

30 MINS TO 6

A Documentary in memory of Behnoud Shojai



www.maniaakbari.com

IRAN

53 minutes

Directed by:
Producer:

MANIA AKBARI
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Synopsis:

30 minutes to 6 am in October 2009, a minor, Behnoud Shojaei, was executed in Iran after being found guilty of hitting his friend in a mass quarrel with a fatal knife blow. His sentence caused a great deal of controversy in the country, since by law the decision to execute Behnoud had to be taken by the mother of the victim. Drawing on this event as the basis of her documentary, Mania Akbari interviews a series of men and women in order to highlight and attempt to understand both forgiveness and its opposite, revenge. Unsurprisingly, there are no straight answers, but rather a process of self-discovery (for interviewees, filmmaker and viewers) as the questions explore the limits of these two diametrically opposed notions. Questioning to what extent this act of punishment represents justice or simply a perpetuation of violence, Akbari intersperses the interviews with fragments of films made by key figures in the history of Iranian cinema that focus on violence, revenge and death. Films such as Roozhaye Bi Taghvim by Mehrdad Oskouei, Shahr-E-Ziba by Asghar Farhadi, Gavaznha by Masoud Kimiai, Gheisar by Masoud Kimiai and Ganje Qarun by Syamak Yasemi. Many, if not all, of these extracts show the importance and strength of the family in Iran, as origin and perpetrator of this kind of revenge. Tellingly, when one of the interviewees strongly condemns the mother who does not pardon the kid, another, a very young woman, wonders what kind of pressures her family may have exerted on her. By juxtaposing images of these household Iranian films with interviewees' testimonies (some derived from personal experience, others merely speculative), Akbari draws attention to how we understand, and how art (here specifically cinema) functions as a representation of society. Since these films depict a society in which violence and revenge are deeply engrained, to what extent are they critical or implicated; do they interrogate or simply create a spectacle? If the latter, do they simply perpetuate the problem? Filmed against Akbari's own photographic work in Akbari's studio, the interviewees range from her own son, a student, to a filmmaker, art collector, architect, butler, housewife, psychotherapist, sociologist, graphic Designer, lawyer, painter, linguist and film critic. None of these people are introduced or given an identity until the very end of the film, when the credits include a photograph alongside their names and job descriptions. This anonymity is crucial, as it puts the focus on the issues being discussed – the details of Behnoud's case only become apparent as the film proceeds. Moreover, without 'experts' to offer some sort of guidance (a staple of talking heads documentaries), the viewer also gets caught in a game of guessing about respondents and their motives, creating a (necessarily) more complicated process of identification and/or rejection. This finely judged disorientation is further enhanced by the form of the film itself. With no introduction to the participants, the viewer is confronted at first with what feels like a machine gun-like montage of sentences from their testimonies. Edited together in random order, it's only afterwards that each individual is permitted to develop their own point of view. It's a formal strategy that highlights the problematic nature of any judgement based on a swift assessment. 30 Minutes to 6 AM clear aim is to be as objective and inclusive as possible - even if the filmmaker is openly opposed to violence – clearly signalled by the variety of people interviewed, in terms of profession, gender and age. Yet perhaps the most interesting point raised in Akbari's film is also the elephant in the room: how our sense of grief, guilt, humility, social responsibility and violence differs greatly in the shift from an individual experience to the collective. It is therefore no coincidence that these interviews are conducted with a group of people, who (not always talking from personal experience) are participating as individuals in a collective debate on what is at the end of the day an individual's isolated decision. The upshot is a questioning of the deeply problematic notion of the collective.

by Mar Diestro Dopide



Behnood Shojaee (17)
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