

WAJIB

(The Wedding Invitation)

A film by

Annemarie Jacir



96 mins / Palestine/France/Germany/Columbia/Norway/Qatar 2017/ in Arabic with English subtitles /
cert tbc

London Film Festival 2017 Competition - Special Mention

Release September 14th 2018

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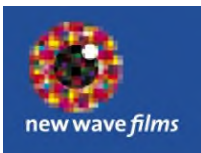
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SYNOPSIS

Abu Shadi (Mohammad Bakri) is a divorced father and a school teacher in his mid-60s living in Nazareth, (the largest Arab majority city in Israel). He is separated from his wife who lives in the US, so after his daughter's wedding in one month he will be living alone.

Shadi (played by Mohammad Bakri's real-life son Saleh Bakri), his architect son, arrives from Rome after years abroad to help his father in hand-delivering the wedding invitations to each guest, as is the local Palestinian custom.

(The term *wajib* roughly translates as social duty.)

As the estranged pair spend the day together travelling all over the city visiting relatives, friends and people Abu Shadi is obligated to invite, the details of their relationship come to a head, challenging the preconceptions of their very different lives.

JURY Prize Oran, 2018

BEST ACTOR for Mohammed Bakri and Saleh Bakri, Oran, 2018

BEST FILM, Kosovo 2018

BEST FILM, Casablanca 2018

And many other international awards for the film and the actors

It was also Palestine's entry for the 2018 Oscars.

Further information and downloads [here](#)

Photo set can be downloaded [here](#)



CAST

Abu Shadi
Shadi
Amal
Fadya

Mohammad Bakri
Saleh Bakri
Maria Zreik
Rada Alamuddin

CREW

Director
Script
Producer
DOP
Production designer
Editor
Sound designer
Costume designer
Mixing
Production Company
Coproducers

Annemarie Jacir
Annemarie Jacir
Ossama Bawardi
Antoine Heberle
Nael Kanj
Jacques Comets
Carlos Garcia
Hamada Atallah
Kostas Varympopiotis
Philistine Films
JBA production, Cactus World Films,
Metafora Productions, Klinkerfilm,
Ciudad Lunar, Ape&Bjørn,
Snow Globe Film, Schortcut Films
L'Aide aux Cinémas du Monde - CNC,
Institut Français, Palestinian Ministry of Culture
Enjaaz, FDC Colombia, Sorfond,
Visions Sud Est, Doha Film Institute,
Nord Deutscher Rundfunk NDR

With the participation of

**Palestine / France/Germany/
Columbia/ Norway/ Qatar
2017 / 96 mins / DCP 5.1 / 1.85 Colour**

ANNEMARIE JACIR



Palestinian filmmaker Annemarie Jacir has written, directed and produced over sixteen films. Her short film *LIKE TWENTY IMPOSSIBLES* (2003) was the first Arab short film in history to be an official selection of the Cannes Film Festival and continued to break ground when it went on to be a finalist for the Academy Awards.

Her second work to debut in Cannes Un Certain Regard, the critically acclaimed *SALT OF THIS SEA* (2008), garnered fourteen international awards, included the FIPRESCI Critics Award. It was the first feature film directed by a Palestinian woman and Palestine's 2008 Oscar Entry for Foreign Language Film.

WHEN I SAW YOU (released by New Wave Films) won, among other awards, Best Asian Film at the 63rd Berlin Intl Film Festival and Best Arab Film in Abu Dhabi FF. It was also Palestine's 2012 Oscar Entry. Notably, the film's production was entirely Arab-financed with all Palestinian producers marking a new trend in Arab cinema.

WAJIB is her third feature film and premiered in Locarno 2017. It was also Palestine's Oscar Entry that year, and since then has been released around the world.

FILMOGRAPHY

FEATURE FILMS

Wajib (2017)

When I Saw You (2012)

Salt of this Sea (2008)

SHORTS

Like Twenty Impossibles (2003)

Sound of the Street (2006)

An Explanation: (and then Burn the Ashes) (2005)

A Few Crumbs for the Birds (2005)

Until When (2004)

Palestine is Waiting (2001)

The Satellite Shooters (2001)

Two Hundred Years of American Ideology (2000)

A Revolutionary Tale (2000)

A Post-Oslo History (1998)

Interview (1994)

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In Palestine, there is a tradition which remains a big part of life today. When someone gets married, the men of the family, usually the father and sons, are expected to personally deliver the wedding invitations to each invitee in person. There is no mailing of invitations, or having them delivered by strangers. And unless the invitations are personally delivered, it is considered disrespectful. I don't know any other place which adheres to this tradition as much as the Palestinians living in the North of Palestine, where **Wajib** is set.

Wajib loosely means "social duty". When my husband's sister got married, it was his *wajib* to deliver the invitations with his father. I decided to silently tag along as he and his father spent five days traversing the city and surrounding villages delivering each invitation. As the silent observer, it was at times funny and other times painful. Aspects of that special relationship between father and son, the tensions of a sometimes tested love between them, came out in small ways. I began working on the idea for a film about this fragile relationship.

