

“When you're used to something and it's gone, part of you is lost.”

A GRAIN MILLER KEEPS PALESTINIAN FOOD CULTURE ALIVE IN EXILE

قصة عائشة

AISHA'S STORY



“Food is the most precious part of Palestinian heritage.”

Palestinian grain miller Aisha Azzam safeguards her culture in a refugee camp. Aisha shares her people's history through food prepared with love, steadfastness, and humour.

“Such a beautiful film. As a Palestinian, I was really emotional.”

Yafa El Masri, Durham UK

SYNOPSIS

“Food is the most precious part of Palestinian heritage.” Aisha Azzam and her husband started their family grain mill in Baqa’a refugee camp, Jordan, 35 years ago. She treasures her role in safeguarding culture by milling the grains and herbs essential to Palestinian cuisine. Through food, Aisha traces the story of Palestinian displacement and rebuilding family and community in a refugee camp. Harvesting, milling, cooking, and feasts ground the film’s arc of displacement, longing, steadfastness and resistance. In Aisha’s words, “Food is what keeps us together as Palestinians.”

Aisha’s story intimately captures the loss, beauty, and resistance that define Palestinian lives.

62 minutes; Arabic with English Subtitles

Subtitles are also available in Spanish, French, German, Italian, Mandarin, and other languages

Past Festivals: Hot Docs 2025 (Toronto), DOXA 2025 (Vancouver)

Trailer Link: <https://vimeo.com/889407916/7b6b44b947?ts=0&share=copy>

AWARDS TO DATE

Audience Award — Mid-Length Documentary

Hot Docs – Spring 2025

Top 20 Audience Favourite

Hot Docs – Spring 2025

Honourable Mention — Vancouver Film Studios Award

DOXA – Spring 2025

CONTACT

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FILM SOCIALS

 [@aishasstoryfilm](https://www.instagram.com/aishasstoryfilm)  aishasstory.com

TEAM BIOGRAPHIES

Aisha Azzam moved as a child with her family to Baqa'a refugee camp, Jordan, in the wake of the 1967 war. She and her late husband Hassan Alababda took over their stone grinding mill in 1987. Now working with her sons, Aisha has dedicated her life to preparing the fundamental ingredients for Palestinian cuisine and passing along that cultural knowledge to the next generations.

Salam Barakat Guenette grew up in a Palestinian family in exile in Amman, Jordan. She has an MA in history from the University of Victoria and works for the Government of British Columbia. Salam's research interests are in human migration and the intersection rather than clash of cultures.

Elizabeth Vibert is a historian at the University of Victoria, writer, and filmmaker whose work focuses on grassroots efforts toward food justice in contexts of poverty, colonial inequities, and climate crisis. Her previous documentary, *The Thinking Garden*, convinced her of the power of film to share stories of ordinary women doing extraordinary things in the face of such challenges.

Chen Wang is an internationally award-winning photographer and cinematographer. As cinematographer and in other roles, Chen has worked on dozens of documentaries, short and feature films, music videos and commercials. Chen is a past director of production at Cinevic Society of Independent Filmmakers in Victoria, Canada. He grew up in mainland China and now lives in Victoria.

PRODUCTION TEAM

Directors: **Elizabeth Vibert and Chen Wang**

Producers: **Elizabeth Vibert and Salam Barakat Guenette**

Starring: **Aisha Azzam**

Director of Photography: **Chen Wang**

Story consultants: **Aisha Azzam, Afnan Al Salahat, Amal Alkhawaja, Deborah Campbell, Mo Bradley**

Editors: **Chen Wang and Elizabeth Vibert**

Consulting Editor: **Christine Welsh**

Music: **Basel Zayed and Ayn Trio, Shoko Inoue, Bashar Ahmad Smairat**

Sound Design: **Gilles Maillet Sound|Echo|Pulse**

Palestinian Location Team: **Afnan Al Salahat, Alaadin AlDaher, Ibrahim Abo Namous, Shatha Salameh, Amal Alkhawaja, Laila Shahin, Imad Alquran**

Graphic Design: **Isaac Hatfield**

REVIEWS OF AISHA'S STORY

“Such a beautiful film. As a Palestinian, I was really emotional.”

