



VENEZIA 2009
Competition

World Premiere - In Competition



LEBANON

a film by Samuel Maoz



Release 18 maart 2010



VENEZIA 2009

LEBANON - synopsis

Juni 1982, de Eerste Israëliëse-Libanese Oorlog. Een eenzame tank krijgt de opdracht om terroristen op te sporen in een vijandige stad. In de tank zitten vier Israëliëse soldaten: Shmuel, Assi, Herzl en Yigal, jongens van rond de twintig die nooit iets met geweld te maken hebben gehad. Gegrepen door angst en het fundamentele instinct om te overleven, proberen ze wanhopig om zichzelf niet te verliezen in de chaos van de oorlog. De hele film blijft de camera bij vier soldaten in een tank, de kijker ziet alleen wat zij waarnemen.

LEBANON is een (deels) autobiografische film van regisseur Samuel Maoz die er 25 jaar over heeft gedaan om zijn oorlogstrauma te verwerken. Op het 66^{ste} Filmfestival van Venetië van 2009 heeft LEBANON de Gouden Leeuw voor Beste Film gewonnen.

93 min. / 35mm / Kleur / Dolby Digital/ Ivriet, Engels en Arabisch gesproken



LEBANON - Nederlandse release

LEBANON wordt in Nederland gedistributeerd door ABC/ Cinemien. Beeldmateriaal kan gedownload worden vanaf: www.cinemien.nl/pers of vanaf www.filmdepot.nl

www.lebanon-themovie.nl

Voor meer informatie kunt u zich wenden tot Gideon Querido van Frank, +31(0)20-5776010 of gideon@cinemien.nl

LEBANON – cast

Shmulik.....	Yoav Donat
Assi	Itay Tiran
Herzel.....	Oshri Cohen
Yigal.....	Michael Moshonov
Jamil.....	Zohar Strauss
Syrische gevangene.....	Dudu Tassa
Libanese moeder	Reymonde Amsellem

LEBANON – crew

Regie en scenario	Samuel Maoz
Producenten.....	Uri Sabag, Einat Bikel, Moshe Edery, Leon Edery, David Silber, Benjamina Mirnik, Ilann Girard
Director of photography	Giora Bejach
Montage	Arik Lahav-Leibovich
Special effects	Pini Klavir
Muziek	Alex Claude, Nicolas Becker



LEBANON – Oshri Cohen

Oshri Cohen (1984) begon met acteren als kind in het Beit-Lessin theater in Tel Aviv. Al snel was hij op televisie te zien in verschillende series. Daarnaast speelde hij in films als *BONJOUR MONSIEUR SHLOMI*, *LOST ISLANDS* en *CAMPFIRE*. In 2006 won Cohen de Israelische dramaprijs voor aanstormend talent en een jaar later speelde hij een van de hoofdrollen in het voor een Oscar genomineerde *BEAUFORT*.

Vandaag de dag maakt hij deel uit van Habima (Het Israelische Nationale Toneel) en schittert hij in het toneelstuk *La vie devant soi* naar de gelijknamige Franse roman van Emile Ajar (in 1977 legendarisch verfilmd met Simone Signoret in de hoofdrol).



Geselecteerde filmografie

2009 **LEBANON**
2009 **AGORA**
2008 **LOST ISLANDS**
2007 **BEAUFORT**
2003 **TO BE A STAR**
2003 **BONJOUR MONSIEUR SHLOMI**
2001 **INGIL**

LEBANON – Itay Tiran

Itay Tiran (1980) is in Israel geboren uit Joodse Zweeds-Hongaarse immigranten. Hij studeerde klassieke piano aan het conservatorium en stond vanaf jong op het toneel en later voor de camera. Als student speelde hij fel begeerde hoofdrollen in toneelstukken als *Amadeus*, *Britannicus*, *Mutter Courage* en *Richard II*.

Al snel werd Tiran enorm populair door zijn rollen in films als *FORGIVENESS* (2006), *BEAUFORT* (2007), *THE DEBT* (2007), *HOMELAND* (2008) en *LEBANON* (2009). Tiran heeft verschillende prijzen en nominaties hiervoor ontvangen, waaronder de Israelische dramaprijs voor aanstormend talent in 2003, de prijs voor beste acteur in 2005 (naar aanleiding van zijn vertolking van Hamlet voor het Israelische Nationale Toneel) en beste bijrol als Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Voor zijn rollen in *FORGIVENESS* en *THE DEBT* werd hij genomineerd voor de prijs voor beste acteur door de prestigieuze Israeli Film Academy.

In 2009 werkte Tiran samen met de wereldberoemde Duitse dirigent Kurt Masur in Mendelsons *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Samen speelden ze met het Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in Tel Aviv om vervolgens samen met het Orchestre National de France in Musee D'Orsay in Parijs en in St. Denis te spelen. Vanaf 2009 werkt Tiran samen met regisseur Daniel Cohen voor The Gropius Ensemble, waar klassieke muziek wordt gecombineerd met verhalen uit de wereldliteratuur.

