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GRAND JURY PRIZE
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DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL
2020

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CPH.DOX
NEXT-WAVE AWARD
2020

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hotdocs
2020
BEST PRACTICE OUTSTANDING

MAYOR

a film by DAVID OSIT

ROSEWATER PICTURES AND RISE FILMS PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH BERTHA DOC SOCIETY AND IDA ENTERPRISE DOCUMENTARY FUND
"MAYOR" CREDITS: DAVID OSIT DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID OSIT EDITOR: DAVID OSIT ERIC DANIEL METZGAR COMPOSER: DAVID TEAGUE
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: MAXYNE FRANKLIN TEDDY LEIFER CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: ABIGAIL E. DISNEY LAURA DURNING
PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY DAVID OSIT

FILM MOVEMENT | BETH | IDA | RISE FILMS | ROSEWATER PICTURES | BERTHA DOC SOCIETY | GUCCI | DOGWOOL | CINEMATIC | FINE

M A Y O R



Directed and Produced by David Osit

Official Selection | True/False Film Festival 2020
Winner, NEXT:WAVE | CPH:DOX 2020
Winner, Grand Jury Prize | Full Frame Film Festival
Official Selection | San Francisco International Film Festival 2020
Official Selection | HotDocs 2020
Official Selection | Maryland Film Festival 2020
Official Selection | Nantucket Film Festival 2020
Official Selection | Woods Hole Film Festival 2020
Official Selection | New Zealand Film Festival 2020

2020 / 89 minutes / 2.39:1 / 5.1 / USA, UK / Arabic, English

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SYNOPSIS

MAYOR is a real-life political saga following Musa Hadid, the Christian mayor of Ramallah, during his second term in office. Surrounded on all sides by Israeli settlements and soldiers, most people in Ramallah will never have the chance to travel more than a few miles outside their home, which is why Mayor Hadid is determined to make the city a beautiful and dignified place to live. His immediate goals: repave the sidewalks, attract more tourism, and plan the city's Christmas celebrations. His ultimate mission: to end the occupation of Palestine. Rich with detailed observation and a surprising amount of humor, MAYOR offers a portrait of dignity amidst the madness and absurdity of endless occupation while posing a question: how do you run a city when you don't have a country?

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I've spent a fair amount of time in the Middle East over the past decade, but I've always been struck by Ramallah in particular as a city in conflict both inside and out - divided between capitalist future-building and preservation of a rapidly-vanishing past; a city of artsy hipster bars and high-security Israeli checkpoints. You won't find terrorists or camels in Ramallah, only the occasional snowstorm and free unlimited public WiFi. In other words, it thoroughly pierces the Western narrative as to what "The Middle East" is supposed to look like.

When I met Musa Hadid - the Christian, liberal, charismatic mayor of Ramallah with a vape pen always by his side and a radical plan to turn Ramallah's public space into a Middle Eastern version of Amsterdam - I knew there was a unique way to understand the discourse around Palestine by following him in his daily work; work that is repeatedly and regularly interrupted by a military apparatus that has control over his city's land and well-being.

Ken Loach once said that "a film isn't a political movement - at best, it can add its voice to public outrage." However, in the case of Palestine, the politics around its representation are entirely created by popular culture: cinema, television, game shows, news functioning as entertainment, all contribute to a Western narrative that defines Palestine through its suffering at best, or its role as a victimizer at worst. Palestinian identity, for those abroad, becomes its *lack* of identity.

I wanted to make a film that shifts the narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict away from the debate of who-deserves-what, or who is right or wrong, by telling the story of a small town mayor dealing with small town problems amid a military occupation of his city. We are living in an era when discussing the rights and humanity of Palestinians has been written into legislation in **several countries** as an act of hate against another nation of people. Very quietly and obliquely, MAYOR challenges the logic of this assertion.

MAYOR follows the dramatically underreported consequences of American foreign policy on a nation persistently denied autonomy and representation on the international stage. I set out to make a film about local government in the shadow of an occupation, and quickly found myself filming during one of the most traumatic times in Ramallah's history - where even the small public space that Musa labors over becomes a symbol of resistance and identity by the end of the film. My goal was to break down the audience's understanding of what a Middle Eastern city "should" look like within the first five minutes - Christmas celebrations, classical music, even an old Hollywood feel - and build a new framework of understanding for how that audience can relate to this part of the world.

Q&A WITH DAVID OSIT

What first brought you to Ramallah? Did your interest in Musa Hadid develop before or after you'd traveled to the city itself?

I'd worked and studied in the Middle East off and on since 2008. I did a three-week edit job in Ramallah for a Palestinian director named Mohanad Yaqubi. It had been a few years since I'd first visited and I was amazed by the hipster bars, night clubs, free unlimited public WiFi - things I either hadn't noticed before or that had emerged rapidly in recent years.

I filed it away, and the following year Mohanad visited NY because the film we worked on was screening. He stayed with me and my partner and one night I asked him, "what's the mayor of Ramallah like?" When he told me the mayor has a good sense of humor, he's Christian, and he knew his brother, a little lightbulb went off for me, trying to imagine what it was like for this mayor to run his city despite all the circumstances surrounding Ramallah and sovereignty and land issues. I imagined that following Musa for a couple years could yield some fascinating stories that may not have

been otherwise reported or documented. I thought that if he was game, and if he was a compelling subject, it could be an interesting project.