Yafa El Masri, Durham UK

“Incredibly moving ... The human story is most touching for its stoicism and dignity.”

Avi Shlaim, Oxford

“A beautiful piece of work.”

Christiane Dabdoub, author and heritage specialist, Bethlehem

“I’ve never seen such a grounded and heartfelt depiction of belonging through food ... As a documentary filmmaker, this was a masterclass.”

Reviewer of DOXA screening

“I cried happy tears over my Palestinian heritage for the first time in a long time.”

Kyla Mort, student

“Inspiring and poignant ... Highly recommended as a way to understand Palestinian heritage, self-determination, and resistance.”

Charles Z. Levkoe, Canada Research Chair in Equitable Food Systems

“Profoundly touching! Reminds us of the incredible power of art to keep a people’s story alive.”

Basma Majerbi, professor of business

“So touching and emotional.”

Tammara Soma, co-director, Food is My Teacher

“Aisha’s Story highlights the strength and resilience of Palestinian women and the passing down of heritage and values through generations.”

Dersu Yazicioglu, art historian, İzmir

“Aisha’s Story is stunning.”

Jordan Stanger-Ross, historian

HOW IT CAME TOGETHER

Notes on Aisha's Story from Director Elizabeth Vibert

I met Aisha Azzam in early 2018 when I was in Amman, Jordan, to screen *The Thinking Garden* at the UN Women Film Festival. *The Thinking Garden* tells the story of South African women farmers fighting poverty and marginalization through a community garden. A member of the audience at the Amman screening asked, "When are you going to make a film about Palestinian women?" A seed was planted.

Aisha and I had our first conversation in the mill she and her late husband, Hassan, set up more than thirty-five years ago in Baqa'a refugee camp. Aisha, now working with her son, stone-mills grains in the traditional forms used in Palestinian cuisine. I was captivated by Aisha – her wry humour and warmth, her intelligence, and her firm attachment to Palestine, the ancestral homeland she has not been permitted to enter since she was a small child. During that first visit, I interrupted her at one point to say, "Aisha, it sounds like you're holding up Palestinian food culture in the camp." She responded, a twinkle in her eye, "I am single-handedly holding up Palestinian food culture in the camp." She drew me into her laughter. A friendship blossomed.

Aisha's Story draws on the life experience and expertise of many Palestinians in Baqa'a camp and beyond. We trained young people in the community with interests in storytelling and art to work as camera operators, sound technicians, and in other crucial roles. Salam Barakat Guenette, who grew up in exile in Amman, joined our team as interpreter and stepped into the role of co-producer. Salam's mother taught in Baqa'a camp in the wake of the 1967 war, when homes and school rooms were canvas tents. Aisha and her adult children, neighbours, and others offer insights from one major strand of Palestinian society, those living in refugee camps across the region.

When we were making *The Thinking Garden* together, Director Christine Welsh talked about telling the stories of "ordinary women doing extraordinary things." These are the stories I am attached to, in my writing and as a filmmaker. I was first guided to film by the South African farmers. My articles would be of little use to them, they pointed out: "When are you going to make a film about us?" Film could be shared with their families and community, could speak to other farmers, and perhaps reach policymakers. How right they were. *The Thinking Garden* premiered at the 2017 International Women in Film Festival in Vancouver and, over the next year, travelled to festivals and communities on four continents. It screened in Xitsonga with English, Arabic, French, or German subtitles. It was shown on television in Southern Africa. Audiences cheered the story of older women – the "poorest of the poor" by many global metrics – crafting dignified lives through collaborative farming activities that resisted the pressures of international capital and national-level neglect.

At a tragic time in the history of the region and its peoples, *Aisha's Story* will have audiences cheering again. Aisha treasures her role in safeguarding culture through her activities as a miller. Through food, she traces the story of Palestinian displacement and rebuilding family and community in a refugee camp. Aisha teaches her grandchildren to use the grinding stone her grandmother carried with her when the older generations were forced to flee in 1948. She cooks with her daughters "hand by hand," although several are blind. Aisha's challenges are many. She meets them with humour, *sumud* (steadfastness), and food: "Food is what keeps us together as Palestinians."