In 2007 werden Tiran en de Israelische zangeres en actrice Melanie Peres in de tuin van de minister van Cultuur met elkaar in het echt verbonden. Tiran wordt in Israel gezien als een van de grootste filmsterren van het land.



Filmografie

2009	LEBANON
2008	HOMELAND
2007	THE DEBT
2007	BEAUFORT
2006	FORGIVENESS

LEBANON – Yoav Donat

Yoav Donat (1980) speelde voor zijn rol in **LEBANON** in de populairer Israelische televisieserie **PARASHAT HA-SHAVU**.

Over zijn rol in **LEBANON**: “Reading the script of Lebanon was a most moving experience. I was totally drawn in. I felt that someone was sharing the most difficult tests of his life with me. It excited me more than any other script I had ever read. I told myself that it’s essential for me to become a part of this creation.”

“My powerful desire to participate in the film became even stronger when I met Shmulik. The moment that Shmulik said ‘Welcome to Lebanon!’ at the end of my fourth audition was one of the happiest moments of my life. The first part I received after completing my acting studies turned out to be the fulfilment of all my dreams!”

Shmuel spoke directly to me as the shots were being filmed, shouting out the horrible thoughts that were supposed to be going through my head: “It’s my fault that a paratrooper was killed! What will they tell his mother? That I made a mistake? That I got confused? I’m worthless! I’m a coward! A murderer.” He thrust me into an extreme situation and continued relentlessly. At the end of scenes like these, many people on the set were in tears. Everyone knew that it was actually Shmulik shouting at himself.”

“Towards the end of the shoot, I was in such a state of emotional oversaturation that I burst out crying. Shmulik comforted me, telling me that he now feels healed through me. When he sees me on his monitor, it arouses empathy within him and he becomes able to forgive himself. I consider it a privilege to have been involved in a process of such profound significance. My participation in Shmulik’s healing and in telling his story are vital experiences that will accompany me throughout my life.”

Filmografie

2009**LEBANON**

2008**PARASHAT HA-SHAVU: Tetzaveh**



LEBANON – Regisseur Samuel Maoz

Samuel Maoz, ook wel bekend als Shmuel of Shmulik Maoz, heeft een opleiding tot cameraman gevolgd aan de Academy of Art Beit Tzvi in Tel Aviv. Na zijn afstuderen verzorgde hij de art direction voor verschillende film en televisie producties en heeft hij documentaries geregisseerd voor ARTE, waaronder TOTAL ECLIPSE (2000) met o.a. Yevgenya Dodina. Hiernaast was Maoz betrokken bij tal van televisieseries en toneelstukken.

In 2007 begon Maoz met de voorbereidingen van **LEBANON**, zijn eerste speelfilm. Hierin verwerkte hij zijn ervaringen als soldaat tijdens de eerste Libanonoorlog uit 1982. Maoz verbeeldt in zijn film de traumatische ervaringen van vier Israëlische soldaten die in een tank een Libanees dorp binnenvallen.

Op het 66^{ste} Filmfestival van Venetië won Maoz de Gouden Leeuw voor zijn **LEBANON**.

Filmografie

2009**LEBANON**
2000**TOTAL ECLIPSE**



LEBANON – Samuel Maoz over Lebanon

On June 6, 1982, at 6:15 AM, I killed a man for the first time in my life. I did not do so by choice, nor was I ordered to do so. I reacted in an instinctive act of self defense, an act with no emotional or intellectual motivations, only the basic survival instinct that takes no human factors into account, an instinct that forces itself on a person facing a tangible threat of death. On June 6, 1982, I was 20 years old.

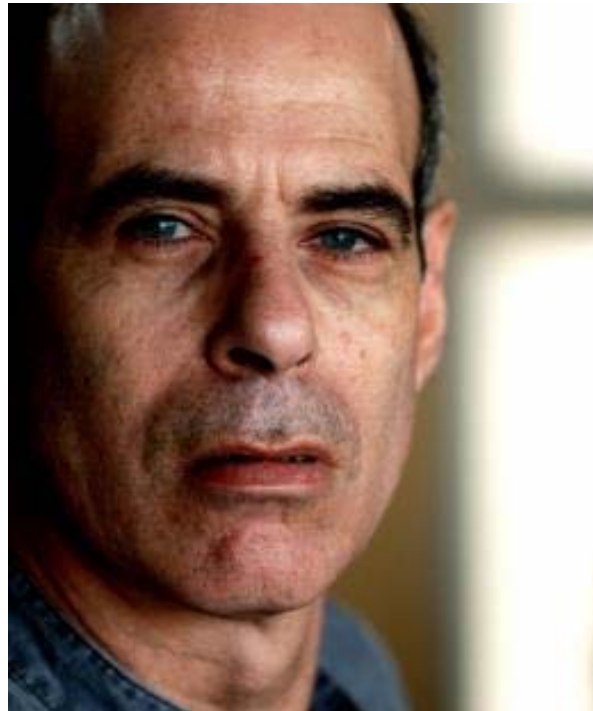
Twenty-five years after that miserable morning that opened the Lebanon War, I wrote the script for the film LEBANON.

