

 70 Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Panorama

NARDJES A.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ALGERIAN PROTESTER

A FILM BY KARIM AÏNOUZZ



SYNOPSIS

Algeria, February 2019.

A popular pacifist uprising erupts against the candidacy of president Bouteflika for a 5th term, steadily swelling into a revolution. Nardjes, a young Algerian woman, takes part in the movement to convey the hope of her people. Shot on the 8th of March 2019, International Women's Day, the film draws a portrait of Nardjes as she joins thousands of protesters in the streets of Algiers, fighting to overthrow a regime that has silenced them for decades.

We follow her, while her whole country could be marching towards a brighter future.



HIRAK

‘Hirak’, meaning “movement” in Arabic, designates the current demonstrations that have been taking place every week for one year across Algeria.

On the 22 February 2019, Algerians launched one of the most impressive social movements for democracy ever, triggered by ageing-president Bouteflika’s decision to stand for a fifth mandate, thus violating the Constitution. After Friday prayers, millions of Algerians took to the streets to demonstrate for democracy, breaking a wall of fear against protest. The Hirak led Bouteflika to resign on April 3rd, after 20 years in power. Ever since, Algerian people have continued to take to the streets every Friday to protest against corruption, unemployment and the country’s political elite. They demand the transfer of sovereign power held by the military branch to the legislative branch elected by popular vote.

Unlike revolutionary movements of the Arab Spring, the Hirak has totally rejected violence. It seeks reforms, but moreover a radical and dramatic change. These peaceful demonstrations are driven by young people, students, but also with women and families playing an important role. It has no leader nor representatives, hence its slogan “One Hero, The People”.

Algerian authorities have used unnecessary and excessive force and arbitrarily detained at least 300 protesters in clear violation of their rights. Part of them were arrested only for having held the Amazigh flag, representing the ethnic group of Berbers. The government leads a constant campaign of disinformation which deeply restricts the information and hides the actual number of arrests.

This week marks the one year anniversary of the Hirak. Algerians protests are still going on, including after the presidential election last December of old-regime-member Abdelmadjid Tebboune. The people will keep on marching until the members of the Issaba – the bandits as the regime has been renamed – react and give their power back.



AIR ALGERIE

طريق البوينة الجديدة



حضارية

لا للعهد الخامس

NARDJES ASLI

Nardjes, 26, lives in Bachdjerrah, a working-class district of Algiers. She is an actress, and works part time in a 'café theatre', where she organizes with her friends political and art events.

Born and raised in an activist family, she has joined the hirak protests since its beginning on February 22nd, 2019. She is brave, sensitive and restless. She describes herself as a 'big-mouth activist' who can't keep quiet when faced with injustice.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

This was my first trip to Algeria, my father's country of origin, I was there to develop a very personal project that aims to investigate this complex relation between my parent's unlikely love story, that country and the war of liberation against the colonial rule of France.

Arriving in Algeria earlier last year was absolutely brutal. Algiers was electrifying around an atmosphere of struggle and hope. Suddenly filming a day in the life of an Algerian protester, NARDJES A. came over as something extremely vital.

This is an urgent film. The noise of the streets and the lively excitement of the city occupied by a feverish youth convinced me that for those 24 hours there was nothing more important to be portrayed: Algiers was electric.

There is something stunning and potent about how these three generations were bound together during the past year. The youth that was demonstrating peacefully on the streets is the grandchild of the former revolutionaries. What happened? What went wrong? What should have been different? As soon as we met Nardjes we somehow recognized the film.

There was a latent need for it to speak less about the crowds that were taking the streets so to gain the contours of an embodied subject. Shooting a day in her life was the way we got closer to the meaning of what was happening on the streets. It was not just about the resignation of a president, but a systematic silencing, a shortening of horizons, and all of the profound feelings that are always scattered on the streets yet condensed by the individuals that gather on these same streets.



KARIM AÏNOUZ

DIRECTOR

KARİM AÏNOUZ is an award-winning filmmaker, screenwriter and visual artist.

Aïnouz debuted as a feature director with *Madame Satã* (Cannes Un Certain Regard 2002). Other works include *Central Airport THF* (Berlin Amnesty Prize 2018), *Futuro Beach* (Berlin Competition 2014), *The Silver Cliff* (Cannes Director's Fortnight 2011), and *Love for Sale* (Venice Horizons 2006). His latest feature, *Invisible Life*, premiered in Cannes Un Certain Regard in May 2019 where it received the Main Award and more than 50 prizes worldwide.

Nardjes A. is his 8th feature.



INTERVIEW WITH KARIM AÏNOUZ

How did you come up with the idea of making Nardjes A., does the fact that your father comes from Algeria played a role?

It definitely played a major role. That was my first trip to Algeria, my father's homeland. I was there, initially, to develop a very personal project that related to my parents' unlikely love story and the war of independence. NARDJES A. was shot during that specific trip. Arriving in Algeria at the beginning of 2019 was absolutely thrilling. Algiers was electrifying around an atmosphere of struggle and hope. Suddenly filming NARDJES A. came over as something extremely vital. This is an urgent film. The shout of the streets and the vigorous excitement of the city occupied by a feverish youth convinced me that for those 24 hours there was nothing more important to be portrayed: Algiers was igniting with hope. The same Algiers that so fervently celebrated colonial independence on July 5th 1962.

