



SAFE HAVEN ?

A DAY AT SIRONIT BEACH, NETANYA

A FILM BY

Omer Toib • Nina Wexler • Milena d'Omano





SYNOPSIS

A day at Sironit Beach in Netanya unfolds the tension between the dream of the "Promised Land", the reality of war, and the complex experience of French Jews navigating life between France and Israel.

APPROACH

Inspired by Cinéma Vérité, this documentary offers an intimate look at the everyday lives of French beachgoers in Netanya, a coastal city north of Tel Aviv often referred to as Israel's "French Riviera." Since the outbreak of the war, immigration requests from French Jews have surged by 500%, and their personal stories raise profound questions about the choice to build a future in Israel.

Through unobtrusive, close observation, the camera captures their responses to unfolding events, their navigation of the broader Israeli reality, and the quiet tensions between diaspora Judaism and Israeli identity.

By contrasting the bright, languid rhythms of the Mediterranean shore with the volatility of a nation at war, the film explores the emotional and ideological complexities of "aliyah" (Jewish immigration to Israel). At its core, it asks: can Israel truly be the safe haven it promises to be?



DIRECTORS' NOTES

After learning that requests to move from France to Israel had risen sharply during the War, we were intrigued and decided to investigate in Netanya - a city known for its large French population. Because the city is famous for its beaches, and the French community is known to be enthusiastic beachgoers, we started there. On the sand, we heard more French than Hebrew. After speaking with several French beachgoers, we realized there was a film to be made.

We set out to capture Netanya's layered social reality - a place where French, Jewish, Israeli, and other immigrant communities meet and mix. The film was shot entirely on the beach, in a single day. Most of the participants were people we met there on the spot.

We chose a Cinéma vérité approach: spontaneous interviews and unobtrusive observation, so the film could reflect the atmosphere as it was, without imposing our own perspective. We wanted to see what ordinary felt like on a day at the beach during extraordinary times.

The film explores the idea of "home" and the immigrant experience during wartime. As international film students living in Israel at a time of upheaval, these questions are personal to us. Between us, we carry multiple identities: one of us is Jewish Israeli, another Jewish French-Israeli, and the third French and not Jewish. Like our subjects, we grapple with how to adapt without losing our roots, and with the sacrifices and choices that come with making Israel a home.



FILMMAKERS

Omer Toib is a documentary filmmaker and MFA student in the International Documentary Cinema MFA Program at Tel Aviv University. His short film *Gordon* won first prize at the EPOS International Art and Culture Festival, and his short *Safe Haven?* is currently screening at international festivals. He is now directing his first feature-length documentary for *Yes Docu*, *The Fans Are Mine*. In 2024, he founded *Ela Studios*, a production company. With a background in research and urban innovation, Omer brings a multidisciplinary approach to filmmaking, blending social insight with cinematic storytelling.

Milena d'Ornano is a documentary filmmaker. After earning a bachelor's in Political Science and Psychology and master's in International Relations from Columbia University, she worked in social justice and the private sector. She then pursued an MFA in Documentary Cinema at the Tisch Film & Television School of Tel Aviv University and co-founded a production company dedicated to sociological documentaries. She co-directed and edited two short films—*Gordon*, which won first prize at the EPOS International Art and Culture Festival, and *Safe Haven?*, currently screening at various international festivals. Her latest short, *PlatoholiC*, is now in the festival submission phase.

Nina Wexler is a second-year MFA student in international Documentary Cinema at the Tisch Film & Television School, Tel Aviv University. She is driven by a passion for exploring cultural and philosophical themes through the lens of documentary filmmaking. Nina started her studies in the *Classes Préparatoires*. Then she went on to earn a bachelor's degree in Philosophy at the Sorbonne, followed by a Master's in Philosophy and Art History. Eager to unite her love for cinema with her connection to Israel, Nina chose to pursue her MFA in Tel Aviv.



SALES & ENQUIRIES

omer.toib@ela-studios.com

milena.dornano@ela-studios.com

+972547363031- Omer Toib

+972527965817 - Milena Dornano

Film Trailer

<https://vimeo.com/1062859422?share=copy>