I wrote LEBANON straight from my gut. No intellectual cognition charged my path. My memory of the events themselves had become dim and blurred. Scripting conventions such as introductions, character backgrounds and dramatic structure did not concern me. What remained fresh and bleeding was the emotional memory. I wrote what I felt.

I wanted to talk about emotional wounds, to tell the story of a slaughtered soul, a story that was not to be found in the body of the plot but derived from deep within it. How the hell could I put that on film? I realized I would have to shatter some basic principles and bend several rigid cinematic fixtures, creating a total experience instead of building a plot.

I wanted to talk about emotional wounds, to tell the story of a slaughtered soul...

The decision to make an experiential movie gave rise to the cinematic concept. My basic principle called for the presentation of a personal, subjective point of view. The audience would not watch the plot unfolding before it but experience it together with the actors. Viewers would not be given any additional information, but would remain stuck with the cast inside the tank, having the same limited view of the war and hearing it only as the actors heard it. We would try to make sure that they could smell it and taste it as well, using the visuals and sound track not only to tell a story but to impact an experience. I realized that I would have to create a total experience to achieve complete emotional comprehension.



Links : Samuel Maoz ten tijdens van de Eerste Libanonoorlog, rechts : Maoz nu.

LEBANON – Interview met Samuel Maoz

Based on director Samuel Maoz's own experiences as a young conscript during Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, *LEBANON* is a tense and haunting evocation of the very real horrors of war. Having won the Golden Lion for best film at this year's Venice Film Festival, Maoz has now found himself hailed as world cinema's latest hot property, as he discussed when we met earlier this week.

LEBANON is based on your own experiences as a soldier. What prompted you to revisit your own past in this manner?

Basically it was a need – a need to unload, a need to expose war as it really is without all the heroic stuff and the rest of the clichés. And it was probably a need, not to forgive myself necessarily, but... I was involved in the war and that in itself is enough for me to feel guilty to an extent. It's something that I'll always have to deal with.

Do you feel that there's a lot of misunderstanding about Israeli history and politics? Are you trying to address that in any way?

I don't think my film exposes anything that Israeli people didn't know before, but it deals with issues that people don't like to talk about. It's strange because on the whole the audience in Israel think that this is not a political film, and that it should be more political.



Can you talk about your decision to set the film almost entirely inside a tank?

What I wanted to use was my subjective memory. That's the filter through which I intended to tell my story. I soon realised that I couldn't use a classic cinematic structure. I don't want the audience to just understand the film, I want them to feel it. Because in this case feeling is understanding. So I needed to create a concept in which you totally identify with the characters. You see what they see, you know only what they know. I don't want you to think during the film, I want you to feel. Then after the film you can start thinking about what you see. And, this is not something I considered at the time, but I knew that if I talked to peoples' heads I wouldn't change anything. Every war film is basically a naïve or pathetic ambition to stop war! I thought if I attacked from another angle and talked to the stomach and the heart, maybe I could make a small difference.

How did the actors themselves respond to their confinement? Was it a claustrophobic atmosphere on set?

The preparation process was very tough, physically and emotionally. For example in the beginning, every actor was left alone inside a small, dark and very hot container for a few hours. So instead of explaining the claustrophobic experience to the actor, I let him go through it himself. After a while we knocked on the container walls with iron pipes. It's very similar to a sudden attack when someone's shooting at the tank. So I prepared them like that. I tried to create an experience that would bring them close to the situation.

Have things changed for you since winning the Golden Lion at Venice?

It's been very busy! I know that Celluloid Dreams have sold the film all over the world, I'm visiting lots of festivals. It's beyond my dreams. Also lots of suggestions, scary suggestions from the Americans! Meetings with Miramax and Universal. I told myself I'll listen to all these suggestions while I'm travelling around festivals, enjoy it, and then consider my steps. But I'm very hungry now. This is my first feature film, and I'm full of passion. I'm not a young director – I'm not too old but I'm not young either!

You see what they see, you know only what they know. I don't want you to think during the film, I want you to feel...

So you won't be moving straight to Hollywood?

I don't think so. I understand that in Hollywood, for example, the producers have the final cut. That sounds like a nightmare to me! The best thing about the success is that I know that I can raise the money I need for the next film, make it the way I want to, and make a living from directing. You can't ask for more from life!

Bron: Paul O'Callaghan, The Times BFI 53rd London Film Festival



LEBANON - Historische achtergrond eerste Libanonoorlog (1982)

In 1982 viel Israël buurland Libanon binnen. Dit gebeurde omdat de PLO terroristische cellen in de Zuid-Libanese bergen had gevestigd, van waaruit de Israëlische bevolking dagelijks werd bestookt. De Israëliërs rukten op tot Beiroet en trokken zich weer terug toen er een vredesaccord was bereikt.

