



JABFILM

Jabfilm in association with Idiom Films present:



اسعاف AMBULANCE

A FILM BY MOHAMED JABALY

Ambulance

Directed by Mohamed Jabaly



Ambulance

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"It was the first time for me, being in an ambulance, moving so fast. That first day I wasn't aware of what was happening. I was scared. I was nervous. I couldn't focus. I could only press the RECORD button on the camera. The camera was my friend throughout the war."

- Mohamed Jabaly

SYNOPSIS

Ambulance is a raw, first-person account of the war in July 2014. Mohamed Jabaly, a young man from Gaza City joins an ambulance crew as the war approaches. What is it like to live under constant threat? How can Mohamed find his place in a country under siege, where there seems to be no foreseeable future? We experience the war through Mohamed's eyes, watching directly from the passenger's seat, as he comes of age among dead bodies, terrified families, and the constant risk of sudden death.

In response to the dark chaos of war, Mohamed learns to rely on his captain and crew-mates from the ambulance, who in turn support Mohamed to make a film that expresses both the trauma and hope of the too-often invisible citizens of Gaza.

BACKGROUND

The ongoing conflict in the Occupied Territories is one of the oldest and most controversial in the world. The war on Gaza in the summer of 2014 has been the most aggressive of the last six years. Few films have been made by directors within Gaza, showing their point of view on the war and their experiences of life under siege.

The international media is saturated with 'noise' on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, distorted by high-stakes political entanglements. This noise makes it difficult for the wider public outside of the conflict, to relate to those affected by the violence and terror. It also isolates ordinary Palestinians from the rest of the world.

Ambulance is a film that rises above the 'noise', telling the story of a brave young man whose dreams and concerns are common to young people around the world. The film moves beyond reportage, allowing an international audience to connect with the filmmaker and his experience, as he risks his life to document the war from a civilian perspective - and whose life is transformed in the process.

TIMELINE

January 2006 - The Islamic party Hamas wins the Palestinian legislative election, gaining a majority of seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council. The conflict between Israel and Gaza intensifies as Israel begins a comprehensive political and economic blockade, which a UN investigation declares 'illegal' and which many call collective punishment.

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27 December 2008 - Israel launches 'Operation Cast Lead', a three week armed conflict which kills over 1400 Palestinians and wounds over 5000, while Israel loses 13 lives.

14 November 2012 - Israel launches 'Operation Pillar of Defense', an 8 day Israel Defense Forces (IDF) operation in the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip, killing Ahmed Jabari, chief of the Gaza military wing of Hamas and killing 174 Palestinians, displacing many and leaving hundreds wounded (UNHCR report).

12 June 2014 - Ongoing hostilities between Israel and the Occupied Territories explode, after teenagers from Israel are kidnapped and killed with a retaliatory attack on a Palestinian teenager burnt to death in Jerusalem. Young people on both sides are increasingly exploited for propaganda to incite rage and prevent diplomacy.

8 July 2014 - Israel launches "Operation Protective Edge" in which 2200 Palestinians are killed and 10000 are wounded. 66 Israeli soldiers and 6 Israeli civilians are killed.

16 July 2014 - Shejaiyah Massacre: Leaflets were dropped 16th July by IDF planes warning people that if they stayed in their homes they would be killed.

20 July 2014 - Israeli tanks entered Gaza City from the east, into the neighbourhood of Shejaiyah. The ground invasion had begins. Israeli forces face resistance and respond with heavy artillery attacks from both tanks and the airforce. Hospitals in Gaza were ill-equipped and faced severe shortages of various kinds of medicine, medical supplies, and fuel. Egypt temporarily reopens the Rafah crossing with Gaza to allow medical supplies to enter and injured Palestinians to receive treatment in Egypt. Due to the operation, prices of food, including fish and produce, rise dramatically. Authorities say over 2,200 people were killed – most of them Palestinians - and many more injured, during 50 days of violence.

