



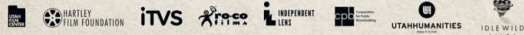
**"CAPTIVATING AND STIRRING"**  
POV MAGAZINE

**"AN INSPIRATION TO WOMEN —  
NOT JUST IN THE MIDDLE EAST."**  
THE GLOBE



**القاضية**  
**THE JUDGE**  
WOMEN. EQUALITY. JUSTICE.

ITVS AND IDLE WILD FILMS PRESENT "THE JUDGE"  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: AMBER FARES EDITORS: SARA MAAMOURI, KEN SCHNEIDER COMPOSER: OMAR FADEL  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: GERALYN DREYFOUS, DIANA LADY DOUGAN, BARBARA DOBKIN, SALLY JO FIFER, LOIS VOSSEN, PATTY QUILLIN  
CO-PRODUCERS: JENNIFER JORDAN, SARA MAAMOURI, AMBER FARES, MARK LIPSON ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS: NICOLE DOCTA, NATASHA ATALLA  
PRODUCED & DIRECTED BY: ERIKA COHN



"THE JUDGE" IS A CO-PRODUCTION OF THREE JUDGES LLC, IDLE WILD FILMS INC. AND INDEPENDENT TELEVISION SERVICE WITH FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING.

THEJUDGEFILM.COM #ShesTheFirst

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# THE JUDGE

## WOMEN. JUSTICE. ISLAM.

### SYNOPSIS:

Religious courts in the Middle East had historically banned women from adjudicating domestic and family matters – in both the Shari’a courts of Islam and the Rabbinic courts of Judaism – until Kholoud Al-Faqih, dares to challenge that history. With the support of a progressive Sheik, Kholoud becomes the first woman judge with her appointment to a Palestinian Shari’a court in the West Bank, bringing a subtle new perspective garnered from her early professional life working with battered women as an attorney in both the criminal and Shari’a courts.

This feature-length documentary chronicles Kholoud’s appointment, her first years as a judge, and her tenacious ability to maintain her position despite attempts to marginalize and demote her. Through Kholoud’s eyes, the film examines the religious and legal stipulations between men and women according to Shari’a law, relaying how the worst aspects of misinterpreted Shari’a laws reflect a tragic misogyny - rape, beatings, and polygamy – stemming from misconstrued ignorance of the Qur’an. As Kholoud’s most compelling cases develop in gripping cinema verité style, the film reveals precisely the kinds of misinterpretations of Shari’a law that Kholoud now has the power to correct.

With unparalleled access and a critical cinematic eye, **THE JUDGE** follows Kholoud in and outside of the courtroom as she asserts her right to equality and redefines how Shari’a law perceives, treats, and respects women. Illustrating a unique portrait of her sustained intervention, **THE JUDGE** reveals that Shari’a is a system largely mischaracterized both in the Middle East and in the West. Amid a time of rapidly increasing global Islamophobia, the unprecedented Muslim Ban and future potential Muslim registry – **THE JUDGE** illuminates how colonial occupation has impacted the legal and cultural worlds of the contemporary Islamic world, while reflecting a universal struggle for women’s control over their bodies, economic welfare, custodial rights, and marital status.





## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

While I was on a shooting hiatus with my last film, *IN FOOTBALL WE TRUST*, I received a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship in Israel/Palestine. There, I taught film, mentored local filmmakers, assisted NGOs launch media advocacy projects, and continued my post-graduate research in Islamic feminism at Hebrew University. One day, a dear friend and colleague invited me to attend a Shari'a law reform meeting in Ramallah.

I was welcomed into a large conference room filled with the images of Arafat throughout the years hanging in old picture frames, and seated at a table surrounded by men in tarboushes (hats that judges and sheikhs wear). Then Judge Kholoud walked in and everyone stood to greet her. I was immediately struck by her presence – her confidence – her command of the room. I wanted to know more. Who was this woman? What was her story?

Though my Arabic comprehension was limited, I listened intently to a discussion about Palestine's legal challenges, issues of domestic violence, regulations surrounding polygamy and the importance of raising the marriage age. I began to grapple with the complexities of law in Palestine. I understood that the law had remnants of the

Ottomans, the Hanafi Islamic school of thought, British, Jordanians, Egyptians and Israelis. However, I hadn't fully appreciated the day-to-day legal implications. Given the political complexity and varying forces at play, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, West Jerusalem and Gaza all have different laws. Therefore, a ruling made in one territory may not be applicable in another. As Judge Kholoud passionately spoke about how women are disproportionately impacted by these inconsistencies and addressed the difficulties in creating a uniform legal system, I wondered why and how she decided to become a Shari'a judge.

