

# Eyes of a Thief

## A Word from the Director

As a filmmaker living in No-Man's-Land between Ramallah and Jerusalem (officially Jerusalem but inside the 450-kilometre Wall area), and desperate for an end to injustice, yet seeing the situation worsening daily with no hope in sight, I questioned what options are available when blackness surrounds a people and the air thickens to a point where the mere act of breathing becomes difficult.

I searched for options, read books, watched movies, and spoke to people who had faced similar circumstances. I tried to see beyond the land marred by daily violence, walls, electric fences, checkpoints, and land confiscation. Though I understood how broken dreams and aspirations could push a society to further isolate itself, especially with the world community turning its back on the injustice on the ground, I fought against myself as I began to sink into despair, uncertainty, and rage.

Then, in 2002, an event took place at the height of the second Palestinian Intifada that intrigued me and raised questions of resistance and survival when people are under fire: a lone Palestinian man engaged in what some would call "terrorism" and others "self-defence." The changes to the meaning of resistance today led me to probe further how justice, dignity, democracy, and self-determination – the basic



Director Najwa Najjar.

rights that Palestinians have demanded for decades – could be achieved when the hope for a real peace based on the above values was being extinguished. *Eyes of a Thief* uncovers the devastation and fruitlessness of violence through one story of the many human stories often overlooked and/or forgotten in any war-torn area.

Themes, characters, and setting are atypical not only for Palestinian film but also for the Arab cinema in general. A father/daughter relationship drama, a love story, a contemplation of the past and present of Palestine, and a thought-provoking reflection on the always elusive concept of survival, *Eyes of a Thief* is a multifaceted chronicle about people with unshakable beliefs as they confront the ethical uncertainty of the time. *Eyes of a Thief* questions what happens when reason and hope diminish, apathy increases, and consciousness becomes almost extinct. Will people's will to resist and survive also diminish? What options present themselves? These questions are not only relevant to Palestine but to the whole region as well.



For decades the discourse on resistance and survival in the Arab world has been misrepresented and oversimplified, creating a skewed discussion. For far too long, only one side of the story has been told, a version that overlooks the Arab perspective and the real place and people involved. Consequently, the discourse has been oversimplified, interpreting the conflicts in the region as sectarian, Muslim vs. Jew, and/or Muslims vs. the West. After 9/11 it has become very easy to demonise and dehumanise all Muslims and Arabs worldwide. Equally important, the reaction in many parts of the Arab world has often been to target minorities, Christians in particular, who have been living in the region for centuries, as they have wrongly become associated with the Christians of the West who have no ties to the East where Christianity was born. The preservation of historical diversity and the role that minorities have played and continue to play as part and parcel of day-to-day life and culture in the various countries of the Arab world is of crucial importance. Central to *Eyes of a Thief* is the

need to represent the region in ways that challenge its reductive portrayal in the mainstream media, bring an end to the warped hegemony of partial and/or inaccurate narratives, and change perceptions and images from the region that are defined and dominated by misconceived convictions and/or distorted television stereotypes. Only by hearing all sides of the story can there be a true understanding of the place and its people, and their aspirations and dreams of dignity, justice, democracy, and self-determination. In many ways, the past and present of Palestinian resistance and the fight for freedom, justice, democracy, and self-determination – a life with dignity – encapsulate the heart and soul of the whole Arab world.

Najwa Najjar  
Director

