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LES FILMS DE ZAYNA, ARTE FRANCE, AKKA FILMS and DAR FILMS
present

إصطياد أشباح
GHOST
HUNTING

Berlinale
67^e Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Panorama

A FILM BY RAED ANDONI

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY RAED ANDONI IN COPRODUCTION WITH RTS SUPPORTED BY THE DOHA FILM INSTITUTE WITH RAMZI MAQDISI MOHAMMED KHATTAB AND RAED ANDONI DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY CAMILLE COTTAGNOUD ANIMATION LUC PEREZ EDITOR GLADYS JOUJOU SOUND DESIGNER NICOLAS BECKER SOUND MIXER FRANÇOIS MUSY EXECUTIVE PRODUCER PALMYRE BADINIER PRODUCED BY NICOLAS WADIMOFF PHILIPPE COEYTAUX AND RAED ANDONI

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SYNOPSIS

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In order to confront the ghosts that haunt him, Palestinian director Raed Andoni assembles an eclectic group of ex-prisoners to recreate the Al-Moskobiya, Israel's main interrogation centre, where he was himself jailed at age 18. Day after day, these construction workers, a blacksmith, an architect, an assistant director give shape to their memories of how they survived with grit and a sense of humor. As the walls of the cells rise, the tongues and the emotions loosen.

PROJECT / TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Original title : ISTIYAD ASHBAH

Shooting Locations: Palestine

Genre: Documentary

Running time: 94'

Format: 16/9, Color

Sound: 5.1

Language: Arabic

Subtitles: English / French

Shooting Locations: Palestine

Production Country (s): Palestine/ France/ Switzerland/ Qatar

Year of production: 2017

Main cast and protagonists: Ramzi Maqdisi (Prisoner Abu Atta), Mo-hammad "Abu Atta" Khattab (himself), Raed Andoni (himself)

World Premiere : Berlinale / Panorama – 12 February 2017



LONGER SYNOPSIS

For more than 25 years, one image has been haunting director Raed Andoni - that of a boy (18), head covered with a bag and handcuffed, sitting inside a prison yard. The same sounds always accompany this image: metal doors opening and footsteps slowly approaching. Through the lower part of the bag, the boy can see a man wearing white sneakers walking away. A survivor of the prison experience himself, Raed has fragmented memories that he can't distinguish as real or imaginary.

In order to confront the ghost that haunts him, he decides to rebuild the Al-Moscobiya investigation center in an empty warehouse near Ramallah. A casting call for former prisoners results in an eclectic group of construction workers, a blacksmith, an architect and an artist. As they build a copy of their former jail based on their own memories, Raed digs deep into their memories, triggered by reenactments and roleplaying. For this purpose, he focuses on the story of Mohammad (50), whom the resistance to the investigation methods – stoked by laughter and rebellion - made him a hero among Palestinians.

From behind the 'colonel's desk' recreated from Mohammad's memory, Raed interviews each one of the men with basic questions: name, professional capability, jail experience. Among them is Ramzi (32), a professional actor who was also jailed in Al-Moscobiya. Raed casts him to play the role of the young Mohammad.

The film's narrative develops throughout the building process. Slowly the inner world of these ex-prisoners takes possession of the entire basement. Some parts of the prison are shaped in details, while others are only sketched or drawn on the floor. And since ex-prisoners' memories are different from each other, lively debates ensue, marked by humorous moments.

