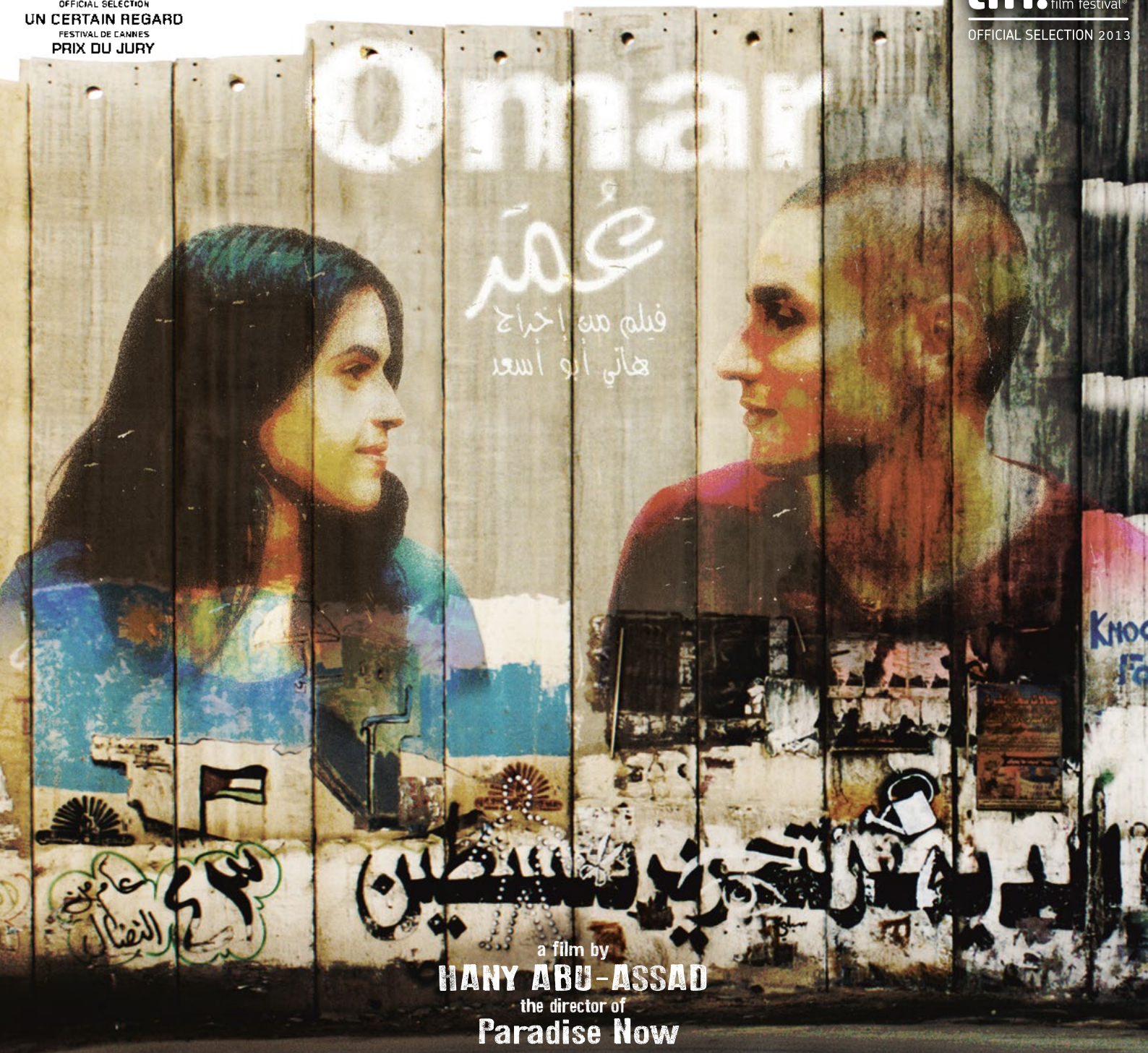




OFFICIAL SELECTION  
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FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
PRIX DU JURY

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OFFICIAL SELECTION 2013




a film by  
**HANY ABU-ASSAD**  
the director of  
**Paradise Now**



# SYNOPSIS

02



A photograph showing a person from the waist down, wearing a green t-shirt and blue denim jeans, leaning over a grey concrete wall. The person's right arm is extended, resting on the wall, and they are looking out over a cityscape. The background is slightly blurred, showing buildings and a clear sky. The overall tone is contemplative and somber.

