

Raising awareness at Palestine Film Festival

By Loren King | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT OCTOBER 04, 2012



BOSTON PALESTINE FILM FESTIVAL

A scene from “The People and the Olive.”

Aaron Dennis’s documentary “**The People and the Olive**,” about a group of American marathoners who run from Hebron to Jenin (that’s 129 miles over five days) to raise awareness about olive farmers in Palestine, may be best described as an inspirational thriller. Nothing that’s shot surreptitiously in the West Bank under the threat of gunfire and harassment by military police could be anything else.

“We tried to stay under the radar so we kept the equipment simple; just a small camera and no lights,” says Dennis, who, on foot or from a car, followed the runners, who hail from the Michigan-based humanitarian group On the Ground.

Dennis created and posted a Web series about the Run Across Palestine in February because “we never knew if our equipment would be confiscated. I’d film all day and edit at night . . . I really wanted to show the human side of Palestine because usually all we hear about is violence. You can’t avoid politics, but we wanted to transcend politics.”

The runners did make it to the finish line and the full documentary will screen as part of the sixth annual Boston Palestine Film Festival (running Oct. 5-13). Dennis will attend a post-screening discussion about “The People and the Olive” on Oct. 7 at 2:30 p.m. at the Museum of Fine Arts.

The BPFJ offers documentaries, narrative features, animation, and shorts — some two dozen titles in all — starting with its opening night film, “**Habibi**” (Oct. 5 at 7 p.m., MFA), the first fiction feature set in Gaza in 15 years.

The debut feature by director Susan Youssef, named one of “25 New Faces” to watch by Filmmaker Magazine in 2010, is about two Palestinian students, Qays (Kais Nashif) and Layla (Maisa Abd Elhadi), whose student visas are revoked by Israeli authorities in the West Bank. Forced to return home to Gaza, the pair find their relationship and their futures jeopardized by cultural and generational obstacles. Youssef will be present for a post-screening question-and-answer session.



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**Kais Nashif and Maisa Abd Elhadi
costar in “Habibi.”**

The closing film, “**The War Around Us**” (Oct. 13 at 5:30 p.m., MFA), is another documentary that offers a view of life in Palestine that Westerners rarely get to see. Director Abdallah Omeish’s riveting and mournful film focuses on two young journalists — Cairo-born Arab-American Ayman Moyheldin and Arab-British Sherine Tadros — who were on the ground in Gaza as Israel bombarded and invaded in 2008-09. Caught in a war zone, they tenaciously reported for Al Jazeera from Gaza City throughout the devastating 22-day assault on civilians, the only journalists to do so. “The War Around Us” is a powerful look at modern war reporting, friendship, journalistic ethics, and violence that is all too easily ignored. Both Omeish and Moyheldin will attend the festival for a post-screening discussion.

For a complete schedule and more information, go to www.bostonpalestinefilmfest.org.

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