



FILM: **THE PRESENT**

FDG RATING: 3.9 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Farah Nabulsi: *director/co-writer*
Saleh Bakri: *actor, Yusef*
Mariam Kamel Basha: *actress, Noor*
Maryam Kanj: *actress, Yasmine*

DATE: September 19, 2021

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE PRESENT**

The Present is an Oscar nominated 2020 short film about a Palestinian father and young daughter who need to contend with the lengthy, intimidating crossing at the Israeli Checkpoint 300, at the West Bank in order to go shopping. It's Yusef and Noor's wedding anniversary so he has planned to surprise her with a badly needed new refrigerator and his daughter is excited to go along on the shopping trip. It's an ordeal that Yusef tackles every morning when he goes to work. As described by one published film critic, Palestinian residents are herded like cattle through a crossing notorious for its long queues, volatile conditions, and horrendous incidences of broken ribs and suffocating commuters during rush hour. The horrible process of crossing the checkpoint has become a part of their daily life.

Yusef, with Yasmine in tow at the checkpoint, faces IDF (Israel Defense Force) soldiers, procedural interrogation, and dehumanizing cages used to hold people as they wait permission to cross. Finally, they are on the other side to begin a day visiting shops, enjoying some treats and buying the refrigerator. Getting home with the new refrigerator presents unexpected challenges and harsher intimidation at the crossing as the day gets later and darker. The unexpected ending is a satisfying relief.

Some discussion participants thought that the film was being manipulative, tugging too intensely at our emotions. Others said the extremely disturbing situations were very effective. Nabulsi captures the dehumanizing and frustrating experience of living under occupation in a very short, powerful scene. We experience Yusef's humiliation, frustration, and anger, all while he must maintain his composure or things would get worse. For him this is normal. One resident reviewer noted that Israeli soldiers are stationed at these check points to prevent terrorists from crossing. Another commented that in reality, although this checkpoint may be especially dehumanizing, others are not. The film maker included one somewhat sympathetic soldier at Check Point 300. It's important to put the film in the context of Nabulsi purpose which is to shed light on Palestinians' deprived freedom of movement. Taking a broader perspective, one discussion participant noted that abuse of power is prevalent in the world. It seems to be in the genes of many narcissistic human beings.

We welcomed the tender moments between Yusef and Noor and Yasmine that showed their loving family relationship. Yusef is a good husband and father who strives to protect his daughter despite the deplorable ways he is constantly treated. He buys Jasmine a glittery tiara on their shopping trip. The relationships are entirely believable and their gentle moments together are effortless, with a tinge of humor at times.

Nabulsi compressed a world of emotions in 24 minutes providing insight into the difficulties of Palestinian life, something we are aware of but the film visually illustrated in a very powerful way. We gave the film a 3.9 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!

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