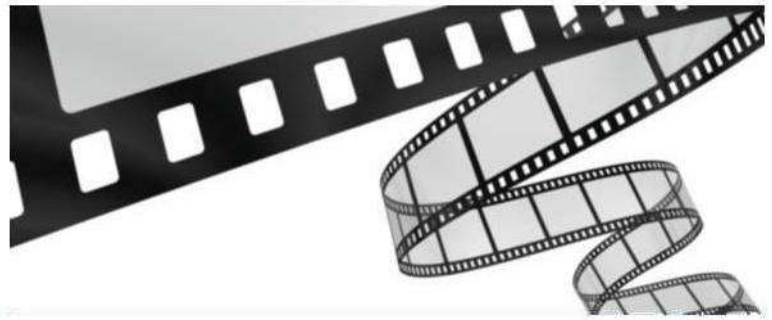


CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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Omar **2013**
Palestine **96 mins**

Director: **Hany Abu-Assad**

Writer: **Hany Abu-Assad**

Cast:

Adam Bakri	Omar
Leem Lubany	Nadia
Waleed Zuaiter	Agent Rami
Iyad Hoorani	Tarek
Samer Bisharat	Amjad



"Omar" carries the weight of the world on its shoulders, but it manages to extract sincerity and preserve cinematic intentions with startlingly ease. Nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the 2014 Academy Awards, the picture also has a little prestige to go along with its many creative accomplishments. Deserving of such accolades, "Omar" takes a troubling subject matter and turns it into an engrossing mystery and study of psychological warfare. Writer/director Hany Abu-Assad presents a clear vision for his exploration of Palestinian unrest, working to build strong characterizations while developing a larger depiction of violence and manipulation, working suspense beats to their fullest potential. Heart-breaking and spare, "Omar" doesn't provide easy answers as it builds its pressure cooker environment, putting primary attention on the personalities involved, allowing for a human perspective as it details acts of breathless survival and suffocating paranoia.

Omar (Adam Bakri) is a baker by day in Palestine, living an unassuming life preparing fresh bread for customers. By night, he's a revolutionary, joining friends Amjad (Samer Bisharat) and Tarek (Iyad Hoorani) as they plan out the execution of a border guard, making their presence known in such a volatile area. When the murder is carried out as planned, Israeli secret police eventually capture Omar, subjecting him to an extended stay in solitary confinement and torturous interrogation methods. His contact behind bars is Agent Rami (Waleed Zuaiter), a well-trained cop who's out to break Omar, hoping to use the young man to arrest leader Tarek. Broken in prison, Omar elects to become an informant, returning to his neighbourhood and his love, Nadia (Leem Lubany), Tarek's teenage sister. Hoping to elude surveillance and win over Nadia with talk of marriage, Omar quickly realizes that his life is no longer his, constantly hounded by Rami and his enigmatic ways. Soon branded a traitor by his own people, Omar sets out to find Tarek and clear his name, leaving him with few people to trust.

"Omar" immediately establishes itself as a film that's in full command of its location. When we first meet Omar, he's scaling a towering wall dividing neighbourhoods, and doing so with a carefree attitude, accustomed to the secretive undertaking as he speeds up a rope and dodges bullets from a nearby security outpost once he reaches the top. It's a routine he must endure to remain in contact with his friends, including bumbling Amjad and authoritarian Tarek, who's working to transform himself into a local hero with this group of assassins, with hopes to build a reputation as a true defender of Palestine. We initially follow their training endeavours on the outskirts of town, with the young men working on their handling of firearms while bonding as

brothers, having known one another for quite some time.

Abu-Assad (who also helmed 2005's harrowing "Paradise Now") creates a neighbourhood of alleys and hideouts, with Omar particularly skilled in navigation, using parkour-like skills to evade detection in a town where everyone is watching. The location is crisply defined by the director, which also adds to the swell of paranoia that eventually builds in "Omar," instilling the picture with realism as the titular character experiences the protection and judgment of the populace.

"Omar" is a tense movie, using harrowing foot chases and accusations to pump up adrenaline levels, following Omar as he endures abusive patrol guards in the mood to humiliate anyone they can find, and bursts of secret police, who storm shops and homes on the hunt for suspects, putting the three men on the run. There's also troubling incidents in prison, where Omar is subjected to torture and beatings the longer he refuses to help Rami, put through the wringer to soften his resolve before he's turned into a collaborator. Despite violence and overall intensity, the core of the picture is actually devoted to a love story of sorts, with Omar consumed with courting Nadia, building a secretive relationship with her that involves an exchange of notes detailing his heartfelt intentions. It's a pure dream of domesticity away from border aggression and police subservience, but it's an elusive one, challenged by time and Rami, who threatens to destroy Nadia if Omar doesn't perform as instructed. It's such a steely, unflinching film, leaving this take on longing and mismanaged desires surprisingly effective, generating a tender understanding of what truly motivates Omar, despite his militant exterior.

Technical credits are all solid, with cinematography by Ehab Assal terrific with fluid movement, but perhaps a little too dependent on close-ups to articulate the tension in play. Performances are uniformly spectacular, finding Bakari's internalization pitch-perfect for such a difficult role. While he's largely non-verbal through difficult encounters, it's easy to understand the pain and volatility burning through Omar. Zuaiter is richly unsettling as Rami, and while we understand that his cordiality toward Omar is an act to lubricate compliance, the acting is so good, one almost accepts his sympathy as authenticity. And in her first movie role, Lubany is naturally appealing as Nadia, articulating conflicted emotions without overplaying the part, creating lovely chemistry with Bakari. She's one to watch.

Brian Orndorf, 2014

Club notices:

Tonight is the last night for returning your selections for the 2015/16 season. Please hand completed forms to Sally, or another committee member, before you leave.

Our third, and final, discussion evening will be held on 19th May, at the Cramphorn Theatre, following the screening of the film Fruitvale Station. This is an informal meeting and gives out members an opportunity to exchanging opinions on the 6 films shown, from **Ida** to **Fruitvale Station** (and including tonight's film).

Our previous presentation:

Based on the feedback slips returned on the night, you rated **The Selfish Giant**, screened on 27th April, 4.58stars out of 5. Please visit the film page at <http://www.chelmsford-filmclub.co.uk> to read all the feedback comments.

Our next presentation:

Fruitvale Station, directed by Clio Barnard, will be shown on Tuesday, 19th May, starting at 8:00pm. This will be followed by our 3rd, and final discussion evening.