Neither love nor war is simple and straightforward in occupied Palestine. Young and handsome Omar is in love with Nadia, his militant best friend Tarek's younger sister. Separated by the Wall that snakes through the occupied West Bank, Omar has become adept at dodging surveillance bullets in order to climb the wall and visit the beautiful Nadia. However, after an Israeli soldier is killed in an act of defiant resistance, Omar becomes a pawn in a cat-and-mouse scheme that undermines his future plans and childhood friendships. Omar is faced with painful choices about life, love and manhood that leave him as riven as the Palestinian landscape. Even though his decisions are simply motivated by this love for Nadia, they nonetheless have far-reaching personal and political repercussions.



A photograph of three men sitting in car seats outdoors in a desert-like environment. The man on the left is wearing a light blue polo shirt and jeans, sitting in a grey car seat. The man in the middle is wearing a brown t-shirt and jeans, sitting in a grey car seat and playing a yellow and black guitar. The man on the right is wearing a purple t-shirt and jeans, sitting in a blue car seat and looking towards the other two. The background features a large green palm tree and a large green cactus. The ground is dirt and rocks. The sky is blue.

**HANY ABU-ASSAD  
ON OMAR**





### **ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT**

While in Ramallah several years ago, a close friend told me how he was approached by an agent from the State, who used his knowledge of intimate information about my friend's private life as a means to coerce him to collaborate. The story resonated deeply with me, and I was immediately motivated to delve into this subject and explore how such a set-up would affect love, friendship, and trust. One sleepless night in a hotel, I pulled out a pad of paper, and four hours later I had the structure of what Omar is today. Real life often provides the most vibrant material for storytelling.

### **REFLECTING BELIEVABILITY IN OCCUPIED PALESTINE**

Even though Omar was inspired by real life events, when it comes to filmmaking, believability is more important than reality. I strived to make every scene in Omar both believable and close to reality. Even at the end. I read about several cases when Israeli military policemen had given a gun to their Palestinian collaborators with the same results. Even though these are real occurrences, I still had the task of making it believable. Such is life in occupied Palestine.



### **THE SEPARATION WALL**

The Separation Wall has torn apart Palestinian villages, towns and cities from within themselves. Palestinians now live in absurdly barricaded cantons. In several places it isn't clear what is and isn't under military occupation. For instance, in Jerusalem both sides are occupied. My intention was to stitch a virtual Palestinian city where the wall crosses through the city randomly – through villages and refugee camps – without any differentiation between either side.

### **JUMPING THE WALL**

Jumping the Wall has become part of daily life in Palestine. There are even people who make a living helping others jump the Wall. While it appears that the Separation Wall was built as a border between Israel and the West Bank, it instead separates Palestinians from each other – sometimes even dividing a Palestinian town into two parts. This is why jumping over is a daily occurrence, and people do it for a myriad of reasons: work, family, survival. Love is one very likely reason.





### **SHOOTING IN PALESTINE**

Shooting Omar took one week in Nablus, six weeks in Nazareth, and one week in Bisan. We didn't encounter reticence anywhere, and managed to get permission for all of our locations – even shooting on the Wall. For the Wall, we had permission to climb up to a certain height, and then we used a fake wall on a set in Nazareth for the moments at the top. I had not shot a film in Palestine since Paradise Now. Shooting in the West Bank has become easier because of a greater presence of Palestinian police authority. This said, any production is still difficult and rife with problems, but so is filmmaking everywhere else in the world. When I started Omar, I wanted to make a film with a strictly Palestinian crew. This meant that some of the heads of departments stepped into these roles for the first time, which created some

issues with organization and process. However, we overcame any challenges that were presented and everyone seems thrilled with the success of the film. Premiering in Certain Regard at Cannes was a fantastic acknowledgement of everyone's work.

### **TRUST**

I continually strive to unravel the complexities of human emotion. In Omar, trust is the fundamental element in every relationship. Trust is the intangible core of love, friendship, and loyalty. It can be both very strong but also very fragile and volatile. I was interested in exploring the lived experience of trust. To me, it is the fata morgana of the human experience, and it is what gives human beings such complex emotions.



### **CASTING FRESH YOUNG ACTORS**

All four young characters are played by newcomers. Omar is their first film. During the casting process, the casting director and I tirelessly searched the community of Palestinian actors. We knew that the most important question was their believability, their ability to express deep emotions and energetically engage with each other. Adam Bakri, who played Omar, is a true discovery. He is remarkably hard working and stopped at nothing to find the core of Omar's character. He leaps off the screen. Leem Loubany (NADIA) is a strong force with an intriguing sadness in her eyes. Samer Bisharat (AMJAD) is the comedian in the group. We incorporated many of the jokes he told off screen into his character and the film. Eyad Hourani (TAREK) showed me a whole new side of the character that I truly appreciated – at once

tough and vulnerable, serious and funny, and all in the same moment. I am delighted with our cast. Each of them enriched this film tremendously.

