

Film review: ‘The Reports on Sarah and Saleem:’ An affair to remember



TOKYO: Countless movies have tackled extramarital affairs, but Palestinian auteur Muayad Alayan gives the theme a new twist to his second feature outing, “The Reports on Sarah and Saleem.”

Screened at the recent 31st Tokyo International Film Festival, the movie is a heartrending account of the humiliation and harassment an Israeli woman and a Palestinian man face when they are caught having an adulterous relationship. Not by their families, but by intelligence officers, underlining how political rivalries have begun to slip between the sheets. What seems utterly cruel is the kind of punishment the man has to undergo by authorities.

Written by Alayan’s brother, Rami, the first scenes in the film show Sarah (Sivane Kretchner) and Saleem (Adeeb Safadi) in the throes of their love affair. While she is married to an Israeli intelligence officer and runs a cafe, he is a struggling Palestinian delivery boy with a pregnant wife. Sarah and Saleem are complete opposites — geographically and religiously — but meet at night.

During the day, they lead pretty unexciting lives. She has a moody husband in David (Ishai Golan), and he has a sweet wife, Bisa (Miasa Abd Elhadi), who dotes on her husband. Things carry on until Saleem, in an act of sheer bravado, takes Sarah on a trip to Bethlehem.

Alayan gets the best out of his actors and while Kretchner and Safadi are entirely believable as their characters, it is Elhadi who scores top marks as the patient wife whose spirited life slips into darkness when she finds out about her husband's affair. She conveys her anguish with a touch of brilliance.

Cinematographer Sebastian Bock uses a handheld camera, which provides the right degree of intimacy and lights up his sets imaginatively to convey the contrast between East and West Jerusalem. What feels like a bit of a drag, however, is the legal process that plays out later in the movie, although it does not harm the film as a whole.