In het midden van de jaren zeventig manifesteerde de PLO zich steeds nadrukkelijker in Libanon. De Palestijnse organisatie vestigde er militaire trainingscentra en voerde terreuraanvallen uit op Noord-Israël. De zaak escaleerde toen op 3 juni 1982 in Londen een mislukte aanslag werd gepleegd op de Israëlische ambassadeur. Ter voorkoming van verdere terreur viel Israël de Palestijnse bases in Libanon aan en zond grondtroepen over de grens. Oorspronkelijk was het de bedoeling dat de Israëliërs niet verder dan 25 km de grens over zouden gaan, voldoende om de PLO-bases in het grensgebied uit te schakelen.

Sharon

De Knesset had toestemming gegeven voor een beperkte operatie, maar minister van Defensie Ariel Sharon besloot dat het leger moest doorstoten naar Beiroet. Zijn doel was al het Palestijns terrorisme in Libanon op te ruimen, de gewelddadige Syriërs uit de Bekaa-vallei te verdrijven en een pro-Israëlische, christelijke regering te installeren in Beiroet. In september gaf Sharon de christelijke Libanese, de zogeheten falangisten, toestemming de Palestijnse vluchtelingenkampen Sabra en Shatila binnen te gaan. Hij kon niet voorzien dat de Libanezen daar een bloedbad aanrichtten, waarbij honderden Palestijnse burgers zouden worden vermoord.

Aftreden

Deze fout kostte Sharon de kop. Hij moest aftreden als minister van defensie nadat een Israëlische regeringscommissie concludeerde dat Sharon had moeten inzien dat de kans op een bloedbad groot was wanneer de falangisten de kampen binnengingen, gezien de haat die de Libisch-christelijke milities tegen de Palestijnen koesterden.

Veiligheidszone

In 1983 tekenden Israël en Libanon een vredesakkoord. De Israëlische troepen trokken zich gefaseerd terug tot binnen een veiligheidszone van 15 km van de Israëlische grens. In 2000 trokken de Israëliërs zich geheel terug uit Libanon en kwam ook deze grensstreek in Zuid-Libanon weer onder Libanees militair bestuur.

Kaartje van de Israëlische veiligheidszone in Libanon 1985-2000:



LEBANON - Gouden Leeuw

[Persbericht]

Gouden Leeuw voor Lebanon van Israëliër Samuel Maoz

Parijs, 1 september - De 47-jarige Israëliëse regisseur Samuel Maoz heeft zaterdag op het 66ste filmfestival van Venetië de Gouden Leeuw gewonnen voor zijn debuutfilm *LEBANON*. De Leeuw is de hoofdprijs van het oudste filmfestival ter wereld.

LEBANON speelt zich af op de eerste dag van de Israëliëse oorlog tegen Libanon in 1982. De hele film blijft de camera bij vier Israëliëse soldaten in een tank. De kijker ziet alleen wat zij waarnemen. Maoz weet zo de angst en de radeloosheid van de vier jonge dienstplichtigen precies invoelbaar te maken.

De film heeft een autobiografische basis. Maoz vocht als twintigjarige dienstplichtige mee in de oorlog, waarin hij, zo verklaarde hij, ook slachtoffers heeft gemaakt. Pas na een diepe persoonlijke crisis was hij in staat om deze film te maken. Het was te pijnlijk om de herinneringen, waaronder die aan „de geur van geschroeid mensenvlees”, op te halen.

"Ik draag de prijs op aan de duizenden mensen ter wereld die zoals ik veilig en wel uit de oorlog zijn gekomen. Zij stellen het klaarblijkelijk goed, zij zijn getrouwd, ze hebben kinderen. Maar in hun binnenste hebben ze moeten leren leven met hun pijn", zei de regisseur toen hij zijn prijs in ontvangst nam.

Lebanon draait vanaf 18 maart in de Nederlandse bioscopen.

www.lebanon-themovie.nl

[Einde persbericht]





LEBANON

Based on the real-life experiences of writer/director Maoz, this grimly-harrowing piece claustrophobically follows four soldiers stuck inside an Israeli tank which has been immobilised for most of the film in enemy territory on the first day of the Lebanon War in 1982.

Set for a place of honour in world festivals and specialised art cinemas, Lebanon was an unusually long time in the making due to problems securing investment and the technical challenges of shooting an entire film inside a tank. It features some of Israel's brightest young talents, covered in sweat and grime for the most part, convincingly reenacting some of the worst moments of Maoz's life – possibly not in exact detail, but how he remembers them now.

