

## The Teacher [12A]

2023 UK/Qatar/Occupied Palestinian Territory 115 mins

UK released **27 September 2024**

Director **Farah Nabulsi**

Screenplay **Farah Nabulsi**

Cinematography **Gilles Porte**

Music **Alex Baranowski**

Cast **Saleh Bakri** (Basem El Saleh); **Imogen Poots** (Lisa);  
**Muhammad Abed Elrahman** (Adam); **Stanley  
Townsend** (Simon Cohen)

Set in the West Bank, Farah Nabulsi's debut feature follows Palestinian school teacher Basem (Saleh Bakri) as he attempts to reconcile his lifelong commitment to political resistance with his role as father-figure to one of his most promising students, Adam (Muhammad Abed Elrahman). When Adam's older brother Jacob (Mahmood Bakri) is murdered by an Israeli settler, Basem is forced to come face-to-face with his own past, Adam's white-hot lust for revenge, the unbearable uncertainty of war and his own chequered past.

Nabulsi expertly demonstrates the precarious everyday of occupation as a sense of unpredictability simmers throughout. Palestine feels tangible through the screen – we stand shoulder to shoulder with characters as they sift through the rubble of a demolished home or daydream in a classroom. One particular highlight comes from a short sequence of Basem walking through a market, stalls adored with Palestinian flags, the camera holding on street sellers' faces. These slow-motion portraits of characters looking directly into the camera could be clichéd, but instead are weighted with history and intrigue as looking into the eyes of those whose lives have been forever altered by occupation, is undeniably powerful.

Other plot strands, such as a romantic digression between Basem and an English volunteer at the school, Lisa (Imogen Poots) are however marred by disingenuous dialogue and wrestle to hold their own against the

formidable main plot. While it's commendable for Nabulsi to aim to create a larger tapestry of conflict, Basem and Adam's relationship has this emphatic magnetism which renders all other narratives a little distracting.

An enthralling performance from Bakri meanwhile ultimately serves as the film's backbone. The immense weariness which comes from a lifetime of struggling with the morality of politics and violence has rendered our protagonist almost ghost-like, and the film seeks to draw him out from the comfort of his bookshelves and into the real world once again.

Paternity is also one of the central themes as the story of Basem's son, who was incarcerated for attending a protest, runs parallel to the story of an American soldier who is being held hostage by the resistance in the hope of a prisoner exchange. In perhaps the most chilling scene, Basem and the father of the American soldier, Simon (Stanley Townsend), come face-to-face for a desperate exchange. There's hope the meeting will result in something akin to Al Pacino and Robert De Niro's infamous exchange in *Heat* yet this scene unfortunately lacks the same raw intensity. We do come away from it, however, with a fresh understanding of the far-reaching effects of occupation which span generations and break down the concrete personas of even the most stoic of fathers. Gripping and full of tension, *The Teacher* not only makes for a wonderful cinematic experience, but poses some all-important questions the wider world has seemingly avoided answering for too long.

**Grace Dodd**, *Little White Lies*, 26 September 2024

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