

CLOSE TO HOME

(Karov La Bayit)



CLOSE TO HOME | 90 mins | Dalia Hager & Vidi Bilu | Israel 2005

Theatrical Release Date: April 6th 2007

Running Time: 90 mins

Cert: 15

Cast: Smadar Sayar, Naama Schendar, Irit Suki, Katia Zimbris

Smadar and Mirit, both 18 years old, are assigned to patrol the streets of Jerusalem together as part of their military service. Worlds apart in personality their initial frosty relationship changes to friendship as they deal with their own emotional issues, the crushes and break-ups in their love lives, as well as the political reality of the city they live in.

Further information: kate@sodapictures.com | 020 7240 6060

Images: martin@sodapictures.com

Distributed in the UK by Soda Pictures
11-13 Broad Court | London WC2B 5PY
www.sodapictures.com

CLOSE TO HOME – Directors Statement
by Dalia Hager and Vidi Bilu

Many films dealing with the Army issue in Israel were made based on the experience of men. Not even one film was made based on the experience of women, in spite of the fact that they were always present.

We have both decided that it was high time their story, ours, is told.

As women who live in Israel, we nourish the military myth like every other citizen of the country. We live along with the fighting male figure constituting the role of mothers, wives, girlfriends and military unit mates; we support them and are supposed to become alike. Renouncing this pattern is perceived as betrayal . However, as we do not actually operate from within the myth but rather along side it, we can question the relevancy of the military service to our own life.

We chose to place the main characters of the film as soldiers with the patrolling police unit of the city of Jerusalem, as one of us actually did this kind of activity in her military service. Throughout this experience it has become possible for us to show our point of view regarding the Israeli occupation in this disputed city.

We wanted to make a film with a political meaning. We wanted to make people think, but not tell them what to think; therefore, throughout the script writing and directing process we were always looking for the individual, its desires and weaknesses in this political situation.

CLOSE TO HOME HAS SCREENED AT THE FOLLOWING FESTIVALS:
BELINALE 2006 | TRIBECA 2006 | PUSAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

CAST AND CREW CREDITS

Screenwriters:	Dalia Hager, Vidi Bilu
Directors:	Dalia Hager, Vidi Bilu
Producers:	Marek Rozenbaum, Itai Tamir
Cinematographer:	Yaron Scharf
Music:	Yonatan Bar Giora
Sound	Itai Elohev
Sound Design	Aviv Aldema
Production Design	Avi Fahima
Costume Design	Li Alembik
Make-up Artist	Merav Horovitz Bushusha
First A.D	Avi Satat
Cast:	Smadar Sayar
	Naaina Schendar
	Irit Suki
	Katia Zimbris

CREW DIRECTOR – DALIA HAGER

Dalia Hager studied at the School of Cinema and Television in Tel Aviv. Before developing and financing Close to Home, Dalia worked as a news editor for a daily newspaper as well as the editor of the Cinameteque magazine and also taught screenwriting. For the last five years Dalia has committed herself to development and production of a number of feature film projects.

CREW DIRECTOR – VIDILILU

Vidi Bilu studied photography before studying cinema at University where she majored in Directing. Since then she has directed, edited and produced a number of projects including shorts, documentaries and commercials.

CAST (SMADAR) SMADAR SAYAR

Smadar studied drama, classical ballet and modern dance for several years. She has had roles in numerous TV shows and has also hosted a number of programmes. Smadar has also directed two video dance pieces.

CAST (MIRIT) NAAMA SCHENDAR

Naama studied drama and literature and also did army service. After her discharge she travelled across Europe and America before going on to appear in a number of plays and student films.

INTERVIEW WITH DALIA HAGER AND VIDI BILU

What inspired you to tell this story now? How did you team up?

Before we started working on this film, we wrote a TV series together. We had to decide where did the characters of that TV series get to know each other, we were amused by the fact that in Israeli television men always get to know each other from the army service; but when you think about female characters you don't think about the army although women serve in the army as well. This led us to talk about our army service and we both noticed that we have never talked about it before. Vidi served as a patroller in Jerusalem, and the film "Close To Home" grew from that talk. (the TV series, by the way, was never made).

Are people aware of what goes on in the army?

Not really. People know what they did in the army, but they are not familiar with other jobs apart from their own. For example, When we held the auditions, we met around 200 actresses and told them what's the film is about. Only the ones who lived in Jerusalem knew that women soldiers did such a job.

Is it just a coming-of-age story or are you making a political statement? Do you have a political intent and if so, what is it?

If it was just a coming-of-age story, we wouldn't set it in the army. Of course we are against the Israeli occupation, but it's a film, not a political pamphlet. We wanted to make people think but not tell them *what* to think.

How does the fact that young people are used in the army for checking, searching Palestinians affect Israeli society?

