panther squad, which in those days was affiliated to the PLO. She believed in her right to belong to the struggle of Palestine's liberation. After having been released from prison, she applied to Israeli universities but was turned down due to her "past" So she went to study law in Italy. Each time she tried to visit Israel, she was apprehended at the airport by the General Security Services and imprisoned for several months on grounds of meeting with foreign agents.

Each time she returned and got arrested, the entire village would swarm around her parents' house. When in prison, Suaad was regarded dead as far as her family was concerned. I remember the village darkened, the nights being cold and all the village talking about Suaad and her misfortune.

In 1991, Suaad did her postgraduate degree in law, at the University of Bologna, Italy. That was the year I passed up to eleventh grade, and for the first time dared to draw the Palestinian flag on my jeans. My mother struck me, shouting that she won't have me like Suaad. At that time Suaad was an active PLO member.



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Director's Statement (con't)

At the Bologna University she met Tauffic - a Palestinian-Israeli. He was ten years her junior, but still, they became involved and decided to get married. Suaad returned to the village with her Palestinian betrothed to have her engagement party thrown there, for all the villagers to celebrate and talk about. She also made sure the event is videotaped. She needed to prove that after being the village's tragic figure, her fate has now reversed.

A short while after the engagement, 33-year-old Suaad was re-imprisoned, this time for two years. Her future husband turned out to be that a collaborator and the romantic involvement with Suaad was a wild idea his operators concocted. Instead of breaking down mentally, Suaad took it all out on paper. In her book "Memories of the Cell", she describes jail experiences of violence, torture and rape, yet, lingering on the few rays of freedom she had lived. " *I'm sitting in my death-row cell waiting for the executioner,*" she writes. But after every fall she pulls herself together and gets back on her feet. Suaad R'nem became the village's tragedy. In 1993 she came out of prison and decided to end all her political activities and complete her Law Ph.D. degree in England.

In 1995, in London, Suaad met Allen, a Christian and high school teacher, and married him. In 1997 they parented their son Wassim. Every year she visits Paradise with her family. Being far away from her family is mighty hard on her, however, living in the conservative village with her British husband and son seemed unrealistic. Two years ago, during one of her visits, I dared speaking with her, asking her how the impossible existential cycle into which we were born can be broken.

I'm now 27, single, still live with my mother in the village. My society has many codes of conduct and restrictions I am bound by. No going out after dark. Tight clothes aren't respectable. Sitting in a cafe is forbidden. Going abroad is not accepted. Going to a movie is intimidating. Marrying a non-Moslem is out of the question. I could put up with that over the years, but could not put up with my village's silence.

Since 1948, hardly anybody spoke of the 1948 war. My father, then a 10-year-old boy, was sent to dig the graves for the Tantura villagers. " *You must never speak of this or else they will imprison you and rape you.*" He used to hush me. My impulse to know the history has made me resent my parents' generation. I did not want them to leave this life without leaving their legacy behind. I need to hear they fought for this piece of land.



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HA'ARETZ Online

Ha'aretz English Edition www.haaretz.com

Excerpted from

THE VILLAGE, THE TOWN, THE SILENCE AND THE RECOLLECTION

By Uri Klein, Haaretz Daily, April 2002

"It is not our time, my daughter" says Ebtisam Mara'ana's father to his daughter, the director of "Paradise Lost" toward the end of her beautiful and moving film. It seems that these words said beside the dying fig tree - which the father keeps tending to lovingly - hovers above the whole film. "Paradise Lost" was screened at the Israeli contest of the "DocAviv" international documentary film festival, which opened the other night at the Tel-Aviv Cinemateque.

"Paradise Lost" is driven by intense emotional questions of female, personal and national, historical and actual identity. Although these intense emotions are what give the film its dramatic volume, its main force derives from the emotional intensity being kept from getting furious. On the contrary, "Paradise Lost" is a film of pondering and solid judgment. Above all, it is a portrait of the director as a young Arab woman trying to define her identity and shape her future in a reality that shifts from silence to repression and from a bygone past to an elusive present. Mara'ana endeavors to define herself as a political person in a reality where the word "politics" is taboo.

Not everything gets resolved in the film. Mara'ana wishes to turn the story of Suaad Genem, who was imprisoned a number of times (for raising the PLO flag in Fureidis, for one), into a mystery that wheels the entire film. However, the mystery is soon worn off leaving behind Genem's story, which is far more moving than the mystery Mara'ana tries to dip in.

