

ينعاد عليكو

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

A FILM BY
SCANDAR COPTI





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● Country	Palestine, Germany, France, Italy, Qatar
● Duration	123
● Language	Arabic, Hebrew (Subtitled: English)
● Screen	1:85
● Sound	5.1
● Premiere	Venice Film Festival Orrizonti

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS



While celebrating Purim at her university in Jerusalem, Fifi, a young Palestinian woman is hospitalized following a car accident. Though her injuries are minor, she fears her newfound freedom at school will now come under the scrutiny of her conservative parents. Meanwhile, back in Haifa, Fifi’s older brother Rami panics as he faces his own personal crisis - Shirley, his Jewish girlfriend, reveals she is pregnant and plans to carry the baby to term. Behind closed doors, the family's deep financial troubles come into focus while Hanan, Fifi and Rami's mother, plans her eldest daughter's wedding.

Led by an incredible cast of mostly non-professional actors, HAPPY HOLIDAYS is a dynamic, sociopolitical family saga which thoughtfully considers the myriad intricacies of Israeli Arab life. Directed by Oscar-nominated Palestinian filmmaker Scandar Copti (AJAMI), the family’s stories and everyday anxieties weave together a collective portrait of a pressurized society, and “speak to a larger culture of silence, shame, social pressure and rampant prejudice” (*Variety*).

● **Production Company**

Fresco Films, Red Balloon Film, Tessalit Productions, Intramovies

● **Screenwriter**

Scandar Copti

● **Co-producers & partners**

Tony Copti, Jiries Copti, Dorothe Beinemeier, Jean Brehat Marco Valerio Fusco, Micaela Fusco

● **Cast**

Manar Shehab, Wafaa Aoun, Meirav Memoresky, Toufic Danial



Scandar Copti

Screenwriter and director

Scandar Copti is a Palestinian filmmaker and visual artist from Yafa. Renowned for his unique approach to working with non-actors, he teaches this technique at NYU Abu Dhabi and internationally. His work draws on personal experiences and broader societal and political narratives, offering a nuanced perspective on the Palestinian minority in Israel. Copti's debut feature film, «Ajami,» co-directed with Yaron Shani, received the Camera d'Or Special Mention at the Cannes Film Festival and was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the 82nd Academy Awards. He is also the recipient of the Sutherland Trophy.

Filmography, videography

● AJAMI, 2009

Co-directed with Yaron Shani

Scandar Copti

Screenwriter and director

«The film uses a dramatic structure that leads the audience to reach false conclusions based on assumptions»

What was your inspiration for making this film?

The inspiration for «Happy Holidays» began with a conversation I overheard as a teenager. A female relative told her son, «Don't ever let a woman tell you what to do,» referring to his wife. This paradox revealed how deeply entrenched patriarchal values are and how they compel even women to uphold them.

Later, during my university years, I observed similar patterns in Israeli society, where many narratives and rituals are used to support and sustain both the patriarchy and the militarization of society.

Because I knew and cared about these people, I couldn't see them as «bad.» I realized they were good people trapped in a corrupt system that shapes their reality through social interactions, cultural norms, and communication. Their lives were regulated by a strict system of reward and punishment, which shaped their perceptions and constructed their realities.

In «Happy Holidays,» I examine these mechanisms of reality construction and their impact on individuals' values. The film uses a dramatic structure that leads the audience to reach false conclusions based on assumptions. This approach allows viewers to experience firsthand how perceptions are shaped, realities are constructed, and how conflict often originates from the clash of opposing perceptions of the same reality.

Tell us more about the film structure.

Unlike classic multi-strand films where the viewer generally knows what is happening to each character at every given moment, in «Happy Holidays», the viewer is not all-knowing. Here, the film immerses the viewer in the struggles of a single character at a time, allowing the viewer to experience their world solely through the partial and regulated truths that each character lives by.

Each of the four chapters of the film tells a story that revolves around a specific character: Rami, Hanan, Miri, and Fifi. For the duration of the chapter, each character becomes the center of our attention. Once the audience reaches a significant incident or resolution, they are detached from this character and sent on a journey with a different one.

This emotional shift is intentional. As we move from one point of view to the other, the events take on a new and surprising meaning.

Little by little, the audience realizes that all the characters are merely pawns orchestrated by political, racial, social, and economic forces regulated by a strict system of reward and punishment.

By presenting these stories from multiple viewpoints, I aim to evoke empathy for each character, even when they do terrible things. I also aim to illustrate how people justify their actions and how injustices are sustained.

Why did you decide to tell this film through the eyes of Palestinian and Israeli women?

My artistic process always starts with a personal annoyance, for which I try to find the origins. These origins are usually connected to a person or a few who have influenced my life and created this annoyance. By digging deep into past experiences and analyzing the dynamics between myself and these people, the story takes shape, and the characters come to life.

I decided to tell this film through the eyes of Palestinian and Israeli women because they are often the ones who suffer the most. Our characters navigate personal and shared challenges within their societies' dominant values and customs.