26 August 2014 - A long-term ceasefire was agreed between Israel and Hamas.

According to Medical Aid for Palestinians (<http://www.map-uk.org>), Statistics about damage and destruction to medical facilities in the 2014 attacks on Gaza includes the following (<http://bit.ly/1FFGB8t>):

- a. 511 of the 2,217 Palestinians who were killed during the attacks never received medical assistance due to obstruction to ambulance access
- b. 45 Ambulances were damaged or destroyed (compared to 6 in 2012 and 29 in 2008/9)
- c. 17 hospitals and 56 primary healthcare clinics were damaged or destroyed (compared to 15 hospitals and 43 clinics in 2008/9)
- d. 16 health workers were killed while on duty, and 83 health workers, most of whom were ambulance drivers, were injured.

1 April 2015 - Palestine files its first war crimes case against Israel at the International Criminal Court in the Hague. This comes at a time when a far-right wing coalition has just been elected in Israel, and has stated that it will not accept a Palestinian State.

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Q&A With Mohamed Jabaly

How did the idea first come about?

I worked as a photographer and a filmmaker in Gaza prior to the war. I was making a documentary for a local hospital in Gaza, and while I was working there, I got to know the director of the hospital and some of the doctors, so I was familiar with working in the medical environment. On the 8th July 2014, when the war started, I was at the hospital. I didn't know the driver or the ambulance crew, so it really began as a kind of experiment at first. It was a challenge for me to see what it would be like, really living in the moment. I wanted to be closer to what was going on, and to relay what was happening from my perspective.

What drove you to the front line?

The people of Gaza know how hard it is to live a life under constant attack, but not all of the people see the details up close. Few people are really on the front line, close to the disasters. Even though I myself had lived through 2 wars and 2 Intifada before, nothing prepared me for my experience during the last war. Every phone call was bad news. The next call and the next... it got worse and worse. It could be my family, my neighbours... Our ambulance could be hit at any time. It was the first time in my life that I was so close to a situation like this. I started to understand that each TV image is just a small part of a big story. Even though I had lived all my life in Gaza, I was shocked every day, moment to moment.

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It's extremely unusual to have that kind of access; filming from a passenger's seat of an ambulance. How did this come about?

In the beginning, Abu Marzouq didn't want me to be with them, because it's usually not allowed for a photographer to be with ambulance unit, especially during a war. Photographers are generally considered a liability and often get in the way. But, because I had the support of the hospital, he allowed me to join them. He was very reserved and skeptical at first. Eventually we became close friends.

Does your film convey a political message?

I don't see myself in a position to make political statements. Ambulance is a personal story, seen through my eyes, as well as the people I worked with during the war. The film is about human connections and does not seek to campaign for any political party or policy, nor to assign blame. This is not because I don't see the urgency of the political debate or the importance of accountability, but because I am a storyteller who believes that personal stories can show us what we have in common: human decency and human dignity. My war experience was very hard, and I am still trying to work through the depth of my feelings. The filmmaking process forced me to do this, and I see that as a good thing.

When did your producers come on board?

I came to Norway in October 2014 to participate in a conference and screen some of my short films. I was supposed to stay one month, but after only one week Egypt closed the border to Gaza. I went from being stuck inside Gaza to being stuck outside Gaza! I was walking around with the war inside of me. While I was filming the ambulance team, I knew I had to make a film, but I didn't know when or how I could do this.

The ambulance crew asked me again and again, "When will you finish this film? We need to see ourselves, see how we are working during the war". It's a heavy responsibility. It also gives me a feeling of pride, that I too might contribute with something. My Norwegian hosts and friends were very generous and understanding. They also helped me to come out of my shell and urged me to make this film.

What does the future hold for you?

All of my family, are still in Gaza and they live there like any one else. I think about them all the time. They are living through this. They haven't seen the film, but they know what I was getting up to. So, I would love to be able to go back to Gaza, and to show more of what life is like there.

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What do you want audiences to take away from the film?

