



**THE TIME IS NEW**

# 200 Meters

## **Director's Statement**

I carry lots of memories that I no longer have access to, or it could be that I fear to dwell back into it. Oppression does alienate you as it denies you your basic rights; especially when you start adapting to it!

A forced separation aches a lot. *200 Meters* is my story and the story of thousands of Palestinians, and stories can definitely alter lives. I believe in the power of the cinema and how it touches our lives and its magical ways. I need to tell this story.

Images of the wall, checkpoints and soldiers are probably what come to mind when Palestine is mentioned. Although these images are also in this film, the focus will be on what such a separation does to us as human beings. And to shed more light on the invisible barriers and walls that are created as a result of the physical barrier.

Here in Palestine we got used to adapting to new situations, to do as we're told and camouflage our feelings. But this should no longer be acceptable. Freedom of movement is a very basic human right that seems to be a fairytale in such a brutal reality. The main character, Mustafa, obeyed the rules, endured humiliation and did as he was told in order to secure a small chance to be with his family – but when the same rules that alienated his life put his family and fatherhood at stake, will he obey it any longer?

## **In conversation with Ameen Nayfeh**

*The determination of a father to overcome all obstacles out of love for his family, in an extremely absurd and oppressive situation, is at the core of your movie. How did you first come across the idea of making a movie about Mustafa and his family, and the 200 meters that divide them?*

I can say that maybe 99% of Palestinians have to go through a similar journey in overcoming such absurd obstacles in their daily life. You fight your way to small victories in order to achieve simple, basic tasks. The idea of the film and the 200-meter distance came as an accumulation of both personal and collective experiences. I've experienced my share of separation as my mother is originally from a Palestinian village on the other side of the wall. The village was my 'Neverland' growing up. But after the wall was built, we were cut off from the rest of our family, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and childhood friends. I have lots of bad memories at checkpoints like everyone else. I can go on forever about the tragedies this situation of apartheid has created.

Of course, our reality is much more complicated than we portray in the film since we need to simplify it to be able to tell the story.

Almost 13 years ago, I was hanging out with one of my friends. His rooftop overlooks the wall and a Palestinian town on the other side. This friend – who happened to be a construction worker in Israel – started telling us: ‘Before the wall, I used to light a cigarette and I’d be home before it was finished. It’s a mere 200 meters away! Going to work now is like travelling around the Cape of Good Hope.’

This irrational situation has affected thousands of families. Many didn’t have the energy to adapt. Others fought their way hoping that the situation would eventually change. But despite this, the story I chose to tell was of the triumph of love.

*In your film you seamlessly combine elements from different genres, from family story over social drama to road movie and thriller elements. How did you develop this approach to filmmaking?*

I believe I was really influenced by my professor Mr Dewi Griffiths, who always emphasised the importance of genre. I actually started developing the script in film school back in 2010. I first pitched it as a road movie, where it was warmly received. Making a genre film was an early goal, but I did not want to make a melodrama. It took me some time and a couple writing workshops to develop the film from a straight road movie with no elements of social drama to a story that’s not only functional but also has emotion, and to weave the various story elements together into the quest of the main character. I believe this was the best approach to tell this story. The first short film I wrote was both a western and a road movie. I am still at the beginning of my career and exploring style. But I am a fan of genre films and yet I also appreciate social dramas, as they touch me the most.

*How was the collaboration with Ali Suliman, one of the most iconic Palestinian actors? At what point did he get involved in the film? Did you have him in mind when writing the role of Mustafa?*

He was in mind since the inception of the screenplay – the first draft, really. I first met him in person a year ahead of production and he was very interested and supportive. We started working together two months before the shoot, where we went through the tiniest details of Mustafa’s world. A reassuring experience that I had prior to *200 Meters* was that I had edited a short film that he starred in. So I was able to get first-hand information from my friend (who was also a first time director) on working with Ali.

Besides that, I didn’t know much about Ali other than his great acting. I was always asking myself, how the hell am I going to direct such a talent? He has worked with such top-notch directors! But it turned out that working with him was a real blessing. He was very generous with his ideas and solutions. At one point he also helped with casting. He is more than a world-class actor.

The support and trust he gave me – in addition to his support to any first-time actor in the film – shows the kind of person he is.