This is obsessively directed by a man who is obviously still fighting the demons of his past

The plot launches straight into the first day of war, a pleasant June morning with a new gunner (Donat) joining the three other members of the tank crew. Assi (Tiran) is the commander, Igal (Moshonov) the driver, and the assistant gunner, Herzl (Cohen), is in charge of ammunition. The tank is quickly dispatched on its first mission – to accompany a paratrooper unit on the way to a Lebanese village that has already been pummeled by the Air Force. No resistance is expected and none should turn up on the road; it's just a routine, easy-going summer stroll.

Of course, nothing happens as expected. On the way to the target, one enemy car makes a charge, the tank gunner freezes and a paratrooper is killed as a result. Another car approaches but this time nobody takes any chances - the gunner pulls the trigger, the car is blown to pieces, and the driver lies, fatally wounded on the road screaming "Peace" before he is shot dead out of pity. This is just an introduction to the real action – the unit and the tank reach the wrong village, they kill civilians who are being used as a shield by terrorists and are hit by an RPG missile shot by a Syrian soldier who shouldn't have been there.

One wounded Syrian is taken prisoner and put inside the tank until they reach a safe haven. Some Phalangists (pro-Israeli Lebanese Christians) are sent in to lead the unit out of the trap it has fallen into. One enters the tank to tell the prisoner in great detail about what is in store for him, while urgent orders to move are stalled for a while as the tank is frighteningly immobilised.

With every new event, the world outside is viewed almost exclusively through the gunner's telescope.

Meanwhile, tension and clashes inside the tank are mounting, with fear and panic growing. The foursome confront the officer in charge of the field operation, Jamil (Strauss).

Effectively shot using minimum lighting and wide angles, mostly in close-up, Maoz' script takes the picture a visceral level, where war is assessed purely by the animal reactions of the people exposed to it. Coming after two other successful Israeli war films, Beaufort and Waltz with Bashir, Maoz goes even further in rejecting all political, social or ethical considerations and it is fair to assume that part of the audience might feel seriously alienated by this attitude. But for him, it is a highly personal and intimate portrait of 24 hours in hell, and as such, frighteningly convincing.

The plot never attempts to generate rounded psychological portraits of its protagonists or show them developing throughout the film, but ultimately, this is a bloody page of a private diary far more than a thoughtful reflection on war. A technical tour de force for camera, production designer and editor, uniformly well acted and obsessively directed by a man who is obviously still fighting the demons of his past, this may not qualify as entertainment, in the usual sense of the word, but movies are not always supposed to be fun.

VARIETY

LEBANON

Visceral, torn-from-the-memory filmmaking that packs every punch except one to the heart, "Lebanon" is the boldest and best of the recent mini-wave of Israeli pics ("Beaufort," "Waltz With Bashir") set during conflicts between the two countries. Ironically, writer-director Samuel Maoz's pic, 99.9% of which is set within an Israeli tank, actually has the least to do with Lebanon per se. The story could be set in any tank, any country, any war -- a cinematic Kammerspiel that's as much a formal challenge for its creator as it is a claustrophobic experience for audiences. With fest kudos, arthouse chances look solid.

The only thing "Lebanon" (set on the first day of the 1982 invasion) and "Bashir" (set three months later) have in common is that both films were directed by actual participants, who've carried the emotional scars to this day. But where "Bashir" helmer Ari Folman extrapolated his experiences into an elaborate structure and animated format, Moaz compresses his own memories into a compact, "Huis Clos"-like drama set over 24 hours in a single location.

The whole film has only three exterior shots, the first of which is of a vast field of droopy sunflowers slightly animated by time-lapse lensing. The viewer is then plunged into the bowels of a lone Israeli tank, at 3 a.m. on the morning of June 6, 1982, as its regular team of three -- cool commander Assi (Itay Tiran), motormouth loader Hertzal (Oshri Cohen) and nervous driver Yigal (Michael Moshonov) -- are joined by new gunner Shmulik (Yoav Donat). All are only in their 20s.

The you-are-there experience commences almost immediately, as the tank trundles across the border and plows through a banana plantation. The outside world is seen only through Shmulik's viewfinder and heard only through the tank's armor plating. When the hatch is occasionally opened, light and sound flood the cramped compartment, but nothing else is seen.

Though the pic is shot in 1.85 and not widescreen, and doesn't have an elaborate soundtrack, sound designer Alex Claude ("Beaufort") and his team do a remarkable job on an evidently low budget, from sloshing water and oil inside the tank to deafening setpieces, such as the sudden shock of coming under heavy fire. A subtly supportive score by Nicolas Becker, which includes almost subliminary sounds on "organic instruments," is a further smart component.

Giora Bejach's lensing, combining 16mm, DV and Red One material into a 35mm print, has a kind of dank beauty in its pools of light cast by a control panel or stray shafts from outside. As the main protags' faces are progressively caked in dirt and sweat, it's sometimes difficult to make out who's talking, but unlike in many other grunt movies, names are helpfully used at frequent intervals.

