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أمل AMAL
a film by Mohamed Siam

1. SYNOPSIS
2. TECHNICAL SHEET
3. DIRECTOR'S BIO
4. ABOUT AMAL :
INTERVIEW WITH
MOHAMED SIAM
5. CREDITS





1. SYNOPSIS

Amal is a feisty teenager growing up in post-revolution Egypt while they're both undergoing a tremendous change.

Within a constant political turmoil, Amal searches for her place, identity and sexuality in a patriarchal society. Amal, whose name literally translates to "hope", is embarking on a 6 year compelling journey from childhood to adulthood. Along the way, she realizes her limited options as a woman living in an Arab police state.



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2. TECHNICAL SHEET

Title: Amal

Genre: Feature Documentary

Year: 2017

**Countries: Lebanon- Egypt- France- Germany-
Norway- Denmark- Qatar**

Duration: 83 min

Aspect Ratio: FLAT

Resolution: 2K

Sound: 5.1

Language: Arabic

Subtitles: English/ French

Color- HD

Screening copy: DCP





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3. DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Siam is a documentary and fiction films director and a cinematographer who has received several international grants and prizes in support of his films, including from Sundance Institute, World Cinema Fund, CNC, Aide aux Cinémas du Monde, Sorfond, Vision Sud Est, Doha Film Institute, IDFA Bertha Fund, Catalyst Film Fund, Hot Docs Blue Ice Fund, OIF, Cinereach, Arab Fund for Arts & Culture and Screen Institute Beirut.

His films were shown in international film festivals such as KVIFF, NYFF, Hot Docs, Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage and IDFA. *Whose Country* was sold by Wide House in France and distributed by Kino Lorber and been broadcasted by ITVS in the US among other channels. His last film *Amal* was IDFA's Opening Film 2017.

Siam's cinematography can be seen in *The Trials of The Spring* (dir. Gini Reticker, producer Abigail Disney – Fork Films) which Siam line produced as well, and *The Path* (dir. Senain Kheshgi) – both films coproduced with ITVS.

An Alumnus of many prestigious film institutions such as Sundance Labs, IDFA Academy, Doc Campus, La Fabrique des Cinémas du Monde in Cannes Film Festival. Siam is a Berlinale, Durban and Beirut Talent Campus Alumnus. At Berlinale Campus Editing Studio, he worked with renowned Danish editor Molly Marlene Stensgaard (*Dancer in the Dark*, *Melancholia*).

Siam has won the Robert Bosch Film Prize, the AfriDocs Prize at Durban FilmMart and Thessaloniki Docs-In-Progress award. Siam is the 2016 recipient of The MacDowell Colony Fellowship and the 2017 Global Media Makers Fellowship and the Mellon Foundation Fellowship.

He's a reader and member of film committees and commissions for documentary and fiction film funds in the Arab region. A lecturer in The New School and Brooklyn College in NYC among few other universities in Beirut, Paris and Egypt.



FILMOGRAPHY

AMAL

(2017, feature documentary)

Director - Cinematographer - Producer
ArtKhana – About Productions – andolfi –
Barentsfilm – Good Company Pictures

WHOSE COUNTRY?

(2016, 58', medium length documentary)

Director - Cinematographer – Producer
ArtKhana – Linked Productions
Funded by Sundance, IDFA Bertha Fund, Hot
Docs Blue Ice, Sundance and ITVS
Festivals: NYFF, Karlovy Vary, IDFA, Hot Docs,
Thessaloniki, Brisbane Asia, Amiens, !F Istanbul
Independent Film Festival, CinemaAfrica, Middle
East Now.

4. INTERVIEW WITH MOHAMED SIAM, DIRECTOR OF AMAL

In the opening scene of the film, Amal wears a Superman t-shirt. Do you see her as a superwoman ?

I see her as a superwoman given the circumstances she lives in. To me, her super power is not being a fighter, even though she is. It's her super capacity to adapt. She's a great survivor. Like all those little children in the darkest fairy tales who have to go through terrible obstacles but still they keep going, whatever happens...

How did you meet her and what intrigued you so much that you decided to make her the protagonist of a movie?

I was looking for a male character subject from the football fans, ultras,

whose members are 99,99% male teenagers who are full of uncontrollable energy and rage. I wanted to foresee what would be the future face of Egypt through them. One night, among all of these men, I see this very little person with a very strong voice, wearing a hoody. She looked really neutral, not really a girl, not really a boy... She was leading a group of men, much taller than her as a tip of an arrow. I wondered who the hell she was.

She noticed me and my camera but didn't change her behavior: she didn't care about me, she spoke her mind, sometimes vociferated obscenities... I understood that she wasn't acting for the camera and that she would be a great character. But at that time, just after the revolution, I didn't know where



I was going.

I just knew that I wanted to follow her.

Can you explain the social, political and historical context in which the film takes place?

