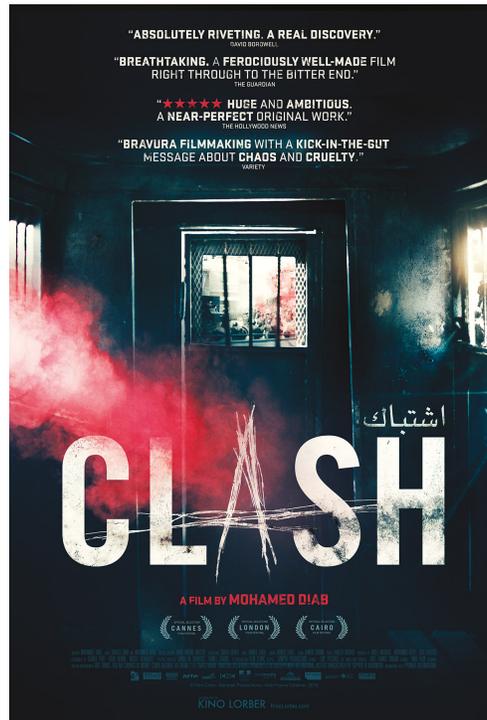


KINO LORBER



A film by Mohamed Diab

2017 / Egypt / France / Germany / 97 min. / Color
In Arabic with English subtitles

Official Selection

Un Certain Regard – Cannes Film Festival

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Synopsis

Set entirely within the confines of a police van, *Clash* dramatizes the ongoing political unrest in Egypt two years after the Arab Spring. It's 2013 and mass protests have led to the ouster of the ruling Muslim Brotherhood by the army. A series of arrests finds rival demonstrators trapped in a paddy wagon together under the threat of impossibly stifling heat. From this simple setup, Mohamed Diab weaves a white-knuckled tale of resistance and shared humanity that artfully evokes the political fault lines in the Arab world's most populous nation.

Interview with Mohamed Diab, director

How did you come up with the idea for *Clash*?

Cairo 678 was released in Egypt a few weeks before the 2011 revolution. I took part in the movement and soon enough, I wanted to make a film about it. But during the following years, things have changed so fast that all my ideas became obsolete even before we started writing.

Only after the 2013 events did my brother Khaled and I discuss the idea of *Clash*, which he came up with. We got down to work by bouncing ideas back and forth, thinking that this was the best way to talk about what's happening in Egypt. Since 2013, the conflicting forces involved have been the same: the revolutionaries, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the army. Ironically, the only relevant subject we could find about the revolution was its failure.

What part did you take in the 2011 revolution?

I drew upon my newfound fame: *Cairo 678* had just been released, I had been on television, people recognized me. Today in Egypt, people know me more as an activist than as a filmmaker. I wasn't one of the ideologists of the movement, but rather one of its promoters. I put my job as a director aside to fight, alongside the Egyptian people, for democracy. I felt it was my duty. I always thought I would go back to making films once things got settled, and I thought, as many people did, that it was the case during the 2012 presidential election. But, unfortunately, everything has changed since then.

Where were you at the time the film is set (i.e. a few weeks after President Mohammed Morsi stepped down)?

I was in Cairo, and just like any other Egyptian, I got carried away by what was happening. All these events took place on the streets; you couldn't help being confronted with or even mixed up in it just by going across the city to get to work. At that time, I demonstrated against Morsi. Of course, he had been elected democratically, but we would have been

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better off with a Mandela of sorts, somebody who would have stood out from the crowd and reconciled the Egyptian people.

But we knew that wouldn't be the case right from the first round of the elections: the winners, both candidates on the second round, were the pro-Islamism Morsi, and somebody from Mubarak's former regime. We were caught between a rock and a hard place. That night I cried, literally.

After a year under Morsi's presidency, during which he divided the country, there was the biggest demonstration Egypt had ever had, to call for his resignation and new elections. I took part in the demonstration. But neither Morsi nor the Muslim Brotherhood did anything. Maybe it was too late, anyway.