After they've been briefed by hardass commander Jamil (Zohar Strauss), who lowers himself inside the tank for a chat, the four soon get their first taste of the slow chill of fear. Not for the last time, the tank quartet is temporarily joined by a wounded soldier, putting extra pressure on the protags' relationships, especially between the combative Hertzal and calmer Assi. As the soldiers enter an already bombed city, with orders to clean it of PLO resistance fighters, they find themselves trapped when the tank is incapacitated and they're surrounded by (unseen) Syrian troops.

Pic recalls many other war dramas set in confined spaces -- from Andrzej Wajda's '50s classic, "Kanal," set in the Warsaw sewers, to Zheng Junzhao's 1983 "One and the Eight," set in a pit prison -- with the same blackened, sweat-smearing faces and sense of living incarceration.

With frequent developments outside and visits by Jamil and others, Maoz technically pulls off the feat of keeping the viewer involved during 90 minutes set in a single, cramped location. But he's less successful at forging any emotional bond: Part of the price of deliberately withholding their backstories -- to make them anonymous soldiers -- is that their survival becomes purely a matter of abstract interest.

Whenever the strongly etched and played Jamil is onscreen, or when a crazed Phalangist (Ashraf Barhom) threatens a Syrian hostage (Dudu Tasa) in a disturbing display of psychosis, the dramatic weaknesses of the four main protags are thrown into relief. Performances are OK, but the dialogue is largely functional, and their characters are neither likable nor especially interesting.

It's not a crucial flaw, but it does prevent "Lebanon" from having the emotional clout that would have turned it from a very good dramatic experiment into a great one.

The Observer

LEBANON

I wouldn't have won if Jane Fonda was on the jury, but she wasn't.

The festival's big winner, however, was a far more controversial choice. The Golden Lion for best film went to an Israeli entry called Lebanon. Directed by Samuel Maoz, it is set entirely inside a tank containing four young, inexperienced Israeli soldiers during the first days of the 1982 war in Lebanon. The intense, claustrophobic film is based directly on the filmmaker's traumatic experiences as a tank gunner during the war and it took him more than 25 years to write the script without being physically sick from the memory.

The award marks the highest honour accorded an Israeli film and comes as attendees and organisers at the Toronto Film Festival, a big rival to Venice, are being urged by famous figures including Ken Loach, Danny Glover and Jane Fonda to protest against the decision to highlight a section focusing on film production in Tel Aviv.

Speaking exclusively to the Observer, Maoz said: "The point of a film like mine is to open a dialogue, to get people talking to each other about important issues. This is something you can't do if films are boycotted. It makes no sense to boycott art. Maybe I wouldn't have won if Jane Fonda was on the jury, but she wasn't."

"I suppose every filmmaker has the naive, even pathetic dream that his film could be the one that finally stops a war," said Maoz. "But making this film has got me my life back and that is more precious than any award. Without fully knowing it, I have been deeply traumatised since 1982, as has a whole generation of Israelis, people who are now running the country. Making Lebanon and finally confronting what happened in that war, has given me my true feelings back and I can cry real tears once more."



The Venice Film Festival

Dripping with sweat, exhausted with combat and challenge, inured to darkness yet desperate for sleep. Who said a critic's life was easy at a leading film festival? Here on the Adriatic, the humidity is off the chart, the films are beyond count and there is no exit strategy from an island quarantined for its annual plague of movie mania.

Some colleagues are already starting to look like Dirk Bogarde in *Death in Venice*. Minds tottering, sun lotion running, they waste picturesquely away on the Lido.

But no: culture is no laughing matter and the opening description – trial by claustrophobia and high stress levels – more properly belongs to the best competition film so far. Israel's *Lebanon* has everything: a powerful plot, prodigious direction (all the more so for a film set entirely inside a tank) and a passport to international controversy since the title invokes the 1982 Lebanese war. In a week that sees a concurrent film festival, Toronto, engulfed by Arab protest for screening a season of movies about Tel Aviv, Venice showcases this tale of four Israeli soldiers traversing 24 hours of nightmare – battle, entrapment, horror, death – in a war of (antagonists will claim) Israel's own provoking.

Yet the main or only crime of Samuel Maoz's film is mis-titling. It isn't about the Lebanon war at all. It is about battle, all battle, and what it does inside men's heads. The tank is not offered as a metaphor for that location, but it's hard not to see this cramped shell where emotion and delirium are incubated as an expressionist vision of a soldier's brain. Simultaneously, no film has more powerfully suggested the actuality of being in a tank. The oil-and-water-puddled floor; the grime of faces and the imagined stink of bodies; the darkness; the wrench and grind of the turning gun turret, its cross-haired sights our only view, for 90 minutes, of the outside world.

At one point a scared Syrian prisoner is dumped in the tank for convenience, then horrifically menaced in Arabic by a Phalangist ally-intruder, who at the end of his torture litany turns to the Israelis and says, in their language: "Treat him carefully, he is a prisoner of war." Irony with a lethal edge. In the final scenes, even the irony runs out. The occupants are trapped in a ruined city prowled by the enemy, their only hope to choke the tank's dying engine into final action and thunder down the nearest maze of alleys into escape or catastrophe. This formidable film transcends flags of nationhood to raise the universal, spectral ensign of war itself.

