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**Friday February 8th, 2019**  
**Wajib (15)**

*dir:* **Annemarie Jacir**

*Starring:* **Mohammad Bakri, Saleh Bakri**

*sponsors:* **Rob and Val Sargent**

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**Synopsis:** Nazareth, present day. Abu Shadi and his son Shadi are delivering wedding invitations around town, as is the custom. As they travel around the city, disagreements between them - stemming partly from events in the past and partly from resentment of his son's decision to move to Italy for a career as an architect - begin to surface, highlighting their different perspectives on life. The attendance of Shadi's mother at the wedding is a particularly sore point, as is Abu Shadi's insistence in inviting a Jewish co-worker whom Shadi considers to be an Israeli spy. The arguments between them become increasingly heated. They part company before their journey is finished. As the day comes to an end, they are reunited in the family apartment

Writer-director Annemarie Jacir's *Wahib*, a sort of errand-running, road-trip movie with a city mile odometer, relies almost entirely on the ability of its co-stars, Mohammad and Saleh Bakri, to command the screen. The duo, real life father and son, are here playing Abu Shadi and Shadi going door-to-door in Nazareth, delivering invitations to the wedding of daughter and sister Amal. The population of the town is mostly Arab Muslims and Christians, with a few Jewish Israeli settlements in the mix, though the decorations for the forthcoming Christmas holiday are everywhere, because after all, this is Nazareth.

The festive atmosphere does not penetrate the beaten up old Volkswagen in which the twosome make their rounds. Between father and Son there is a quiet unease, the reasons for which will be meticulously excavated as the film proceeds. There are, seemingly, echoes of the Bakri's own lives in the characters they play - Shadi is an architect living abroad in Italy, while Saleh has made a name for himself in Italian movies, playing the title role in Fabio Grassadonia and Antonio Piazza's 2013 Cannes prize winner *Salvo*. (This is Saleh's 3rd film with the Annemarie Jacir, following 2008's *Salt of the Sea* and 2012's *When I Saw You*.) But whereas Mohammed Bakri has at times been a controversial figure and outspoken critic of the Israeli government, his Abu Shadi a school teacher known throughout town, is a man who has lived his life observing and obeying the forms of how things are done, rocking the boat as little as possible for the sake of sustaining a placid life for his children. As such, he bears the fact that his wife left the family behind to start a new life in America as an enduring shame, while Shadi seems quietly approving of the fact that his mother had the bravery to fly the



coop - he's a Mama's boy, while Amal (Maria Zreik) appears closer to Dad. Each man bears a ranking grudge towards the other, and each seems not so secretly to regard the other as a coward and himself as a true, faithful son of Palestine - Abu Shadi resents Shadi for leaving his homeland behind while keeping up a resistance fantasy from afar, while Shadi resents his father for leading a compromised life of bowing and scraping to Israeli authority.

The movie proceeds through a slow, steady airing of all this dirty laundry, with the quiet brooding finally erupting into open hostility at the climax, though for most of its running time it's a film of held tongues more than spoken feelings. The westernised Shadi openly chafes at insults, while his father, more expert in the art of forbearance from a lifetime's practice, reverts in times of stress to a private smile, and ironic twinkle and a cigarette or two on the sly.

The close-to-the-vest performance by Bakri *père* is the movie's greatest virtue; opposite his increasingly exasperated son, he exudes the air of a man entirely at ease in his environment, working his way through the long rounds of parlours and pleasantries. He is a rehearsed caller, and it is second nature to him to receive the proffered morsels and little cups of coffee and to smoothly negotiate through the by-the-numbers conversation, telling a procession of hosts the things that they want to hear while giving an account of his son's life that has much more to do with his own wishes than with any reality.

The pattern that develops through the film, which unfolds over the course of a single day, is that of a pendulum swinging back and forth between public performance and private agreement, as Abu Shadi and Shadi step out of the car to go through the motions of playing functional father-son unit with friends of the family, only to pick up their running argument once on the move again and away from prying eyes, the peevish petulance gradually but inexorably developing into open confrontation.

