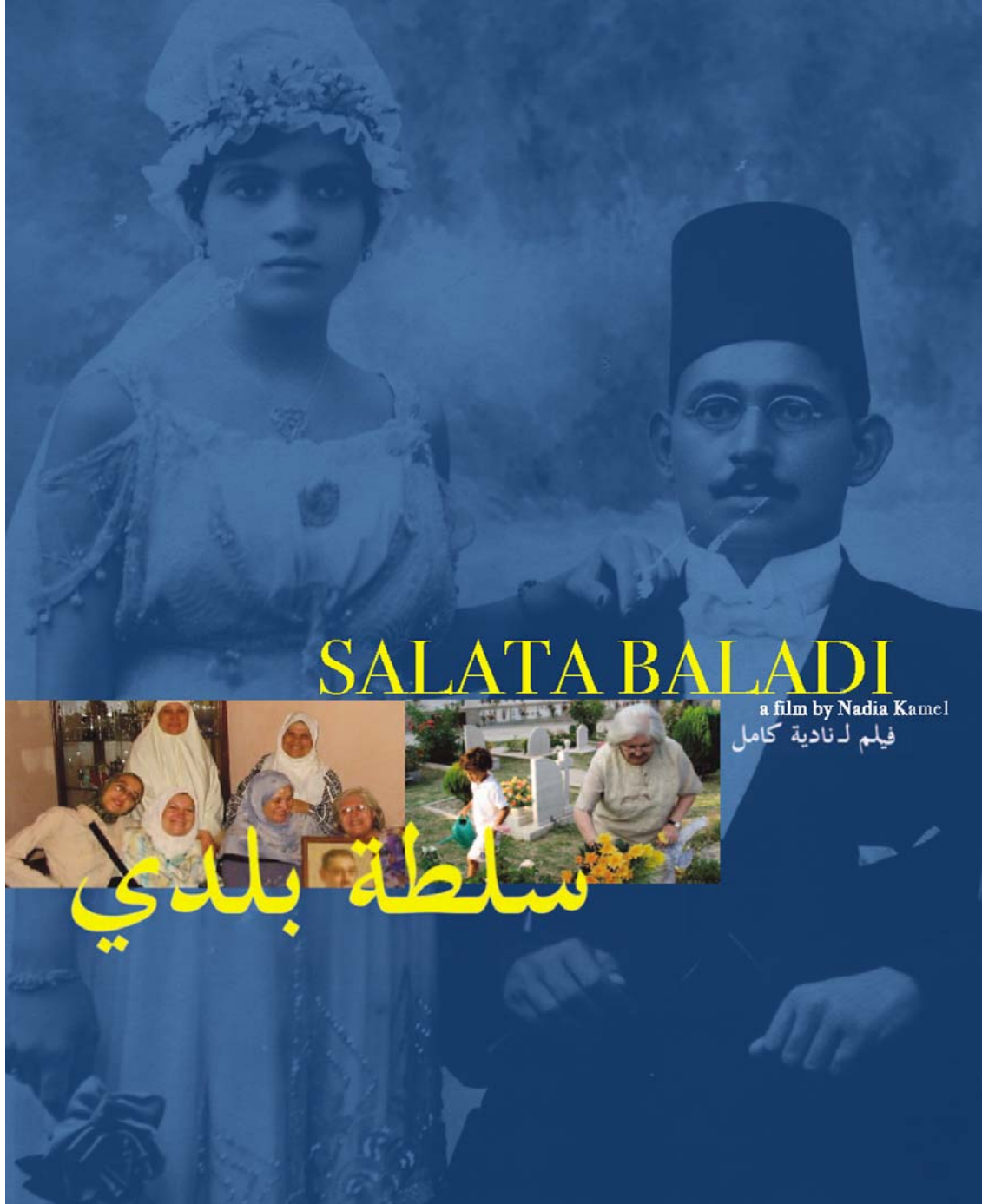


# SALATA BALADI

## AN EGYPTIAN SALAD

A film by Nadia Kamel



WMM

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## SYNOPSIS



**“A welcome reminder that beyond politics lie people with much more in common than their leaders are willing to acknowledge... [a] multilingual, multiethnic documentary.”**  
- Jay Weissberg, *Variety*

