



Warner Independent Pictures
Presents

PARADISE NOW

Palestine/Netherlands/Germany/France – 2005

Directed by Hany Abu-Assad
Written by Hany Abu-Assad & Bero Beyer
Starring Kais Nashif, Ali Suliman, Lubna Azabal

A production of Augustus Film
with Lama Films, Razor Film, Lumen Films, Arte France Cinema and Hazazah Film

Produced with the support of Nederlands Fonds Voor De Film,
Filmstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Eurimages, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg,
I2I Preparatory Action of the European Community and World Cinema Fund

Running Time: 90 minutes Aspect Ratio: 2:35
Color, Scope Sound Format: Dolby SR
Rating: PG-13

CREDITS

CAST

Kais Nashef	Saïd
Ali Suliman	Khaled
Lubna Azabal	Suha
Amer Hlehel	Jamal
Hiam Abbass	Saïd's Mother
Ashraf Barhoum	Abu-Karem

CREW

Director	Hany Abu-Assad
Written by	Hany Abu-Assad & Bero Beyer
Director of Photography	Antoine Heberlé
Production Designer	Olivier Meidinger
Casting	Lara Zoabi
Sound	Uve Haussig
Costumes	Walid Maw'ed
Make-up	Friderike Weber
Editor	Sander Vos
Re-recording Mixer	Matthias Lempert
Production Manager	Baher Agbariya
Associate Producer	Hamoudi Buqai
Line Producer	Peter Hermann
Producers	Hengameh Panahi
	Amir Harel
	Gerhard Meixner
	Roman Paul
Producer	Bero Beyer
Produced by	Augustus Film

With Lama Films, Razor Film, Lumen Films, ARTE France Cinema, Hazazah Film

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PARADISE NOW

“PARADISE NOW” is the story of two young Palestinian men as they embark upon what may be the last 48 hours of their lives. On a typical day in the West Bank city of Nablus, where daily life grinds on amidst crushing poverty and the occasional rocket blast, we meet two childhood best friends, Saïd (Kais Nashef) and Khaled (Ali Suliman), who pass time drinking tea, smoking a hookah, and working dead-end menial jobs as auto mechanics.

Saïd’s day takes a turn for the better when a beautiful young woman named Suha (Lubna Azabal) brings her car in for repairs. From their spirited interaction, it is apparent that there is a budding romance growing between them.

Saïd is approached by middle-aged Jamal (Amer Hlehel), a point man for an unnamed Palestinian organization, who informs Saïd that he and Khaled have been chosen to carry out a strike in Tel Aviv. They have been chosen for this mission as a team, because each had expressed a wish that if either is to die a martyr, the other would want to die alongside his best friend.

Saïd and Khaled have been preparing for this moment for most of their lives. They spend a last night at home -- although they must keep their impending mission secret even from their families. During the night Saïd sneaks off to see Suha one last time. Suha’s moderate views, having been educated in Europe, and Saïd’s burgeoning conflicted conscience cause him to stop short of explaining why he has come to say good-bye.

The following day, Saïd and Khaled are lead to a hole in the fence that surrounds Nablus, where they are to meet a driver who will take them to Tel Aviv. But here the plan goes wrong, and Saïd and Khaled are separated.

“PARADISE NOW” follows two Palestinian childhood friends who have been recruited for a strike on Tel Aviv and focuses on their last days together. When they are intercepted at the Israeli border and separated from their handlers, a young woman who discovers their plan causes them to reconsider their actions.

Winner of multiple prizes at the 2005 Berlin Film Festival, and invited to the 2005 Telluride Film Festival and Toronto International Film Festival, the film was written by Hany Abu-Assad (“Ford Transit,” “Rana’s Wedding”) & Bero Beyer and directed by Abu-Assad, and stars Kais Nashef, Ali Suliman, Lubna Azabal.

“PARADISE NOW” is a production of Augustus Film with Lama Films, Razor Film, Lumen Films, Arte France Cinema, Hazazah Film and produced with the support of Nederlands Fonds Voor De Film, Filmstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Eurimages, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, I2I Preparatory Action of the European Community and World Cinema Fund.

Q&A with director Hany Abu-Assad

Where did the idea for the film come from?

