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# Waiting for Sallah El-Din

## Natreen Sallah El-Din

A film by Tawfik Abu Wael

Palestine 2001

## Synopsis

The Arabs in Jerusalem are in a constant state of waiting. Everything is fine, blessed Allah, but the bitter memory of June the 5<sup>th</sup> 1967 sends its reminder every year.

Still, all is good-the Nargilla tobacco, the games of backgammon, the strong Hell-spiced coffee and also the Israeli oppression: seemingly, it has never been more oppressive. The poverty is hard and prices are higher than ever. The voice of the singer Feruz reaches from the valleys, saying: -we are coming back-, but all we have to say is: -we are coming back to nowhere but Allah.

*Palestine 2001, Tawfik Abu Wael, documentary, 53', Video, colour, Arab/ Engl. subtitles*

## Credits

|            |                 |
|------------|-----------------|
| Director   | Tawfik Abu Wael |
| Production | Tawfik Abu Wael |
| Camera     | Shai Peleg      |
| Sound      | Tawfik Abu Wael |
| Editing    | Galit Shakid    |

## Festivals

Palestinian Documentary Film Festival Teheran, 2003; MedFilm Festival Rome, 2003; Kurdish Film Festival Berlin, 2003; Biennale Havanna, 2003; Mostra Internazionale Del Cortometraggio Montecatini/Italy 2002; 6e Biennale des Cinemas Arabes, Paris 2002; International Dokumentary Film Festival Munich 2002; Arab Screen Independent Film Festival Doha/Qatar 2002; DocAviv 2001

## The filmmaker Tawfik Abu Wael

Tawfik Abu Wael was born in the Palestinian town of Um El-Fahim in Israel in 1976. He graduated from Tel Aviv university where he studied film directing. From 1996 to 1998 he worked in the film archive of Tel Aviv university. From 1997 till 1999 Tawfik Abu Wael taught drama at Hassan Arafe school in Jaffa. Since 1997 he has been working as free-lance production manager and (assistant) director.

## Filmography Tawfik Abu Wael

Bread, Hashish and the Moon (1997, 11')  
I leave, you stay (1998, 8')  
Intellectual in Garbage (1998, 2')  
Characters (1998, 4')  
Diary of a Male Whore (2001, 14')  
Waiting for Sallah El-Din (2001, 53')  
The Fourteenth (2002, 14')

## Interview with Tawfik Abu Wael

*In your documentary Waiting for Sallah El-Din you tell the stories of four people from East-Jerusalem, set in the larger frame of the daily chicanery of occupation and increasing religious practice. In Western media we usually see very dynamic pictures from Palestine: youth throwing stones, shouting women, burning flags, fighters... You present the opposite: a state of waiting. Why?*

I didn't think "how Western or Israeli media present Palestinians" when I start to make this film. Everyone looks at reality from his interest, or shows it in a way to support his interest. What is interesting to me are people who have to fight everyday in order to find a job or to get a bread or to have a permission that they exist. Those whose "banal" problems are tragedy: if they lost their ID card or want to put their new born children on their ID....they have to queue at the ministry for home affairs from night, maybe they will have the chance to enter in the morning and maybe not!. I live between people who live under occupation, suffering every day, their problem is still basic: to survive! And they don't complain because they are afraid to complain.

*Did the outbreak of the second Intifada in September 2000 change the situation of waiting? Did it overcome passivity?*

Arabs/Palestinians still live in a constant state of waiting. The "second Intifada" is a political expression, most Arabs/Palestinian are suffering in mute, also at other places around the world.

*The four people you portrait in the film are an actor who has his own theatre group, a woman who sells vegetables in the streets, a man whose house was demolished and whose son disappeared and an unemployed worker who has to send his small boy making money. Why did you choose these people? What do their stories stand for?*

My need to make a film about Palestinians in Jerusalem, came during my work in Jerusalem, selling books for children from door to door. Many times I found myself advise people not to buy the books, because I saw that it is hard for them to afford their food. Every door I entered had it's own story, tens of stories touched my heart. At last, when I decide to make the film, I chose the characters and stories with which I felt so close. The story that I want to tell in the film, came from my feelings when observing the characters/stories.

*Was it difficult to find people who agreed to have their suffering filmed?*

I didn't look for shooting suffering, there are a lot of "sexy" photos of hard violence, that occur every day in Jerusalem against Palestinians. I wanted people to tell their story through their daily life. People there are afraid, they are in stress all the time. The Israeli Authorities use a "brilliant" way to depress people, make them afraid of their shadows. It took me time to make people trust me and feel safe. For example, women who sold vegetables were afraid that I worked for the Israeli Authorities. It is hard to enter to every story in Jerusalem, some times I really had to be alert to the Israeli forces or municipality workers as well as Palestinian criminals in Jerusalem.

*The opening scene of your film is a street scene in front of the Israeli ministry of home affairs with people lining up at night. It is a very humiliating and in a way violent scene, yet the camera and the words are poetic. Also in your film Diary of a Male Whore, which touches*

*various levels of violence, there is lot of poesy. Can you explain why you use poetic elements in your films?*

Maybe I want to see/show life in those films in a poetic context, it is more interesting to see the poesy in what is called "violent scenes".

*Waiting for Sallah El-Din was produced by the film and television department of Tel Aviv university, where you studied. How was the cooperation?*

I don't have a good experience studying in Tel Aviv University. I had to fight in a lot of ways with the heads of the department because they prevented me to make *Diary of a Male Whore* there. But I succeeded to make them a lot of "head ache" so they wanted to get rid of me so fast. They agreed on *Waiting for Sallah El-Din* as my "final project" after three minutes of meeting.

*Do you already know what your next projects will be?*

In these days I am shooting a documentary about Palestinian refugees who live inside the Israel state. I also work on a feature film.

*Thank you.*

*Interview with Irit Neidhardt  
May 2002*