**“...An exceptionally controversial endeavor that [brings] into question the taboos shaping the Arab perception of Israelis...”**  
- Noha El-Hennawy, *Los Angeles Times*

Photo: Courtesy of WMM

Award-winning, Egyptian filmmaker Nadia Kamel’s heritage is a complex blend of religions and cultures. Her mother is a half Jewish, half Italian Christian who converted to Islam when she married Nadia’s half Turkish, half Ukrainian father. Prompted by the realization that her 10-year-old nephew Nabeel is growing up in an Egyptian society where talk of culture clashes is all too common, she decides to let her mother Mary Rosenthal share their diverse family history.

“The original inspiration for this film was simple enough,” says Kamel, “a love for my family’s stories and a wish to share them. It was a storytelling project.” But, as she and Mary weave their way through the family’s fairytales, they bump into the silence around old prejudices concerning the estranged Egyptian-Jewish branch of their family living in Israel since 1948. Inspired to further challenge the boundaries between cultures, religions and nationalities that are used to divide us, Kamel travels, along with her mother and nephew, to Israel and Italy and confronts fears and prejudices along the way. “My storytelling film became witness to a new story still in the making,” says Kamel, “a story about my family’s efforts to once more climb the wall that unjustly insists on separating our principles from our humanity.”

- Munich International Documentary Film Festival

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## CREDITS

2008, 105 MINUTES, COLOR  
EGYPT/ISRAEL/PALESTINE/ITALY  
ARABIC, SUBTITLED

### **DIRECTOR/WRITER**

Nadia Kamel

### **EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS**

Sharry Lapp  
Nadia Kamel  
Elda Guidinetti  
Richard Copans

### **DOP/SOUNDS**

Ibrahim El Battout  
Nadia Kamel

### **EDITOR**

Catherine Mabilat

### **SOUND EDITOR**

Beatrice Wick

### **MIXAGE**

Stephane Lara

## FESTIVALS, SCREENINGS & AWARDS

### **Mumbai Int'l Film Festival**

Golden Conch for Best Long Doc  
International Critics Jury FIPRESCI

### **San Francisco Arab Film Festival**

Noor Award for Outstanding Doc

### **National Film Festival Egypt**

Certificate of Merit

### **Ayam Beirut Festival**

Int'l Doc FF of Amsterdam (IDFA)  
Munich International Doc Film Festival  
Locarno Int'l Film Festival in Switzerland  
Middle East International Film Festival



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## DIRECTOR BIO

Egyptian filmmaker, Nadia Kamel was born in 1961 in Cairo, where she continues to live and work. The daughter of journalist parents with a long history of political activism, Kamel grew up in a house steeped in progressive politics and a passion for the arts and popular culture. She studied microbiology and chemistry before turning her full attention to her life-long romance with the cinema in 1990. Working as an assistant director to leading independent filmmakers in contemporary Egypt including Atteyat El-Abnoudy, Youssef Chahine and Yousri Nassrallah, Kamel has considerable experience in the making of both documentary and feature films. When Kamel first began to work on her own projects in 2000, she found that a saturated production scene left little space for new directors and unconventional topics. Eventually, she concluded that addressing the daring, often taboo topics, confined to the margins of conventional Egyptian discourse that she hoped to engage with in her projects, she would need to take the risk of producing her own low-budget films. SALATA BALADI (AN EGYPTIAN SALAD), her first film, has been produced in this spirit of indomitable independence. After nearly five years of working solo, she was joined by co-producers Films d'Ici and Ventura Films in the post-production of this family tale celebrating a century of Egyptian cosmopolitanism.



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

***"It struck me that our history is contained in the homes we live in, that we are shaped by the ability of these simple structures to resist being defiled." (Achmat Dangor, Kafka's Curse)***

The original inspiration for this film was simple enough: a love for my family's stories and a wish to share them. It was a story telling project. The energy that eventually propelled me into this adventure was more complicated. I saw my octogenarian mother aging and my 10-year-old nephew growing up under a shadow of satellite dishes and a rising clamor about some inevitable clash of civilizations. And a mixture of hope and fear overtook me.