Every day in the newspapers we hear of these attacks. It is such an extreme act that I began to think, like everyone, how could someone do that – what could drive them to it? I realized that we never hear the whole story. How could they justify this? Not only to their families but also to themselves. However you may feel, there is a reason.

How did you research the subject?

I studied the interrogation transcripts of suicide bombers who had failed; I read Israeli official reports; I spoke to people who personally knew bombers who died -- the friends and families and mothers. What became clear was that none of the stories were the same.

There are also a good number of producing entities involved – could you give a rough chronology of when they came on board?

Bero Beyer is the Dutch producer, of course from the beginning. The first co-producer on board was Lama Production's Amir Harel from Tel Aviv who produced "Walk on Water, " "Yossi and Jagger." "Ford Transit" was screened at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2003, and it caught the eye of German producer Roman Paul from the Berlin-based Razor Film. Then the Paris-based Celluloid Dreams and Lumen Films came on board. During the Berlin Film Festival of 2003, we all met: a Palestinian director and a Dutch, two Germans, an Israeli and a French Producer.

Exactly two years later, the film played at Berlin (2005).

How was your crew assembled? How would you describe the group?

The crew consisted of people from Palestine, The Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium, Israel and UK. We had Palestinian local crew and cast of about 50 people, a German crew of about 14 people, 4 French people, including of course the cameraman Antoine Heberlé, 3 Dutch people, the actress who plays Suha, Lubna Azabal, is a Belgian citizen, a British crewmember, and for the shoot in Tel Aviv, we hired about 10 additional Israeli crewmembers .

How did you cast the three leads? In selecting them, how did these actors embody what you were looking for?

We had many casting sessions. The first session was more like a job interview with about 200 actors. I tried to figure out their personality and if they had charisma or presence. The actors I found close to the characters, I invited back to work with some scenes. The ones that were able to add an extra layer to the characters, were the actors I chose. To finalize my decision, I had them acting together to see if they fit together on screen.

You shot in Nablus, Nazareth and Tel Aviv. How many days in each?

We had 3 months of pre-production in Nablus, during which the local cast and crew had to be found and sets and locations had to be found and/or built. Also the main actors were brought in early to work as actual mechanics in Nablus in preparation. We shot in Nablus for 25 days, then had to move. In Nazareth we shot another 15 days – mostly interiors and car scenes, but also The New Headquarter where Khaled is brought with Abu-Karem, and where they are all brought after the cemetery; Said and Suha in the car, talking about his father; the nighttime cemetery shot; Said in the restroom wiping off the sweat from under the belt; Said in the cab talking about water filters; the Othman checkpoint with many extras; and the olive grove.

Some sets had to be built to match with the original sets in Nablus, such as the exterior of Said's house (the original was in an actual refugee camp) and the exterior of Khaled's house (where Said comes asking for Khaled). Our production designer Olivier Meidinger did a tremendous job and did it quickly, to build those on the spot. We finished with 2 1/2 days shooting in Tel Aviv.

Did you and your crew have a sort of contingency plan in place for safety while shooting? What could you do to put people at ease with the circumstances under which they would be shooting?

We didn't have a watertight plan, because such a thing is impossible in Nablus, but we had a security department. They advised us when and where to shoot. We were lucky to have some very good and courageous people working with us, who made sure we knew as much as was possible and could react as best as possible. From the moment it got dicey, all the cast and crew were briefed as much as possible. They all had the feeling they were dealing with a film worth being brave for.

It was kind of insane to shoot a film there. Every day we had some sort of trouble. Both the Israelis and Palestinians were used to news crews of a few people. But we didn't have a small crew that could shoot film and run. There were 70 people and 30 vehicles, making it impossible to run and hide.

Some Palestinians thought we were making a film against the Palestinians. And some Palestinians supported the film because they thought we were fighting for freedom and democracy. One group though, thought the film was not presenting the suicide bombers in a good light and came to us with guns and asked us to stop.

Not one day went by without our having to stop filming. We would stop and wait until the firing stopped and then start again.

Describe the difficulties involved in shooting in Nablus.

To get into the area you have to get friendly with the Israeli army, to survive inside the area you have to work with the Palestinians. Immediately, it is a difficult task. To many Palestinians, we were instantly suspicious; how did we get in with so many people and so much material? Everybody wanted to read our script and many, not understanding what we were trying to do, drew different conclusions.

