



# AMREEKA

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



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

ENTERTAINMENT

# The Seattle Times

Review by John Hartl  
Movie review 3 stars

'Amreeka,' with Nisreen Faour, Melkar Muallem, Hiam Abbass, Yusef Abu Warda. Written and directed by Cherien Dabis. 97 minutes. Rated PG-13 for language. In English and Arabic, with English subtitles. Harvard Exit.

MAKING IT IN 'AMREEKA' A STORY OF RESILIENCE, CHARM

By John Hartl

Special to The Seattle Times

The mortgage is two months overdue. Landing a full-time job seems impossible.

And when a well-educated woman starts flipping burgers to get by, she feels such shame that she goes through an elaborate juggling act, making it look like she's landed an administrative position at a bank.

This could describe Anytown, USA, in 2009, but in Cherien Dabis' "Amreeka," it happens to be the plight of a Palestinian family trying to establish roots in small-town Illinois in 2003. The invasion of Iraq has just begun, their neighbors fear that the Palestinians are suicide bombers, and school bullies take full advantage of the situation.

Dabis' semi-autobiographical script focuses on an irrepressible West Bank woman, Muna (Nisreen Faour), and her skeptical teenage son, Fadi (Melkar Muallem), who move in with her sister (Hiam Abbass) and brother-in-law (Yusef Abu Warda) - a doctor who is losing patients because he's an Arab.

Going through Customs, Muna and Fadi accidentally lose most of the money they planned to bring to Amreeka (aka America), but the recently divorced Muna is not easily defeated, and Fadi has obviously learned from her ability to bounce back. Faour and Muallem make a formidable team; their relationship carries the movie and almost justifies its optimism.

The other characters are sketchier. Warda and Abbass are credible as a homesick couple strained to the breaking point, but what keeps them together after she stupidly accuses him of cowardice? The burger-joint employees are almost too nice to be true; so is a gentle divorced man who makes himself available when Muna needs help.

For the most part, Dabis and her actors charm their way through this material, finding absurdist humor even in the darkest moments. Asked at Customs for her occupation, Muna gets confused and tells a bewildered official that yes, they've been occupied for 40 years. Applying for a bank job, Muna promises to open an account if she's hired.

Faour consistently emphasizes Muna's sweet nature and resilience. They keep her going even in apparent defeat. At times, she almost glows. As a result, the movie can't be denied its tentatively happy ending.

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