### **WALEED ZUAITER AS AGENT RAMI**

Waleed Zuaiter is the only actor amongst the main cast that has had previous experience in front of the camera. Working with professionals is always interesting and a challenge because they are the people who ask the toughest questions about their character and their character's motivations. Working with Waleed was like sculpting in marble. He was strong and tough, but the results were glorious.





### **THE HUMAN SIDE OF FREEDOM FIGHTERS**

I will never make a film that either condemns or defends human beings wholesale. The humane face of freedom fighters intrigues me. Actually, it's the humane side of any character that intrigues me, and often what makes us humane is also our tragic flaw. Many people or characters appear perfect on the outside, whether a freedom fighter or a lover, but this perfection is only a perception, deep inside are imperfections and failures. My job as a filmmaker is to be curious and show it in the most honest way – in shades of grey, not simply black and white.

### **GIVING VOICE TO THE PALESTINIAN CASE**

Mostly, I find that I am either being praised or criticized for giving a voice to the Palestinian story. Admittedly, it is a charged subject matter that elicits strong reactions from all sides, but this is not artistic commentary. It is political commentary and judgement. It should be part of the conversation, but I hope in a more tangential way. I want to make interesting and powerful films, and I hope my work is an exploration into what makes great stories. For me, great films include specific characters whose motivations are both timeless and placeless, and exploring the human side of characters that act violently is what keeps a great deal of storytellers busy.



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**CAST & CREW**





### **HANY ABU-ASSAD – Director**

Hany Abu-Assad directed the often debated 2006 film *Paradise Now*, which won the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film, and was also nominated for the Academy Award in the same category (representing Palestine). The story of two Palestinian men preparing for a suicide attack in Tel Aviv, *Paradise Now* made its world premiere at the Berlin Film Festival, where it won the Blue Angel Award for Best European Film, the Berliner Morgenpost Readers' Prize and the Amnesty International Award for Best Film.

Abu-Assad previously had an international hit with 2002's *Rana's Wedding*, the story of a young Jerusalem woman trying to get married before four o'clock. The film was selected for the Cannes Critics

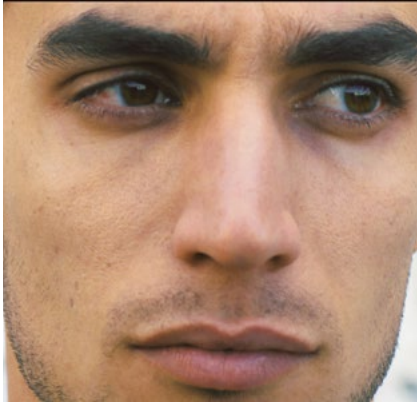
Week and went on to win prizes at Montpellier, Marrakech, Bastia and Cologne.

Abu-Assad's other credits include 2011's English-language *The Courier*, starring Jeffery Dean Morgan, Til Schweiger and Mickey Rourke, and the 2002 documentary, *Ford Transit*, the portrait of a Ford Transit taxi driver and the resilient inhabitants of Palestinian territories.

Abu-Assad was born in Nazareth, Palestine, in 1961. After having studied and worked as an airplane engineer in the Netherlands for several years, Abu-Assad entered the world of cinema as a producer. He produced the 1994 feature film *Curfew*, directed by Rashid Masharawi. In 1998, Abu-Assad directed his first feature, *The 14Th Chick*, from a script by writer Arnon Grunberg.

### **FEATURE FILMOGRAPHY**

- 2013 *Omar*
- 2011 *The Courier*
- 2005 *Paradise Now*
- 2002 *Ford Transit* (Documentary)
- 2002 *Rana's Wedding*
- 2000 *Nazareth 2000* (Documentary)
- 1998 *The 14Th Chick*



### **ADAM BAKRI – Omar**

Adam Bakri makes his feature film debut in *Omar*. A day after graduating from New York's Lee Strasberg Institute, Adam sent an audition tape to director Hany Abu-Assad, and was thrilled to be on the set of *Omar* the following month. During his two-year acting program, he participated in several theater productions. Before moving to New York, Adam attended Tel Aviv University where he double majored in English Literature and Theater Arts. During that time he did a number of short films. Adam was born in 1988 in Yafa, Israel.