My mother's stories, woven across the 20<sup>th</sup> century, confound any straightforward understanding of the historical events during which they were played out and are almost always an exception to the reductive homogeneity with which we are taught to view "History." In my family, religions and cultures get married when they appear to be divorcing in the global arena. In a world where my family's

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identities are being squeezed into irreconcilable positions, I needed to document my history before I

became apologetic about it and the myth of its extinction was realized.

But as my mother told her stories, I discovered that the film could not simply be a reclaiming of our treasured past: we found ourselves colliding with pockets of denial and silence. Without confronting the taboos of our present, my mother's stories were reduced to self indulgence and nostalgia. And so my story telling film became a witness to a new story still in the making - a story about my family's efforts to once more climb the wall that unjustly insists on separating our principles from our humanity.

## MORE INFO

Hi-res photos are available for download on this film's web catalog page at [www.wmm.com](http://www.wmm.com).

### **For press inquiries please contact:**

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## Los Angeles Times

September 3, 2008

### **EGYPT: Documentary Ignites Egyptian Sensitivities to Israel**

By Noha El-Hennawy

By telling her mother's unorthodox story on film, Egyptian director Nadia Kamel has recently embarked on an exceptionally controversial endeavor that brought into question the taboos shaping the Arab perception of Israelis and dug deeper into the animosity between the Arab world and the Jewish state.

Delving into sensitive political and emotional terrain, Kamel documented the story of Mary Rosenthal, an Italian of a Jewish decent who converted to Islam and married an Egyptian Muslim more than five decades ago. Like her husband, Rosenthal joined the ranks of the Egyptian communist opposition. This conviction forced her to sever ties with her Jewish relations who had settled in Israel, a state the Arab left condemned as a seat of imperialism. But the familial split never felt right, and 60 years later Rosenthal decided to end the estrangement and visited her Israeli cousins.

In "[Salata Baladi](#)" or "Home Salad," Kamel follows the footsteps of her 77-year-old mother across Egypt, Italy and Israel over the course of six years. But, like so many things between Arabs and Jews, the film became more controversial than one woman's journey to back to her roots. The Egyptian press was inflamed, and many critics dismissed the movie as a call to normalize relations with the Jewish state, an apologist narrative to downplay Israeli aggression. Kamel's membership in the filmmaker's union was suspended.

"What I did is not normalizing with the state of Israel; I visited my family and made a film about the Egyptian identity.... This does not mean I condone the Israeli policies," said Kamel.

"My support to the Palestinian cause has not changed," contended Kamel. "I do not believe in boycotting human beings. As a rule, I don't boycott Israeli individuals, but I do boycott business with Israeli institutions."

Egypt was the first Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel in 1979. Although the agreement called for normal political and economic relations, most Egyptians never reconciled making peace with the enemy of the Arab world.

Since it opened in August 2007, the documentary has been screened at local festivals and cultural and educational centers to limited spectators and also in several Arab, European and American cities

The movie won two prizes at India's Mumbai Festival earlier this year and another prize at the San Francisco Arab Film festival last year.

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Besides Rosenthal, the 110-minute documentary revolves around Nabil, Kamel's little nephew whose mixed origins serve as the best manifestation of the documentary's title. Born to an Egyptian mother and a Palestinian father, Nabil remains torn between multiple identities. However, none of those identities ensured him a passport. Belonging to no internationally acknowledged state, Nabil cannot be treated as a normal citizen anywhere in the world. Even the laws of his mother's home country do not allow him to inherit Egyptian nationality. Yet his identity crisis is exacerbated when he finds out from his grandmother that his bloodline includes Jews.

Through the ethnic mosaic that her mother and nephew demonstrate, Kamel said she sought to expose the Egyptian racism bred by the national anti-imperial climate of the 1950s.