Some of the nicer scenes in the film show the relationship as it develops between Mara'ana and Genem - first when the director visits Genem in her UK exile where she lives with her British husband and little son, and later when Genem visits her family in Fureidis. The strength of these scenes lies in the way they highlight a moving portrait of real and symbolic exile. "I can smell the village on you," says Genem to Mara'ana in the film, when they first meet. Even the brand name "Telma" on the back of a foodstuff Mara'ana brought her from Fureidis makes her sigh in yearning.

In this film Mara'ana molds her own story versus Genem's story. Despite her sympathy and even adoration to Genem, Mara'ana gradually realizes that she is an altogether different woman living in a different time and conscious of her independent identity. That is why "Paradise Lost" becomes a documentation of liberation. Even as liberation is still far away and vague, and although Mara'ana's tools in implementing it are primary and uncertain, the film documents the beginning of the process. The film is evident of its historical commitment, intellectual determination and moral integrity.



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INTERNET JERUSALEM POST

Jul. 30, 2003

Excerpted from

Faradis found, By Shula Kopf

Growing up feminists in a small Arab village leads two women to very different lives

Faradis tumbles down the Carmel range to meet the old Haifa -Tel Aviv road. Its houses gasping for air, the village is jostling in chaos for views of the blue ribbon of sea just beyond the plain.

In one of the houses in the Arab village, exactly 67 steps down from the nameless road that winds its way up the hill, lives Ebtisam Mara'ana, a 27-year-old filmmaker with a brutally honest camera.

Ebtisam turned her scrutiny on her own village in *Lost Paradise*, her first full-length documentary film in which she takes a look at the dilemmas facing a secular Arab woman in traditional Arab village life. In the film Ebtisam travels to England to track down Soaad Gnem, the mythical "bad girl," who served time in Israeli jails for political activism. In her youth Ebtisam hid a picture of Soaad under her pillow.

She says she doesn't remember a time when she hadn't heard about Soaad, "but at age 14 I became aware of her story. She was put in jail and it made a big noise in the village. I dreamt that when I grew up I would be just like her," she says.

Soaad, an activist for Palestinian rights, got into trouble with the Israel security forces and landed in jail three times. "Some say Soaad is the only 'man' in the village," says Ebtisam, who was 17 years old when the activist left the village with a one-way ticket for England.

Ebtisam never forgot her childhood hero. The camera finds her in Exeter where she is a doctor of international law and married to an Englishman. "I was moved, I cried when I saw the film. It wasn't easy for me; it wasn't easy for her".

Both women condemn the meekness and lack of political activism in Faradis. "Fear, like tradition, has a respectable place in Faradis," says Ebtisam. "I'm a stranger here, and big time. In Israel as an Arab I'm estranged. And in Faradis, I'm also estranged. There is a confusion of identity. I am sick and tired of constantly being defined, feminist, dark-skinned, single."

Ebtisam, a member of this new generation, is ambivalent about staying in Faradis. "All the people that succeed in Faradis leave this submissive, cowardly village," she says.

Soaad, as one of those who left, disagrees. "Leave Faradis? Why? Who is bothering her here? Who is knocking on her door? She can wear what she wants and do what she wants," she says. "The problem is with her, not with the village. I left because I had no choice. She has a choice."

Ebtisam dreams that one day she will be head of the village council and change things. "If only Soaad hadn't left for England things could have been different," she says.



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YNET 27.7.03
By Ariana Melamed

Excerpted from
TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Fureidis, a Lost Paradise (Saturday, Channel 8), is a beautiful and gloomy documentary that links the oppression of women in Arab society with the identity issue of the Israeli Palestinians.

A young woman seeking to build her own identity begins by looking for it in her home village. Ebtisam Mara'ana is in a predicament: She is an Arab woman, an educated unmarried filmmaker and has no role model to emulate or outstanding women to identify with. Wherever she turns, all she hears are voices speaking to her from a superior footing trying to lure her back into a conformism that seems to have one purpose only, and that is to oppress its women.

The village is Fureidis, one of only two Arab villages left along the coastal plain after 1948. Fureidis is not a paradise. "*In Fureidis fear is respected, like tradition,*" says Ebtisam Mara'ana at one point in her film Fureidis, in voice-over, as the camera zooms in on a cave entrance with a bunch of kids too afraid to go in. Evidently, the cave is used as a metaphor for other fears. Some people are not to be mentioned to the villagers as they won't talk about them, Suaad Genem above all. A figure Ebtisam remembers from childhood and youth as a distant and scary rumour.

Suaad Genem, Dr. Suaad George now, was once an active member of the Communist Party and a woman well ahead of her time. When the State of Israel was still combating icons and shadows, Suaad raised the PLO flag high up, and was imprisoned three times for membership in a terrorist organization. She did not engage in terrorism, she was an ideologist - demonstrated, said all she had to say and took her penalty with dignity. As far as the village was concerned, they were terrified, "Something must have happened", and the villagers were ready to adopt the security forces' version of Suaad's alleged wrongdoings and erase her, along with their own conflicted identity, from their consciousness.

