



أخيراً من المدينة

IN THE LAST DAYS OF THE CITY

A Film by Tamer El Said





SYNOPSIS

Downtown Cairo, 2009. Khalid, a 35 year old filmmaker is struggling to make a film that captures the soul of his city while facing loss in his own life. With the help of his friends, who send him footage from their lives in Beirut, Baghdad and Berlin, he finds the strength to keep going through the difficulty and beauty of living In the Last Days of the City.



THE FILM'S JOURNEY

In the Last Days of the City was born as an idea in 2006, while war was raging in Iraq and Lebanon. By the time shooting began at the very end of 2008, the global financial crisis had begun, the Gaza war was under way, and protest movements calling for social and political change had become established as a regular reality in Egypt. With an ageing dictator priming his son to inherit power and extreme levels of poverty amidst the luxurious excesses of corruption, the sense that things could not go on like this was palpable.

The film was conceived as an act of witness, set on the borders of fiction and reality. The script was completed by Tamer El Said and Rasha Salti in 2007. It created the soul of the film while being open enough to allow the film to respond to life in the cities and people that would carry it. With the exception of Khalid and Laila, all the film's characters play a version of themselves. The stories of Hanan and Maryam are very personal stories of loss, filmed as documentary. Khalid's mother is played by Tamer's mother. His three friends are filmmakers who got to know each other through filmmaking before working on In the Last Days of the City.

Bringing together the cast and crew was a major undertaking which came together by 2008, however at that point less than 15% of the budget was in place. Faced with the decision of postponing the film, and recognizing a now or never moment, the crew and cast decided to throw caution aside, defer their fees, and film guerilla. Originally planned as a three month shoot, the film took two years and three winters to complete. Without the unrelenting dreams and efforts of an entire cast and crew willing to adjust their lives to the needs and unruly rhythms of the film it simply would not have been made.

The story of the filming was an epic improvisation, of losing locations and finding new ones; of losing actors and changing story lines; of filming events that became part of the fabric of the story; of

gradually finding a community of investors and funders willing to take a risk on the film's team. Throughout, Tamer's mother was ill. Sadly, she passed away weeks before shooting was completed. Utterly exhausted, the film's team returned to their lives in December 2010 hoping to rest for some time. Six weeks later Egypt's streets erupted in revolution and toppled Mubarak.

Called In the Last Days of the City long before this moment of rupture, it turned out to have been a film shot with a sense of foresight and edited with the benefit of hindsight. Everything the film had captured gathered entirely different meanings, and kept developing new ones with each turn in the race of events. Meanwhile, the editing room settled down to grapple with over 250 hours of footage against the backdrop of mass demonstrations and a country convulsing, each person participating in parallel to the film in their own way.

A key aspect of the film's journey was a common desire to confront the hurdles that made making In the Last Days of the City and films like it so difficult. Indeed so much of what made the film possible, was a sense that big sacrifices were essential to move beyond the flattening of Arab stories and images into stereotypes and news. Aware that so many issues facing Arab cinema are infrastructural, and identifying themselves within a much larger movement across the region, work began to establish an alternative film centre called Cimatheque as a fully equipped hub for education and screening to support the local filmmaking community. Built over the last five years and functioning in parts since 2012, it opened last June.

The making of In the Last Days of the City was a defiant collaboration between individuals from many countries who broke from roles and rules to make a seemingly impossible film happen – a search for the pulse of an exceptional moment.





INTERVIEW WITH TAMER EL SAID

- **What motivated you to make *In the Last Days of the City*, and what inspired the title?**

I've been wondering why, when we try to capture a moment in reality and put it on the big screen, something is always missing. Where does this magical mixture of spontaneity and structure go? How can a film be just as intense, multi-layered, complex, astonishing and surprising as life? I felt I had to question the method of making films and try to find a process that keeps each moment fresh and real, to allow the magic to come through.

I was born in Cairo and have lived in Downtown most of my life. It's one of the most photogenic cities in the world. It has this amazing mixture of tenderness and harshness. I wanted to try and learn how to film Cairo in a different, cinematic way, how to reflect and create the experience of Cairo on screen, to show the pulse of the street, the pulse of the people.

Personal life experiences motivated me to think of the film, too. Between 2005 and 2006, many events shaped my life. I lost my father. I also lost some friends in a fire that took place in a theatre in Beni Suef. It is horrible to imagine people burning inside a theatre and nobody is being held accountable. These were the last years of Mubarak's rule when it was clear on a political level that we couldn't continue like this. I wanted to reflect on all these complex feelings.

