



OFFICIAL SELECTION
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BACK TO THE SQUARE

By Petr Lom

- Signals: Power Cut Middle East -



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BACK TO THE SQUARE

Norway/Canada, 2012, 83', documentary, HD, color
World premiere in Rotterdam

Credits

Production: Piraya Film AS
Producer: Torstein Grude
Director: Petr Lom
Assistant Director: Omar Elhamy
Script: Torstein Grude, Petr Lom
Camera: Petr Lom
Editor: Petr Lom, Erik Andersson
Sound design: Jeroen Goeijers

Screenings in Rotterdam

Sat Jan 28, 14.30, Cinerama 3 (press & industry)
Sun Jan 29, 21.15, Pathe 6 (public)
Mon Jan 30, 12.15, Lantaren/Venster 2 (public)
Wed Feb 1, 18.30, Pathe 2 (public)

Synopsis:

One year after the euphoria of Tahrir Square and Mubarak's fall, Egypt's revolution remains incomplete: many continue to suffer from state-inflicted cruelty. More than 12,000 protesters have been arrested by the army and secret police, sentenced by summary military tribunals, and often tortured.

BACK TO THE SQUARE follows five people who have suffered injustice at the hands of the current post-revolutionary military regime. It shows how the systematic use of violence and fear by Mubarak's regime continues essentially unchanged after the revolution.

Shooting in Egypt since the very beginning of the revolution in January, the creative team of BACK TO THE SQUARE has been inspired by this unprecedented Arab Spring. One year later, we are outraged by daily stories of continuing basic human rights violations in Egypt.

BACK TO THE SQUARE reminds the world that the Egyptian "Facebook Revolution" is far from complete, and above all, honors the courage of our characters, who repeatedly confront and challenge injustice - even as it is still unclear how political reality will develop in Egypt.

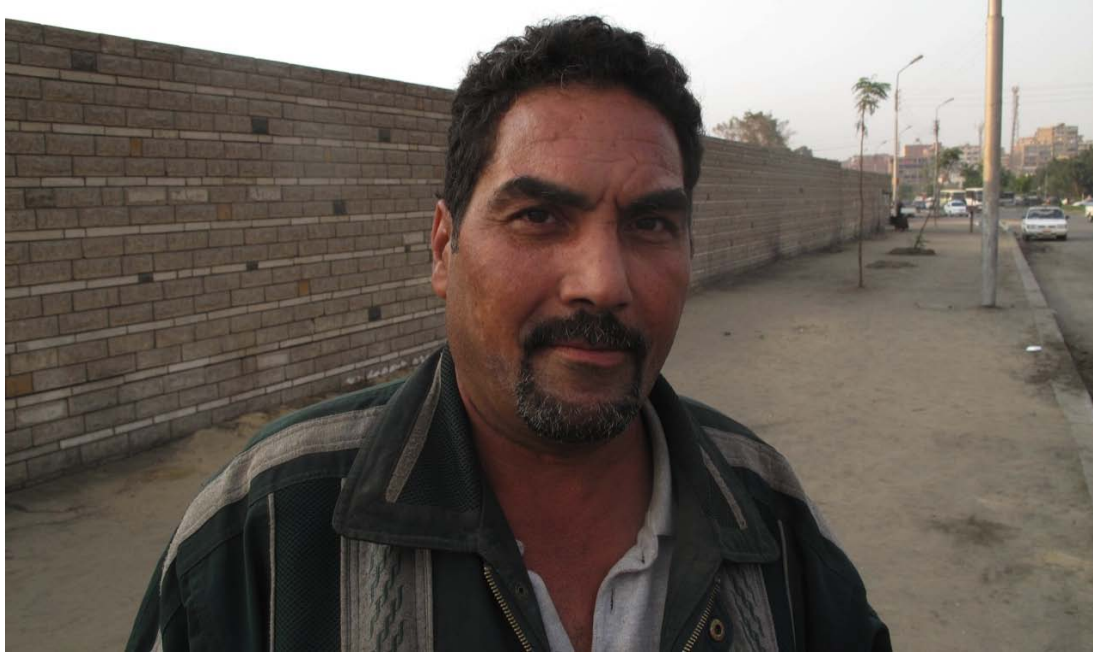
Our characters and their stories:

The five characters followed in *Back to the Square* represent five stories of injustice during and after the revolution:



Wally Hosni, a 15-year-old boy. Wally works at the Pyramids selling cheap trinkets and giving horse rides to tourists. He was unwittingly thrust into the revolution on the infamous “day of the camel”, when pro-Mubarak protesters attacked demonstrators in Tahrir Square. Wally is a naïve teenager who was tricked by local corrupt politicians to go to Tahrir, and was almost killed as a result.

Wally is representative of the 45% of all Egyptians who are illiterate and live on less than \$2 a day. His story illustrates the political manipulation of the poor, who are usually ignored by the international media that almost exclusively celebrates the westernized elites of the “Facebook Revolution.”



