



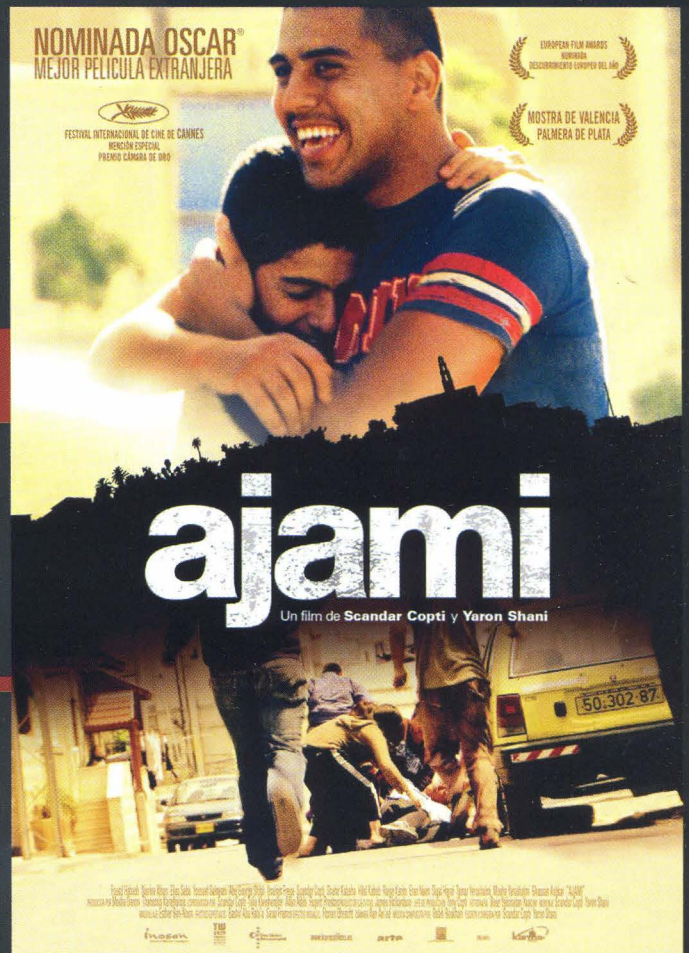
Ajami

Year: 2009

Language: Arabic, Hebrew

Director: Scandar Copti & Yaron Shani

Cast: Fouad Habash, Shahir Kabaha, Youssef Sahwani, Scandar Copti.



I chose two movies from Israel this month, having never watched the films of that region. I was curiously surprised by the sameness of experience of its people with ours and those of many other countries. Communalism, hatred and orthodoxy are everywhere. It is simply the degrees that differ. Ajami is a movie reminiscent of many such movies on poverty, hatred, anger and death that continue to fascinate me in their depiction of despondent realities that know no border, language or religion. Ajami is based in the Arab ghettos of Israel, mainly in Jaffa. Scandar Copti, the Palestinian director of this movie hails from there and just like in the Brazilian movie, 'City of God', the non-actors make Ajami all the more realistic.

Five chapters are threaded together to form the narrative of this movie, which is narrated by the young Nasri (Habash) living in Ajami, Jaffa. His brother, Omar (Kabaha) is one of the main protagonists of this saga. His uncle is threatened at his restaurant by an operative of a dreaded

Bedouin gang-lord's cartel. When the uncle shoots the man in self-defence, a series of unfortunate events follows. The gang declares revenge and is out to kill anyone related to Omar's uncle. In the first of many depressing casualties in the ruthless game of revenge and money, they kill Omar's neighbour assuming him to be Omar. Omar's family is in grave danger and Omar takes it upon himself to try and set things right. He approaches Abu Elias (Sahwani), a wealthy member of the community for help. Unbeknownst to Elias, Omar is romancing his young daughter and this becomes the plot for one of the five chapters in the film. Omar begins to work at Elias' restaurant and Elias intervenes and buys the family a few days of peace. You will be amazed at how unjust the meting out of 'justice' can be. Justice is a luxury of the rich and powerful and certainly not something that is available to Arabs in Israel.

In another chapter, Malek a young Palestinian boy illegally crosses into

Israel and begins to work for Elias. While watching this film, you will wonder how everything is connected. The film holds your attention throughout and beautifully weaves all the chapters into one sordid tale of poverty and despair. I will not spoil the experience for you by revealing more details. Ajami is a gentle reminder of how dangerous it is to play with anger. It also shows us the sorry state of affairs of Palestinians in Israel, the rising hatred between the two communities and it showed me yet another facet of why people turn to crime. A great watch!

Verdict: Confusing at times but there is never a dull moment.

Rating: 4/5

Hot: The portrayal of the ruthlessness and immediacy of anger and the depths it can take one to.

My insight: I watch movies like this and I am always left with a sinking feeling in my stomach – when will all this change?