You are filming on a SMARTPHONE really into the heart of street demonstrations as if were part of it. How did this feel and did you create a bond with them?

In NARDJES A. a sense of urgency is what informed all my choices as a director, both aesthetic and technical.

In this film I seek to register an intimate report of a crucial day in contemporary Algeria.

We followed the trail of a young Algerian woman from 8 AM till 5AM the next day. My approach was to craft an immediate, vibrant portrait of a youth in revolt, rather than a journalistic, generic account of the events. Nothing is neutral here - all is passionate and biased.

The idea was that the film should breathe in synch with Nardjes, a young Algerian activist and our main character. The camera should feel somehow as if it were attached to her, pulsating with her, in the middle of the mass of young people.

It was all about being close to these bodies, being amongst them, walking between them, sharing their space, following their steps. This proximity, of course, also made me become part of them, and in that sense a bond was created, a very organic bond.

Being able to enter and inhabit these spaces was only possible with a very discreet apparatus. From the very beginning it was clear that a classic film apparatus would prevent us from portraying that moment either because it would call the attention of the police and of the security forces or because it would disturb the demonstrators due to its ostensive presence. We would have to make the camera invisible, so we decided to use a smartphone camera, which enabled us to go through the crowd and to dive into it. It reminded me of when I shot the carnival in Brazil – there was a powerful cloud of hope that engulfed us.

About Nardjes A. How did you meet or find her?

I met Nardjes through my friends Fouad and Sarah Triffi. When I arrived I was blown away with what was happening in Algeria. As I was there to do another project, I had already called on some contacts. As the demonstrations were taking over the city, this couple of friends, who are part of the film community in Algiers, introduced me to Nardjes. She is a working actress and also holds a job in a café in downtown Algiers. We met, we talked very briefly, I proposed the documentary, and she accepted. It was all done so quickly, there was no time or anything to lose. The only thing she asked me was: don't ask me to act, to perform. I need to demonstrate, to chant, to be there as an activist, and not as an actress.

Beside the scenes that Nardjes A. is demonstrating we see a lot of her social life too. Was that important for you to show?

My approach was to craft an immediate vibrant portrait of a youth in revolt, not a journalistic generic account of the events. It was more about capturing the excitement of the streets, that energy, that sexiness, an energy that does not dissipate when the demonstrations end, but which inhabits their lives, that inflames their mood. It was indeed important to depict how that energy resonates in their lives apart from the demonstrations. It is of course a political movie, but not only. There is an ambiguity that I wanted to explore, politics can be very heavy, and to a certain extent it should be heavy, but not only that. There is also an electricity that comes along. And that's what I found in Algeria -- something also extremely uplifting and invigorating.

How would you define the youth culture now in Algeria ?

Obviously there are specificities in Algerian youth. But what surprised me the most was the feeling that being in Algeria was like being anywhere in the world. I think that there is discontent with politics everywhere, a crisis of democracy that needs to be addressed carefully in order to avoid fascism, which is usually the easiest answer to these political moments. The Algerian youth I met is a youth who has a vital need to be able to think about their future, to be able to dream of a better possible horizon, who want to overcome the prognosis of catastrophe and this I see as something paramount and global.

Why is your film so different from so many other films about Algerian Revolution?

My intention was to capture the state of things, the voltage of a productive rage, an insurgency, and the ambiguity proper to these moments. The agenda I have behind this film is to portray the encounters, the taking of the streets as something vital. I wanted to craft a film that would bring joy -- a portrait of a pacific yet fierce uprising that can inspire others in the world. Revolt, riot, and thrill. Blast!

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NARDJES A.

A FILM BY KARIM AINOUZ

ALGERIA/FRANCE/ GERMANY/BRAZIL/ QATAR
2020

80 MIN. COLOR

LANGUAGE: Arabic, French, Tamazight

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Juan Sarmiento G.

EDITING: Ricardo Saraiva

SOUND: DESIGN: Sebastian Morsch

SOUND: Ilyas Mohamed Guetal

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: Viviane Letayf, Mourad Hamla

CASTING: Sarah Trifi, Fouad Trifi

LINE PRODUCER: Mario Brandão

PRODUCTION MANAGER: Jule Jäger

PRODUCERS: Marie-Pierre Macia, Christopher Zitterbart, Claire Gadéa, Richard Djoudi, Janaina Bernardes

FESTIVALS & AWARDS

FESTIVALS:

BERLINALE PANORAMA, GERMANY

VISIONS DU RÉEL, SWITZERLAND

MOSTRA DE VALENCIA, SPAIN

RIDM, CANADA

BERGEN IFF, NORWAY

ANTOFACINE, CHILE

MEDFILM FESTIVAL, ITALY

AWARDS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD

(MEDFILM FESTIVAL)











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ILS ONT CRU QU'ON AVAIT PEUR DE CE PASSÉ TOUT NOIR
IL N'Y A PLUS PERSONNE, QUE DES PHOTOS, DES MENSONGES
QUE DES PENSÉES QUI NOUS RONGENT, C'EST BON, EMMENEZ-MOI LÀ-BAS
OUI, IL N'Y A PLUS PERSONNE, LÀ-BAS, IL N'Y A QUE LE PEUPLE

OULED EL BAHDJA

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