

# My Brother The Devil

## (Sally El Hosaini)

### Component 2: Global Film: Narrative, Representation and Film style

#### Focus Area Film style

#### PART 1: Key Sequence(s) and timings and/or links

Sequence 1

- Title and opening scenes (00:00:29 - 00:06:41)

Sequence 2

- Home life and street fight ( 00:19:56 - 00:26:50 )

#### PART 2: STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

##### Cinematography (including Lighting)

- The film's poster summarises what El Hosaini says about her vision of Mo and Rashid: that she envisioned them like a DNA strand, two separate helices, spiralling around each other, on their own paths but inextricably connected. This is the way she structured her screenplay, with each character moving back and forth between conflicting worlds: criminal and 'straight', Egyptian and 'street' cultures.
- Sequence 1: Right from the start of the film almost every shot is a CU of Rash or Mo's faces, or their POV. This links to the subjective aesthetic of the film and the 'Four Rules' El-Hosaini established with her cinematographer (see Aesthetics). From the beginning, we are completely immersed in their perspective. As the scenes progress we often see events with one of their faces - or back of head and shoulders - in the foreground, with events in the background.
- MLS of Rash in the gym, standing in focus in the background, watching a boxer training in the foreground. His admiring facial expression suggests two of the films' themes:

the homo-eroticism of male (street) culture, and Rash's conflicts with his sexuality. These can also be seen in the scene with Rash and his friends: group or two shots where there is an easy physical intimacy (arms around neck, play fighting). See Representations of masculinity in Social Context.

- Sequence 2: Consistent with the film's aesthetic, almost everything in these scenes is shot from Mo or Rash's perspective. The expressionistic images of Mo in the tree are entirely immersed in his mental state. Even when the shots aren't POV, they still express the brothers' subjective experience. A good example is the LS of Rash standing alone, deserted by his gang, between the corpses of Izzi and Demon's dog.
- The CU of Rash putting money into his mother's purse (and the reaction shot of Mo) reflects the complex representation of masculinity that El Hosaini is trying to achieve: the money comes from the macho criminal world of 'the road', yet Rash is using it for respectable ends - supporting his family - whilst also being aware his parents would disapprove of how he earned it.

##### Mise-en-scène

- Sequence 1: The film was shot on location in Hackney, East London, on the council estates where the real people El Hosaini based the film on live. Though the area is clearly lower class, it eschews the 'ghetto aesthetic' (broken windows, graffiti etc.) of other films in the urban drama genre. This suggests the film will be a less sensationalistic portrayal of street culture.
- The prop of the TV becomes symbolic of the conflicts and tensions experienced by Rash and Mo. Firstly, it represents the pride Rash has in his brother's academic achievement. Secondly, it ironically also symbolises the criminal world of easy material gain that Mo aspires to be a part of. It also represents this world to the father, who refuses to accept it in his house, introducing the inter-family tensions between a 'decent' (if

poor) lifestyle and the temptations of crime.

- Sequence 2: The costume of Rash and Izzi at the bus stop again reflects the conflict between the two cultures - 'street' and 'straight' - that are at the core of the brothers' lives: Izzi is trying to get a respectable job, wearing a shirt and tie, while Rash wears a hoodie and puffs on a joint.
- The knife prop denotes Mo's developing attitude to aggressive masculinity. In the scene in the tree, he flicks open the knife repeatedly, fantasising in harmless role play; in the later scene, he witnesses the deadly reality of the territorial aggression knife crime creates.

### Editing

- Sequence 1: The title sequence features black and white 'reportage' photography of urban youth, intercut with dramatic scenes that introduce Mo and Rash. Though the people featured in the photos seem stereotypical at first, the images capture humour, energy and humanity, suggesting that this film will go beyond the sensationalistic portrayals in films like *Kidulthood* (2006).
- Almost everything we see is presented using shot-reverse-shot, so we are completely immersed in either Mo or Rash's subjective views of the world and constantly aware of their emotional reactions to what they see. As we don't really see anyone else's POV or objective shots, this also shows the strength and intimacy of their relationship.
- Sequence 2: In the short scene of Mo in the tree, jump cuts are used to show the aggressive scenarios playing out in his imagination. During the fight in the street, almost every shot is POV or reaction, so we see the tragic events play out entirely from Mo and later Rash's perspective.
- The juxtaposition of the scenes of Mo in the tree (and in his own imagination), at home with his mother, and on 'the road' show the conflicting influences on his identity. There is another juxtaposition of violent fantasy and reality later, when Rash plays out the shooting of Demon in the mirror (also echoing the famous scene from *Taxi Driver*), followed by his terror when faced with actual situation.

