



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

UNDER THE FIG TREE (12)

Director: Erige Sehiri

Starring: Fide Fdhili, Feten Fdhili, Ameni Fdhili

Tunisia/France/Switzerland/Germany/Qatar, 2022, 1 hour 32 minutes SUBTITLES

Plucking figs is a delicate process. The lean and fragile branches need to be bent gently using a twig, ensuring that they don't break. Once picked from the trees, they have to be carefully placed in the basket lined with leaves. Much like the fig harvesters in her film, director Erige Sehiri too treats her debut feature *Under the Fig Trees* with the same kind of sensitivity and care. Set in rural Tunisia, the slice-of-life film tracks a sunny day in the lives of a group of harvesters — consisting of old-timers as well as teenagers taking up the job during their summer break from school — working at an orchard.

Like the figs the teenagers pluck, some of the conversations between them are ripe with discovery and brimming with possibilities. Some, on the other hand, shine light on the sour spots in the relationships, especially between couples. The ensemble cast bringing the characters to life consists mostly of non-professional actors. The easy flowing body language and dynamics between the actors give away the fact that a lot of the scenes and dialogues were borne out of improvisation (as confirmed by the makers in their media interactions).

Filmmaker Erige Sehiri's background in documentary filmmaking — she helmed the 2018 documentary *Railway Men* based on the lives of railway workers managing Tunisia's crumbling railway network — greatly lends to the observational gaze through which the film unravels.

"Premiering in Cannes' Directors' Fortnight sidebar, Sehiri's film is an elegant, understated tapestry of complex interactions. The protagonists, played by an intergenerational group of nonprofessional actors, debate societal expectations and narrow sexual mores while whispering secrets, sharing meals and shedding tears. Their conversations resemble fireside chats, where the past is recounted and visions of the future forged". - **Lovia Gyarkye Arts & Culture Critic - Hollywood Reporter**

Preview courtesy of Modern Films

Notes compiled by Marie Rosenthal