

SHARAF - DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I was born as son of an Egyptian father and a German mother, so I have been living in both cultures since my childhood. After graduating from the German High School in Cairo I left Egypt to study in Germany, but my connection with the country stayed strong.

Living in Germany gave me the ability to perceive Egypt through a double perspective. At one side I remained a part of Egyptian society and can relate to its people with empathy. But on the other side I often have that feeling of an outsider who observes things more analytic and rational. This double perspective allowed me to perceive things with distance and closeness at the same time.

This same dualism of closeness and distance I found in Sonallah Ibrahim's novel SHARAF. It thrilled me how the great Egyptian storyteller managed to condense the frenzy of Egyptian society and linked it to the crisis of young people in a beautiful, artistic manner. I instantly imagined it on the screen. Since then I wanted to do a movie based on this novel that would achieve the same balance of simplicity and complexity.

SHARAF brings together big extremes. It tells a gloomy story in a laconic, sometimes funny and always entertaining manner. It paints a picture of a whole society and an ongoing crisis while taking place in a very limited space. The main character is fascinating in his contradiction between naivety and trickery, like a mixture between Candide and Machiavelli. While the story proceeds he becomes more and more guilty, but we can't condemn him for that.

He is a perfect example for a new lost generation in the Arab World. They grew up in authoritarian political systems and are deeply influenced by fundamental religious values. Yet they dream of freedom and Western lifestyle, as they know it through internet and television. This dreams and high aspirations for the future dominate their thinking while they have no tools or any realistic chance to achieve them.

SHARAF is a movie that makes comprehensible why many young men want to leave their countries and risk their lives to come to Europe. This makes the film highly relevant for a Western audience an important cultural counteroffer. The pressure of migration

and the accompanying populist movements generated a stigmatizing and discriminating cliché of „the Arab man“.

It is necessary to correct this image through a different, more balanced perspective. A movie like SHARAF will help Western audiences to perceive Arab people with their hopes, sorrows and anxieties. Relatable, engaging characters like SHARAF are desperately needed to bring new aspects to the controversy of migration and integration.

The success of the Oscar-nominated French-Lebanese film CAPERNAUM testifies to the importance of these subjects and the interest of Western audiences in these films.

The Arab Spring was in the first place a movement of young people who fought for more freedom and a better future. Sadly the big aspirations couldn't be fulfilled and the dream turned into a nightmare. The current situation is worse than before the revolution in almost every aspect. SHARAF deals with this harsh reality and examines the mighty, corrupt power structures that are so resistant to change. Without destroying these structures every coming revolution is doomed to fail.

Another important element in this film is that it links the events in the microcosm „Egyptian prison“ to global developments. The character of Dr. Ramzy is the perfect manifestation of how the countries of the region became a cue ball of multinational companies in a globalized world.

It is also a loving description of Egyptian mentality and the ability of a nation to never lose its humour, even in the darkest hours. Humour was and will always be a strong tool of Egyptian resistance.

After my graduation from the Film Academy Baden-Württemberg I realized several long documentaries and fiction movies, many of them had been awarded and were shown at international film festivals.

My first long documentary NIGHT SERVICE STATION was given the *First Steps-Award* and the *Berliner Kunstpreis* by the Academy of Arts, Berlin.

My fictional debut SEEDS OF DOUBT won several awards, e.g. the *Naguib Mahfouz Award* at the Cairo International Film Festival and the *Golden Gate Award* at the San Francisco International Film Festival.

Then I concentrated on teaching, which is another passion of mine. I was guest professor for screenplay and film history at the University of Arts, Berlin. Personally, I was deeply involved in the events of the Egyptian revolution and spend a lot of time during these years in Egypt, where did a lot of teaching to young Egyptian filmmakers in Cairo and Alexandria.

Through my friendship with writer Sonallah Ibrahim we took the time to develop the screenplay for SHARAF together and we teamed his sense for details and his vast knowledge of the life inside the prison with my idea of condensing this huge novel into a filmic structure.

In the meantime I also worked with Sonallah Ibrahim on the radio play „Cairo, 11. February“ which we wrote together and that I directed for the German radio station rbb Kulturradio in 2013. It deals with the events on the day Mubarak was forced to step down from power and link it with the story of Sonallah Ibrahim who had dreamt of this revolution for a long time. The play was awarded with the Premios Ondas in Barcelona 2014 as „Best International Radio Play“.

It was a good rehearsal for SHARAF by telling a very local story for an international audience. During the last years my wish to go back to making films grew inside me. In 2017 I wrote and directed the documentary RANIA'S DREAM for arte Square, that deals with a brave Egyptian female activist and puppet artist. Last summer I shot the film BESIDE THE PALACE, that portrays the Abdeen neighborhood in Downtown Cairo during the soccer championship. This documentary movie is in the editing now.

I am convinced that the combination of my inner and outer perspective will enable me to direct the story of SHARAF with passion and authenticity, but also with the needed precision and restraint where it will be needed.

This film gives those a voice, who usually don't have one. In an Arab world, in which freedom is under attack and basic human rights are neglected, the movie SHARAF is a brave and necessary statement.

Samir Nasr,
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