The film shows what happened after Morsi's deposition, the demonstrations that set Cairo on fire and the casualties that followed. But one should choose one's words carefully, because Egypt is black-and-white right now. For instance, if you use the word "coup" to describe Morsi's removal from office, your choice of word deems you are on the Muslim Brotherhood side; likewise, if you refer to it as a "revolution", that word would deem you to be on the military's side.

I would like people to watch my film without wondering all the time which side I am on. It isn't a film about politics, it is a film about the human rather than the political aspect of things.

How did you come up with the characters for the film?

My brother and I spent a lot of time thinking about that. We thought about some people we know, and we wanted to show several aspects of Egypt. Yet it isn't a "panel" in the sociological sense: the proportion between the revolutionaries and the Muslim Brothers isn't as balanced in real life... We tried to think about ordinary Egyptians. We wrote thirteen versions of the script.

Obviously, the first characters were the journalist and the photographer. The journalist was inspired by Mohamed Fahmy, an Egyptian-Canadian who used to work for Al-Jazeera. He spent a year and a half in prison, and afterwards he sued the network, which had let him down. In the film, he is an Egyptian- American, it was a way to address the increasing xenophobia in Egypt, and the constant conspiracy theory going on there.

Zein, the photographer, was inspired by Mahmoud Abu Zeid, also known as Shawkan, who used to cover the demonstrations for an Egyptian newspaper, and who has been in jail for almost three years now. Shawkan was on the side of the revolution, but then anyone could get arrested, especially journalists, who were branded as traitors by both camps. In a way, both characters are reflections of myself: I also take pictures and I am claustrophobic too.

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Tell us about the opponents of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Those people are on the street for various reasons, but essentially they get arrested by mistake. There is a family: parents and their adolescent son. The mother is a nurse. She cannot stand the pervading chaos any more. Her husband is probably a civil servant, although it isn't said in the film. They belong to the middle class. There are also two young men: one of them isn't politically active, he was just following his pal.

The homeless man is angry because his dog died. This character is a good example of what I was trying to show: if you saw him on the street, you would think that he is a thug. But his genuine sadness about the death of his dog makes him human. You see, this is what the film is about, you don't know anyone until you really know him.

Among the Muslim brothers, there are members and sympathizers, right?

Indeed. We don't know exactly how many members they have in Egypt, especially as their organization is now being tracked and declared illegal. As for them, they see themselves as a kind of clandestine resistance.

I tried to clearly separate members from sympathizers. For instance, the old man and the girl with a veil are religious sympathizers, but not members. Although I am against the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology, I can still portray them as human beings. You can't understand someone if you can't humanize them.

In the film you see their collapse, the fight between their elders and their youth, who are now leaning towards violence as a form of retaliation. Understanding the Muslim Brotherhood and what they've been through, is very essential to understanding the roots of extremism

What is the connection between the Muslim brotherhood and Daech?

The answer is in the film: indeed, the exposure to brutality and violence leads some characters to consider joining the extremists in Syria. In Egypt, this is what is happening: the Muslim Brotherhood is collapsing, so many young men are quitting and joining Daech. If Had Badr, the Salafi, would have mentioned Syria in the truck at the beginning of the film, nobody would have listened to him. But after the cycle of violence, resulting in one guy losing his father and another losing his child, it becomes easy for the extremists to recruit.

Could you tell us about the making of CLASH?

Technically this was a complex film to make. One year before shooting, we created a wooden replica of the truck that we put in an apartment. We rehearsed with the actors for

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several months, and they helped us fine-tune the characters. We started by improvising and the writing became gradually more specific. And then we shot those rehearsals: it was a chance to shoot the film before the actual shoot which gave us a kind of a live storyboard. Simultaneously, we built the truck that you see in the film, which is identical to those used by the police. It's a real truck you can drive. The film was shot within 8 square meters, over 26 days, with all the actors present all the time.

The action scenes are quite impressive.

The first one was shot in two days, with 500 extras in a studio. It was hell, mostly because there is no stunt culture in Egypt. The stunt coordinator would tell me: "This looks real, because it is real". The extras really fought each other, some of them even got injured. The bridge scene was shot in the city, on a huge interchange, which is one of the busiest highways in Cairo. The shooting caused unbelievable mayhem, because a lot of people thought this was yet another demonstration and walked away.