INTERVIEW WITH ANNEMARIE JACIR

SEPTEMBER 1, 2017 BY JEREMY ELPHICK | [LOCARNO FILM FESTIVAL](#)

Since her 2001 short, Annemarie Jacir has established herself as one of Palestine's most recognised and influential filmmakers. *Salt of This Sea* (2008) and *When I Saw You* (2012) were both chosen as the Palestinian entry into the Academy Awards, yet despite this profile, Jacir's work has always remained focused on the immediate and the intimate. It's a trend that she continues with her first work in five years, *Wajib*, which focuses on the relationship between a father living in Nazareth and his son, who has returned from Italy for his sister's wedding. The Bethlehem-based director uses the relationship between the father and son to explore manifestations of Palestinian identity. They embody, and live, different responses to conflict and occupation, and the depths of these divisions boil over throughout the film; as nuance paves the way for an unexpected sense of catharsis.

We spoke to Annemarie Jacir at Locarno Film Festival about the responses to conflict each character embodies, making films about Palestinian identity, and how the country's film scene has developed in recent years.

How much has your own experience played into writing your recent films, which have been so focused on the Palestinian identity – with those anxieties of separation and idealism compounded into this with *Wajib*?

Well, I'm not from Nazareth. I'm from Bethlehem, and this tradition of delivering wedding invites is a Palestinian tradition. I'm finding out that many other Mediterranean countries do it... I know someone who is Italian and they have something similar. But nobody really practises it anymore. Except in Nazareth, they still do it, and I was really interested in that, and I was interested in Nazareth because I'm spending a lot of time there, because it's the largest Palestinian town inside Israel. It's completely Palestinian. There is the town of Nazareth, and then the Israelis built, in the 1950s, this settlement right on top of it, called Nazareth Illit, which is where father and son go to deliver one wedding invitation and then start arguing. I was interested in Nazareth as a character, and the people of Nazareth, who live such a strange, contradictory life, in some ways. And they have... Nazareth is a violent, tense city. At the same time, you have this great humour. In a way, that's how people survive. You find that in a lot of minorities in the world. Humour is a survival mechanism.

I was interested in that, and then what it means for a father and son if Shadi has to come back to help his father. That's his *wajib*. That's his duty. He has to help his father deliver the invitations, as the son. But when was the last time those two were really together? I mean, and the fact that men maybe don't talk. You know, the stereotype, they don't talk to each other as much.

And two people who are carrying a lot of pain with them, and they're trying to deal with it, with Abu Shadi it's the fact that his wife left him, and he's been struggling, and he tells all these white lies in the film, and he tries to have this image. But when have the two of them really been face to face with the tension that has existed since the mother left? To be in a car and stuck with each other, these were the things I wanted to explore.



The father and son – Abu Shadi and Shadi – share a certain male stubbornness, and their rigidity and disconnect seems to stem from this; with their respective experiences continually blocking them from intimacy with one another.

It's continuously blocking them. It's also a case of two men who made different choices in their lives. Different choices of how they want to live and who they want to be. They have a lot of love for each other, but at the same time, they can't stand each other. Sometimes, that's actually the case in reality too. In the end, I think it's really about respect. What they really want from one another is some kind of basic respect. That's what they're both looking for. Abu Shadi feels that his son respects the mother [his ex-wife] more than him. She did what she wanted to do, and he didn't. As he says in the end: "I could have done that, too, but I didn't." He made a compromise because he wanted to raise a family. That's what's important to him.

That genuine sense of revelation snuck up on me a bit in the film. At the start, Shadi came off as a really repellent, judgemental figure. He was intolerable. On the other hand, Abu Shadi's anger and acquiescence felt off-putting as well. I thought that was one of the real strengths of the film. I immediately felt such a distance from the characters; in the case of Shadi I was almost hostile.

Yeah. He's so smug.

But over the course of *Wajib*, you draw the audience in, as there's a complexity and depth given to their relationship and their characters. It crept up on me at some point towards the end of the film, where I realised I'd begun sympathising really strongly with these characters – and I couldn't place when that shift had taken place.

I like this... You know, I always have these kind of flawed characters in my films. I don't know if you saw *Salt of the Sea* but Soraya (Suheir Hammad) is a little bit similar in a way. She's not totally sympathetic. You gradually come to understand her and like her in the film, but I think I kind of like unsympathetic characters. You slowly get to know them, and maybe you like them less, maybe you like them more. I don't know, but it depends.

You've worked with Saleh Bakri who plays Shadi before, right?

Yes, Saleh. We sort of began together. I consider him a collaborator. An artistic collaborator.

Did he live in Jordan, as well?

No, he lives in Palestine. We both live in Palestine now. We both live in the same city. But yeah, we began together and I really like working with him. He was always the son [in *Wajib*] for me. His father (Mohammad Bakri) was a very well-known actor in Palestine, but I hadn't worked with him before. It's the first time I've worked with Mohammad.

