

Press Kit

Light at the End of the Tunnel

Daou Akhir al-Nafaq

A film by Sobhi al Zobaidi
Palestine 2001

Director

Sobhi al-Zobaidi

Script/Research

Sobhi al-Zobaidi/Thomas Jenatsch

Camera

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Sound

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Synopsis

According to many sources, over half a million Palestinians have been arrested and imprisoned by Israel since 1967. This film reflects on some of the problems that Palestinian detainees face after their release from Israeli (and Palestinian Authority) prisons. Six ex-detainees, two women and four men, talk about their life after being released. Some were unable to bridge the gap between them and their families, some feel that they came out from one prison only to enter another.

Palestine 2001, Sobhi al-Zobaidi, documentary, 57 min, colour, Video, Arab/English subtitles

Festivals

Palestinian Documentary Film Festival, Teheran 2003; MedFilm Festival, Rome 2003; Palestinian Film Festival, Beirut 2003; Films from the South, Oslo 2002; Festival Internacional Tres Continentes del Documental, Buenos Aires 2002; 6e Biennale des Cinemas Arabes, Paris 2002; Arab Film Festival San Fransico 2001; Arab Screen Independent Film Festival Doha/Qatar 2001

The filmmaker Sobhi al-Zobaidi

Sobhi al-Zobaidi, Palestinian filmmaker and film scholar, born in Jerusalem in 1961. Educated at Birzeit university (BA in Economics and Philosophy) New York university (Diploma in film and video productions, MA in cinema studies) and Simon Fraser university (Ph.D. candidate in film and communications). In 1998, al-Zobaidi founded reFugee camp productions where he produced and directed a number of documentaries, short fiction, experimental videos and multi-media installations. Since 2006, al-Zobaidi has been on scholarship researching issues relating to memory, space and new media technologies in the case of Palestinians.

Filmography

- [My Very Private Map](#) (1998, 21')
- [Women in the Sun / Nisa Fi Al-Shams](#) (1999, 58')
- Ali, His Friends and Their Whishes (1999, 8')
- Deep Shit (multi-media installation, 2000)
- [Light at the End of the Tunnel / Daou Akhir al-Nafq](#) (2001, 57')
- [Looking Awry / Chawal](#) (2001, 29')
- Returning from Ives Street (performance, multi-media installation, 2001)
- Crossing Kalandia (2002, 56')
- A Caged Bird's Song (2003, 30') Missing Gaza (2005, 15')
- Memories Without Geographies (2007, 38')

Interview with Sobhi al-Zobaidi

This film is an extraordinary record in a number of ways.

How did the making of this film come about?

Red Cross initiated the idea and commissioned me to make the film. Although we ended up with many huge differences in the way we see things, but I'm glad that they went for it. Unfortunately, they wanted a final product devoid of any political content, and they wanted to portray ex-prisoners as victims of some unknown tragedy. I couldn't do that, of course, so I ended up cutting two versions of the film. See what I mean. It is exactly the same story I talk about in *Looking Awry* how foreigners see things different from the locals.

The prisoners represent a wide spread of background, age, personalities and so on. How did you select the interviewees and was there a lengthy selection process?

Yes indeed. I met with hundreds of prisoners and with each one them you can make more than a film. But I made a selection that hints to the scale of the problem, age, gender, geography, ...etc.

It was good that you included women former prisoners also. Do you find in general that women ex-prisoners face additional pressures eg social stigma when they are released? Why is this?

Yes, I do believe that woman carry an additional load. Although they are treated with respect but still, strong women are feared in our societies. Prison give women some strength which make men fearful.

How did you manage to get the prisoners (and some of their family members) to talk so frankly in front of the camera about such highly painful and personal matters? How did you gain the trust of the interviewees to such a high degree?

I take this as a complement. Trust is a key feature. I try not to impose or direct their attention or emotions. And I think that people in distress need and like to talk, they just need the right tool and the right person to talk to. In my previous film *Women in the Sun* you have four women talk about incest, rape, sexual harassment, family abuses, and they are all young, and this is something not easy to do in our society, but I gained their trust and the film was very appreciated. Maybe because I make my films for local audiences, so from the beginning it sets a certain vibe and it works.

What has been the reaction of Palestinians to the film, especially given that it covers not only imprisonment by the Israelis but also by the Palestinian Authority?

Brave, sensitive, courageous. These are the words I heard the most. Ex-prisoners felt the film was realistic and not romantic. I got some beautiful letters from people who saw the film.

Do you have any information on the current status of prisoners eg numbers, and whether the Palestinian Authority is now less abusive of rights?

Right now it is difficult to guess the numbers but I can find out. (Thousands have been imprisoned since the Intifada started) and yes, I think that the PA is less abusive now. At least there are almost no political prisoners (opposition)

How was the film funded? Where has it been shown so far - has it been on TV?

It was funded by ICRC (you don't see their name on this version). It has been on local TV. It has been screened in Qatar, Amman, Amsterdam, and the US.

Please tell us something about reFugee camp productions and its activities. What film project(s) are you working on at the moment? I see from your CV that you have an award from the Hubert Bals Fund for Al-Ajeebah... what is that?

reFugee camp productions is my own production house. It is not really an establishment yet, but I'm hoping to build a production house with facilities to make films, promote film culture and provide training for younger people.

You work in the music field as a lyricist; which bands have you worked with, are the lyrics in Arabic, English or both. How would you describe the current music scene in Palestine? (it's something we don't hear about over here).

I wrote songs for the local band *Sabreen* and I wrote music plays and songs for plays. Lyrics I only write in Arabic. But reviews and essays on culture and arts I write in English. Palestinian music faces same problems other art forms face. There are talents but not enough institutions. In my opinion there isn't what you can call a musical scene in Palestine, it is the weakest among popular art forms, such as painting, film, theater.

You have also been active in multimedia installations etc. Any current or planned activities in this area?

I did two multimedia installations in the last 3 years. I like this art form and I do have plans for future projects.

How would you describe the state of the film industry in Palestine at this time? Is it possible to study film locally, and if so, where? Is it difficult to get funding; are there many accessible foreign sources? Is there much censorship of film?

The state of film is quite complex here. If you publish an add in local newspapers asking people to submit proposals for film, you'll get a large number of responses (I would say minimum 50.) Though there are no film schools or colleges or any professional institutions that offer training. Many people here came to film from news and you can feel that in the majority of Palestinian films. In addition there no film funds whatsoever, as a filmmaker I don't have one local address to go to ask for support to make a film. With the establishment of the PA and the founding of the ministry of culture we hoped that things would be different, but not really. Bureaucracy gets in the way and not having the right people as cultural bureaucrats. I have many ideas for films, and every few months I submit an idea to some foundation, and it is sad that I don't have an address for one Arab foundation to submit a film idea to. It is really sad.

Interview with Sussanah Tarboush (London based writer) on 25.9.2001