This film is a kind of personal time capsule for the war. When people in Gaza see this film, I think they will be shocked. They will be sad, remembering the war and everything they have lost. We try to forget because it's too much to think about on a daily basis. They will also feel glad that this will be remembered, that no one can say that it never happened. No one can erase or deny our pain. The world must know what has happened.

Both in Gaza and outside, people will see how we survive. The film will also remind people that we are still alive. We can still smile. We maintain great hope. The best thing about the war was that I gained a new family inside the ambulance crew. I learned what hard work and courage looks like. I want audiences to look at this situation a bit deeper. To understand that this is a universal problem, but ours is a situation that is ongoing.

Ambulance Team



Abu Marzouq is an ambulance captain who invited Mohamed to be part of his crew. A determined and compassionate leader, Mohamed must work hard to earn Abu Marzouq's trust, and comes to respect and care for Abu Marzouq deeply, as does the rest of the crew. Abu Marzouq also comes to care for Mohamed. Together, they maintain courage through laughter as bombs literally fall on top of them and other ambulance crews are killed.



Mohamed Jabaly (Director) is a Filmmaker and Artist from Gaza. He has been working in several organizations and projects as a trainer of film-making and photography, including being a media coordinator for Save Youth Future Society. His wish is to present Palestinian society to the international community through songs, films and photos in order to open a new window to the world of Gaza and the lives of Palestinians. His recent films include Daboos (short film, 2014), Here's Gaza (doc, 2014), We Teach life Sir (music video, 2014) and Saffa (Short film 2014).

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Team and partners

PRODUCER John Arvid Berger and his company Jabfilm are producing and co-producing international creative documentaries. Jabfilm are also producing “Artic Muslims”, “Chessbrains”, “When the town went quiet”, as well as co-producing “Burma storybook” with ZinDoc Holland and “Nuclear neighbor” with Bautafilm Sweden. Recent titles include, “MONSTERMAN” (2014), Documentary for cinema and TV in co prod. with Illume Finland and “SUMÉ—the sound of a revolution” (2014) documentary in co-production with Greenland and Danmark -selected for Berlinale Panorama 2015. “MY BELOVED” (2010) winner of best doc at Lubeck Nordic film days. John Arvid Berger is also co-producing a film about the Utøya attack in Norway in 2012 called Reconstructing Utøya.

EDITOR Nanna Fran Møller is a Danish editor and director. She graduated in editing at the National Film School of Denmark, 1999. Nanna also trained at London International Film School, 1994. She has edited several films, mostly documentaries. Frank Møller's directorial debut, "Someone Like You", (2007) about a traveling circus troupe won the Grand Prix at Odense Film Festival and first prize at DOK Leipzigs Young Documentary Talent Competition. She came onboard as an editor for Ambulance in 2015.

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PRE-EDITING: Michael Aaglund (A world not ours) and Marthe Aasen.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: Christine Cynn (Co. director/co.producer The Act of Killing), Kristian Mosvold (co. producer 1989), Herman Greuel (NUFF), Gitte Hansen and Esther Van Messel (First Hand Films).

CO-PRODUCERS:

Idioms film was established in Ramallah in 2004 with the purpose of developing the cinematic capacity of independent film production in Palestine, by improving accessibility to production facilities, international film markets, and financing. Our recent titles include "Suspended Time", a program of 9 short films marking the 20 years of the signing the Oslo Agreement; "Infiltrators" by Khaled Jarrar; "Pink Bullet" by Ramzi Hazboun, and "No Exit" by Mohanad Yaqubi. Some of our previous productions include shorts and feature films, including "The Shooter" by Ihab Jadallah (2007), "EXIT" by Mohanad Yaqubi (2009), "Chicken Heads" by Bassam Jarbawi (2009), "Though I Know the River is Dry" by Omar Hamilton (2012); and the feature film "Habibi Rasak Kharban" by Susan Youcif (2010).

Parad Media, Anna-Karin Grönroos. Helsinki based production house working with TV and digital productions www.parad.fi.



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