The movie, “Farha,” (2021) by Jordanian film-maker Darin J. Sallam tells the story of the First Arab-Israeli War (1948) through the experience of Farha, a 14-year-old girl who is caught in the events of the war. Though a feature film, Sallam has commented that the movie is also based on a true story that she was told as a child about a girl named Radieh. “Farha” finds itself at the center of controversy as the movie promotes the Nakba narrative that charges Israel in 1948 of displacing the “Palestinian population from their homeland.” Others still point to the alarming use in the film of blood libel, an accusation waged against the Jewish people historically.

For further discussions on the film, please see:

• “Netflix film depicts murder of Palestinian family by IDF,” (JPost)
• “The Washington Post gets by with a little help from its antisemitic friends,” (JNS)
• “Lies, Libels and the Justification for Terror,” (Jewish Journal)

Guiding Questions:

1. What is the difference between history and narrative?

2. What is the Nakba narrative and does it promote antisemitism? If so, how?

3. Director of the film Darin J. Sallam has stated that the story of Anne Frank hiding in the attic during the Holocaust partially inspired her rendition of “Farha.” What do you think about this historical reference?

4. Critics have pointed to the use of blood libel in the film. Depicting Jews as willful murderers of children is a staple of antisemitism that stretches back centuries. Blood libel is the accusation that Jews target non-Jewish children intentionally for murder. In Medieval Europe this accusation was likewise accompanied by the idea that Jews use the blood for baking Matzah over passover. At the same time, one cannot deny that in wartime, blood is spilt. What do you think about the difference between blood libel and representing violence due to war?

5. How are the Israeli Jewish characters represented in the film?

6. Is "Farha" a movie that correctly represents the history of the First Arab-Israeli War of 1948? If so, how? Does the film depict the five Arab armies that attacked Israel?

7. While the Netflix film “Farha” claims to be “based” on true events, the director has admitted that it is not factual, and that these scenes did not actually occur. What do you think, therefore, of watching feature films to better understand historical events? What would be a better method to learn about history?

8. In 2011 P.A. leader Mahmoud Abbas claimed that “Zionist forces expelled Palestinian Arabs to ensure a decisive Jewish majority in the future state of Israel, and Arab armies intervened.” What does Abbas’ attitude toward Zionism reveal about any Jewish sovereign presence in the region of Palestine? Is the logical conclusion, therefore, to assume that any Jewish sovereign presence leads to a refugee crisis? How so?

9. In response to global support for the film, Sallam wrote that “we are overwhelmed by the amount of support the film is receiving globally… The film exists, we exist, and we will not be silenced.” What do you think Sallam means by “we will not be silenced.” Who, according to Sallam, is silencing her and what message does Sallam want to promote?

10. Hamid Dabashi, a professor at Columbia University, calls “Farha” an exciting addition of the “Palestinian narrative” to the “American mainstream.” Dabashi has a long history of engaging in antisemitic rhetoric, claiming that Israel is a “key actor” in “every dirty, treacherous, ugly and pernicious act in the world.” What does it tell us that those who praise “Farha” are also fierce deniers of Israel’s right to exist?