

Women in Struggle

A film by Buthina Canaan Khoury



Documentary, 2004, Palestine
56 mins, Color, Subtitled

CREDITS

Director/Writer/Producer/Camera: Buthina Canaan Khoury
Editor: Saed Andoni
Music: Wasim Kassis
Cast/Characters: Aysha Odeh, Rawda Basir, Rasmieh Odeh,
Terry Bulate & Rawda's mother



SYNOPSIS

WOMEN IN STRUGGLE presents rare testimony from four female Palestinian ex-detainees who disclose their experiences during their years of imprisonment in Israeli jails and the effect it has had on their present and future lives. Once content in their lives as sisters, wives and mothers, each of the women became active members for the national fight for Palestinian independence, but their "crimes" differed markedly - one woman was detained in a peaceful protest while another was arrested for her participation in a bombing. Their painful recollections provide a fascinating personal perspective on their motives for political involvement, reveal their struggles in prison, and define the difficulties they have faced readjusting to life in Palestinian society. Though the women are now free, they continue to feel imprisoned by the current climate of the Intifada, by the "war on terror" and by the recently built "security" wall.

With horrifying stories of torture suffered while in Israeli detention, the film brings to the forefront the hot-button issue of human rights abuses in prisons—and its particular implications for women prisoners. It also grapples with timely and difficult questions—what politicizes an individual? Are people born to fight, or do their circumstances force them to do so? Presented without narration, WOMEN IN STRUGGLE does not categorize its subjects as heroes or criminals, instead letting the women's voices stand on their own to add another layer to the complex discourse on Israel.

FESTIVALS

For the most updated list, visit www.wmm.com.

- Association of Muslim Women in America - "Best Film Producer 2005", Film and Video Category
- The Netherlands Social Forum
- DocuDays, Lebanon
- AMWA Excellence in Media Award
- Canada Palestine Film Festival

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHY

Buthina Canaan Khoury has been an independent filmmaker for the past few years. She has established Majd Production Company in Palestine in (2000). The company's main objective is to produce documentaries about different and vital Palestinian issues. Ms. Khoury has over fourteen years of experience in the media field and a bachelor's degree in filmmaking and photography from Boston, MA.

She worked as the first Palestinian camerawoman, producer and coordinator covering special events in the Middle East area for the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and other well-known European TV stations in Palestine. *Women in Struggle* is her first one hour documentary as producer, director and cameraperson.

Multimedia: Buthina Canaan Khoury at Chicago Palestine Film Festival

Posted on Sunday, May 01 @ 14:49:23 EDT

Sonia Nettnin, Ramallah Online columnist & film critic

She established good relations with all four Palestinian women. As a result, Director Buthina Canaan Khoury completed her first documentary, "Women In Struggle," in four years. After 39 hours of footage, she edited her film to 56 minutes with seasoned decisions. Her documentary is about women who are ex-political detainees, and it is from the Palestinian point of view.

When Khoury was at the Gene Siskel Film Center for the 2005 Chicago Palestine Film Festival, she spoke with natural spontaneity. Her knowledge showed an expertise in not only her film's subject matter, but of Palestinian cinema, culture, history, and politics.

Moreover, she emanated grace.

"I'd like to give special thanks to these women to trust me to pass on their experience," she said. "They were strong, they endured a lot of suffering and they are good role models."

For over fourteen years, Khoury worked in the media field. She was the first Palestinian camera woman, producer and coordinator who covered special events in the Middle East region for the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). In 2000, she established Majd Production Company in Ramallah.

The women's experiences motivated Khoury to make this film because of their awareness and their uniqueness.

On August 17, 2004, the first day of release for "Women In Struggle," Palestinian prisoners began a hunger strike. It gained media attention worldwide. As Khoury expressed, they raised their voices for better living and medical conditions within Israel's prisons.

For example, if a prisoner is in pain, she receives one Tylenol. Visitation of Palestinian political prisoners by family members can be restricted, if not eliminated altogether. For many years, Palestinians endured torture from Israeli prison guards. One additional source of information is a recent article I wrote on this topic.
<http://www.palestinechronicle.com/story.php?sid=20050415091323477>

Years before the 2004 Abu Ghraib prison scandal, Israeli prison guards used these torture methods on Palestinians.

Sometimes peace negotiations involve the release of prisoners. Khoury said the release involves two categories of prisoners: people who snuck into Jerusalem without a permit so they could work or see their family; and the second category involve detainees who will be released from prison within a couple of months because they already served their sentence terms.

Last year, one prisoner refused to leave jail because he did not want diplomats receiving credit for his release. His scheduled release was in a month. The man wanted media exposure on the prisoner issue so that conditions would improve in the prisons.

At the time the women in Khoury's film were in prison, they did not have political prisoner status. They wanted their status clarified officially and publicly. In the '60s and the '70s women's involvement in the political movement was not as accepted within Palestinian society compared to now. Back then, "appropriate" roles for women did not expand into the political realm.

Upon release, these women faced unique challenges regarding marriage and children. Some women could not have children anymore physically – the torture sterilized their reproductive systems. Moreover, the psychological trauma caused by prison torture made it difficult for one woman to have a relationship with her husband.

Their struggles did not stop after their prison release – they continue to suffer from their prison experiences. Their integration into Palestinian society is not an easy transition. Khoury gained a thorough understanding of the women's perspectives so that the film was from their point of view.

For the last, two months, Khoury toured the U.S. with her film. The Chicago Palestine Film Festival was her last engagement. What has been the reaction of audiences in the U.S. and back home?

"I've seen many tears while I screened this film in Palestine," she said. "I've seen tears from Israelis (Jewish people) in the U.S."

Khoury's hope is that her film brought public awareness, and that people will continue asking questions about the conditions of Palestinian prisoners. She hopes people will continue learning more about it.

For instance, Khoury shared that 450 Palestinian children under the age of 18 are in Israeli prisons. She explained that life under military occupation is harsh. People see tanks rolling by their windows instead of a peaceful view. People hear the sounds of Israeli helicopters flying overhead.

"We live under force," she said. "Occupation is the worst method of torture."

I asked Khoury about a scene in her film that involves an Israeli soldier holding a gun near her and one of the women, Aysha. At the time, Khoury's main concern was that Aysha not suffer anymore. She explained that Israelis have guns, so they use military force for abuse and humiliation. The Palestinians carry their strength and their power because they have a right to live on their land.

The Arabic word, sirra' means a struggle that does not finish. Palestinians will continue demanding their human rights and their right to live on their homeland peacefully.

About a year ago, Palestinian filmmakers formed an organization called the Cinema Group (<http://cinemagroup.ps>), which gathered individual filmmakers into an association for collective communication. The web site has the latest developments in Palestinian cinema.

Khoury's next film is about the social aspects of Palestinian women. She explained sirra' means inner struggle, cultural struggle and the social aspects of struggle also.

After the film discussion, several audience members approached Khoury. They asked her more questions and they shared their comments.

From what I could understand, one woman introduced herself, and then said: "I want to thank you so much for making this film."

While she spoke with Khoury, the woman wrapped her hands around Khoury's hands.