In Nablus, the Israeli Army invades the city almost everyday to arrest what they call the 'Wanted' Palestinians. At day-break the invasion starts with tanks rolling in, gunshots and rocket attacks and in the evening there is a curfew. We had to report our whereabouts to these armed Palestinian factions behind the backs of the Israeli Army, without the Israeli Army knowing we were in contact with the Palestinians, because getting in and out of Nablus was difficult enough as it was. On top of this, the rivalry between Palestinian factions meant approval from one faction and meant definite disapproval from the other. The rumor that we were doing something that was anti-suicide bombers was spreading fast, and one faction kidnapped our local location manager, Hassan Titi, and demanded that we leave Nablus.

That day there was an Israeli missile attack on a nearby car, and gunmen ordered us to leave, which was the last straw for six of our European crew members. They left and I don't blame them. They did the right thing. Life is more important than a film. We were too close to the destruction and the situation was getting worse. Most of the real danger was from the missiles. When we heard shooting, we could go somewhere else, but you don't see missiles coming. That is much more scary. For all these reason we had to stop the shooting and I had a few dilemmas to deal with: How do I get my location manager back, how can I stay friendly with the various Palestinian factions without the Israelis knowing about it

and seeing me as one of them, risking a rocket attack? Where do I find six professional crew members on such short notice, whom I have to recruit by telling the reason why the others left?

I decided to contact Prime Minister Yasser Arafat, although I'd never met him. I knew for a fact that Arafat had never visited a cinema, however, he did help us obtain the release of our location manager who was returned two hours later.

But I was torn with a new dilemma. Should we stay in Nablus or should we go? If we left, we would justify the rumors that we were traitors. That would leave Hassan and the rest of our local crew who we would have to leave behind, as well as the factions that were on our side, in big trouble. If we stayed, we would have to continue working in a war zone and stand up against the rival factions. I decided to stay, it seemed the only option, but it created another dilemma; my producer Bero Beyer, wanted to leave. After a long fight I suggested the following to Bero: I would start a campaign in town to stop the rumors, without upsetting the Army. In the meantime, the local and international journalists were about to turn Hassan's kidnapping into world news. We asked them to hold, because we were afraid of what that might do. The rival faction started a counter campaign. They were handing out pamphlets saying that we were an American/Spanish conspiracy. So we were outlawed. It seemed that with every step in the right direction, we were pushed back two steps. Every plan we made to resume the shoot got torpedoed.

After three weeks at a standstill, we resumed working again. I will save you the details of the financial troubles we got ourselves into. Six new crew members were flown in and I continued, paranoid and under great stress, with my original plan: directing a movie, dealing with actors, crew and Mise en Scene.

Five days later, a land mine exploded 300 meters away from the set. We were running towards it; three young men died in the area we were shooting the night before, and the lead actress, Lubna Azabal, fainted. Though we wanted to continue filming in Nablus for authenticity and continuity, we felt we had no other choice but to leave. We decided to move the set to my birth city Nazareth and leave Nablus for good.

We took these ridiculous risks to make sure the film would be as close to reality as possible and to have an authentic look and feel. I understand why the Palestinian crew might do this, but I have wondered why the foreign crew would risk their lives.

It would have been quicker and easier to shoot digitally. Why did you make the film on 35mm ?

It was a way of creating a distinction from the news footage that is on our television screens every day. While the film looks realistic, naturalistic, it is still a film and tells a story. On the one hand, the film is fiction and at the same time you want it to ring true.

A surprising moment in the film is the shooting of the martyr videos – was there any particular inspiration for the humor and pathos in that scene?

The scene catches the heart of the film's idea by simultaneously breaking down the martyrdom-heroism as well as the monster-evil and making it human. And humans are often quite banal, but also funny and emotional. In real life there often is comedy in the most tragic moments.

I shot the scene in a real location. This was one of the film's concepts; putting actors in the real surroundings in order to create a moment of truth with the actor. When Ali Suliman stands where real martyrs also stand giving their speech, he was so nervous there was no need to act anymore. I was also

nervous, because all around us, real organizers of these kind of attacks were watching. I was very afraid they would get angry about the comedy in the scene. The entire cast and crew were nervous.