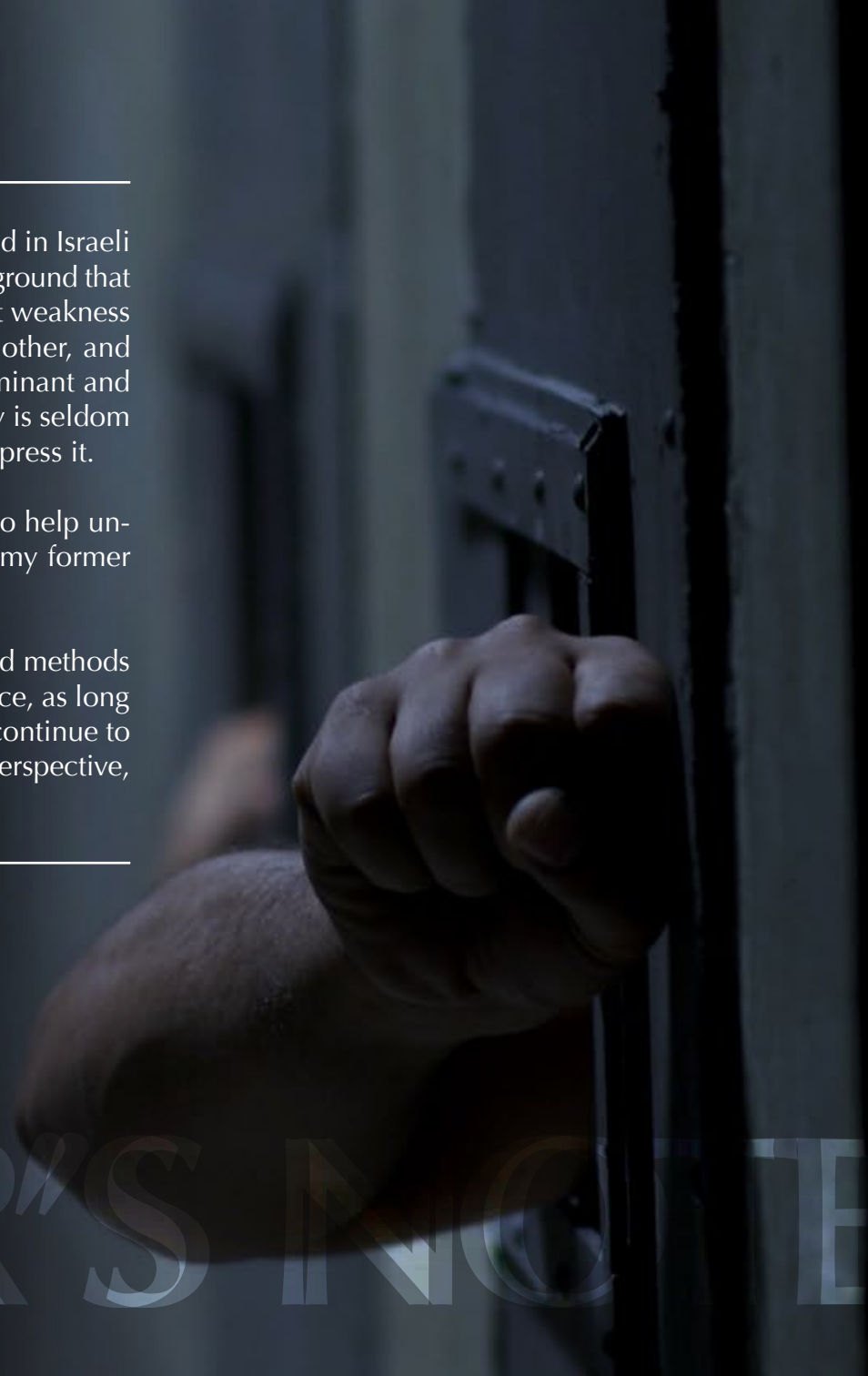
Each participant recreates his own cell, based on his own memories, and thanks to the physical work, people start to talk more freely. Once they start sharing painful memories, the prison becomes a safe place – even as they play roles of the prison guests, reliving the traumatic moments they experienced, which they try to overcome with a vibrant sense of humor. As the walls rise, these survivors finally release the violent emotions and deepest fears they had kept inside – leading to spell-binding catharsis, stylized by Raed's captivating mis-en-scène and animation elements.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In Palestine, more than four in ten men are, at least once in their life, either arrested or investigated in Israeli prisons. The youngest among them are only 12 years old. The investigation centers are the breeding ground that produces many legendary stories about heroism and victory, and a lot of "shameful" stories about weakness and defeat as well. This common matrix serves as a lesson in domination - domination by the other, and of the self. However, the relationships that are built on the values of strength and weakness, dominant and subordinate, once experienced, repeat themselves endlessly, both in and out of prison. This reality is seldom expressed and the traumas land in the bottom of the souls. This film was born out of a need to express it.

