

FILM REVIEW

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## Separation and Resilience in *200 Meters*

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### *200 Meters*

Film (drama), 2022

Written and directed by Ameen Nayfeh

Runtime: 1 hours and 36 minutes

Original Languages: Arabic

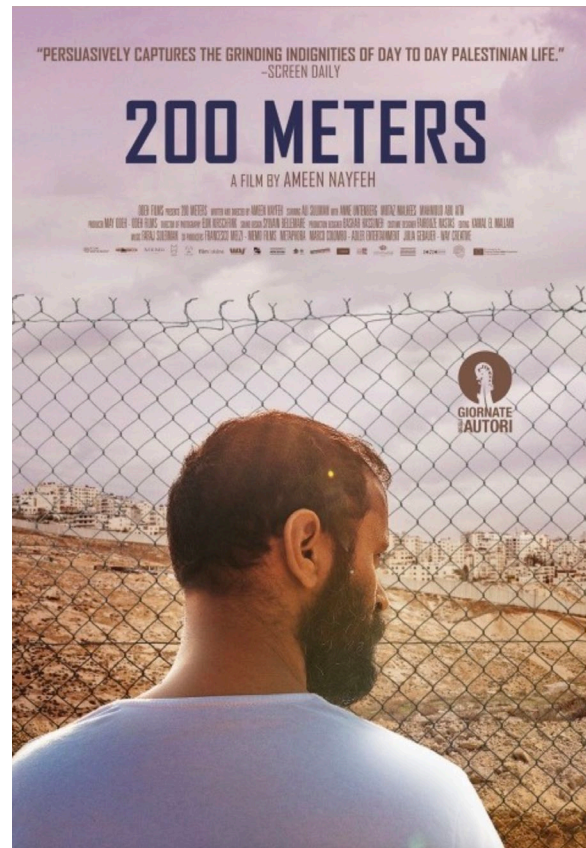
More information at:

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12246266/>

The 2022 film *200 Meters* is about a separation barrier dividing a family between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. The movie also illustrates how the wall motivates people to get together despite the barrier.

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Borders, boundaries, limits, and limitations are the walls of our lives. However, borders, as artificial products decorated with or without land mines and/or wired meshes, have been the *raison d'état* and even the *raison d'être* of states, especially modern nation-states. Paradoxically, borders have been consecrated by the essentially secular nation-state. In social life, borders are the frames of the public space and become norms regulating our social lives as moral values. Borders also shape us individually and communally. We try to overcome our personal borders through sciences, arts, and sports. Since ancient Greek theatre, public space is depicted as the platform where we perform our activities with our masks. In the private sphere, we take



off our masks and act as we are. Despite the idiom “good fences make good neighbors”, borders also provoke killing and even massacres, delineating contested land claims and even wars. According to another idiom, “necessity is the mother of all inventions”, borders are artificial constructs that have emerged in an effort to regulate a well-balanced life as much as possible.

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Cinema not only shows us our defects but also how to overcome them. For this reason, borders have become a key themes in movies.

*200 Meters* (2020) is filmed in the occupied West Bank Palestinian city of Tulkarm, the director's hometown, and concerns the Israeli separation barrier, which the Israelis call the "security fence" and Palestinians call the "apartheid wall". The movie depicts a nuclear family separated geographically since the father, living with his elderly mom, resides on the Palestinian side of the wall and the wife with their children on the Israeli side. The film's genre is a road/journey movie with elements of thriller and action drama as well. Moreover, the film is both emotionally tailored and thought provoking thanks to the actors' vigorous performances and the artistry of the debut director and writer Ameen Nayfeh.

The film's protagonist, Mustafa (played by Ali Suliman), is an ordinary hardworking Palestinian construction worker trying to provide for his family's needs despite suffering from a back injury. He lives with his mom and mostly apart from his wife Salwa (Lana Zreik) and three children, just 200 meters away but separated by the wall. Their blissful marriage and family unity is challenged by the wall in every respect. Mustafa uses his work permit to cross the barrier daily despite long queues and unfriendly treatment of Israeli security forces. The checkpoint scenes powerfully depict how thousands of people are intimidated and herded inhumanely through fingerprint and document checks. Even passing all these steps does not guarantee passing through the barrier. This demeaning routine is unavoidable for Mustafa and many others seeking employment and education opportunities.



Still from the film trailer

Mustafa's other daily routine, but joyful one, is talking with his family by phone and signaling good night via flashing a light from his balcony. This creative communication epitomizes the family's determination to remain united despite the wall. Thus, the film apprehends human resilience transcending artificial borders and age-old political conflicts.

Salwa and the children can only cross into the West Bank on weekends, since during the week the children attend Israeli schools—another point of tension between spouses—and because Salwa works two different jobs and sleeps only two hours a night. The main plot of the film starts when Mustafa gets an alarming call that his son has been hospitalized after an accident. Despite Mustafa's rush to the checkpoint and his nerve-racking wait in the long line, his entry into Israel is denied due to paperwork complications, even though he holds a valid work permit. This desperate situation symbolizes what any individual might do when "legal" recourses are blocked. Lacking better options, Mustafa resorts to the "illegal" one and hires a smuggler to take him across. The symbolic 200-meter journey then becomes a 200-kilometer epic. At one point, the journey is almost thwarted when an Israeli activist, Anne (Anna Unterberger), and her translator, Kifah (Motaz Malhees), risk drawing the attention of Israeli security forces while documenting the misery imposed on Palestinians by Israeli settlers. At another point, Mustafa nearly suffocates in an overcrowded trunk of a car. In the end, despite the excitement and troubles, Mustafa happily rejoins his son and wife at the hospital.

Overall, the film portrays how the struggle of a man and his family become an odyssey in the face of the Israeli separation barrier. *200 Meters* successfully bridges the gap between politics and the human condition. The movie displays the oppression of the apartheid regime on ordinary Palestinians seeking only subsistence and dignity. The film ends with Mustafa expanding his balcony flashlight communication system with more elaborate and colorful bulbs, highlighting the creative resistance of a people struggling to remain united and hoping for better days ahead.