Without diminishing the role of direct patriarchy, which is apparent in the film,

I chose this approach to demonstrate the vicious cycle of oppression and how it is sustained. Through these female characters, «Happy Holidays» offers a nuanced portrayal of the interdependence between Palestinian subculture and dominant Israeli culture, exposing the varied processes of reality construction within each society and their mutual influence on ordinary individuals from both sides.

The whole cast is made up of non-actors. Can you tell us about the casting process? Your characters all feel so «lived in»—they are real people, and both the characters and their performances feel so sincere. What is your method for directing non-actors?

To maintain a sense of authenticity, I worked with non-actors using the 'Singular Drama'

«I aim to evoke empathy for each character, even when they do terrible things»



method developed during the making of my previous film «Ajami.» This method leverages the «Paradox of Fiction,» which is the human capacity to respond emotionally to fictional characters and events.

I selected people to act in the film based on their resemblance to the personalities and professions of the characters I had written. For instance, a doctor in the film is a real doctor, a nurse is a real nurse, a teacher is a real teacher, and so on.

These non-actors embarked on a psychological journey through intensive 'Singular Drama' workshops that I led over the course of a year. In the workshops, the participants didn't focus on text, goals, mise-en-scene, or acting techniques. Instead, they explored their characters' private histories through role-playing and discussions, building relationships through experiences in the actual filming locations before the filming started.

Over time, they deeply identified with their characters, seeing them as extensions of their own personalities. In the film, the non-actors reacted spontaneously to unfolding

events without ever seeing the script or knowing the plot's details. Their dialogue and behaviors came from their hearts, based on their understanding of the reality that unfolded before them.

The film was shot chronologically, with two handheld cameras closely following the characters and capturing situations as they naturally happened, just like in a documentary. This approach avoided blocking and established a logical progression in the actors' minds, charging them with the appropriate emotions from one scene to the next and making every take unique and impossible to reproduce. Sometimes, the filming incorporated documentary scenes of actual events in which the actors actively participated.

To avoid any sense of a 'film set' that might disrupt the authenticity of the scenes, we did not use any film lights or even a boom microphone, and we worked with a tiny, almost invisible crew.



Fifi and her mother couldn't be more different and yet similar. How did you decide to write these characters and their relationship?

In the patriarchal nature of Palestinian society, the main driving forces behind the lives of our Palestinian characters are honor, shame, and the response to the infamous question: «What would people say?» Both Hanan and Fifi understand the rules of society, yet they are worlds apart in how they deal with them.

Hanan, the mother, conforms to societal expectations and can't see beyond her set of values and beliefs. She cannot fathom her daughter Fifi's choices, as they are beyond her realm of possibility. On the other hand, Fifi navigates these rules by leading a double life. She lies and hides aspects of herself to achieve self-realization. Despite their different approaches, both are driven by the same goal of finding personal fulfillment within the constraints of their society.

All the characters and situations in «Happy Holidays» are inspired by real-life events and

developed based on actual societal dynamics. Through Hanan and Fifi, we see the tension between the two generations sticking to tradition and seeking personal freedom. The film shows how, in trying to protect our loved ones, we can unintentionally hurt them by not accepting their individual choices. The characters are never portrayed as bad; instead, we understand their motives within their own set of values. Their stories help the audience see how people navigate and challenge societal pressures in their own ways, highlighting the personal battles and triumphs that shape our lives.

Why «Happy Holidays»?

The name «Happy Holidays» is both ironic and reflective of the film's themes. In Israel, holidays play a significant role in shaping the national psyche and personal experiences. For Israelis, these holidays often reinforce a sense of historical persecution and trauma. Palestinians in Israel are also affected, as these holidays are prominently featured in education, media, and workplaces. In the film, Fifi experiences these holidays at the Israeli school where she interns as a teacher.

perspectives of the characters, I aim to highlight the complexities and nuances of their experiences, urging the audience to question and reflect on their own beliefs and assumptions.

For the audiences in Venice and Toronto, I hope they connect with the human stories at the heart of the film. I want them to empathize with the characters, understand their struggles, and see the world through their eyes. My ultimate goal is to inspire a deeper understanding of the issues explored in the film.

Ultimately, «Happy Holidays» emphasizes that true freedom is interconnected. No one is free until everyone is free from all forms of oppression—political, social, and cultural. The film aims to remind us that our struggles for freedom and equality are deeply linked.



In Arabic, the title «Yinad Aleykou» has a double meaning. It is a holiday greeting that translates to «May this be repeated for you,» traditionally wishing for many more happy days to come.

However, «Yinad Aleykou - May this be repeated for you» also takes on a literal tone in the film. It appears just before Fifi's story is repeated, taking us back to the beginning and showing the events from her perspective. This also suggests that the cycle of oppression repeats across generations.

What kind of impact do you hope your film will have? What hopes do you have for the Venice and Toronto audiences?

I hope «Happy Holidays» will provoke thought and encourage a culture of critical thinking among viewers. I want the film to spark conversations about the traditions, values, and societal norms that shape our lives. By presenting the different