In the Last Days of the City is about the sensation that something is ending and a need to witness and document this moment. It has been the title of the film since 2008 and somehow it has always echoed with what is happening in reality.



- **How did you approach the making of the film, given it was inspired by real life stories?**

Rasha Salti and I worked on the script for a year to weave all the stories together. We knew it had to have an open structure so we created a blueprint knowing it would develop while making the film itself. With the actors I did many rehearsals, improvising the dialogue in order for them to get the right pace and to create a complicity between all of us. I was trying to remain open to what the city was giving me while at the same time keeping a level of control. So when we went to the shoot, I would ask the actors to forget everything they did in the rehearsal, to start from the beginning. The crew knew that we needed to be there and ready to capture the magic when it happened. This is something you can't organize. When we were in tune, we all knew it.

- **Can you talk about Khalid in the film - how much of his story is autobiographical?**

Khalid is stuck between the past, his memories and a suffocating present in a city on edge. He is trying to find his way to a future that he can't see. This situation for me is very cinematic.

I want to distinguish between autobiographical and personal films. This film is a personal one. When I started to think of it, I was haunted by many events that were happening in my life. I promised myself that I would only speak about things I know. I don't feel comfortable speaking about people I don't know or presenting a world that I am not part of. I feel everything in cinema has to come from within.

Khalid as a character is in a battle against time. His mother is dying, he has to leave his flat, his ex-girlfriend is leaving the country and he has to finish his film. He doesn't feel that he has much time to achieve anything. Many things echo with what happened in my life, and his friends are my friends, but I don't see him as myself. Of course, the character has something of me in him, but he is distinct as well as fictional. Also, I didn't want to keep Khalid, the actor, from putting something of his soul into the character. And I think what he brought to the character is beautiful.



- **You were still in production at the time of the revolution in January 2011. Was there a decision not to include it, not to film it?**

The revolution was a moment when you rethink everything, on every level. It was an amazing feeling seeing all our friends on the streets holding a camera freely, able to document without being arrested or trying to hide. It brought with it all these questions about what we should film, and our responsibility as filmmakers. During the 18 days I didn't feel the urge to film. I didn't want to look at what was happening through the lens of the camera. I wanted to participate and be part of this moment. But under the influence of others, we decided to film for half a day, and it felt wrong. For 2 years we had been shooting in the streets of Cairo using it as a backdrop and it always felt right, but it didn't feel right to use such a big moment as a backdrop for the film. When everything goes upside down, it's not simple. We couldn't use this moment before we understood it. And to understand it we needed time.

The revolution only opens up a possibility for change, but the change itself is our responsibility. I'm always asked if my film is about the revolution, or if it is 'revolutionary'. For me a revolutionary film is not a film that just films a revolution. It is a film that revolts against the old, established cinematic language. This is what I identify with. I always say the responsibility of doctors is to come up with new proposals for healthcare, and so the responsibility of filmmakers is to come up with new proposals for cinema.

- **The film took around 9 years to make. Can you elaborate on this process, why it took so long?**

It is difficult to sum up 9 years in a few lines, but I will try. The journey of making any film is a journey of loneliness. Even though you are supported by everyone around you, the longer it takes the harder it is. Every day you feel that you have an appointment with your failure.

When I started work on the film I knew I wanted it to be like a free-wheeling kite in flight, like a train that doesn't stop, and as multi-layered as life. I didn't know how to find the balance between these three things at first.

To achieve this we had to create a production model that allowed me to have a high level of autonomy and freedom. Finding the right people to join this journey was not easy with almost no money. We had to organize a schedule that allowed people to work on the film without destroying their lives.

Egypt has a strong, well-established mainstream industry. There is no infrastructure for independent films, so we had to create an infrastructure to make the film the way we wanted. 90% of our energy was taken by building this infrastructure within a very difficult political and economic context. Keeping certain standards while lacking a big part of the budget was a crazy thing to do. We had to film, stop, look for money, film, and so on.

Directing and producing at the same time was hard, because you are fighting against yourself. Also, when you are talking about a film that was shot in 4 countries, with crew from at least 10 countries, it's a lot of work.

The revolution gave a lot to me and the film, but it affected the schedule. It was impossible to make any plan and stick to it while there were daily battles in the streets.