Amal was born in January 1997. She was 14 in January 2011 when the revolution started, when she was drawn to the streets and was beaten up by the police. In 2012, the first free elections in the

country brought the Muslim Brothers to power and Amal lived under their rules until the coup d'état in 2014. At the end of the film, she's 20... What I found amazing is that year after year, important events have marked in parallel both Egyptian history and her life.

Do you have an idea of where her total absence of fear comes from?

She literally listens to everything her father said. He died when she was 10 years old and she never had time to understand that he was also a man. She kept idealizing him more and more, until he became everything to her: a mentor, a guardian angel, a god. He told her at one point "have no fear, do whatever you want". Since then she believes that nothing will happen to her. Of course it's not true, but so far she has been very lucky, even though she was brutally and

emotionally hurt by the police. The more she survived, the more fearless and gutsy she became.

You used some archival material shot by Amal's father, where we understand how loved she was as a kid but also how free to talk she was. Why was it important to mix those images to yours?

One of the reasons was to understand where Amal came from, how close she is to her father, but I also wanted to show that she's still the same person since she was a child: very animated, loud, craving for attention, with a strong personality. I tried to emphasize this consistency in her life by making visual and verbal connections whether it's a word her father said or a red

ball she holds both as a child and as a young woman.

Amal talks passionately about the elections and the power, to people she meets or to her mother who sometimes seems a bit lost. Is it common for the young generation in Egypt to be so interested in political issues?

It is very recent. The moment Amal woke



up to this world, she saw only change. Same thing for this whole generation. They saw their friends chased by the police, being beaten, getting killed, or going to prison... Amal even saw her first boyfriend die. Contrary to the older generation who surrendered and chose to surrender to the status quo, so this generation's interest in politics is genuine because they understood that they could change things and that the country is theirs. I don't believe it's a coincidence that Amal means "Hope". It reflects how much I believe in this generation.

Amal says to the men she meets in the street : « talk to me as a boy, not as a girl ». She seems very proud to be a tomboy. Is it a way for her to be respected or is it more complicated than that ?

Of course it's a way for her to gain respect, but it's also gender confusion, which is very normal at that age. At one point she says that she's happy to be treated equally as a boy but at the same time, it hurts her femininity not to be recognized as a woman. One of the themes of the film is identity, and one of the big question marks in the film is: how do you forge your identity and find yourself as a woman in this context of permanent clashes and surrounded by so many men. But the more important question is: who does Amal really want to be?

Later, we discover Amal as a young woman, not a tomboy anymore, with a boyfriend who seems to forbid her a lot of things (to dress the way she wants, to smoke, go to

football match...), which she seems to accept. Is she still the free spirit that she was on the streets?

I think she will always be. But as I said earlier, Amal is constantly adapting. Once she has a boyfriend, she starts putting make-up on. He forbids her to do lots of things, but she keeps resisting and she keeps fighting for her being. And until now, she is still the same person, smoking whenever she wants, wearing whatever she wants.



Did you have many rushes? How did you work in the editing room?

I relatively didn't have a lot of material because I knew exactly what I wanted. Even though I shot for 6 years, I have reasonable hours of rushes. I started alone in the editing room, I came out with the idea of the chapters and the chronology. Then I started to work with Véronique Ségot Lagoarde who built the basic structure of the film and helped me to find the rhythm of the film and the nuances. She did the jewelry work, articulating the harmony between the different layers of the film because she was the first person to get the film even before I did.

What are you working on now?

I'm currently writing my first fiction film. It's also going to be about the police. This would be the third chapter of the trilogy constituted by *Whose Country* and *Amal*.

Interview by Pamela Pianezza for Tess Magazine



5. CREDITS

Writer, Director & Cinematographer: **Mohamed Siam**
Producers: **Myriam Sassine and Mohamed Siam**
Co-producers: **Arnaud Dommerc, Sara Bökemeyer, Patricia Drati and Ingrid Lill Høgtun**
Executive Producers: **Talal Al-Muhanna and Bruni Burres**
Editor: **Véronique Lagoarde-Ségot**
Sound Editor: **Jocelyn Robert**
Music Composer / Re-recording Mixer: **Matthieu Deniau**

Produced by: **About Productions & Artkhana**
In co-production with: **andolfi, Barentsfilm and Good Company Pictures**
Winner of: **The Film Prize of the Robert Bosch Stiftung**
With The Participation of: **l'Aide aux Cinémas du Monde, Centre National du Cinéma et l'Image Animée, Institut Français**
With the support of: **Sørfond, Word Cinema Fund Europe, Goethe Institute, Berlinale and Creative Europe – MEDIA Programme of the European Union, the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC), Doha Film Institute, Fonds Image de la Francophonie, Catapult Film Fund, IDFA Bertha Fund, Visions Sud Est with the support of the SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), Cinereach, International Media Support (IMS), AfriDocs, Dox Box Fund.**
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