Before *Lebanon* was shown, it looked as if women would have the best collective shout in the festival's polemical reaches. Egypt's *Scheherazade*, *Tell Me a Story* and the German-directed, UK-filmed *Desert Flower* are both designed to stir controversy. The first has done so already in its native land, Yousry Nasrallah's furore-inciting film centring on a woman TV interviewer who publicly airs three stories – including her own – about females bullied or battered by a patriarchal Arab society.

My advice? Take off your shirts, make sure they each bear the right name tags, and put them without further hesitation on *Lebanon*. The Golden Lion will be announced on Saturday night. If Venice's top prize does not go to this Israeli film I shall eat my hat. For that purpose I have chosen a natty and stylish *Death in Venice* number, a fedora made entirely of white Veneto liquorice.



Golden Lion restores pride

Film festival juries sometimes have a rush of sanity. Good sense goes to their heads, like new wine into old bottles, and the bouquet can nearly knock a festivalgoer out. We are so used to daft juries picking daft films, but this year's Venice victor was Israel's Lebanon, the best film in the competition. (Where did you read that first? Here in the Financial Times. From everyone I encouraged to wager his shirt I would now like a small commission on winnings.)

Lebanon may be the millennium's best war film to date. I cannot pile much more praise atop the plaudits I gave in my previous dispatch. But if you ever wondered what it is like to be trapped inside the moving eye of a hurricane – here the hurricane of war and the “eye” of a tank advancing deep into enemy danger – speculate no more. Writer-director Samuel Maoz provides the experience. Two short framing shots apart, the entire film is set inside this grisly echo-chamber. Horrors are reported, threatened, enacted, endured and – through the sights of the ever-turning and grinding gun turret (an unforgettable visual and aural motif) – seen.

Maoz knows of what he speaks. He was a tank gunner in the 1982 Lebanon war. But his film is much more than memory or memoir. It is a living, vivid re-imagining, a film that stands taller even than Waltz with Bashir in what begins to look like the vanguard of a visionary new Israeli cinema.

The Venice jury, led by Ang Lee, tried to make up for the wisdom that guided their Golden Lion choice by erratic distribution of the runner-up prizes. Fatih Akin's Soul Kitchen, a flailing attempt at feelgood comedy from the director of Head-On, won the Special Jury Prize. Imagine Alice's Restaurant directed in German by the “Carry on” team. The Iranian artist-turned-filmmaker Shirin Neshat won the Silver Lion for Best Director, though Women without Men, visually accomplished but dramatically inert, more deserved Best Big-Screen Video Installation. The performing prizes went to Britain's Colin Firth, modestly affecting as Christopher Isherwood's fictive alter ego in Tom Ford's film of the novelist's A Single Man, and to Russia's Ksenia Rappoport, playing a Serbo-Croatian hotel maid who stumbles on murder and intrigue in Italy's La Doppia Ora (The Double Hour).

Happily the handouts to runners and riders included a Best Screenplay award, richly deserved, to Todd Solondz. His Life During Wartime, a weird but often scintillating sequel to Happiness, was the favourite in a final-day critics' poll. Solondz now joins that growing band of artists who have returned to the scenes of former crimes. Also in town was Oliver Stone announcing, between questions about the Hugo Chávez interview film he brought to Venice (South of the Border), that he was about to make Wall Street 2. From Venezuelan Marxists to the fat cats of Financeland: you can't say Stone doesn't box the compass.

Sequelmania on the Adriatic was rounded out with Werner Herzog's Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans (previously reviewed on these pages), which had the Bavarian director insisting he had never heard of Abel Ferrara, creator of the original cop drama, while the rip-off-sensitive Ferrara, also in town, said he hoped Herzog and his producer Edward Pressman, who owns the Bad Lieutenant title, would both rot in hell.

What fun. By close of play we needed it. A festival where the gap between good and bad was already of Grand Canyon proportions ended its days with the mostly bad. The Men Who Stare at Goats is a fatuous comedy about military “psi ops” starring George Clooney, its hippified take on army life about as funny as a dud episode of the M.A.S.H. television series. Mr Nobody from Jaco Van Dormael (Toto the Hero) is a time-journeying whimsy so windbagging it makes The Time Traveler's Wife seem watchable. Survival of the Zombies – another sequel – lumbers out of the George A. Romero stable with vivid features and metronome gait, begging for a bullet to end its misery.

“Transitional” is finally the best word for the 2009 Venice Film Festival. It had its highs. It had its lows. Then it had a few more lows. Lebanon, though, is a great film. And northern Italy in early September is always lovely. And in two years – I said three in my previous report, inadvertently adjusting for Italian building time – we shall have the new Palazzo del Cinema. Try to keep me away from Venice then.