Today, when people see a gathering in the street, they think it is a demonstration and they get scared. We shot for 12 hours straight, with a passionate team. I guess we got infiltrated by both sides, the Muslim Brotherhood as well as the police, with each believing that the other supported us. Making this film under extreme time constraints lead me to some weird talent, which consists of giving orders into the microphone exactly between the characters' lines.

The shot where the sniper eventually gets killed is particularly emotional: the feeling we get is of a terrible waste of human lives. But I think the film avoids easy answers, and I'm 100% against violence. That scene starts with emotional soldiers losing their colleague then goes to the killer on the ground bleeding to death. You decide how you feel about it. Throughout the story we see how someone can turn into that killer, and we understand how a police officer could become so brutal. It's the vicious circle of violence.

Biographies

Mohamed Diab, director

Mohamed Diab is an award-winning writer and director, whose work is often centered on issues concerning Egyptian society. His directorial debut *Cairo 678* (Les Femmes du bus 678) was released a month before the Egyptian revolution and is a drama about three women who unite to fight against sexism in Cairo.

Diab wrote the blockbuster Egyptian franchise *El Gezira* (*The Island*). Those films are considered the highest grossing Egyptian and Arabic films of all time. *El Gezira* was also the 2007 Egyptian submission for the Academy Awards.

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Besides filmmaking, Diab is known for his participation in the 2011 Egyptian revolution, which earned him a Webby Award. After the revolution, Diab wanted to make a film about it - and it took him four years to develop CLASH, a film that was initially focused on the rise of the revolution. CLASH, his second feature film, was selected as the Opening film of Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival in 2016.

Nelly Karim, actress

Born in Alexandria, from an Egyptian father and a Russian mother, Nelly Karim started out as a ballet dancer, trained at the Academy of Arts in Cairo, before she became a model and an actress. She has worked in about 25 films and television series, including Youssef Chahine's second to last film, *Alexandria ... New York* (2004).

She was awarded the Best Actress prize at the Cairo International Film Festival for Khaled Youssef's *My Soul Mate*.

She was one of the heroines in Mohamed Diab's *Cairo 678* (2012), and together with her partners on screen Bushra and Hajed El Sebai, she won the Jury Grand Prize at the 2011 Asian Pacific Screen Awards.

Cast:

Nelly Karim ... Nagwa
Hany Adel ... Adam
Tarek Abdel Aziz ... Hossam
Ahmed Malek ... Mans
Ahmed Dash ... Fares
Husni Sheta ... Fisho
Aly Eltayeb ... Huzaifa
Amr El Kady ... M. Hashem
Mohamed Abd El Azim ... Radwan
Gameel Barsoum ... Salah
Ashraf Hamdy ... Omar
Mohamed Tarek ... Hussein
Ahmed Abdel Hameed ... Awad
Waleed Abdel Ghany ... Nader
Mai El Ghaity ... Aisha
Mohamed El Sebaey ... Zein
Mohamed Abu Elsoa'ud ... Abdel Hamid
Mohamed Salah ... M. Hashem
Mohamed Radwan ... Badr
Mohamed El Souisy ... Eweis

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Crew:

Directed by Mohamed Diab
Written by Khaled Diab and Mohamed Diab

Production Designer... Hend Haidar
Creative Producer... Sarah Goher
Photography... Ahmed Gabr
Editing... Ahmed Hafez
Sound... Ahmed Adnan
Music... Dagher
Producers... Mohamed Hefzy, Eric Lagesse, M. W. Zackie
Coproducers... Olivier Père, Rémi Burah, Nicole Gerhards
Executive Producers... Jamal Al Dabbous, Daniel Ziskind

Coproduction...
Film Clinic (Egypte)
Sampek Productions (France)
Emc Pictures (Emirats Arabes Unis)
Arte France Cinema (France)
Niko Films (Germany)

With the participation of Arte France, Aide aux Cinemas du Monde - Centre National du Cinéma et de L'image Animée, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et du Développement International, Institut Français