Right. What was the dynamic like working with him – as both a well-known actor, and as the father of Saleh in real life and Shadi in the film?

It was very collaborative. I wasn't sure about casting him. I had no doubt about his ability to do the role of Abu Shadi, because I know that he's a fantastic actor, but I was doubting whether they would they be able to do it, being real father and son. Would they be able to push themselves to open themselves up that much to being that vulnerable and that sensitive? It's a sensitive issue because it's too close. It's too close to them.

They are father and son. Maybe they don't want to air their dirty laundry or whatever. In *Wajib*, they have to be naked. They really have to be naked to do this together; to be open to confronting each other. I wasn't sure that they could do it, even though they're professional. Both of them are professional actors, but it's different. Family makes you crazy. Family makes you do weird things. So I talked a lot, and then finally I talked to him about it.

I said: "Mohammad, listen, I want to be really direct. I don't know, it's a tricky thing and this is why I'm hesitating." We talked about it, but then I dreamt about it. Whenever I dream about an actor, I cast them. It's happened a couple of times and I've never been wrong with that. I had my dream, then I woke up. I said, "It's him. He's the one."

There's such a range of emotion they have to engage with in the script as well, but I think they definitely broke through those barriers. There's an implicit political landscape that underpins their relationship too, and it moves throughout the film more broadly. Whether it's Shadi walking out of the car because he doesn't want to go to the house of a settler, the scene where he rushes to help a guy about to be hit by a baseball bat – a reminder of the presence of violence that is always close to boiling over. It's a political film in a lot of ways, but it veers away from that needing to be overt. I wanted to know how you considered those elements, whether you wanted to express them with subtlety or if it's more something you encounter implicitly?

I think that was part of the experience for me. I'm not interested in the fight at the gas station. I'm not interested in the obvious political stuff. I'm not interested in the stuff we already know, the easy stuff. I'm more interested, like even with them, with all their dialogue in the film. There's a lot of talking in the film. I'm more interested in the silent moments between them. I think it says a lot more when they can't speak, when they don't know how to say something. There's more in those moments. That moment of the script was not cut in editing, it was in the script. It cuts at that moment at the gas station. It doesn't continue, because I knew that was not interesting. You know what I mean?

Yeah. I think you're right about that silence. The most affecting moments and the most surprising ones are the most valuable. They're the scenes that changed how I approached both Shadi and Abu Shadi. The ending where they're smoking together – a very simple, common action – is embedded with a real sense of catharsis.

Yeah.

Within the broader cast of the film, did you write any characters in response to anything, as representative of anyone?

I don't think anybody represents anybody. None of the women represent women. Nobody represents anything except for themselves. Talking about the women, they're just women I know. You know, like Amal, Shadi's sister. She is really different from Shadi. She's kind of conservative. She's the younger sister, but she's actually a little bit more conservative than him. She's happy with her life, in a way. She lived apart, and now she's getting married. She has a partner. She's marrying him. She's going to stay in Nazareth. It's not like Shadi, who is more like his mother. He's trying to find his place in the world. Maybe it's why he sympathises with his mother, why he understands why she left Nazareth. But Amal? She's different, and she's a smart person too. I didn't want to make her like a cliché boring conservative person who just wants to get married. No. She's comfortable with the choices she's made in her life, and that's it.



Then Fadjah, the cousin, she's very different. She lives with a man and there's a critique about our society a little bit in that. She lived with her boyfriend and they broke up. In that kind of a society, she's been judged for that. Now she's alone: a professional, a lawyer, beautiful, smart, but she's alone. She's single, and you get the sense in the film she will remain like that. It's because of this idea that "she lived with somebody and now it's over for her."

That exists in Palestinian society a little bit, and I wanted to critique that. If Fadjah was living somewhere else, she would be happier. If she was living anywhere else in the world, she'd have a trail of like 50 men behind her, I'm sure.

As one of the more prominent Palestinian filmmakers working today, I wanted to know how you related with the broader industry back home. How do you feel that industry exists today, outside of your own work? How do you see it evolving in the coming years?

I think that the future of Palestinian cinema looks very good. I think there's a lot of young people making really interesting work, while working in difficult conditions. It's always been difficult, but it's not getting better. The only thing that's gotten better is that digital filmmaking has made things a little bit cheaper. You can make work and you can experiment more. Film is more accessible; making films is more accessible to people. But I think there's a fantastic generation of Palestinian filmmakers and storytellers. I don't think we have an industry, but we have actors, and we have directors, and we have producers. We have storytellers. I think there's really more and more coming from Palestine – and it's good stuff.

Any particular names?

There's a few names in both documentary and fiction. Like, in documentary, there's a woman, Hind Shoufani, who's making really personal work that I think is very, very interesting. In fiction, there's a guy named Muayad Alayan. He's working on his second feature now, working on a very low budget, and he's very talented. There's a lot. There's a lot.