Israeli film on '82 Lebanon war wins Venice prize

"Lebanon," an Israeli film that recounts Israel's 1982 invasion of the Middle East country through the eyes of four soldiers in a tank, won the top prize at the Venice Film Festival on Saturday.

The festival jury announced the Golden Lion and other prizes on the last day of the 11-day screening of films from around the world. An Iranian film about women and repression took the No. 2 prize, the Silver Lion.

"Lebanon," directed by Samuel Maoz, tells the story of Israeli paratroopers searching a hostile town. The conflict is seen through the binocular-aided eyes of those inside a tank, with their cramped quarters lending an anxious sense of claustrophobia to their viewpoint.

"I dedicate this work to people all over the world that come back from the war safe and sound," the director told the audience at the award ceremony. "They work, get married, have children," but the memories get "stuck in their souls."

Maoz was a young man when he served in the Israeli military during the invasion, which led to a long occupation of southern Lebanon.

Variety has described the film, one of 25 which competed for the Golden Lion, as the "boldest and best of the recent mini-wave" of Israeli movies. The awards jury was headed by Ang Lee, himself a Golden Lion-winning director, who marveled that if "Lebanon" was Maoz's first film what might he do next.

He said the jurors were both quick and unanimous in choosing "Lebanon" and were "happy not be inside that tank which could have been any tank in any war."

Maoz told Israeli Channel 1 TV in a phone interview immediately after winning that he hoped the film "helps people understand our country better, understand our society better, and the complexity of our society better."

The jury seemed to wade straight into conflicted parts of the world.

Iranian filmmaker and photographer Shirin Neshat snared the Silver Lion for best director for her feature debut with "Zanan Bedoone Mardan" ("Women Without Men").

International Herald Tribune

War and Drugs in the Cross Hairs

“On June 6, 1982, at 6:15 a.m., I killed a man for the first time in my life,” writes Samuel Maoz in the notes to “Lebanon,” which he wrote and directed. This powerful and original film held its premiere in competition at the Venice Film Festival, which closes with the presentation of the Golden Lion and other prizes on Saturday night. Mr. Maoz was 20 years old when he took part in the Israeli invasion of Lebanon as a tank gunner in 1982, and he says he came back a changed person.

It has taken him many years to confront his experiences there, but he has now succeeded in turning them into an astonishing piece of cinema. The film is not an exact account of what happened to him, but a semi-fictional narrative based on it.

“Lebanon” begins when Shmuel, a new gunner, joins a tank crew of three other young conscripts sent across the border into the south of the country as artillery backup to an elite detachment of paratroopers making their way northward after a devastating Israeli airstrike designed to clear their path.

Almost the entire action of the film is shot from within the claustrophobic, searingly hot, deafeningly noisy interior of the tank. What is going on outside is seen intermittently through the telescopic viewfinder and cross hairs of the gunner’s sights, which move clumsily up and down and from side to side with the tank’s heavy hydraulic turret.

This viewpoint renders the external mayhem, to which the tank is contributing, both remote and ghastly in its magnified detail.

Every person who comes into focus in the cross hairs of the gunsight — from an old Arab man staring defiantly back and a distraught woman staggering into the street from a shelled apartment block, to masked Arab fighters and the Israeli paratroopers — is framed as a potential target, with only split seconds for the gunners to decide whether or not to fire.

A Syrian soldier is captured and confined inside the tank, but amid the confusion the unit has strayed out of reach of Israeli air support.

Instructed to rely on a couple of Christian Phalangist militiamen to lead them back to safety, the major in command defies orders, suspecting the Phalangists of wanting only to lay their hands on the Syrian prisoner. Then the tank becomes separated from the paratroopers. While the tank itself is a death-dealing machine, it could also at any moment become a fiery death-trap for the young men manning it, and their fear is palpably conveyed. The four actors who play the tank crew — Yoav Donat, Itay Tiran, Oshri Cohen and Michael Moshonov — put in a superb ensemble performance.

Zohar Strauss as the paratrooper Major Jamil and Reymonde Amsellem as a Lebanese mother caught up in the fighting are no less convincing. The imaginative and creative design and cinematography, by Ariel Roshko and Giora Bejach, respectively — achieved on a low budget — transform the dark, oily, suffocating interior of the tank, its black walls streaming with condensation, into a sinister, almost live presence in the action.

This is a film above all about what it is like to take part in combat, though it does not shrink from showing an appalling number of civilian casualties. Like the vast majority of all who have fought in wars through the ages, the conscript tank crew have no time to consider the rights and wrongs of this particular conflict but are simply trying to survive.

The production is courageous, too, in depicting an operation that goes badly wrong and the desperation of a group of soldiers, both veterans and raw conscripts, who feel they have been abandoned to their fate by their superiors when they are told over the radio to improvise as best they can to make their escape. The audacious and unpredictable way “Lebanon” tells its story will give future filmmakers much to think about when trying to depict the realities of war on screen.

Violence of a much more cinematically conventional variety is featured in two American productions.