Did you have any preconceptions about Palestine that you found challenged — not just what you expect an audience might not know, but what you yourself didn't?

I couldn't begin to make a list of all the things I didn't know when I first began filming, or conceptions I had that were changed. I'd like to think the whole film is an exploration of questions I personally had at the outset - *How important is civic pride here? How do people define themselves when the rest of the world defines them by what they're not?* That's really the reason I was interested in making the film and having the film begin the way it does, with a classical score, a humorous scene, etc. I wanted an audience to be so lost in a wave of misconception-breaking information (Christmas lights, Christian city, modern-looking Ramallah, the low-seeming stakes of "city branding" in a high-stakes city like Ramallah) that they'd have to allow the film room to build a new world on top of the ruins of their misconceptions.

How large a crew did you work with while filming? What was the filming process like with the Mayor and the people of Ramallah?

In terms of crew, I worked alone - I was the cameraperson, the sound person, everything. I did that because it's the way I've worked in my previous films, but also because it's what Musa was most comfortable with. More than anything, this film was a collaboration between Musa and I, and I wanted to respect the way that it was easiest for him to work with me. On the few occasions I did try to bring another crew member - a Paletinian friend - in, counterintuitively, it created access challenges, because Musa was so comfortable with me filming alone.

This film was also a collaboration with Musa and his staff. I asked Musa and his team what they were excited about showing off, what excited them in general, what meetings they thought were interesting, what challenges they faced. This film is trying to show Ramallah through Musa's eyes so our relationship and collaboration is really at the heart of it all.

In addition to that, I had hundreds of meetings with people in and around the Ramallah municipality, so that I could explore whether or not the film should be broadened beyond Musa's direct perspective. Ultimately in the edit it was strongest to stay with Musa - but all of those meetings taught me

so much, and contributed to what I filmed, and to my larger understanding of the city and of Palestine.

Do you speak Arabic?

I can get by - I understand much better than I can speak, which mattered more anyway. I studied in Cairo so I speak with an Egyptian accent, which is a bit strange for people to hear in Ramallah. Because my language ability was pretty weak at the start, I'd keep an ear out for key words in Arabic and make sure when those came up in conversation, I'd be alert to making sure I could capture the scene. As a DP, it also made me pay more attention to body language and facial expressions - I love Buster Keaton comedies and the work of Palestinian filmmaker Elia Suleiman, and sometimes I liked to pretend I was making a silent film from old Hollywood - when entire emotional journeys could be conveyed in a single expression on an actor's face.

How frequently did you film with Mayor Hadid, and how much time did you spend in Ramallah?

I filmed over twenty months, had 106 shoot days and filmed about 350 hours of footage. The lion's share of that was with Mayor Hadid in meetings, in his office, occasionally abroad. Each shoot would be one month maximum, and I'd try to go every other month or every two months. Since I by no means understood everything I was filming, I'd film a LOT and spend the following month going back through the footage, translating, etc.

Were there any special hurdles you had to clear in order to work in Ramallah? What was it like dealing with Israeli border security / permits / travel?

The fact is that as an American, I had it much easier than others would. I wouldn't tell anyone at Israeli border crossings what I was doing and certainly had an elaborate alibi, encrypted drives, etc. But aside from time and anxiety, going back and forth was rarely a problem. There was never a single permit for filming in Palestine. Filming on the city streets of Oxford, for example, involved much more bureaucratic paperwork than anything I experienced in Ramallah. As to crossing through between Israel and Palestine - I have American passport and a Jewish name. Unfortunately, the illegal settlement apparatus is actually designed to allow people like me to move freely into and out of the West Bank.

BIOGRAPHIES

MUSA HADID is a Palestinian civil engineer. Hadid studied at Birzeit University and comes from a Christian family. He worked as a civil engineer and at UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency For Palestinian Refugees) for 20 years before becoming Mayor of Ramallah, the de facto capital of the State of Palestine, in 2012.

DAVID OSIT (Director / Producer / Cinematographer / Editor) is an Emmy Award-winning director, editor and composer. David is one of the directors of the feature documentary **THANK YOU FOR PLAYING**, which premiered at the 2015 Tribeca Film Festival, broadcast on POV in 2016, and was nominated for three Emmy awards, winning for Outstanding Arts & Culture Documentary. He also edited and produced **OFF FRAME**, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and Berlinale in 2016. His first film, **BUILDING BABEL**, premiered at True/False in 2012. David is an alumnus of Berlinale Talents and the Sundance Nonfiction Director's Lab.

ERIC DANIEL METZGAR (Co-Editor) is an Emmy Award nominated filmmaker and fellow of the Sundance Institute's Documentary Film Program. He directed, shot and edited **REPORTER** (2009), about New York Times reporter Nicholas Kristof, which premiered at Sundance, aired on HBO, and was nominated for an Emmy Award for Best Long-Form Programming. He also edited and produced **CRIME + PUNISHMENT** (2018) which premiered at Sundance and won a Special Jury Prize, broadcast on Hulu, and screened at over 100 film festivals.

CREDITS

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Editing

David Osit

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Teddy Leifer

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David Osit

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David Teague

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IN ASSOCIATION WITH IDA ENTERPRISE DOCUMENTARY FUND AND BERTHA
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