

Film Review: ‘Wajib’ — a father and son bond on a road trip



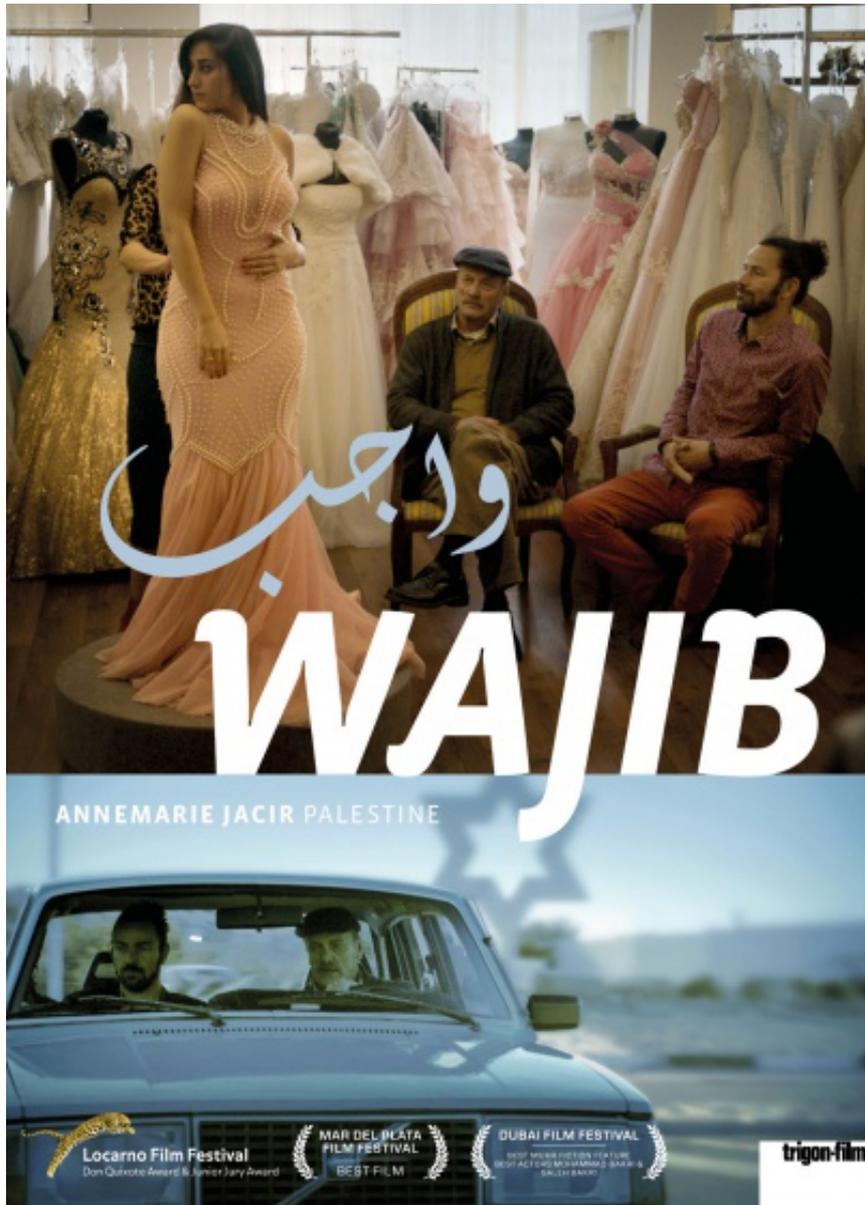
- The latest drama from Palestinian writer-director Annemarie Jacir “Wajib,” is set over the course of a single day and shows the relationship between father and son
- Played by real-life father and son Mohammed and Saleh Bakri, the two characters — Abu and Shadi — drive around Nazareth delivering wedding invitations

CHENNAI: As many films have illustrated, male-female relationships are difficult. But those between fathers and sons can be equally problematic. Two closely linked men can be extremely touchy about their independence. We have seen this, too, in films, and the latest drama from Palestinian writer-director Annemarie Jacir (“Salt of This Sea,” “When I Saw You”), “Wajib,” is a fascinating study, set over the course of a single day, of how a father and his son develop a camaraderie.

Played by real-life father and son Mohammed and Saleh Bakri, the two characters — Abu and Shadi — drive around Nazareth on a winter’s day delivering invitations to the wedding of Abu’s daughter, Amal (Maria Zreik). (Palestinian custom requires that the

father and son personally visit each relative and friend to deliver the cards.) As they travel in a ramshackle Volvo, the two men have time to bicker and provoke each other. There is also subtle manipulation from both.

What Jacir does with a flourish is to fill her plot with layers, and as the car trundles along, revelations pop out. We are let into one secret of how retired schoolteacher Abu had to make compromises to keep his position in an Israeli-run school. As a teenager, Shadi embraced more radical politics and saw his father as a sell-out.



Cut to the present, and we learn that Shadi’s girlfriend back in Italy, where he currently works as an architect, has a father who is known to be a Palestinian activist and intellectual — “a PLO leader,” according to the conservative Abu, who sees such people as dangerous terrorists, while Shadi is proud of this association.

But the anger and hurt between the father and son go beyond political -isms.

Jacir's 96-minute movie is not just all work and no play. The tension is often lightened with a touch of the comic. The writing is tight and precise; a little too antiseptic perhaps, but the multitude of characters from a variety of backgrounds — both Muslim and Christian — and their neatly observed mannerisms give the narrative great energy. The style is judicious and simple, and the often-sparse frames, in which Abu and Shadi are alone reflect a relationship that is fighting to emerge from years of silence and pain. Paced like a road movie, "Wajib" really comes alive at the climax. Not to be missed.

"Wajib" is showing at Cinema Akil in Dubai from Feb. 22 – 28.