### Sound

- Sequence 1: The non-diegetic music in the title sequence (and throughout) is emotive, rather than

the hip-hop soundtrack we may have expected. This establishes the film as being more of an emotional drama than an 'urban youth' movie.

- The clash between family/heritage and 'street' identity that is central to both Rash and Mo's lives are shown in the dialogue. The whole film is rich with authentic street slang (the non-professional actor who plays Repo was also the film's script editor) but this contrasts with the 'proper English' and Arabic spoken by the father. His refusal of the TV and insistence that Rash goes to the job centre and "stops hanging out with black boys" reflects the clash between the 'decent' and 'gangsta' lifestyles.
- Sequence 2: The dialogue between Izzi and Rash at the bus stop again reflects the conflict between criminal and 'straight' lifestyles: "£325 a week? You can make that in a day!" This also suggests that crime (and the associated violence) is a product of social and economic environment.

## PART 3: STARTING POINTS - Contexts

### Social

- Representation of masculinity: the director has stated that she wanted to show audiences the conflicts and vulnerability behind the machismo and bravado of young men. The 'alpha male' image all the male characters attempt to project is a performance for their peers, and - as we see later in the film - one that can be dangerous if compromised or contradicted. Sayyid represents a different kind of masculinity: he has left his 'street' identity behind, become a successful middle class photographer, and is at peace with his sexuality (in contrast to the 'no homo' male relationships of the gang). He also is in touch with his ethnic identity: he listens to Arabic music and shows his political consciousness during his dinner with Rash's parents. It is also during this scene that Rash receives the only approval his father displays throughout the whole film.
- The film is, essentially, about conflicted identity in many forms: ethnicity/cultural heritage vs 'hip hop' culture; (aggressive) heterosexuality vs (tender) homosexuality; family vs gang community; crime vs respectability; underclass vs middle class.

## Historical

- The director has stated that she wanted to portray the human beings behind the ‘hoodie’ stereotypes of urban youth featured in both news and other ‘urban films’. This took on extra significance when the London riots of 2011 broke out whilst she was filming. The subsequent dehumanising and demonising of young people in inner cities makes the complex portrayal in the film even more poignant. Her representation of young urban lives contrasts with films like *Sket* (2011) and *Kidulthood*. The latter film’s script was actually based on a collection of tabloid headlines collected by the writer, Noel Clarke, over a year, and the narrative reflects this sensationalistic view of urban life.
- A more recent US film that explores similar territory is *Moonlight* (Barry Jenkins, 2016) which traces a gay African-American’s journey from child to adulthood and explores similar conflicts in masculine identity in a tough urban environment.

## PART 4: STARTING POINTS - Specialist Focus – FILM STYLE

- Both the director and cinematographer David Raedeker (who won Best Cinematographer at the 2012 Sundance Festival) have backgrounds in documentary filmmaking, and this is evident from the immersive aesthetic of the film. El Hosaini said she was inspired by a Hackney bus ride, where she was squashed up next to a teenage boy with bad skin. She thought “that’s how close I want to feel to the characters, so that you can see their bad skin, their sweat, and the texture of their face, and feel very close to them, and get intimate with them.”
- Before shooting, she and Raedeker agreed on ‘Four Rules’: that every shot would be ‘experience-driven’, translating the five senses of the brothers into a visual style; that there would be no ‘master’ shots to establish location; that each shot would be as simple and uncluttered as possible; and that they would express a ‘1.5 POV’. The ‘1’ here is Mo’s perspective; the ‘.5’ is Rash’s. This means that even though Mo is often passive in terms of driving the narrative, we are completely immersed in his perspective throughout.
- El Hosaini wanted the audience to feel like they are ‘inside’ the situations, empathising with all the characters rather than seeing them as an objective viewer who makes judgements about the characters’ behaviour and decisions. To achieve this, the film was shot on a handheld Alexi Arri digicam that gave Raedeker ‘360 degree space’ to move and frame each shot. To achieve naturalism, El Hosaini spent nearly five years hanging out with the people the characters are based on, and even employed many of these as actors in the film. In order to get naturalistic performances, she would often cover the camera’s ‘on’ light, so the performers wouldn’t know when they were actually being filmed.
- Despite this almost reportage approach, the film uses expressionistic movement and framing. A great example is the scene with Mo in the tree (see above) or the almost final shot of the film (below): the tight two-shot showing the close bond of the brothers; but with them looking in different directions, showing the alternate paths they eventually take.