It's a beautiful film, sad and fascinating, boldly climbing unpaved slopes and a groundbreaker in documentary filming done here and in the Occupied Territories, making a definite connection between the problem of women's oppression within Arab society and the national identity of Israeli Palestinians. Women have it much tougher since their fight for identity is double hard: On the individual level - having no role models and nobody to support them, and on the national level - all backs are turned to a woman who goes out in the open against the village policy of erasure, silence and closing eyes.

"You need a deeper understanding of the political game in this country," says Suaad's classmate on a short visit home (home? what a charged word). "Understanding it means remaining silent?" Suaad asks. He has no good answer for her.

The film follows its courage through to the ending when Ebtisam admits she is not willing to make the same sacrifice Suaad made, and refuses to linger on the past alone. But where will the train take her to on the Arab-free coastal plane? I want to see sequences by this excellent filmmaker in five years time and again in ten. She may not have all the answers then, but she will certainly know how to keep presenting her queries in a notable and respectable fashion.



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Paradise Lost

Excerpted from

PARADISE NEXT DOOR

By Dani Wasserman, Kolbo, April 2003

Next Friday, the documentary film "Paradise Lost" will be screened at the Tel-Aviv Cinematheque, as part of the Doc-Aviv Festival. Only a few of the many guests invited to the screening will realize that this screening is actually a ceremony – an exorcism; The exorcism of a ghost that for many years has been looming over the narrow allies and threatening the residents of the village of Fureidis, located on the old Haifa-Tel-Aviv road. The director of the film, a resident of Fureidis– Ebtisam Mara'ana, chose this difficult mission

"My father had a very difficult time with the subject of the film. When I presented the theme to him, I told him I was making a movie about him, so he was very pleased and cooperated. In the midst of shooting I asked him about Suaad and he responded very harshly and refused to speak of her. This is visible throughout the film, from start to end, and actually, to this day he refuses to speak about her. His argument is that talking about her is political talk and politics are to be avoided. He told me my fait would be like Suaad's. My father can talk for hours about a fig tree, a tree which is like one of his own kids. This film is also about him, it's a very personal family film, and it includes scenes with my father where I am trying to learn about his history but he refuses to speak about anything. Everything is political to him, even when I tried to ask him about the war in 1948 he said this was political and remained silent."

Weren't you scared from this comparison, that you are actually she? It was scary to others, but for me it was a source of strength, because I told myself that I would not be worse off than Suaad, and she withstood it all, so it is actually my honor to be compared to her.

"The film gave me the strength to reach out to her, what I had always wanted was almost an excuse. I called her home in England, she responded normally, we talked, she's already kind of English. I remember I was sweating when I was talking to her and for me it was like meeting God. I told myself what a woman she must be to survive all she's been through. She overcame it all, received her PhD, she didn't commit suicide or disappear, this woman has a kindof will power existent in very few people.

For many years Ebtisam was unable to separate between her and the image she had of Suaad. Only towards the end of the film, during a moment that was supposed to be peaceful and serene did Ebtisam realize that despite everything, she is a separate personality with a different fait than Suaad. "At first I was looking for her with a ton energy, I find her and she tells me how she misses the village, what they did to her, and about the Israeli establishment, she is completely connected to the national-political story. Any question I ask her she'll go back to the village, the issue of nationality and politics. At the end of the filming we were sitting on the Tantura beach, and I wanted to sit on the little island over there, by the ocean, having Fureidis, Tantura and all the politics behind us. I said to her: "Lets look forward into the horizon, to the future, to our dreams". She suddenly went berserk, as if I said something forbidden, "what dreams are you talking about", she yelled at me, "go dream, here's your ocean". She pointed at the holes in the rocks on the island, "do you see these millions of holes, they are our millions of dreams, black". I was sad to see a woman like her unable dream anymore. That's where andwhen I realized that I would never be able to understand what she had gone through in her life. This gap between us made me realize that I have a future, I have dreams I need to fulfill, not only be like Suaad. Only then did I realize these things. I suddenly appreciated the fact that I have my own life and I appreciated my own existence, that I'm not Suaad.

This film is proof to my father and all the fathers and grandfathers in Fureidis, and the young ones afraid of talking, so that they'll know that I searched for Suaad, I found her, and I didn't die, I wasn't put in jail, I'm fine. The film is being screened during a festival and Jews and Arabs are coming to see it, and the GSS knows about it, and that's that.



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