By allowing others the space to tell their own stories of incarceration, I'm able to gather details to help unlock this mystery. My personal quest is to rebuild Al-Moscobiya and attempt to take control of my former submission.

Far from wishing for an objective and comprehensive reconstruction of the place of detention and methods used by Israeli interrogators, I propose a framework where everyone is free to relive their experience, as long as they participate: by building the jail, playing the role of another, or sharing the memories that continue to haunt them. This project is about addressing the traumatic experience of torture and changing its perspective, in order to free, or at least discover another part of oneself.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

DIRECTOR'S ARTISTIC APPROACH

This film takes place inside one location - a 600-square-meter empty basement located in Ramallah, Palestine.

The first documentary scene is a casting session in which I recruit engineers and craftsmen to help rebuild the prison. All of those men have been jailed in Al-Moscobiya. I have already met and know the main characters and protagonists, but many other potential participants come in response to various recruitment ads posted for this project. My initial questions in this sequence are short, basic and official, in order to ensure my desire for authority as a filmmaker and as an ex-prisoner. The purpose of filming these short interviews is to introduce the characters and protagonists including myself.

As the different parts of the jail are given a shape, the ex-prisoners start spontaneously to play the roles of the Israeli officers on the others. Then my suggestion to re-enact Mohammad's

story comes organically in the documentary process.

Mohammad's ability to resist to Shin Beth's officers made him a hero. In 1985, the same year of my arrest, he was also jailed at Al-Moscobiya. Despite the tough methods used by the Israeli interrogators, including sleep deprivation for 7 days, Mohammad never gave them any information. For those scenes, the role of Mohammad's character is played by a professional actor, Ramzi who was also at Al-Moscobiya. But unlike Mohammad, he experienced a complete break-down while under investigation. Therefore, to make Ramzi understand the character's reactions, Mohammad has to dig in his deepest memory to explore the mechanism that allowed him to resist to the pressure. This approach is for me a way to question the myth of the hero behind the jails stories.

For the other participants, preparing, filming and taking on the role of the investigators of those scenes is a way

to free themselves; even to release their admiration and fascination with power. By performing an exaggerated violence or arrogance, the ex-prisoner expresses a bit of his internal world. And, when at some point, they refuse the director's orders, it brings up the relationship each one has with authority and control.

The film progresses with all the protagonists between documentary to reenactment sequences, each line giving a very particular depth to the other. When the audience watch the re-enactment scenes, they know the real background of the ex-prisoners acting in the roles of the Shin Beth officers and investigators. Therefore, it will provide an additional perspective towards the story and the film's characters.



ARTISTIC APPROACH

DIRECTOR'S INTERVIEW (PART1)

How long has this idea been on your mind to make this film and what made you finally decide to go ahead and do it?

It wasn't a matter of making a decision. It was about feeling brave enough. I was 18 years old when I was detained. I'm 46 now. The flashbacks and sounds of having been detained blind-folded have been haunting me for over 25 years.

I suppose the actual seed of the idea of this film first came up while I was working on my earlier film 'Fix ME' (2009), where I had asked a psychologist to psychoanalyze me and made a movie out of it. I signed up for 20 sessions over 20 weeks and the filming took place between the sessions and during my visits to Palestine. That's when the topic of having been detained came up, and it crystallizes the situation of being entirely subjugated to someone else's control. I could not go into then because 'Fix ME' was a film about forging an individual identity within Palestinian society and Arab society. Since that completion of that film, the format of how to actually explore detainment and interrogation cinematically took me about five years to develop.

You published a call in the Ramallah newspaper for ex-prisoners to apply for the job of working on this film to rebuild the 'Al-Maskobiya' prison. What made you take that approach?

In Palestine, more than four in ten men have either been arrested or investigated in Israeli prisons. That's 25% of the male population. This usually happens during early adulthood. Of course, it haunts you forever after. You are not free once you step out of the prison block. And the odds are there, Palestinian ex-prisoners are many.



I initially thought I would write this film as a feature. But then I realized I would be losing the reality of people's faces, a reality that is more powerful and moving than any scenario I could write. And, on a practical level, I needed construction workers. I needed stage designers and wall painters and builders to help me do what I needed to do. Actors don't usually have those skill-sets.

