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***The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem.* (2021). Screenwriter Shlomo Mashiach, executive story line Esther Namdar Taman and creator Oded Davidoff; director Oded Lotan, presented by yes and Artza Production, Israel. Netflix.**

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In two eventful seasons, this television series based on a novel by Sarit Vishai Levi is available on Netflix (airdates June 7, 2021-March 4, 2023). The drama largely told in intertwined flashbacks juxtaposing narratives of different decades relates the interweaving stories of a Jerusalem-based Sephardic family beginning in the Ottoman Empire before the Jewish people had a state.

Filming began in summer 2020. The film was shot in various locations of Safed in Northern Israel spliced with shots of a miniature set. The saga continues during and after the Israeli Independence War. The years spanned are 1919-1949. Resistance against the British is also featured.

Women and their plights figure large in the story, including the role of the matriarch Mercada superbly acted by Irit Kaplan. To stop the marriage of her son Gabriel to an Ashkenazi, in Season 1, she organizes his marriage to a servant to the British, Rosa (Hila Saada who claims this is her best role yet). Rosa continues to function as a demeaned subservient in the Ermosa family even while her husband, played by Michael Aloni of *Shtisel*, does not love her. He takes breaks and visits sex-workers in Lebanon, at the encouragement of his mother. There he becomes deeply involved with an exotic dancer. Once, while he is away, Rosa is raped and impregnated by an Arab producing a child whom Mercada refuses to embrace and recognize as part of the family, even when as a grandmother she comes back to Jerusalem after a ten-year hiatus in Spain.

The relationship between Rosa and her husband's favorite daughter, Luna, played by a twenty-three-year-old Swell Ariel Or, is strained. Luna steps out to take a job in a shop and to pursue her career as a clothes designer, producing high class items bought by British women of means who take an interest in nurturing the young woman's career. They refer to her as "the most amazing seamstress in Palestine" and invite her out to their private parties.

Luna has troubles of her own, including being in love with a member of the resistance who was executed and a subsequent marriage to a Sephardi neighbor. He becomes extremely jealous of her career, loiters in the shop where she works scaring off customers, and beats her, then resists giving her freedom in a divorce defying the decision handed down by an arbitrator. He had suffered trauma during his military service when young Jewish men joined with the British to fight a common enemy in the European war. There he had been confined in a mental institution for eighteen months, which only later does Luna discover.

Season 2 Episode 12 documents Luna's return from the hospital as her family rallies around her, overcoming various layers of tension between them to do so. Mercada covers a mirror as she doesn't want Luna to see herself badly beaten, and her father sings to her in Ladino as Luna pleads with him not to leave her alone.

David, the estranged husband, sends an emissary to try to reach Luna, saying he is worried about her. The real motivation seems to be to discover if the family went to the police, yet no one had the inclination to get the police involved in a domestic matter. Simply put, Mercada says why would they do that, so everyone knows what goes on in the Ermosa family? She seems more concerned about damaging the family honor. And as Rosa points out, "they are husband and wife; the police don't get involved in this." But the woman with whom Luna's husband is sheltering seemed to think the fight, which happened to get a little physical, was justified, since Luna had planned on going on a trip to England without telling him.

Nonetheless women are not only victims in the series. In periods when the Ermosa delicatessen undergoes difficulties, Rosa supports the family through making food to sell to the British. Luna also contributes through her design and production of dresses and what she earns in the dress shop. She financially supports her younger sister (Rochelita, played by Eli Steen), in pursuing university studies where she gets involved with her Communist professor. Luna also deceives the family to spread her wings by participating in a dance competition in modernizing Tel Aviv. She furthermore outright rejects her mother's and grandmother's attempts to school her in housewifely chores like cooking to please her husband. Stubborn as a mule, she defies her father's orders to not return to work at the shop after her husband leaves a threatening note and disappears; she also turns down the shopkeeper's paternal gesture to walk her home. She asserts that her home is a home not a

prison and refuses to be locked in. After the British discover she is the niece of the most notorious Jewish terrorist, she assures them that since he killed her best friend for having had a British boyfriend, she had cut off all ties to him.

Other dimensions of women's roles deepen the script through portrayal of a woman healer who uses folkloric and psychic tools, and that of a woman neighbor who becomes involved with Rosa's notorious brother. She completely supports herself and her son (who later marries Luna) through washing laundry. The character of Rosa is further developed as she courageously maintains a relationship with her brother who plays a prominent role in the Jewish underground. He often appears to her on the streets wearing various disguises. The rejected Ashkenazi lover of Gabriel Ermosa returns to Jerusalem from America as a widow and goes on the lamb with her son who is really Gabriel's illegitimate son, not the son of the Ashkenazi who she had married in a rush after already conceiving.

The emotional soap-opera like series, based on real events, won four well-deserved awards in the 2022 Israeli Television Academy Awards, one of which was Best Daily Drama. It was shown in Israel, the UK, the US, and Spain. The noteworthy series that documents the culture of crucial periods in history is largely in Hebrew but includes Ladino and English.