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FILM REVIEWS

Amongst PIAF's more topical film entries this year is ***Lemon Tree***, from Israeli writer/director Eran Riklis, and his Palestinian-Israeli co-writer Suha Arraf, both of whom worked on *The Syrian Bride*. Based on a true story, this film centres around Palestinian widow Salma (Hiam Abbass), who lives right on the West Bank's border Palestinian-Israeli border. Salma's three children have all grown and moved on, and now she spends her days lovingly tending a lemon tree grove left behind for her by her late father. Everything seems hunky dory until the Israeli defence minister moves in opposite her, on the other side of the border. His security team ruthlessly dubs the lemon grove a "security threat" and orders its destruction. Salma, who has little else in her life, decides to fight against the order by launching an appeal, despite strong discouragement from her Palestinian neighbours. This conflict is obviously intended as a microcosm of the larger political situation that surrounds it but the film is a little too safe. The characters are all likeable, and the 'enemy' is the completely undeveloped secret service representative. The film's strength instead lies in its depiction of wordless human connection. In her rebellious attempts to water the grove, Salma shares eye contact with the defence minister's wife, Mira (Rona Lipaz-Michael), who watches from her balcony or patio. As Salma's defiance clashes with Mira's helplessness, the two seem to empower one another, through stares alone. Likewise, Riklis skilfully negotiates Salma's unique relationship with her much younger lawyer, Ziad (Ali Sulliman). Politics may encroach from all sides here, but ultimately it is Salma's (and Mira's, to a certain extent) personal growth that forms the core of this film.

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