By the end of Take One, where Ali makes the speech, one of the organizers stopped us. I thought: now it is over. But he just wanted to show Ali how to hold his gun correctly. There was no protest over the humor at all. Later I realized that in reality things like this happen. It wasn't irregular to them. By the way, Ali's gun was theirs. We borrowed it. When Ali held it, knowing that this gun was used daily to aim at the Israeli Army, it had quite an impact on him.

When you finished production, how did you feel?

After we finished, François Perrault-Alix, the gaffer, said to me: "So much has happened; I don't even know where to start when I get back to France. Usually I'll have a few good stories after a shoot that will last a while in the local pub, but now... The amount of stories I have to tell will last for the next three years, but I don't know where to start."

And that's how I feel. I look at my journal and realize there were so many stories happening every day and all worth telling. We were all, given all that had happened, exhausted and euphoric.

Are you anticipating that Israeli or Jewish groups might find the film sympathetic to suicide bombers?

I understand that it will be upsetting to some that I have given a human face to the suicide bombers; I am also very critical of the suicide bombers, as well.

The film is simply meant to open a discussion, hopefully, a meaningful discussion, about the real issues at hand. I hope that the film will succeed in stimulating thought. If you see the film, it's fairly obvious that it does not condone the taking of lives. In my experience, with the film since it screened earlier this year in Berlin, much of the talk and protest comes from the *idea* of the film and not necessarily the film itself.

The full weight and complexity of the situation is impossible to show on film. No one side can claim a moral stance because taking any life is not a moral action. The entire situation is outside of what we can call morality. If we didn't believe that we were making something meaningful, that could be part of a larger dialogue, we wouldn't have gambled our lives in Nablus.

Director Hany Abu-Assad Biography

After having studied and worked as an airplane engineer in The Netherlands for several years, Hany Abu-Assad entered the world of cinema and television as a producer. He worked on television programmes about foreign immigrants and documentaries like “Dar O Dar” for Channel 4 and “Long Days in Gaza” for the BBC.

In 1992, Abu-Assad wrote and directed his first short film, “Paper House.” The film depicts the adventures of a thirteen year old Palestinian boy, who tries to build his own house after his family’s original house has been destroyed. “Paper House” was broadcasted by NOS Dutch television and won several international awards at film festivals.

One year later, Abu-Assad produced the feature film “Curfew,” directed by Rashid Masharawi. An international co-production between Argus Film Productions, WDR, ARTE and AVRO, “Curfew” was highly praised, winning awards including the Gold Pyramid in Cairo, and the UNESCO Prize in Cannes, among others.

After his second short “The 13th,” which he wrote, produced and directed, Abu-Assad began his first full-length feature project as a director. He teamed up with writer Arnon Grunberg to develop a script that challenged and explored cinematic narrative and style in a comedy about a couple in Amsterdam. The film, “The Fourteenth Chick” was the opening film of the Dutch Film Festival in Utrecht 1998 and was distributed by United International Pictures.

Recent works include the bittersweet documentary “Nazareth 2000,” which Abu-Assad made for Dutch VPRO television. The turmoil in a divided and secretly occupied city and its quarrelling Palestinian inhabitants, Christian and Muslim, is viewed through the eyes of two gas station attendants. Combining both a kind and a satirical approach to a serious subject matter, Abu-Assad succeeded in creating a multifaceted and surprisingly humorous documentary.

Since Augustus Film was founded by Abu-Assad and Bero Beyer in 2000, Abu-Assad has directed “Rana’s Wedding” (2002), a production realized with the support of the Palestinian Film Foundation of the Ministry of Culture of the Palestinian National Authority, and describes a day in the life of a young woman in Jerusalem, during which she tries to get married before four o’ clock that day. The film was selected for Critics Week 2002 in Cannes and went on to win prizes at Montpellier, Marrakech, Bastia and Cologne.

Abu-Assad’s latest documentary, “Ford Transit” (2002) played at the Sundance Film Festival. A portrait of a driver of a Ford Transit taxi, the film humorously observes the resilient inhabitants of Palestinian territories. The film won the FIPRESCI award during the Thessaloniki Film Festival, the In the Spirit of Freedom Award in Jerusalem and together with “Rana’s Wedding,” the Nestor Almendros Award for courage in filmmaking at the Human Rights Film Festival in New York.

Abu-Assad and Beyer wrote “Paradise Now” in 1999 and shot the film in Nablus in 2004. It made its World Premiere at the Berlin Film Festival 2005, where it was won the Blue Angel Award for Best European Film, the Berliner Morgenpost Readers' Prize and the Amnesty International Award for Best Film.