Mohamed Sayyd, forty-seven years old. Mohamed is an ex-convict. Disgusted with the regime, he had the courage to speak to us. He was let out of prison during the revolution and told to go into Tahrir Square to battle protesters. Six months after the revolution, he is tortured by the police – showing us horrific burn marks all over his body - and told to go to Tahrir Square and throw hydrochloric acid on protesters. Refusing, he says he now lives on the run from the police, living like a “scared chicken”.

We find Mohamed again several months later – at the end of October- just before the beginning of the parliamentary elections. Mohamed tells us how the police are rounding up thugs to help with intimidation tactics during the elections.

Mohamed gives us an uncanny insight into the operations of Mubarak’s system of fear: a personal illustration about how the system of organized fear keeps a reserve army of ex-convicts who can easily be terrified into doing the state’s bidding – even now after the revolution.



Lamiz Ragab, 21 years old. Lamiz is a university student. We met her after filming at a police station (the first Westerners ever allowed to film inside an Egyptian police station). Lamiz approached us in the parking lot, hysterical and in tears. Lamiz had been arrested together with her husband by plainclothes police, sexually harassed, and bullied to testify against her husband, who was detained on a trumped up drugs and possessions of weapons charge.

Lamiz succeeds in getting her husband released with the help of a Cairo Human Rights Center. She is now suing the Interior Ministry.

Her story is illustrative of the day-to-day humiliation and brutality that were exceedingly common during the reign of Mubarak, and that persist after the revolution.



Salwa Hosseiny, 20 years old. Salwa is from a small village in the Nile Delta. While protesting in Tahrir Square, Salwa, and twenty other young women, were arrested, tortured, and forced to undergo a public virginity examination.

Though traumatized by her humiliation, Salwa refuses to remain silent: the only one to speak out about this abuse, she wants to sue the military.

Confiding in us, she invites us into her romantic dreams, telling us about the boy she fell in love with during the revolution, who was later arrested by the military.

Salwa is representative of the tremendous discrimination and injustice facing women – particularly rural women – in Egypt today. The army now justifies these virginity tests by claiming many women protesters are prostitutes. And indeed, this charge has stuck: Salwa can no longer return home to her village, for she has made it look bad by speaking out against the army.



Mark Nabil, 19 years old. Mark Nabil, a computer science student, is the brother of 26-year-old blogger Maikel Nabil. Maikel was arrested at the end of March by the army and sentenced to a three-year prison term for “insulting” the ruling military and “spreading false information.” Maikel posted videos of the army beating protesters in Tahrir Square. The first blogger imprisoned after the revolution, he is also the first prisoner of conscience in post-Mubarak Egypt.

Mark will do anything to get his brother out of jail. He protests outside the prison where his brother is held: when the secret police show up (though officially disbanded), and film Mark along with his half dozen young protesters, Mark responds by pulling out his own cellphone, and films them as well, challenging them to identify themselves (which they don’t), and then posting his footage on YouTube.

Maikel Nabil’s story, told through the eyes of his brother, is yet another instance of the extraordinary courage of Egypt’s revolutionary youth that refuses to accept injustice.

Today as we submit our film synopsis, Maikel has been on hunger strike for more than one hundred days, protesting the injustice of his arrest. We are not sure how much longer he will survive.

The narrative arc of our film:

Our narrative arc starts with the euphoria and pride of freedom at the beginning of the Revolution, and then charts how these hopes are confronted with the continued ugliness of much of reality under the military regime.

Along the way, particularly through our first three stories – of Wally, Mohamed and

Lamiz - we show the audience how the institutionalization of injustice and fear continues to operate in Egypt, fundamentally unchanged.

All the stories in our film are ones of courage: courage to challenge injustice and no longer remain silent. Wally is not afraid to speak out about the injustice he has suffered. Mohamed is similarly willing to talk about the ongoing injustice of the police in Egypt. Mark Nabil is trying to get his brother released from prison. Lamiz is filing a lawsuit against the police. And Salwa is suing the army for the virginity test they forced upon her. Whether our characters are successful in obtaining justice is not in the end what is essential: far more important is simply to document their courage.



Biographies

Petr Lom – director

Petr Lom was born in Prague in 1968, and grew up in Canada. A former academic with a Ph.D. in political philosophy from Harvard, he gave up his university career in 2003 to become a fulltime documentary filmmaker, specializing in human rights subjects. His first film was BRIDE KIDNAPPING IN KYRGYZSTAN (2004), followed by ON A TIGHTROPE (Sundance, 2007), a film about the persecution of the Uighur minority in China (www.onatightrope.org). Petr's third film LETTERS TO THE PRESIDENT (Berlinale, 2009) was an exclusive-access film about the regime of President Ahmadinejad of Iran (www.letterstothepresidentmovie.com).

Torstein Grude - producer

Torstein Grude is a director, designer, stills photographer, cinematographer, producer, executive producer and distributor. He is the founder of and main shareholder in Piraya Film. After getting a *cum laude* degree in media theory and film history from the University of Bergen in 1994, he enrolled at the London International Film School and finished the last year of training in 1997.

Torstein Grude has directed, shot and produced documentaries, short films, commercials, industrial movies and music promos, and has also worked in various technical capacities in the camera department on more than 100 productions. He is also vice president of production in Kudos Family Distribution.