



# AMREEKA

A FILM BY CHERIEN DABIS [www.AMREEKA.com](http://www.AMREEKA.com)



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

ENTERTAINMENT



## DREAM FADES IN 'AMREEKA'

By James Verniere  
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Review by James Verneire

An immigrant tale with a post-9/11 twist, "Amreeka" begins in 2002 or 2003 in the occupied territories of Israel, where Palestinian workers must pass several armed checkpoints to get to work and more recently negotiate the cement wall Israel is building to keep Palestinians and other Arabs penned in.

The hero and heroine of the tale are divorced single mother Muna Farah (Nisreen Faour) and her adolescent son, Fadi (Melkar Muallem). She has two degrees and 10 years experience as a banker. But she can't make ends meet and gets no support from her ex-husband. Fadi, whose father neglects him, goes to an expensive school but has, as a Palestinian in Israel, no prospects. Together, they embark for "Amreeka" with a dream.

Written and directed by Nebraska-born Cherien Dabis, whose writing credits include episodes of "The L Word," "Amreeka" feels honest in its depictions of Muna and Fadi's trials and tribulations, their difficulty adjusting to a new culture, their very different reaction to the invasion of Iraq, the hostility and racism Fadi encounters in a Chicago suburban high school and Muna's inability to find work outside of a White Castle.

But too much of "Amreeka" is cliched, even if it is true, and the tone has the earnestness of an after-school special.

As the luckless Muna, Faour is an attractive and appealing presence. But the film's tone makes her job more difficult. Is Muna a tragic figure, or is she the Palestinian Lucille Ball?

Muallem's Fadi yearns persuasively for understanding. But his transformation into a homie is a tad ridiculous.

In the roles of Muna's more assimilated sister and physician brother-in-law Hiam Abbass ("The Visitor") and Yussuf Abu-Warda bring a world-weary authenticity to their roles. Also good is newcomer Brodie Sanderson as Muna's Goth White Castle co-worker Matt, whose name she informs him means death in Arabic.

"Cool," says Matt.