Hany Abu-Assad (Director)

2005 PARADISE NOW
2002 FORD TRANSIT
2002 RANA'S WEDDING
2000 NAZARETH 2000
1998 THE 14TH CHICK

Antoine Heberlé (Director of Photography)

2004 VOICI VENU LE TEMPS Alain Guiraudie
2004 PARADISE NOW Hany Abu-Assad
2003 LE CADEAU D'ELENA Frédéric Graziani
2002 NO REST FOR THE BRAVE Alain Guiraudie
2002 A THOUSAND MONTHS Faouzi Ben Saidi
2001 THE REPENTANT Laetitia Masson
2000 ONE SWALLOW BROUGHT SPRING Christian Carion
2000 UNDER THE SAND François Ozon (summer part)
1999 PEAU NEUVE Emilie DELEUZE
1999 LOVE ME Laetitia Masson
1998 MAMIROLLE Brigitte Coscas
1998 LE P'TIT BLEU François Vautier
1997 FOR SALE Laetitia Masson
1997 LE NEW-YORKER Benoît Graffin
1994 UN DIMANCHE A PARIS Hervé Duhamel
1994 PAIX ET AMOUR Laurence Ferreira Barbosa
1994 L'INCRUSTE Emilie Deleuze
1993 NORMAL PEOPLE ARE NOTHING EXCEPTIONAL Laurence Ferreira Barbosa
1992 THE END OF THE WORLD Di Joao-Mario Grilo

Kais Neshif (Saïd)

2004 ALEM BY ROMANCE Johnny Zicholtz (short)
2004 PARADISE NOW Hany Abu-Assad
2002 by Zev Woloshin (theatre)
2001 The Good Guys (television)

Ali Suliman (Khaled)

2004 PARADISE NOW Hany Abu-Assad
2004 THE SYRIAN BRIDE E. Riklis
2003 THE BARBEQUE PEOPLE D. Ofek and Y. Madmoni
2001 DIARY OF MALE WHORE T. Abu-Wael
1997 CHRONICLE OF A DISAPPEARANCE E. Suleiman

Lubna Azabal (Suha)

2004 CHANGING TIMES André Téchiné
2004 PARADISE NOW Hany Abu-Assad
2003 EXILES Tony Gatlif
2003 25 DEGREES IN WINTER Stéphane Vuillet
2002 VIVA ALGERIA Nadir Mokneche
2002 ALMOST PEACEFUL Michel Deville
2002 ARAM Robert Kechichian
2001 FAR André Téchiné
2000 PURE FICTION Marian Handwerker
2000 LES SIESTES GRENADINES Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud

Hiam Abbass (Saïd's Mother)

2005	FREE ZONE	Amos Gitai
2005	LE DEMON DE MIDI	Marie-Pascale Osterrieth
2005	PARADISE NOW	Hany Abu-Hassad
2004	LA FIANCEE SYRIENNE	Eran Riklis
2004	THE GATE OF THE SUN	Yousry Nasrallah
2002	A LOVING FATHER	Jacob Berger
2002	RED SATIN	Raja Amari
2001	L'ANGE DU GOUDRON	Denis Chouinard
2002	WE NEED A VACATION	Didier Bivel
2001	ALI, RABIAA ET LES AUTRES	Ahmed Boulane
2000	ONCE WE GROW UP	Renaud Cohen
1998	LIVING IN PARADISE	Bourlem Guerdjou
1998	LE GONE DU CHAABA	Christophe Ruggia
1997	HAIFA	Rachid Macharaoui
1996	WHEN THE CAT'S AWAY	Cédric Klapisch
1994	QUELQU'UN	Marie Vermillard
1992	ASSASSIN (S)	Mathieu Kassovitz
1991	ALJABAL	Hanna Elyas
1987	NOCES EN GALILEE	Michel Khleifi

Amer Hlehel (Jamal)

2005	PARADISE NOW	Hany Abu-Assad
2004	JOIN THE HUMMOS	Alaa' Hlehel
2004	JACOB	Victor Qamar
2004	A DAY OF OUR LIVES	Muhammad Bakri (theatre)
2003	GILGAMESH DIDN'T DIE	Francios Abu-Salem (theatre)