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## Movie Review

by Joshua Sinai

**Aner Preminger** (Director and Producer) “*Present Continuous*”, December 19, 2013, Run-time: 100 minutes, Hebrew with English Subtitles, Director & Producer, Official site (includes a movie trailer) URL: <http://www.anerpreminger.com/index.php/en/films/32-present-continuous>. Distributed by: <http://www.go2films.com/New-Releases/Present-Continuous>.

This fictional drama is set in 2002, at the height of the Second Palestinian Intifada, which began in late September 2000. After some two years of constant Palestinian suicide bombings, with many Israeli fatalities, Israeli society is in the midst of a deep crisis. As the action begins, on a Friday afternoon, in preparation for the Sabbath weekend, Ruty (Chagit Dasberg) is shopping at Machane Yehuda, Jerusalem’s crowded, historic market, when a Palestinian female suicide bomber blows herself up, close enough for Ruty to feel the bombing’s explosion and see its aftermath, with the killed and injured shoppers lying on the flames-filled ground. Ruty returns home, but does not confide her traumatized experience to anyone. She is so unable to deal with the enormous stress and anxiety she suffered a few hours earlier that she can’t focus on preparing the Sabbath dinner, as she keeps burning cake after cake in the oven. In her disoriented and desperate state, Ruty decides that her only option is to protect her family from this constant crisis and violent carnage outside their apartment. With Ofer (Matan Preminger), her 19-year old son, returning home from his army service for the Sabbath, and her husband, Yoel (Eyal Nachmias) and Noa (Tamar Preminger), their 15-year-old daughter, all taking their afternoon naps, she decides to barricade their 4<sup>th</sup> floor apartment with a chain lock that is reinforced by a club steering wheel lock. While her family is sound asleep, she removes and hides their cell phones, including detaching the house telephone. She also turns back the clocks to let them sleep longer than they had wanted. When they wake up, they find the apartment locked, disconnected from the outside world (except for the television sets), with their street deserted for the Sabbath. “Why are you doing this?” the son asks angrily. “I want quiet,” the mother replies. “How long do you plan on this madness?” the son adds. “Until there’s peace. I don’t know when,” the mother replies. The husband then observes, “this is completely insane.”

Most of the film’s action is set inside the apartment, but it also includes external scenes of what could have happened to the family members if they had been outside. The son’s tank unit is desperately trying to reach him by telephone for a sudden deployment that evening for what is supposed to be a retaliatory operation against the Palestinians in the West Bank. Making matters worse, if he doesn’t return to his unit that evening he will be disciplined for unauthorized absence. The daughter is expecting to go out that evening with her friends to a club for a rock concert. The father is supposed to be jogging with his running group, including a young woman who is reportedly his mistress. Finally, the Palestinian mastermind of the Machane Yehuda bombing, who had escaped from the incident, keeps menacingly showing up at these and other events taking place that evening in Jerusalem.

As the movie’s action progresses to its climactic resolution, we see Ruty’s family’s dynamics play out, with the husband and children becoming increasingly desperate to break out of the barricaded apartment, while the mother does everything in her power to protect her family by detaching them completely from the terrifying and deadly world outside.

When this movie appeared it was considered one of the first Israeli movies to describe the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict not only from an Israeli civilian perspective, but from the view of an Israeli mother. This is also unlike other films that present the perspective of Israeli soldiers who deploy in the front lines, such as the “Beaufort” (released in January 2008), which was set at an IDF post in the mountaintop *Beaufort* castle in southern Lebanon, and which is also well worth watching.

Moreover, “Present Continuous” presents a side of Israel not usually highlighted even in the printed literature: the serious cracks in the population’s resilience to constant Palestinian terrorist attacks, which almost 15 years after the period in which this movie’s plot was set, today, again, features constant Palestinian knifing and gun attacks against Israelis, with Jerusalem’s consumer and tourist economies suffering, as a result. Further exacerbating the tense situation, some 300,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem and its suburbs, while not Israeli citizens, hold Israeli-issued blue identification cards that grant them permanent resident status, thus enabling them to blend in and work in the largely Jewish West Jerusalem. With heightened tensions between Israelis and Palestinians in Greater Jerusalem, this has made Jerusalem’s Jews anxious about the free movement of Palestinians in their midst. Moreover, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s right-wing coalition government appearing uninterested in pursuing a serious peace process with the Palestinian Authority, there surely are numerous Israeli mothers like Ruty who are extremely worried about the safety of their families – making this movie invaluable in presenting a portrait of what it is like to live in such a ‘hurting stalemate,’ with constant thoughts of how to escape from it all. It is for this reason that the movie’s final credits include a dedication to both Israeli and Palestinian mothers.

On a side note, despite the movie’s overall disturbing plot line, the family’s dynamics are also marked by some humorous exchanges. Moreover, for those with a sharp eye, at the opening scene when Ruty is strolling through the market, Mr. Preminger, the movie’s director, can be seen for a few seconds sitting outside a café. The film’s son and daughter characters are played by Mr. Preminger’s children, which also enables him to include their appearances in his family’s home movies in the film’s powerful flashback scenes.

This movie, which has received numerous awards at film festivals around the world, is highly recommended for showings in courses on terrorism and counterterrorism as it portrays the psychological impact of constant terrorist attacks on their targeted populations.

The movie’s director and producer, Aner Preminger, who is related to the legendary Hollywood director Otto Preminger (“The Exodus”, 1960), is a professor of film studies at Sapir Academic College, in the northwestern Negev desert, near Sderot, and a Filmmaker/Film Scholar at The Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

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