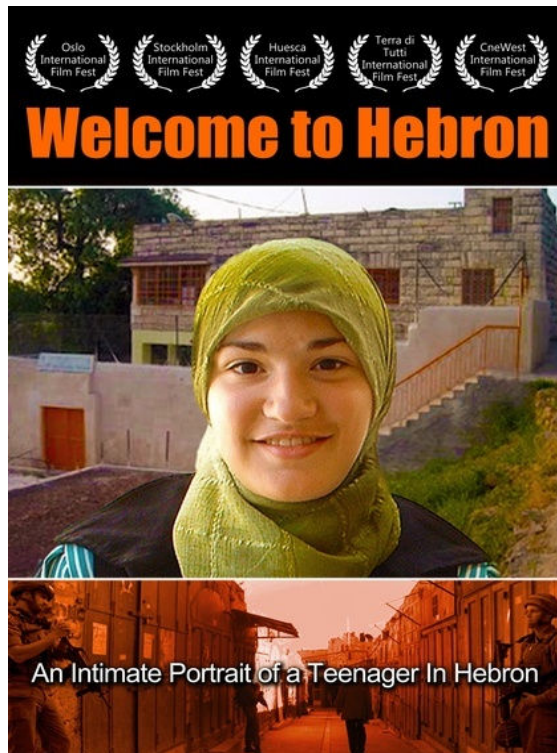


WELCOME TO HEBRON: PORTRAIT OF A TEENAGER IN HEBRON

Guidebook



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SUMMARY OVERVIEW

Leila Sarsour is a student at the Al-Qurtuba [Cordoba] School, a Palestinian high school for girls located in the ancient West Bank city of Hebron (Al-Khalil in Arabic). Al-Qurtuba School is surrounded by Israeli military installations and settlements populated by Israeli Settlers. *Welcome to Palestine* depicts everyday life for Palestinians attempting to lead normal lives in this volatile city surrounded by checkpoints and barbed wired. Importantly, 17-year-old Leila, an observant Muslim, breaks the widespread Western stereotype of the weak, victimized Arab woman. Leila is strong, intelligent and outspoken—as are many of her female compatriots. She yearns for a life free from the oppression and violence which are characteristic of the Israeli occupation and its continuing expansion.

EXTENDED DESCRIPTION

Welcome to Palestine premiered in November 2007 at the Stockholm Film Festival in Sweden, and aired on Swedish TV (SVT) in February 2008. It was directed and shot by Terje Carlsson, a freelance journalist based for many years in Jerusalem, working mostly for Swedish National Radio and Television. Carlsson has produced features from ex-Yugoslavia, South Africa and different parts of the Middle East. He also directed the award-winning *Israel vs Israel*, a documentary about Jewish peace activists who work to end the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. Produced by Ekedalen Produktion, *Welcome to Palestine* was edited by Josef Nyberg, with sound editing performed by Ola Eliasson. The 55-minute documentary was filmed on location in Hebron over a period of 2 ½ years.

Welcome to Palestine focuses almost entirely on the everyday violence and harassment committed by Israeli settlers against Palestinian inhabitants of Hebron. Leila, her friends and classmates are regularly attacked by Israeli settlers who, believing that Biblical promise gives them eminent domain in Hebron, receive protection from Israeli soldiers as they attempt to colonize every last inch of Hebron in complete disregard for Palestinians who have lived and worked there for countless generations. Carlsson's direct cinema style captures these vicious attacks as they play out in the context of a city arbitrarily divided by Israeli decree into segregated areas for Arabs and Jews, respectively. *Welcome to Palestine* reveals the arrogance, bigotry and hatred endemic to the Israeli settlement project, as it depicts foul-mouthed orthodox Jewish women slinging obscene invectives ("Whore!" "Filthy bitch!") at Leila and other Palestinian women and girls who, proceeding to go about their daily lives, must inevitably cross into areas now heavily populated by the inhospitable and intransigent Jewish settlers. Merely walking to and from school, shopping for food, or simply standing outside on their balconies may incur the wrath of these religious fanatics. Such scenes of unwarranted provocation, to which Leila and company respond with commendable, nonviolent fortitude, are complemented by shots of stone- and egg-throwing orthodox Jewish children who have clearly been taught by their elders to behave blindly and thoughtlessly vis-à-vis Palestinians, and whose actions occasionally result in injury to Leila and her friends.

In addition to candid shooting, *Welcome to Hebron* presents interviews with Leila in the company of her friends, family and neighbors as well as with Feryal Abu Haikal, retired headmistress of Al-Qurtuba School, and Yehuda Shaul, a former Israeli soldier stationed in Hebron who subsequently formed Breaking the Silence, an Israeli organization dedicated to airing publicly the human rights violations committed against Palestinians on a regular basis by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the occupied Palestinian territories.

BACKGROUND - HEBRON AND THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION

The Israeli occupation of Hebron formally began during the War in June 1967.

Although Hebron was officially occupied by Israel in 1967, it always contained Jewish inhabitants. Historically these Jews were religiously observant and lived fully integrated for centuries with their mostly Muslim neighbors. Hebron is associated with the Abrahamic legacy crucial to both Judaism and Islam; according to legend, Abraham's wife Sarah, and his daughters-in-law Rebecca and Leah are buried there. Effectively Arabized, the Jews of Hebron had little socially, ethnically or politically in common with the European Jews who would colonize Palestine in the 20th century. Except for a small group of settlers in the late 19th century, these European Jews were mostly secular and influenced by various manifestations of socialism, communism, and pastoralism. In typical colonial fashion, these settlers practiced techniques of divide-and-conquer in an effort to extricate their more traditional co-religionists from the Arab communities in which they had for so long been integral members, and persuade them to identify with Jewish nationalism. In 1929, in reaction to Zionist provocations concerning religious control over Jerusalem holy sites, Palestinians rioted against Jews in Hebron, attacking hundreds and killing anywhere from 23-60; nearly 500 Jews were spared because hidden by their Muslim neighbors. Resulting tensions increased following the establishment of Israel in 1948 and, more so, the occupation of 1967, when Israeli colonization and concomitant Palestinian displacement grew and was bolstered by official Israeli approval in 1970 of the presence of armed Jewish settlers in occupied Hebron—in direct violation of international law. These tensions were epitomized in December 1994, when 29 Muslim worshippers were murdered, and 125 more wounded, by a Jewish religious extremist, Baruch Goldstein, in the Cave of the Patriarchs, the site of a mosque located in Hebron. Goldstein was a member of the militant Jewish Defense League then led by Jewish right-wing nationalist Meir Kahane.

After the Oslo Interim Agreement of 1995, which followed the Oslo Accords of 1993 establishing the Palestinian Authority (PA), headed by Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat, as the official government of the West Bank and Gaza, Hebron was divided into three parts: Area A, to be administered by the PA; Area B, also to be administered by the PA but subject to IDF security; and Area C, to be administered by the IDF. In 1997, the ensuing Hebron Agreement re-divided Hebron in two parts: H-1, an area comprising 80% of the city and inhabited by 115,000 Palestinians, to be administered by the PA; and H-2 comprising 35,000 Palestinian inhabitants and 500 Jewish settlers, to be administered by the PA but subject to IDF security. According to B'Tselem, a major Israeli human rights organization, "Israel has continually ignored its duty to protect the safety and welfare of the Palestinians living in Area H-2. Most IDF effort is directed toward protecting settlers in the city, while grossly violating the human rights of the city's Palestinian residents" (http://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200308_hebron_area_h2).

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MAP OF OCCUPIED WEST BANK



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