*Mustafa meets a very diverse group of travellers, from Palestine and beyond, during his odyssey. Can you tell us how you developed this ensemble of characters?*

The script went through a long period of development where the ensemble changed many times. The only constant characters were Mustafa and Kifah – the young men going to the wedding of his cousin. I wanted to keep the journey and the characters as authentic as possible. Credibility was a key issue for me. All characters are either people I knew, met, or had heard about. But it didn't mesh together until I had a cohesive structure for the screenplay. Only then was I able to see the dramatic potential of these characters and their relationship with Mustafa and his experience. The characters came to life to create a balance within our absurd realities. There is something truly arbitrary about the way we experience apartheid and separation. And yet the experience is both plausible and true, which is where a lot of the irony and humour came from, as well. It was such a great memory when I started casting and started to see my characters as real people. It was an absolutely exhilarating experience.

*Do you see yourself as part of a group of Palestinian filmmakers, or what are your references as an artist?*

I do identify as a Palestinian filmmaker and it is an honour to be affiliated with this group of hard-working individuals who took it upon themselves to reach out to the world. We are facing many challenges as independent Palestinian filmmakers. After all, we are working in a country with no filmmaking infrastructure. Personally I am influenced by my countryman Hani Abu-Asad, but also by filmmakers such as Asghar Farhadi or the Dardenne Brothers. My ambition is to tell good, inspiring stories from our region, not only from Palestine.

**Production notes**

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## 200 METERS

*Directed by:* Ameen Nayfeh

©: Odeh Films

*Production Company:* Odeh Films

*Co-produced by:* Metafora Productions, Memo Films, Adler Entertainment, Film i Skåne, Way Feature Films

*Supported by:* Doha Film Institute, Palestinian Cultural Fund, Royal Film Commission-Jordan, RTI

*Developed through:* EAVE Programme

*Presented by:* Odeh Films

*Executive Producers:* Francesco Melzi, Marco Colombo, Gabriele Moratti

*Produced by:* May Odeh

*1st Assistant Director:* Alex Koryakin

*Written by:* Ameen Nayfeh

*Director of Photography:* Elin Kirschfink

*VFX:* Henrik Lehmann

*Graphics:* Sebastian Cronholm

*Editing:* Kamal El Mallakh

*Production Designer:* Bashar Hassuneh

*Costume Designer:* Fairouze Nastas

*Make-up Artist:* Fairouze Nastas

*Hair:* Saed Jarrad

*Original Music:* Faraj Suleiman

*Piano:* Faraj Suleiman

*Bass:* Faraj Suleiman

*Sound Design:* Sylvain Bellemare

*Sound:* Raja Dubayah

*Sound Mixer:* Benny Persson

### Cast

Ali Suliman (*Mustafa*)

Anna Unterberger (*Anne*)

Motaz Malhees (*Kitah*)

Mahmoud Abu Aita (*Rami*)

Lana Zreik (*Salwa*)

Nabil Al Raei (*Nader*)

Ghassan Asgqar (*Saleh*)

Alaa Abu Saa (*Ahmad*)

Ahmed Tobasi (*Waleed*)

Ghasan Abbas (*Abu Nidal*)

Samia Bakri (*Nabeela*)

Palestine/Italy/Sweden/Qatar/Jordan 2019

96 mins

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## THE TIME IS NEW:

### SELECTIONS FROM CONTEMPORARY ARAB CINEMA

#### 200 Meters

Tue 7 Sep 20:50; Wed 15 Sep 18:10

#### As Above, So Below

(*Kama fissamaa', kathalika ala al-ard*)

Wed 8 Sep 20:45; Fri 1 Oct 18:10 (+ pre-recorded Q&A with director Sarah Francis)

#### 143 Sahara Street (143 rue du désert)

Sat 11 Sep 11:30; Mon 20 Sep 18:15

#### It Must Be Heaven

Sat 11 Sep 20:40; Mon 27 Sep 18:00;

Mon 4 Oct 14:30

#### Let's Talk Ehkeely

Mon 13 Sep 18:00 (+ pre-recorded Q&A with director Marianne Khoury);

Tue 5 Oct 20:50

#### Tlameess

Tue 14 Sep 20:40; Thu 30 Sep 18:00

#### The Man Who Sold His Skin

(*L'Homme qui a vendu sa peau*)

Thu 16 Sep 20:50

#### Talking About Trees

Mon 20 Sep 14:30; Mon 27 Sep 20:45; Sun 3 Oct 18:00

#### You Will Die at Twenty (Satamoto fel eshreen)

Thu 23 Sep 20:30 (+ pre-recorded Q&A with director Amjad Abu Alala);

Sat 2 Oct 14:20

#### Narrative Encounters: Shorts Programme

Fri 24 Sep 20:40; Tue 5 Oct 18:10

#### Adam

Sat 25 Sep 14:20; Mon 4 Oct 20:50

#### Abou Leila

Sun 26 Sep 18:00; Sat 2 Oct 20:30

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email [prognotes@bfi.org.uk](mailto:prognotes@bfi.org.uk)

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