



TONDOWSKI FILMS PRESENTS

BORN IN EVIN

A DOCUMENTARY BY MARYAM ZAREE



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Filmfestspiele
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Perspektive Deutsches Kino



SYNOPSIS

Born in Evin follows filmmaker and actress, Maryam Zaree, on her quest to find out the violent circumstances surrounding her birth inside one of the most notorious political prisons in the world. Exactly forty years have passed since the monarchy of the Shah of Iran was toppled and the Islamic Republic declared. In the 1980's Ayatollah Khomeini, the so-called religious leader, had tens of thousands of political opponents arrested, persecuted and murdered. Among them the filmmaker's parents who, after years in prison, managed to seek asylum in Germany. The family never talked about their persecution and imprisonment. Maryam Zaree faces the decades-long silence and explores her own questions about the place and the circumstances of her birth.

She meets other survivors, talks to experts and looks for the children born in the same prison. She tries to find answers to her personal and political questions. What are the personal consequences of persecution and violence when the same perpetrators remain in power while the victims internalize their stories? And what does it mean, politically, to face the silence within the family. The political is private and the private political. With this conviction, Maryam Zaree works through the complexities of trauma and denial.

Director, Maryam Zaree

Maryam Zaree was born in 1983 in Teheran/Iran. Fleeing political persecution, her mother brought Maryam with her to Germany when she was two. She grew up in Frankfurt am Main and studied acting in the renowned film school Konrad-Wolf in Potsdam/Babelsberg. She has played lead roles in a dozen feature films, worked for theatre and

Television and has been awarded for her performances. In 2018 she received a "Grimme Preis" for her performance in the TV show "4 Blocks." Her first theatre play "Kluge Gefühle" received the Author's Prize of the Heidelberg Stückemarkt and has been performed in multiple theaters. *Born in Evin* is her debut feature film.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"Some people joke and some people don't."

That's maybe not the best line to introduce a movie about prison and torture but it does say something about my view on life. It's also not meant to be cynical. Cynical is the fact that I was born in one of the most notorious torture prisons in the world. One could say "well tough luck!" but things turned out pretty well. My parents survived, I grew up safely in Germany, became a successful actress and haven't even lost my humor. End of story.

That's mostly how western communities see refugees in our countries. They managed to survive war, poverty or persecution and will now integrate and soon forget what they lived through. That's common to the economic Zeitgeist and the tale of the American dream. But in such a state of mind, we refugees walk straight into collective denial, which we as Europeans and Americans have practiced diligently for centuries.

As a society, though, we must create circumstances and conditions in which we can talk about the deprivation of rights, about violence and abuse of power. These stories are usually not pretty; they are often brittle and incomplete, but they help us to understand how we want to live together and how we don't. They are a moral compass in times when our human rights are once again being questioned. So we have to learn to listen. But the emotionally injured often can't speak or only decades later. Sometimes it's only their children that can tell us about their parent's pain, and even they have often become speechless. Which brings us back to humor, the fool and life savior, who often allows us to approach the horror.

This film is my life project, no more no less. But the last thing I ever wanted was to make a film about myself. When I began the process of the film, I wanted to tell the

story of the children of Evin prison. I wanted to find them and understand how the persecution of their parents had impacted their lives. During a development program in Sweden, a script consultant asked me where I was in my story. I thought the question was absurd, but it revealed a much deeper truth. I wanted to talk about it, but I didn't want to go where it hurts. I was convinced that if I tell about the other children, my intention would become clear and I could avoid the criticism of self-therapy. But the truth was, I just continued the silence, like my mother. I felt I needed to share, but I didn't know how. How should I talk about things for which there are no words until today? Over time I realized that with the courage to confront the microcosm of personal denial and trauma, universality could be found. And by doing so, I would be able to talk about our mutual experience of being human – and humanness could be regained.

Of course the children of Evin are still part of the story. They are my companions on the quest into the painful secrets of the past. But the essential requirement for my journey, and a great film, is bravery which is often found where fear lies.

BORN IN EVIN

Documentary

Director Maryam Zaree
Camera Siri Klug
Editor Dieter Pichler
Sound Michel Klofkörn und Tom Schön
Sounddesign Rudolf Gottsberger
Production Tondowski Films GbR
Producer Ira Tondowski, Alex Tondowski
Co-Production Golden Girls Films (Austria)
Co-Producer Arash Riahi
Commissioning editor ZDF – Das Kleine Fernsehspiel, Burkhard Althoff,
ORF - Film/Fernseh-Abkommen, Susanne Spellitz

Length 98 min.
Picture Farbe / 1:1,85
Shooting format 2K / 4K
Screening copy DCP
Sound 5.1
Original language German, Englisch, French, Farsi
Subtitle Englisch, German
Year of production 2019

German Press

Anne Beringer - PR Managerin
KFP Kölner Filmpresse & Service GmbH

Tel.: +49 (0)221 168 90 726
Mobile: +49 (0)179 14 38 458
beringer@koelnerfilmpresse.de

Contact

Alex Tondowski
Tondowski Films GbR

Tel.: +49 (0)30 91 50 93 42
Mobile: +49 (0)176 24 54 87 67
alex@tondowskifilms.de