Judge Kholoud and I were introduced at the end of the meeting and I was moved by her charisma and personal story. After spending her first years as an attorney representing women who were survivors of domestic violence, Kholoud felt she could best catalyze change in the Shari'a courts, where familial cases are adjudicated. She then turned to the Shari'a text to prove that women could be judges and began studying for the judicial exams. I remember asking her how she felt about the mistreatment of women under Shari'a...to which she responded, the problem isn't with the Shari'a, it is with the interpretation (or rather misinterpretation).

I have always been fascinated with how law is interpreted – how power, economics and/or status can influence implementation. I am captivated by the intersect and tension between religion, culture and identity. I am drawn to narratives about strong women. Kholoud's story stuck with me and I felt that her experiences might invoke a more nuanced understanding of Shari'a, challenge rapidly increasing global Islamophobia and highlight positive advancements for women by women in the Middle East, which are often uncovered or ignored by mainstream media.

Upon learning I was a filmmaker, Kholoud immediately expressed enthusiasm in making a film about her journey. She hoped that sharing her story would inspire other women and girls throughout the Muslim world to pursue leadership roles in their communities, despite cultural and/or traditional norms. Thus, *THE JUDGE* was born.

# DIRECTOR'S

## statement continued:

The first challenge was approaching the Qadi al-Quda (Chief Justice) to gain access to the Shari'a courts. After numerous meetings and proposals (which were later repeated every time a new Qadi al-Quda was appointed) I was granted full access. I believe this was only achievable given our team's non-threatening presence, my gender and compact camera kit. Within the courts, we unobtrusively captured proceedings with GoPros and small DSLR cameras.

Cinematographer Amber Fares and I visualized cases that occurred when we weren't filming or when it was necessary to preserve individuals' anonymity via obscured recreations, primarily shot with a moving slider camera, in variable focus with extreme close-ups and observational wides. In addition to the courtroom scenes, editors Sara Maamouri and Ken Schneider skillfully sorted through hundreds of hours of footage, ultimately interweaving intimate verité footage from Kholoud's home life and unprecedented drone aerials of the West Bank, painting a unique and vivid portrait of Palestine's raw beauty.

Music plays a key role in THE JUDGE. Kholoud embodies what jazz music means to me – she resists oppression, asserts her right to equality and does so boldly. I wanted to take that feeling and voice it in a musical score that incorporated Middle Eastern music elements but didn't orientalize or exoticize the film. Composer, Omar Fadel, constructed a unique, organic aesthetic of piano, cello, guitar and pedal steel, which became the soul and heartbeat of the film.

Judge Kholoud's resilience and determination greatly impacted all of us and will encourage others around the world to persevere through adversity – in asserting legal rights, achieving



gender justice and challenging cultural and traditional norms. I believe her story reflects a collective struggle for women's control over their bodies, economic welfare, custodial rights, and marital status. Finally, I hope THE JUDGE leaves viewers with a greater insight into Shari'a law and strong imagery of powerful Muslim women, while illuminating some of the universal conflicts in the domestic life of Palestine. It is a tremendous honor to finally share the film with the world after this six-year journey.

Along the way, there were some major wake up calls and challenges...one being the search for financing. Throughout the first five years, I cannot count the number of times we heard "no," nor the amount of grant rejections we received, including four from ITVS, who later became a co-production partner. Each time we examined the feedback, made adjustments but ultimately stayed true to the original vision and in the long run, our persistence paid off. We were blessed with access and an incredibly passionate, talented team.

Handwritten signature of the director.

## DIRECTOR & PRODUCER

ERIKA COHN is an Emmy award-winning filmmaker who *Variety* recognized as one of 2017's top ten documentary filmmakers. Most recently, Erika completed *THE JUDGE*, a film about the first woman judge to be appointed to the Middle East's Shari'a courts, which premiered at the 2017 Toronto International Film Festival and will be broadcast on PBS' 2018 Independent Lens series. Erika co-directed/produced, *In Football We Trust*, an Emmy award-winning, feature documentary about the unique faith and culture that ultimately drives young Pacific Islander men into the NFL, which premiered at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival and was broadcast on PBS' 2016 Independent Lens series. Her work has been supported by IFP, the Sundance Institute, Tribeca Institute, Hot Docs, Sheffield, ITVS, Women in Film, BAVC and the CPB Producer's Academy among others.