You are very careful with staying true to the sensory perception of the former detainees; getting the exact color of the walls, the dampness and temperatures of rooms. I imagine it was an intense process, re-living these traumatizing realities. How did you manage it? Did you follow any principles or guidelines to help contain the process?

I am no better than anyone else taking part in this film. We are all sick. We have all been through extreme situations. From my side, I needed to do this for myself. I followed my own drive. At the same time, I needed to keep space and freedom for everyone else to have their own experience too. And yes, the impact of all of us coming together for such a project was very strong. Within the first week of work, grown men, tough guys, were crying. We have all been through many kinds of hell. It is reality. No need for concepts or guidelines. We were just living it. That's the point. And it makes an amazing film.

« In Palestine, more than four in ten men have either been arrested or investigated in Israeli prisons... »

DIRECTOR'S INTERVIEW (PART2)

Weren't you afraid of going too far?

What do you mean too far? Nobody was forced here. There were no prisoners this time. Anyone could leave the project at whichever point they wanted to. I made the element of choice very clear from the very beginning. And that is the key. One person did in fact stop showing up. He had a different excuse each time. Something in him just did not want to be part of it. And that's fine. Those who stayed, stayed because they wanted to.

I don't think many people would dare to present such humiliating memories, especially with regards to Palestinian tropes of courage and defiance.

In Palestinian society, surviving detainment and interrogation has become almost like a right of passage. It is an initiation into what it means to be Palestinian. You either come out a hero, or you come out broken. And people do compare notes. There is competitiveness in survival. How many continuous days without sleep? How many months? How much time in solitary? The stories become legendary. I don't deny them one bit, and I would never deny anyone their heroism and survival. These stories are true. They have happened and continue to happen. But it is important for me to also to touch the real emotions that are hidden within people who have become legends.

Have you noticed changes among the people who have participated in this film?

An important change-maker was the role-playing and role-reversal that we had in the film. Former prisoners got to play the role of their interrogators. This allowed things to move. Often it would happen spontaneously. One silent guy who came in to work as set designer and refused to speak of his experience in prison started playing out bits and pieces of his memories, in a very natural way, because the situation allowed it.



All in all, the filming together with the construction of the prison took place over a period of six weeks. It happened

in three phases. The first two phases were very intense. Extreme emotions and pain did come up. There was withdrawal and isolation. There was rage. But there was also a palpable sense of love between us.

By the third part of the filmmaking, something had clearly shifted. We all felt a new lightness. Some of the men even start sharing personal stories about their sweethearts and their families.

Today, we are all friends, in a beautiful kind of way.

There is an image of Palestinian as shackled, bound, beaten, yet unbreakable and defiant. In reconstructing the place and the psychology of imprisonment, is there also a process of deconstructing this identity, perhaps towards someplace somehow different? Is there a possibility of a new image?

Absolutely. People become recognized as heroes for having survived detainment, torture and interrogation. They identify with this image, not only for themselves, but for all of Palestine. It is a matter of refusing defeat. It is a matter of staying alive, psychologically, with dignity, no matter the humiliation. But it is a huge effort, to go through life as if we are made of unbreakable stuff. The image of hero can become a prison in itself. I am looking for the person living inside. That is what's real. A legend cannot be loved. Only a person can be loved.

RAED ANDONI, Director

Raed Andoni is a Palestinian director and producer. He was born in 1967 in Amman (Jordan). Andoni started his career in the film industry in 1997 as independent producer. He cofounded 2 production houses: DAR FILMS in Palestine, and LES FILMS DE ZAYNA in Paris.

His first documentary as a director, IMPROVISATION (2005), is an appealing insight into a Palestinian Joubran family during the Caesarean birth of their musical "Oud" trio. For his first feature length film, FIX ME (2009) Andoni filmed 20 sessions of his own therapy in Ramallah. Featuring a colorful array of characters, including members of Andoni's own family, FIX ME explores the need for finding individuality in a place so dominated by collective consciousness and identity. FIX ME was premiered in Sundance and Cannes.

GHOST HUNTING is his second feature film.

SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY

GHOST HUNTING

Writer and Director
Feature documentary.
Palestine/France/Switzerland/
Qatar, 2017, 94'

FIX ME

Writer and Director
Feature documentary
France /
Palestine, 2009, 98'

INVASION

Producer
Documentary
by Nizar Hassan
Palestine, 2003, 60'

TAHADI

Producer
Short documentary
by Nizar Hassan
Palestine, 2001, 60'

FAMILY ALBUMS

Artistic producer
Feature collective documentary
France / Palestine / UAE, 2012,
82'

IMPROVISATION

Writer and Director
Documentary
France / Palestine, 2008, 60'

LIVE FROM PALESTINE

Producer
Documentary by
Rashid Masharawi
Palestine, 2002, 60'

THE INNER TOUR

Co-Producer
Feature documentary by
Raanan Alexandrowicz
Israel, 2000, 94'

"This film, directed by Raed Andoni, is startling in its originality. It is an extraordinary recreation of the imprisonment of Palestinians by the Israeli state.

The making of the film is laid bare. We see prison cells constructed and actors chosen, some with harrowing stories of their own. With memories, drawings and scenes acted out, a brilliant but horrifying picture emerges - fear, torture, desperation - with a warm humanity shining through. Laughter turns to terror in the blink of an eye.

This is a daring and shocking film, made with fine cinematic judgement. It leaves the audience with a challenge: what do we do in the face of such illegal brutality? Sooner or later the world will have to wake up to this cruel injustice. Raed Andoni, through his talent and commitment, brings that day closer."

Ken Loach
January, 2017

COLLABORATIONS

CAMILLE COTTAGNOUD, cinematographer

Born in 1962 in Switzerland, trained to photography by Oswald Ruppen, Cottagnoud has worked as a freelance DOP for more than 20 years. His filmography includes OF MEN AND WAR, VIRAMUNDO, THE FORTRESS, WINTER NOMADS, among many other documentaries.

In GHOST HUNTING, camera moves freely, leaving room for spontaneity. It serves as an observer and is slowly forgotten by the protagonists. Camille's very particular filming style is based on a quick and rather physical way of approaching the protagonists, avoiding long lenses, rarely stopping the camera.

Ramzi MAQDISI, actor

Ramzi Maqdisi is a Palestinian filmmaker and film and theater actor known for Solomon's Stone (film), Omar (film), The Attack (2012), Love, Theft and Other Entanglements, Giraffada, Le Jour de l'Homme or Under the Sky (Or Hajar). Born in 1980 in Jerusalem, he studied Performing Arts at Tel Aviv University. He began his professional career as an actor in the Palestinian National Theatre (PNT).

LUC PEREZ, animation

French Artist currently living in Denmark, directed numerous short animated films. He mixes different techniques, using colors and forms as an invisible character adding feelings in the narration.

Nicolas BECKER, sound design

One of the most sought-after foley artists, sound designers and composers in the world. Nicolas BECKER's approach is different on each film, putting forward a uniquely creative reasoning in order to obtain very special material. He has collaborated with filmmakers including Roman Polanski, David Cronenberg, Matthieu Kassovitz, Andrea Arnold and Danny Boyle. In 2013, he received his second Golden Reel award for his work on Gravity by Alfonso Cuarón.

CAST & CREW

CAST

Ramzi Maqdisi (Abu Atta)
Mohammed «Abu Atta» Khattab (himself)
Raed Andoni (the director)
Atef Al-Akhras (the set dresser)
Wadee Hanani (the assistant director)
Adnan Al-Hatab (the «father» and set builder)
Abdallah Moubarak (the blacksmith)
Anbar Ghannan (the groom and poet)
Raed Khattab (the cheerful prisoner)
Monther Jawabreh (the visual artist)

CREW

Written and directed by: **Raed Andoni**
Director of Photography: **Camille Cottagnoud**
Editor: **Gladys Joujou**
Animation: **Luc Perez**
Sound Mix: **François Musy**
Sound Design: **Nicolas Becker**
Sound: **Olivier Claude**
Production Manager: **Bassem Jerbawi**
Producer: **Palmyre Badinier**
Co-producers: **Nicolas Wadimoff, Philippe Coeytaux, Raed Andoni**

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AKKA FILMS

AKKA FILMS, coproduction

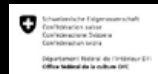
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