Mo, Season 2: A Palestinian-American comic at the US-Mexico border and other disasters

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In late January, Netflix rolled out Season 2 of *Mo*, an American comedy-drama streaming television series whose first season premiered August 24, 2022. It features Mohammed Amer as an undocumented Palestinian, Mo Najjar, living in Houston, Texas. The second season, with eight episodes like the first one, was co-created by Amer and Egyptian-American Ramy Youssef, and co-directed by Amer and Algerian-American rapper Solvan Naim.

Season 1 of the semi-autobiographical series introduced Mo living in with his mother Yusra (Farah Bsieso) and brother Sameer (Omar Elba), a young man clearly on the spectrum. The three have been waiting to be granted asylum for over 20 years (like the actual Amer family)—since Mo arrived in the US when he was nine.

Sister Nadia (Cherien Dabis) resides in nearby Galveston with her son and Canadian husband, through whom she obtained legal status.

Other central characters in both seasons include Mo's Latina girlfriend Maria (Teresa Ruiz) and his childhood friend Nick (Tobe Nwigwe), a Nigerian-American.

Mo Amer's parents were displaced from Palestine to Kuwait, where he was born. The family was forced to flee the country and emigrate to the US during the 1991 Gulf War.

The WSWS wrote about the first season:

> With an ebullient, captivating presence, Amer delivers rapid-fire, humorous and insightful material that targets several different circles of hell in America: the chaotic, crisis-ridden state of affairs in the US and in Houston—one of the country's largest cities—as a whole, the horrific plight of the undocumented immigrant in general and of Palestinians and refugees from the Middle East in particular.

"It speaks to a second generation statelessness … and the ripple effect that happens from being stateless … Once you're waiting for your asylum to be granted, you're just out there, no home on paper," Amer commented in an interview. A "refugee free agent," is how he terms his status.

The sequel's storyline begins six months after the end of the first season. Mo is stranded in Mexico after having been kidnapped by an olive oil cartel! He is working multiple jobs in Mexico City, including selling falafel tacos and wrestling as "The Palestinian Bear" ("El Oso Palestino"). He is trying to secure a laissez-passer to legally re-enter the US in time for his family's postponed asylum hearing.

After a chance meeting with the American ambassador's wife, his introduction to the sleazy official himself ends in an argument about Palestine not being *in conflict* with Israel, but being *occupied* by Israel. This ends his ability to get back to the US legally. The Palestinian uses a smuggler-coyote, but is caught by a band of redneck migrant hunters upon crossing over to Texas.

Mo is now incarcerated in an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention center. This is the strongest episode of Season 2. His experiences with US immigration authorities graphically depict the harsh realities of the system, including his being incarcerated in a disgusting hole where detainees are treated horribly by the guards.

While the fictional Mo retains his humor and resilience, others are shown as deeply traumatized. For instance, one detainee survives on liquid from a can of

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sausages, while another has lost the ability to speak coherently, resorting to meowing like a cat. A moment of levity is introduced when Mo starts playing basketball, with crumpled up Mylar blankets as basketballs.

Contrary to the Trump-Vance degrading fascist lies about immigrants–an "invading army"–Amer makes special effort to humanize the victims of American "justice." He eventually leaves the center with an ankle monitor.

Meanwhile back in Texas, life has radically changed. Although hampered by his autism, Mo's brother Sameer is desperately trying to keep the family's olive oil business afloat. Meanwhile, Maria has dumped Mo in favor (adding insult to injury!) of an Israeli-American chef Guy (Simon Rex) with a massively successful restaurant. Guy further vexes Mo by stealing his falafel taco recipe ("First take our land and then our food"). An angry confrontation ensues, during which Guy's customers hear the word "Hamas," instead of "hummus."

The series ends when Mo, his mother and brother visit family in Palestine, on October 6, 2023, one day before the US-backed Israeli genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza begins.

Amer explains to the *Guardian*:

> My intent was to absolutely go back and film in Burin, the village we're from. But because it's so dangerous and just not the right time, and settler violence and whatnot, it was impossible to do. Really, really impossible. And I would never in a million years put anyone in danger. Lives are at stake. So we never had the ability to actually go there.
>
> But I was able to send in crews at different times. We were able to get locals on the ground to physically get the exteriors we needed. But even then I said: 'Listen, if you even feel a hint of uncertainty, don't do it. You have to be really careful and really thoughtful about how you do it, and make sure that everything is safe.' That was our number one priority.

The comic is one of those gifted, restless, insatiably curious people who finds the world and its inhabitants amusing and fascinating, and, in return, the world tends to meet him halfway, regarding him in more or less the same fashion.

Amer as a humorist-artist and a human being faces a very difficult, painful situation. The circumstances of the last nearly 17 months of unceasing mass killings by the Israeli forces have nothing comical about them. Charlie Chaplin directed the satirical *The Great Dictator*, released in 1940, in which he mocked Hitler, Mussolini, Goebbels, Goering and company. However, he wrote in his autobiography that had he known "the actual horrors of the German concentration camps, I could not have made *The Great Dictator*; I could not have made fun of the homicidal insanity of the Nazis."

In interviews, Amer acknowledges an internal struggle. What to do in the face of such horrors? And not only those confronting the Palestinians. He sees his television series as telling "a universal story of struggle that relates to so many refugees and millions of underrepresented humans trying to be seen around the globe." (comingsoon.net) It's a metaphor, he told the *Guardian*, not simply for one Palestinian family, but "for everyone that's trying to hold on." A genuine, conflicted humanity is at work here.

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