Erika grew up attending the Sundance Film Festival as a native Utahn, where she first began her career. In 2008, Erika traveled to Cambodia where she shot *Giant Steps*, a documentary about the restitution of art after the Khmer Rouge rule, which aired on PBS. Later that year, she directed *La Guerrera*, a narrative short about a young girl in Mexico pursuing her dreams to become a professional soccer player, which premiered at the Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival. Erika has received numerous accolades for her work, including a Director's Guild of America award for her film, *When the Voices Fade*, a narrative profile of the Lebanese-Israeli war of 2006, and has been a featured panelist/speaker at various film festivals and university conferences across the globe. She studied at Chapman University (California) and Hebrew University (Jerusalem) and has degrees in Film Production, Middle Eastern Studies, and Acting Performance. In 2013, Erika founded Idle Wild Films, Inc., which has released three feature documentaries and produced numerous branded content and commercial spots, including Gatorade's Win from Within series, for which she received a 2016 Webby award nomination. Erika is also an avid photographer and served as a U.S. Ambassadorial Film Scholar to Israel/Palestine.



## EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

GERALYN DREYFOUS is a philanthropist, entrepreneur and Academy Award-winning filmmaker with a wide, distinguished background in the arts. GERALYN's passion for implementing social change through film inspired her to found the Utah Film Center and co-found IMPACT Partners with Dan Cogan. In 2013, GERALYN co-founded Gamechanger Films, a film fund dedicated to women directors.

She has produced and executive produced over 100 feature-length films including the Academy Award-winning *Born Into Brothels*; Emmy award-winning *In Football We Trust*; Academy Award-nominated *The Square*; Academy Award-nominated *The Invisible War* and multiple film festival winners. GERALYN was honored with the IDA's Amicus Award for her significant contribution to documentary filmmaking and *Variety* recently recognized GERALYN in their 2014 Women's Impact Report highlighting her work in the entertainment industry. From her courageous tackling of the horrific sex slave trade of Bombay, to her championing the victims of rape in the military, GERALYN has helped make films that give the silenced a voice and the underserved a platform of power.

## EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

DIANA LADY DOUGAN is an award-winning television producer and long-term pioneer in global information technologies and media. She has served under appointments by three U.S. Presidents in full U.S. Senate confirmed senior policy positions. During her two terms as a Director of Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), co-founder of the International Media Fund and Arthur C. Clarke Center for Human Imagination (UCSD), she led a number of innovative and unprecedented initiatives. She conceived and executive produced the first live dual PBS/NPR specials with Bill Moyers, for which she won the Peabody Award for “Excellence in Broadcast Journalism”.

Recent productions and outreach work include: *How to Survive a Plague* (2013 Oscar Nominee); *Girl Rising* (2013); *Pandora’s Promise* (Exec. Prod; CNN); *The Square* (2014 Oscar Nominee); *Janice, Little Girl Blue* (co- Exec Prod; PBS 2015); and *Letters from Baghdad* (BBC 2017). Her books include: *Arab and Muslim Countries: Profiles in Contrast* (Brookings Press).



## CO-PRODUCER & CINEMATOGRAPHER

AMBER FARES is an award-winning documentary director and cinematographer. Her feature length directorial debut *Speed Sisters* premiered at Hot Docs in 2015, where it was one of the top 20 Audience Choice Awards. *Speed Sisters* has played in over 70 film festivals around the world including Sheffield, Melbourne, CPH:DOX and DOC NYC. It won the Audience Award for Best Feature at the Irish Film Institute Doc Festival, the Jury Award for Best Documentary at the Adelaide Film Festival, Vail Film Festival and the Youth Jury and Broadcast Awards at CMCA PriMed. Amber’s continually expanding storytelling approach is driven by the belief that personal stories can best help connect audiences to important topics and issues. She has worked with organizations like ACLU, UNICEF, UNRWA, Defense for Children International and Amnesty International. Amber was a 2014 Sundance Institute Edit and Story Lab Fellow.