Whether on the stage of the sitting room or the back stage of the car, *Wajib* is distinguished by a fine attention to detail, applying the same fidelity to depicting the texture of everyday life in middle class Nazareth as it does to capturing the curious mixture of pride, shame, dutiful diligence and dudgeon that comprises its central relationship. Jacir and the Bakris know these characters inside and

out, and as such the stalemate irresolution of the film's ending seems the only possible choice. Here, as very often in life, the best you can hope for isn't closure, but a fresh detente.

### Credits

<b>Abu Shadi</b>	Mohammad Bakri
<b>Shadi</b>	Saleh Bakri
<b>Abu Murad</b>	Tarik Kopty
<b>Um Murad</b>	Monera Shehadeh
<b>Maria</b>	Lama Tatour
<b>Director</b>	Annemarie Jacir
<b>Screenplay</b>	Annemarie Jacir
<b>Director of</b>	Antoine Héberlé
<b>Photography</b>	Jacques Comets
<b>Editor</b>	Noel Kanj
<b>Production Design</b>	Carlos Garcia
<b>Sound</b>	Hamada Atallah
<b>Costume</b>	<b>Palestine/France/Germany</b>
	<b>2017</b>
	<b>96 mins</b>

### Another View

Annemarie Jacir's new feature is aptly titled – '*Wajib*' - is an Arabic term referring to a mandatory duty that will get you punished if you ignore it. As such, the film deals with the complexities of living in – and leaving – a city like Nazareth.

Is there anything we owe to our homeland? To the people and community that raised us? Can we ever fully diverge from the path they have laid for us, and if so do we have any say in how those we leave behind choose to lead their lives? In the private setting in which she addresses these questions, Jacir offers wider thoughts on Palestinian life, not least on the emotional price paid by those living under Israeli rule.

The film sees Shadi (Saleh Bakri), a young architect working in Rome, return to his hometown to attend his sister's wedding. Most of *Wajib* is set in his car or at the homes of relatives, as Shadi drives door-to-door to hand-deliver wedding invitations with his father (Mohammad Bakri). Tension builds along their journey as Shadi's father, both privately and in public, tries to convince him to move back to Nazareth so that he can "do the right thing" and settle down with a wife.

It is clear, however, that Shadi has no intention of coming back nor to abandon the culture he has embraced abroad. He struggles to readapt to the customs of his homeland, which he now examines through an eye informed by the new ideas he adopted in Europe. Shadi only has disdain for the way things are done in Nazareth.

*Wajib* depicts the effect that moving somewhere else – where the grass seems greener – has on our perception of the place and culture we have always known. We might baulk at the ingratitude Shadi shows to the people that brought him up and his lack of respect for everything his native land has to offer. Anyone who has ever moved abroad might find it easier to appreciate part of his reaction as inherent to the homecoming experience.

Jacir subtly opposes two visions of Israel in the characters of Shadi and his father. The latter has accepted that some of his honour, convictions and patriotism ought to be silenced in order to raise his family under Israeli surveillance. Estranged from the dangerous realities of his native land, Shadi eventually confronts his father on

what appears to him as cowardice and treason (of Palestine) over a powerful, climatic argument.

### Thomas Nguyen: Little White Lies

#### **Our next screening: Friday February 15th, 7.30pm The Wound (S. Africa, 2017. Cert 15)**

Set amid the scenic grandeur of the Eastern Cape, *The Wound* takes us to the Xhosa community, where tradition and ritual play a vital part in community life. Kwanda is sent from his comfortable city background by his father, to spend 2 weeks under the guidance of an older mentor Xolani, while preparing for the ceremony of transition to manhood. Kwanda's father - less than happy about his son's attitudes - hopes this will provide a solution, but Kwanda's arrival sets off a chain of events that end in tragedy.