"I am telling my family's story because they suffered a lot of injustice. I am showing all forms of persecution whether against the Jews of my family, the Palestinians or the Italians," added Kamel who has pursued a career as an assistant director to Egypt's best known moviemakers for more than a decade.

Kamel took her viewers on a journey to Italy, where she listened to the story of her uncle, who was driven out of Egypt along with a large European community after the military coup d'etat in 1952.

"Colonialism is based on discrimination, by definition, but in Egypt we ended up responding to it with another form of discrimination," Kamel argued. "Egyptian Jews or Egyptians with European origins started to be considered non-Egyptians, mainly by the national government in the beginning, but this triggered a process of sorting people according to religious and ethnic criteria."

In the meantime, Kamel highlighted Gamal Abdel Nasser's intimidation of Egyptian Jewry in the 1950s and 1960s. While in Israel, Kamel recorded the memories of her mother's cousins in Egypt. Looking back on their old days in Cairo, Kamel's relatives voiced mixed feelings. They bragged about their Egyptian roots and stressed their attachment to Egyptian art and music, but recounted how they were intimidated by the political regime.

Kamel's take on the issue has deviated by and large from the stereotypical portrayal of Israelis in the Arab media. By depicting the warm welcome that her family received in Tel Aviv and the intimate interactions they had with their Israeli relatives, some of whom had fought against the Palestinians in 1948, Kamel's documentary hit a sensitive nerve in a region where long wars with Israel still constitute an integral part of the people's collective memory.

"In most Egyptian films so far, Israelis are portrayed as materialistic and essentially corrupt individuals," said Kamel. "For me this is nonsense. When you stereotype others, you have stereotyped yourself."

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By [JAY WEISSBERG](#)

Tue., Aug. 21, 2007

**Just how complicated things are in the Middle East -- and yet how connected the disparate parties are -- is the real subject of "House Salad," Egyptian helmer Nadia Kamel's intimate look at her complex family background. A welcome reminder that beyond politics lie people with much more in common than their leaders are willing to acknowledge, the multilingual, multiethnic docu benefits from a hugely sympathetic lead subject and her equally charming grandson. Despite tech problems, pic needs to be seen in Arab lands as well as Israel and beyond, where likeliest venues will be fests and cable.**

When Kamel accompanied her young nephew Nabeel to his first mosque ceremony in Cairo, she was disturbed by the rhetoric of hate spouted by the mullah and decided it was time to make a film explaining the family roots. Linchpin is her mother Mary, also called Na'ela, a warm woman in her 70s with quite a tale to tell.

Though many of her neighbors and even some in-laws know her as a tolerant, non-religious Muslim, Mary was born in Cairo to a Jewish father, Elie Rosenthal, and an Italian Catholic mother. She converted to Islam when she married her husband, Sa'ad, but was active in the communist party and later spent seven years in prison for her political activities.

In 1946, Mary's parents and brother moved to Italy when Nasser's anti-foreigner policies made life untenable for non-Arab Egyptians. Kamel travels with her parents, sister Dina and nephew Nabeel to the Italian town of Ripatransone to see the relatives, where discussions of the golden years in Cairo segue into tales of the family's frustrating initial statelessness within Europe.

Young Nabeel knows this problem all too well. With a mother of mixed birth and a Palestinian father, he's also technically without a country, registered in Gaza but unable to travel to Israel. This proves a significant hurdle for Kamel when she decides the family should visit the relatives in Tel Aviv, since the mere idea of traveling to the "Zionist state" is anathema to friends and neighbors.

The trip becomes a cathartic journey, with Mary's personal revelations providing the docu's most moving moment as well as its finest lesson. A little trimming of extraneous material is necessary, but docu's major drawback is the vid quality: Apart from overall graininess due to obviously cheap equipment, the focus proves maddeningly unstable within scenes. Sound, however, is acceptable.

Camera (color, DigiBeta), Kamel; editor, Catherine Mabilat; music, Kamilya Jubran; sound, Beatrice Wick.  
Reviewed at Locarno Film Festival (Ici et Ailleurs), Aug. 7, 2007. Running time: 106 MIN.

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