For these young people the Palestinians become the ones they are checking, searching and registering and without noticing they stop being real human beings for them. The Palestinians of course feel humiliated and disturbed by the checking and the whole situation just increases the mistrust and hatred between the two people.

Do women in Israel have a strong place in the army? Are there any social effects?

We both think that since the army is a masculine paradigm, there is no reason that women will find their way in it. We don't share the excitement that you can always find in the Israeli media when, for example, one woman succeeds in finishing a combat pilot course. We can't see any feminist values in that military world. We don't think that the women's role is to fight for equality in the army, but to struggle against those values which turn Israel into a military society.

The big problem in Israel is that the army service is a springboard to major jobs in civilian life (The generals are becoming prime ministers – Ariel Sharon, Yitzhak Rabin etc – and Head Managers of big companies). Since most of the women are doing inferior jobs in the army, they will get inferior jobs afterwards. (by they way, The Israeli-Palestinians, who are not serving in the army, have the same problem (and other ones, of course).

Do people talk about this role of women in society – their army service?

No, women tend not to talk about that chapter in their lives once it's over. They don't feel it has any connection to their own life. They don't feel they belong to that military system, and they just want to forget about it and move on. And if women don't talk about it, why would men do?

More and more people are finding their 'excuses' to get out of the army – both men and women – why is that?

When we both served in the army (around 20 years ago) it was not a question for us if we wanted to do it or not. It was an obligation and we did our duty. Now it's different - young people ask themselves if they want to do it or not, and many of them skip it by pretending they have mental disorder. It's not a political movement, everyone take care of themselves. Most of these young people are indifferent to the political situation, which has been going on for so long. They don't see any point in getting killed for their country, and they just see the army service as a waste of time. Probably, unlike previous generations, the existence of the State of Israel is obvious for them and they don't feel it is in a real danger.

The ones who declare they don't want to serve in the army because of conscience reasons (the occupation) are still very few, and they are put in jail.

Tell me about the two main characters – what are the major concerns in their lives.

Mirit wanted to serve in an army base far from her parent's house, but found herself stuck with her suffocating parents. She is very afraid of authorities and that's why she always prefers to obey the rules. She wants to be loved and tries to please anyone (her commander, Smadar etc).

Smadar is completely the opposite: She doesn't really care in what place she is serving in the army. Everything concerned with the army service look the same for her – an unpleasant way to spend two years of her life – and she just want to get it over. For her, rules are invented in order to break them. She always revolts and looks for action. She can't stand people who don't agree with her.

How did you select the lead actresses?

We went to all the actor's agencies and met around 200 actresses aged 20-25. in those meetings we asked them if they served in the army and what kind of role they had. But the army service was not our criteria to choose the cast it was just a subject to talk about, in order to get to know them a little bit. From these 200 actresses we choose 30 for the audition. We looked for actresses who still looked like girls.

They auditioned in pairs. Smadar and Naama are from the same agency, so it was quite a coincidence that they came together, and we both liked them very much. Neither of them had much professional experience and It fitted our concept of finding unknown faces (to the Israeli audience), in order to keep a sort of authenticity.

Naama served in the army in the same place we shot the army base in the film. She was very happy to come back to that place as a free citizen, because she suffered very much when she served in the army. Smadar skipped the army service. When asked how did she managed to play a soldier, she answered that she talked with friends who served in the army and that in Israel everybody know what is like to serve in the army, so it was not such a big deal for her.

How long did the shoot take?

The shooting lasted only 21 days. most of the days we were shooting in the center of Jerusalem. We worked with Telephoto lens, so the camera was far from the actresses and that gave us the ability to use often the passersby who were crossing the frame, instead of extras. That helped us to keep a sort of authenticity and of course saved money.

The opening scene is particularly strong, how did the actors feel about shooting the search scenes?

Since the searching process is a very sensitive subject, we decided that the actresses who played the Palestinian women who were being searched would not be Arabs, but Jews. Everybody, even in Israel, is convinced that these women are Palestinians, because actually we all look alike.

Do you want to show the film in the Palestinian territories too? Why is that important to you?

Yes, we want to show the film in the Palestinians territories, because although we focused on the two young soldiers, the Palestinians are part of this story. It's interesting for us to see what they feel about it. From the outside, it may seem that Israelis and Palestinians can't talk with each other, but individuals can talk quite easily. It's the authorities which fail to, or don't really want to establish a way of dialogue.

Who did you make the film for?

The film was aimed to the Israeli audience. The Israelis don't like to see films about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, because they live in it and have too much of it on the media. Actually, they are sick and tired of this conflict, which has lasted too many years, and they have become indifferent to it. In this film we tried to wake them up with a point of view which has never been seen before. From the reaction to the film it seems that we succeeded: People said that the film was very strong and caused them to think about the place they live in. We couldn't expect more.