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Film Review: *The Attack* (2012), Complex Issues through a Camera's Lens

Ziad Doueiri's recent film, *The Attack*, presents an extensive number of situations and characters that seem to fall in-between two opinions associated with Israel and Palestine. While the overall theme in the film is about people in impossible situations trying to find answers, it has numerous other social developments of extreme complexity that are interspersed throughout the entire film. Doueiri presents to the audience ideas of where Palestinians with Israeli citizenship fit into the collective society, and how constant conflict affects the mentalities of people in the region.

The film centers on Amin Jaafari, an Arab surgeon with Israeli citizenship, who discovers that his wife, Siham, was involved in a suicide bombing at a restaurant in Tel Aviv. The film makes it clear very early that Siham is responsible for the attack, but leaves her motivations for it a mystery. From that point on, the film follows Amin through numerous sections of both Palestinian and Israeli society, territory, and culture, as he tries to discover the motivations behind his wife's actions.

The questions that Doueiri offers to his audience are extremely visible, yet very subtle and nuanced in their presentation. The earliest concept shown is where do Palestinians integrated into Israeli society fit into the overall structure. In the beginning of the film, the audience sees Amin being needled by a couple of his Israeli colleagues over his finances and recent accolades, making it clear that he is not completely accepted in the hospital where he works. Following this is an interaction between Amin and a survivor of the attack. In this scene, the audience sees the survivor vehemently reject Amin as his surgeon and declare that he does not want to be treated by an Arab doctor. The reverse of this is seen when Amin returns to his home town of Nablus in the West Bank. While visiting, his reception is less than welcoming, some believe that Amin is working for the Israeli internal security forces, namely Shin Bet, or that he is being monitored by them in hopes of exposing agitators. Others believe that he is simply a man who abandoned his people and heritage for a more comfortable life. Situations of this nature are not new developments in Israeli-Palestinian society. Rhoda Kanaaneh wrote a piece in 2005 for *American Ethnologist* about young Palestinian men who signed up for the Israeli armed forces. Kanaaneh detailed how the

men were looked down upon by fellow Palestinians for a variety of reasons, while Israeli's see them as unviable and limited in their role.¹

The other question that Doueiri presents to the audience is how living under the stress of constant conflict affects people in the area. In the beginning of the film, the audience sees Amin talking with a friend named Raveed, who works for the Israeli police. During their conversation, Raveed describes a horrendous incident between a Palestinian and an Israeli that ends with one, the Israeli, being stabbed to death; however, he concludes with ambivalence by asking what can be done. Raveed's statement, coupled with Amin's nonchalant response, indicates an air of acceptance among both Palestinians and Israelis over the violence that occurs every day, reducing it to a part of daily life. Lori Allen described in her 2008 article for *Cultural Anthropology* the Arabic phrase "Ta`wwunda" which can be translated as "we have gotten used to it."² This phrase applies heavily to the tone of this film: violence, the threat of violence, and death, are all alluded to throughout the entire film, yet the subjects have a feel of casualness that is nothing short of jarring.

A final trend that Doueiri highlights is that of the martyr poster, a subject Allen also covers in her publication. As the name implies, martyr posters display the faces and final quotes of suicide bombers. As shown in the film, they can be other pieces of memorabilia as well, such as flyers, key chains, and cards, which demonstrated by what the young boy in Nablus was selling on the street. Allen points out that this action merely reinforces people's awareness of how close death is at any given time, and even goes as far as to say that it unites people on both sides; perhaps rightly so.³

Ziad Doueiri has crafted a film that is nothing short of a masterpiece in its capturing of an extremely complex issue. No side is taken throughout the film, no ideology is held above any other, and everyone's suffering is presented. There is no clear right or wrong, villain or hero, winner or loser; only people and impossible decisions. Ultimately, what Doueiri created is a very human story about decisions that cannot be taken back, regrets that must be endured, and uncertainties that must be forded.

Steven Anthony

¹ Rhoda Kanaaneh, "Boys or Men? Duped or 'Made?' Palestinian Soldiers in the Israeli Military," *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 1 (2005): 261-262 & 270.

² Lori Allen, "Getting by the Occupation: How Violence Became Normal During the Second Palestinian Intifada," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2008): 457.

³ *Ibid.*, 462-463.