



P.S. Jerusalem

Danae Elon

Producer Paul Cadieux. **Production company** Entre Deux Mondes (Montreal, Canada). **Director** Danae Elon. **Screenplay** Sophie Farkas Bolla. **Director of photography** Danae Elon. **Editor** Sophie Farkas Bolla. **Music** Olivier Alary. **Sound design** Benoît Dame. **Sound** Philippe Attié.

DCP, colour. 87 min. Hebrew, English, Arabic.

Premiere 10 February 2015, Haifa

World sales Filmoption International

Defying a parent's good advice in favour of gaining experiences of your own – that can't be such a bad thing, can it? Even when your father's name is Amos Elon, who emigrated to Italy from Israel in 2002 and made his daughter promise never to move back to the country of her birth. Shortly after the death of this prominent critic of Israel, Danae Elon moves with her husband Philippe and two sons Tristan and Andrei to Jerusalem, where her third son is born. She names him Amos. Making Jerusalem their home, giving their sons an identity they can be proud of, it would all be no problem if it were only possible to identify with the State of Israel's policies. But doing so is as impossible for Danae as it is for Philippe, with even the children, who are sent to the only school in the country where Palestinian and Jewish pupils learn Hebrew and Arabic together, quickly sensing that wanting to do everything right doesn't mean everything's fine. *P.S. Jerusalem* is the document of three years spent in the irresolvable conflict zone between looking for your identity and taking a reality check, between the emotional and the political. In the end, the house is once again full of moving boxes.

Christoph Terhechte

Jerusalem, the emotional prison

I pray for the day when I will stop cringing about my nationality, the day I will feel proud to say I am from Israel and not coil into a string of excuses and explanations about the country and the politics that do not represent who I am.

I wanted to make a film about the 'occupiers', about the jail in which the Zionist version of Israel has mentally and emotionally imprisoned both Israeli Arabs and Jews. I wanted to make a film that would reflect the impossible contradictions of being born in Israel to a liberal Jewish family. I did not want to tell my story through the experience of Palestinians, nor tell another story of the occupation. Rather, I focused on how Israel's narrative imprisoned my own identity.

During the last few years of my father's life, we often took walks together. He was a father who challenged me to think about the times in which we lived. He once told me that we were 'cursed' by being from Jerusalem. He meant that maybe there would never be an end to the strife in this city we called home. Maybe we would always care about a place even if we turned our backs on it. It was the sort of curse that falls upon those responsible for the destruction of the very home they want to belong to.

Not two stories – one

The idea of a 'Jewish homeland' was never organic to our family experience; rather, it was a choice. I was born into that choice; my father was brought to it by his parents who escaped Europe in the early 1930s. We believed in peace yet lived in homes abandoned by Arabs in 1948; we believed in co-existence yet never learned the language of the other. This led to a basketful of contradictions that were to exist simultaneously within our daily lives. One people's tragedy had led to another people's tragedy. This was not two stories. It was one.

Before my father died he sold our family's home in Jerusalem, and made sure that I understood his position against my ever returning. He was so passionate and adamant about his feelings that it became impossible for me not to go back after he died. He'd tried to make me more cosmopolitan, a woman of the world, but something deep was missing in my life. While I could understand his reasoning, I could not rid myself of the need to make a difference. I knew what we were facing when I chose to go back, and my partner Philip was even more positive than I was about the possibilities and importance of doing so. What happened in the course of the next three years became a completely unexpected love/hate relationship with the place I chose to return to.

My need to return and remain in Jerusalem was really as simple as wanting to go home. Jerusalem is home, one impossible to live in, and yet it captures us so much that we never feel quite at home anywhere else. I would say this regarding Israel in general, but the film is about Jerusalem in particular. In all this pain there is a great deal of love, a situation that makes our condition a very sad and contradictory one.

The film is not an intellectual political journey but a profoundly sincere emotional one. The moments of grace, whether it is the snow falling, a ride on the train, the walk by the water, the way in which my family is photographed – all hold within them my love and attachment and deep desire to make our lives in this place work.

Danae Elon

"I wanted to bring my family to the place in which I grew up"

What drew you to this story?

Danae Elon: I am drawn to address complex social and political subjects by staying close to my own world and examining how the people in it react and evolve as human beings in a complex setting such as Jerusalem. I wanted to draw a portrait of a place without falling in to the stereotypes so often associated with the Middle East and Jerusalem in particular. Most of all, I wanted to express what it felt like to be so torn about the place one comes from and wants to call home. I wanted to bring my family back to the place in which I grew up. Once the decision was made, I started filming my four-year-old son, who was quite articulate for his age and asking all sorts of interesting questions. Experiencing the city through his fresh and untainted feelings was what compelled me to focus on him and his younger brother, as well as my Jewish-Algerian partner, Philip Touitou, who collaborated with me on my last film, *Partly Private*, and whom I deeply enjoy filming for his sincerity and emotions.

What was the biggest challenge in making the film?

My biggest challenge was to find a way to film an 'impossible' city – a city that has been so over-documented and in many ways has its own image, which in my mind is larger than any documentary film can capture. I found that each time I opened my camera and filmed Jerusalem, its image was overtaking what I wanted to express.

Every city has a 'filmic' quality to it – that very quality that already has a character associated with it. It was this character that I wanted to avoid, or more accurately, I wanted to make personal. Therefore, I found myself filming mostly 'inside', focusing on my family and their realisations about the place and avoiding any recognisable imagery of the city. The result, I hope, is a very personal testimony to how the outside world affected us.

I would like people to feel – not think – when they leave the theatre. My film is an emotional experience, not an intellectual one.

Name your favourite woman-directed film and why.

Ben Zaken by Efrat Corem, which premiered at the 2015 Berlinale Forum. *Ben Zaken* is a sensitive portrait of the south of Israel and of an environment that is marked by stagnation and lack of resources. I was deeply moved by the director's dialogue with the place itself – not in relationship to how the more privileged parts of society may view it, but from within. The characters in the film had their own dialogue with themselves and the culture they came from. So often we try to look at 'others' – tell stories in underdeveloped places, judge them and set the drama within them. Corem comes from the city she filmed, and the reality she is expressing is her own. She makes no apologies and does not attempt to seduce any audience beside the one she is representing. I think this takes a lot of courage and integrity – to find your own voice and way to express not only your story, but the reality you are setting it within.

Freja Dam, in: *Indiewire*, 11 September 2015



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Danae Elon was born in Tel Aviv in 1970. She grew up in both Italy and Israel as the only child of Beth and Amos Elon. From 1991 to 1995, she studied at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Danae Elon works as a director, producer, and cinematographer. She has also been the curator of the documentary competition of the Cinema South film festival in Sderot, Israel, as well as a lecturer in cinematography and documentary film at Sapir Academic College. Danae Elon has lived and worked for the past few years in Montreal, Canada.

Films

1996: *Never Again, Forever* (56 min.). 1999: *Wild Mint* (60 min.). 2004: *Another Road Home* (79 min.). 2009: *Partly Private* (82 min.). 2015: *P.S. Jerusalem*.