## CO-PRODUCER & EDITOR

SARA MAAMOURI is a Tunisian-born documentary filmmaker based in San Francisco for over a decade. Her projects include ITVS-LINCS awardee, *The Music’s Gonna Get You Through* (2010), and the Cyprus documentary *In This Waiting* (2011), a feature length film, which premiered at Thessaloniki Documentary Festival, the short documentary *Amal’s Garden* (2012), an official selection of Dubai International Film Festival, Cinema du Reel and Bird’s Eye View. Sara most recently edited *Genomania*, a feature-length documentary about genetic and biological determinism in the 20th century, and co-produced/edited *A Revolution in Four Seasons* a feature-length documentary on Tunisia’s democratic future, which premiered at Hot Docs (2016).



## CO-PRODUCER & POST PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR

MARK LIPSON attended NYU Film School and came to Los Angeles to pursue photography and film/television producing. He developed and associate produced the original *Children of the Corn* feature and produced *Almost You*, an indie-comedy for Fox Classics. In the mid-90's he supervised three innovative documentary series for ITVS, including *The United States of Poetry*. Later, while shooting stills for David Byrne's film *True Stories*, he met Errol Morris and went on to produce three of Errol's films: the award winning *The Thin Blue Line*, then *Fast Cheap and Out of Control* and most recently, *Tabloid*.

Mark has executive produced and post-supervised numerous independent features such as *Standard Operating Procedure*, *Countdown to Zero*, *This Space Available*, *The Source Family Movie* and *Red Army*.

His most recent film, *In Football We Trust*, premiered at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival. Mark's current projects include *Bogalusa Charm*, *#NoFilter*, *Larry Flynt for President*, *JoyBubbles* and *Belly of the Beast*.

## FIELD PRODUCER

MAY ODEH was born in Birzeit, near Ramallah, Palestine. She is a director and producer, known for *Diaries* (2011) and *Searching for Napoleon* (2006).

May has worked on the production of many Palestinian fiction films, including Anne-Marie Jacir's projects. Most recently, May established a production company entitled Odeh Films, aiming to produce creative documentaries and independent feature films from the region.





## EDITOR

KEN SCHNEIDER has edited over 35 feature-length documentaries, focusing on war and peace, human rights, artists' lives, untold American histories, and contemporary social issues. Ken co-edited the Oscar-nominated *Regret To Inform*.

His films have screened on PBS' American Masters, POV, Independent Lens, Frontline, on HBO, and in television and film festivals worldwide. Other projects includes: *Have You Heard From Johannesburg* (Emmy winning series); *The Good War and Those Who Refused To Fight It*; *El Poeta*; *Orozco: Man of Fire*; *Ralph Ellison: An American Journey*; *Store Wars*; *School Colors*; *Bolinao 52*; *Ancestors in the Americas* and *Speaking in Tongues*.

Ken's editing can be viewed on [kenschneidereditor.net](http://kenschneidereditor.net).

Ken lectures at NYU, Harvard, San Francisco City College, the SF Art Institute, and Chapman University.

## COMPOSER MUSIC

OMAR FADEL'S work can be heard in numerous films, television shows and video games, namely the global game franchise *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*, *The Dictator*, and the Oscar nominated film, *Day One*.

Born in Houston, and raised between Texas and Dubai, Omar's global exposure is heard throughout his music. He is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin where he studied film, music production and composition. In 2010, Omar composed the score to the award-winning feature film, *The Taqwacores*, which premiered to a standing ovation at the Sundance Film Festival. He then went on to score the critically acclaimed Lionsgate documentary, *Just Like Us*.

In 2011, Omar was selected to score the first ever Arabic language, American studio feature film, *The United*, produced by Walt Disney Motion Pictures. This was followed by Omar scoring the award-winning documentary, *In Search of Oil and Sand*. In 2013, the Sundance Institute awarded Omar a prestigious Fellowship at their Film Music Composer's Lab. Omar works in his state of the art studio, *Fly the Coop Studios*, in mid-city Los Angeles.





# SELECTED CREDITS

A full credit list is available upon request.

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Sally Jo Fifer, Lois Vossen

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Amber Fares, Mark Lipson

**Edited by**  
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**Cinematography by**  
Amber Fares

**Music by**  
Omar Fadel

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