

## Lemon Tree

Etz Limon

PG France / Germany / Israel 2008

106 m sub-titles

### Crew

Director	Eran Riklis
Screenplay	Suha Arraf, Eran Riklis
Cinematography	Rainer Klausmann
Editor	Tova Ascher
Production Designer	Miguel Markin
Music	Habib Shehadeh Hanna

### Cast

Salma Zidane	Hiam Abbass
Mira Navon	Rona Lipaz-Michael
Ziad Dauki	Ali Suliman
Israel Navon, Minister	Doron Tavori
Abu Hussam	Tarik Copti
Captain Jacob	Amos Lavie
Liron Leibowitz	Amnon Wolf
Gilad	Liron Baranes

### Synopsis

*Palestine, the present. Salma Zidane is a 45-year old Palestinian widow who scrapes together a living from the lemon grove her father planted several decades ago.*

*When Israel's ambitious new defence minister, Israel Navon, moves in next door with his wife Mira the lemon grove is deemed a threat to national security after accusations that terrorists would be able to hide there.*

*The Israeli government builds a watchtower over the grove, locks it up behind barbed wire and orders it to be chopped down. Salma rejects the order and decides to take her case to the Israeli supreme court. She hires Ziad Dauki, a Palestinian lawyer estranged from his family. Salma's case eventually attracts the attention of local and international press.....*

**Abridged from Sight & Sound Jan.09**



### Review

A hit at the 2008 Berlin Film Festival, *Lemon Tree* is a film about security in the state of Israel. Salma Zidane is a poor Arab widow from the West Bank, who lives alone, and whose sole livelihood is her lemon grove. This area also happens to be known as the 'Green Line', which is the border between Israel and the West Bank and an area of continual conflict. When Israeli Defence Minister, Israel Navon, moves into his new house opposite the lemon grove, he sees Salma working there, decides the trees pose a threat to his and his wife's safety by providing a screen for potential terrorists, and makes an immediate order to have them uprooted. He has a security fence and watch tower installed and the lemon grove becomes fenced in like a prison.

The story in the film focuses on the human level, the personal lives of people and the system of oppression that operates there, without any form of glamorisation. It manages to translate the ongoing complex troubles of the Middle East into a story simply told of the conflict played out between one Arab widow and the Israeli Defence Minister in a David and Goliath situation. Supported only by her lawyer, Salma decides to take her case all the way to the Israeli Supreme Court in Jerusalem. It is also a story about love and loss, loneliness and unhappiness within cultural confinement. For Salma it is the threat of developing a forbidden relationship. For Mira, the wife of the Israeli Defence Minister, it is the realisation of Salma's struggle that awakens her to involve herself politically and cause a conflict in her marriage. Salma finds an unexpected ally in Mira, an elegant, thoughtful woman whose loneliness is as intense as Salma's own.

Director Eran Riklis is not shy to tackle politically challenging subjects. He says he couldn't resist once again creating a film that reflects his views of Middle East madness. In his previous film *The Syrian Bride* (2004) he also dealt with the Arab-Israeli conflict through the story of a family divided by political borders, and how their lives are fractured by the region's harsh political realities. This won 18 international awards and also starred Hiam Abbass. Riklis was born in Jerusalem but grew up in the USA, Canada and Brazil, graduating in 1982 from The National Film and Television School, Beaconsfield, England.

The film has some strong and convincing acting by Hiam Abbass (Salma), and Doron Tavori (Israel Navon). Ali Suliman as Salma's lawyer gives a performance of quiet resilience taking on the Israeli legal system. Rona Lipaz-Michael as the Minister's wife portrays Mira's political and social awakening convincingly.

The film's dazzling, burned-by-the-sun imagery is ably supported by leading German Cinematographer Rainer Klausmann (*Head-On, Downfall, The Edge of Heaven*). *Lemon Tree* focuses on some of the political issues of the Middle East today. It is a brave film because it exposes the brutal forces of power and oppression for people on both sides of a conflict. It is an honest film, dealing with the controversial subject of human rights.

**Martyn S Harris, Bath Film Festival 2008**