The long production time is also related to building Cimatheque, a dream that grew with time. It's a place where people meet, watch films, learn things together - a home for independent cinema in Egypt. The revolution created a moment that made this dream possible. And it was impossible not to seize this moment. It's hard to imagine the time and effort it took to get this place built and opened.

I believe every film needs its time. Some films need less, some need more. In our case I'm convinced that the film needed the time it took.

Interviewed by Yasmin Desouki

Tamer El Said is a filmmaker living in Cairo where he was born in 1972. He studied filmmaking in the High Cinema Institute – Cairo and journalism in Cairo University. He went on to make many documentaries and short films that received several international and local awards. Tamer founded Zero Production in 2007 to produce independent films. He also founded, along with others, Cimatheque - Alternative Film Centre in Egypt. *In the Last Days of the City* is his first feature length film.

FILMOGRAPHY

Director | Writer

18 September

Short Fiction, 1995 | 12 min

Charlie

Short Fiction, 1995 | 8 min

Like a Feather

Short Fiction, 1996 | 12 min

Crisscross

Short Fiction, 1998 | 20 min

Music of the Nets

Documentary, 2000 | 26 min

Take Me

Documentary, 2004 | 52 min

On a Monday

Short Fiction, 2005 | 8 min

In the Last Days of the City

Fiction, 2016 | 118 min





Khalid Abdalla is an actor who works across fields, as a producer and filmmaker but also in cultural production and alternative media. He has acted leading roles in films including Paul Greengrass's *United 93* and *Green Zone*, Marc Forster's *The Kite Runner*, Tala Hadid's *The Narrow Frame of Midnight*, and Danis Tanovic's *Tigers*. His upcoming films include: Susanna White's *Our Kind of Traitor*, Justin Kurzel's *Assassin's Creed* and Faruk Sabanovic's *Birds Like Us*- in which he plays a bat. In documentary film he has producing credits on Hanan Abdalla's *In the Shadow of a Man* and the upcoming film by Hanan Abdalla & Cressida Trew, *The Vote*. He also appears as himself in Jehane Noujaim's Oscar nominated *The Square*. Khalid is a founding member of three collaborative initiatives in Cairo – Cimatheque, Zero Production and Mosireen. Born in Glasgow and brought up in London, he lives in Cairo.

CAST

In order of appearance

Khalid	Khalid Abdalla
Mother	Zeinab Mostafa
Gaber	Mohamed Gaber
Hanan	Hanan Yousef
Editor	Islam Kamal
Maryam	Maryam Saleh
Flower Lady	Ikram
Aly	Aly Sobhy
Aly Khamees	Aly Khamees
Raafat	Raafat Bayoumi
Laila	Laila Samy
Bassem	Bassem Fayad
Hassan	Hayder Helo
Tarek	Basim Hajar
Abla Fadila	Fadila Tawfik
Doorman	Zakaria Ali Mohamed
Lady in Niqab	Rola Asir
Man in Horreya Café	Mostafa Bayoumi
Calligrapher	Mahdi El Jabouri
Violent Husband	Hisham Wanas
Assaulted Wife	Reham Abdelkader
Protester	Mohamed Adel
Thug 1	Mohamed Shahat
Thug 2	Mohamed Hanafy
European Photographer	Julia Schulz
Angry Taxi Driver	Mohamed El Sayes
Etimad	Etimad Ali Hassan
Uncle Mounir	Uncle Mounir



Director

Tamer El Said

Producers

Tamer El Said
Khalid Abdalla

Co-producers

Hana Al Bayaty
Michel Balagué
Marcin Malaszczyk
& Cat Villiers

Screenplay

Tamer El Said
Rasha Salti

Director of Photography

Bassem Fayad

Production Designer

Salah Marei

Editors

Mohamed A. Gawad
Vartan Avakian
& Barbara Bossuet

Sound Mix

Mikael Barre

Sound Designer

Victor Bresse

Music

Amélie Legrand
Victor Moïse

Colour Grading

Jorge Piquer Rodriguez

Visual Effects

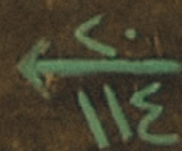
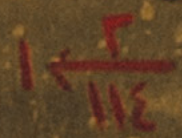
Unai Rosende

Art Director

Yasser El Hussein

Costume

Zeina Kiwan



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Zero Production

in co-production with
Sunnyland films
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Autonomous

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