### **EYAD HOURANI – Tarek**

Eyad Hourani makes his feature film debut in *Omar*. Eyad has acted in several productions of the inspirational Freedom Theatre in Jenin Refugee Camp, including *While Waiting*, *Animal Farm*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Men in the Sun*. He also played in Ramallah's Ashtar Theater production *Jasmin House* and Shakespeare's *Richard II* in London's Globe Theater Festival. Eyad started acting at the age of 14 with Hebron's "Days For Theater" Founda-

tion. In addition to studying Theater Arts Education at the Freedom Theater, he did his acting training in cooperation with the Arab-American University and also participated in several international workshops, including Vienna (National Theatre) and New York (Public Theater). Born in 1988, Eyad is currently tours Palestinian hospitals with Clown Doctor Acts, and works as a drama coach for various theaters of Palestine. Eyad has also directed a short film *C The C*, which was shown at festivals in Dubai and Sarajevo.

### **SAMER BISHARAT – Amjad**

*Omar* is 16-year-old Samer Bisharat's feature film debut. He is a student at St. Joseph High School. He has participated in several short films since he was seven years old, recently in Sari Bisharat's *Turmos* for Jerusalem's Sam Spiegel film school. Born in Nazareth in 1996, Samer is also an oud musician, and he studied music at Bait Al Mouseeqa in Shefa-Amr.





**LEEM LUBANY – Nadja**

Sixteen-year-old Leem Lubany makes her screen debut in *Omar*. The talented Harduf high school student recently added acting to her passion for singing and dancing. Born in Nazareth, Leem started ballet at a very young age, then turned to singing at 13. She is also an avid photographer and looks forward to exhibiting her work one day.

**WALEED F. ZUAITER – Agent Rami**

Over the past 15 years, Palestinian-American actor Waleed F. Zuaiter's film and television career progressed from the attention he received from his fine stage work.

In film, Waleed had standout roles in Grant Heslov's *The Men Who Stare At Goats*, alongside George Clooney and Ewan McGregor, and Michael Patrick King's *Sex And The City 2*. Other feature credits include Simon West's *Thunder Run* and Amin Matalqa's *The United*.

On the small screen, Waleed's garnered much attention for his portrayal of Sgt. Brody's torturer in *Homeland*. Among his many TV credits: *The Good*



*Wife*, *Political Animals*, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, *Blue Bloods*, and the Emmy-winning mini-series *House of Saddam*.

Waleed's prestigious theater credits include the Public Theatre's production of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage* (adapted by Tony Kushner and starring also Meryl Streep and Kevin Kline), Eliam Kraiem's *Sixteen Wounded* (Broadway), David Hare's *Stuff Happens* (Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Ensemble Performance), George Packer's *Betrayed*, Ilan Hatsor's *Masked*, Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*, Victoria Brittain & Gillian Slovo's *Guantanamo: Honor Bound To Defend Freedom*, and David Greig's *The American Pilot*.

The youngest of three brothers, Waleed was born in Sacramento, California, but grew up in Kuwait. He moved back to the US to attend George Washington University where he received a degree in Philosophy and Theatre. He currently resides in Los Angeles with his wife and two children.

In addition to playing the role of Agent Rami, Waleed also produced *Omar* with his two brothers and their new independent production company, ZBROS.



### **MAIN CAST**

Omar – *Adam Bakri* · Nadja – *Leem Lubany* · Agent Rami – *Waleed F. Zuaiter* · Amjad – *Samer Bisharat* · Tarek – *Eyad Hourani*

### **MAIN CREW**

Written, directed & produced by – *Hany Abu-Assad* · Director of Photography – *Ehab Assal*  
Co-Editors – *Martin Brinkler A.C.E. & Eyas Salman* · Production Design – *Nael Kanj* · Costumes – *Hamada Attalah*  
Sound – *Raja Dubayah* · Casting – *Juna Sulieman* · Key Hair & Makeup – *Dorte Dobkowitz*  
1st Assistant Director – *Enas Al-Muthaffar* · Line Producer – *Baher Agbariya*

Co-Producers/In Association with – *Dubai Entertainment and Media Organisation Enjaaz A Dubai Film Market Initiative*

Executive Producers – *Abbas F. "Eddy" Zuaiter* · *Ahmad F. Zuaiter* · *Waleed Al-Ghafari* · *Zahi Khouri*  
*Dr. Farouq A. Zuaiter* · *Suhail A. Sikhtian*

Produced by – *Waleed F. Zuaiter & David Gerson*

Production Company – *ZBROS*

### **TECHNICAL INFORMATION**

Year – *2013* · Country – *Palestine* · Length – *97 Minutes* · Screening Format – *DCP*







A man with a short haircut is running towards the camera in a city street. He is wearing a dark blue leather jacket with a high collar and a zipper. The background is a blurred city street with a brick wall and a blue door.

**PRESS**

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