

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

We Are Many

Evie Sullivan · Thursday, November 26th, 2015

February 15, 2003. The British filmmaker Amir Amirani was in Berlin attending a workshop when he got word of a global peace demonstration at the Brandenburg Gate. He left the campus and joined the demonstrators. Returning to London a few days later, Amirani learned that on this day of protests across the world, thirty million people in nearly eight hundred cities expressed opposition to the imminent Iraq War. It was an historic moment, and Amirani, who has worked for the BBC as a documentarian for over ten years, decided to make a film about this event, but as an independent.

In the years that followed, Amirani developed the outline for *We Were Many*, a film that tells the remarkable, inside story behind the demonstrations. He chronicled the political events that led to the Iraq War, and its aftermath, which changed the world as we knew it. He began by interviewing demonstration participants, filming the testimony of a unique cast of direct participants, organizers, activists, converts, high-profile figures, including Danny Glover, actor Mark Rylance, film director Ken Loach, Prof. Noam Chomsky, musicians Brian Eno and Damon Albarn, writer and Vietnam vet Ron Kovic (author of 'Born on the 4th of July'), Rev. Jesse Jackson, Richard Branson, and Colin Powell's former Chief of Staff, Col. Lawrence Wilkerson.

Filming in seven countries – Italy, Spain, Egypt, Sweden, Australia, UK, and the USA, Amirani recorded extraordinary testimony from activists in Egypt which revealed how, on the eve of the invasion of Iraq, the global anti-war protests inspired those in Tahrir Square to engage in the massive democratic movement that ultimately led to the Arab Spring. In the UK, the government was defeated in 2013 over the proposed invasion of Syria, an historic event that might not have transpired without the legacy of those demonstrations a decade ago.

Cultural Weekly contributor Evie Sullivan sat down with the filmmaker for an interview on the difficulties of bringing awareness about the "Second Superpower," as the New York Times called the thirty million demonstrators, to the screen.

ES: Was there a decisive moment when you knew you had to document this historic event?

Amir Armirani: There was a moment. I was working at the BBC on a radio program or such and I couldn't stop thinking about the peace rally. I said to myself: 'Wait a moment! That was probably the biggest demonstration in history and I was in it!' That was the moment I knew I had to tell this story! When I started my interviews in April of 2006, I understood I was on to something because of how passionately these people talked about the peace rally. Between 2006 and 2009, I developed the story and pieced it together. I knew I had to do it. You don't often get a chance to do

a movie about something so historic and epic – a lot of people remember where they were on that day!

ES: How did you decide what needed to be in the movie and what could be left out?

Amir Amirani: The interviews that made it into the movie had to be connected by this one day: interviewees had to either be organizers, been a part of the demonstration, or, in terms of politicians, they had to have made a transition based on it. Then I met people like Tim Goodrich, the Air Force vet who is one of the founders of “Iraq Vets Against The War,” and women of “Code Pink,” a grassroots organization that is working to end U.S. wars and militarism, and support peace and human rights initiatives. The list is endless; so many groups and organizations were involved in the demonstration. Many are in the movie.



Amir Amirani, right, with actor and activist Danny Glover

ES: All these demonstrations didn't stop the war. Did thirty million people march in vain?

Amir Amirani: No, not at all. We want to live in a world where there is no war. Human nature might not allow that, but one has to move in that direction. The history of most interventions is a terrible one and Iraq is one of the worst. Actually, two weeks ago, Tony Blair gave an interview to CNN and out of his own mouth came the words: “Those of us who took the decision to go to war in 2003 cannot be absolved of responsibility for what's happening now with ISIS.” And you know what? I think he's not right about many things in life, but that feels right! There was a vote in Parliament on August 30, 2013, on attacking Syria. The vote was defeated. I was watching it on the news, live, and I said to myself, ‘wait a minute, the anti-war people are planning a “Hands Off Syria” demonstration in two days! This is not going to be an anti-war but a victory march!’ I got my crew together and we filmed it. That gave me the bookends for my movie.

ES: There is a scene in the movie where George Bush is in a sketch, looking for “weapons of mass destruction,” but he can't find anything. This is one of the most cynical scenes I've ever seen. Hundred thousands of people died because of his actions and he makes fun of it! Do you want to comment on it?

Amir Amirani: Most people are totally shocked by that scene because they have never seen it. But some people say, ‘Amir, that was at the Correspondents' Dinner and it's taken as a joke.’ I answer them: ‘At those kind of dinners you normally make fun of yourself, or a comedian is roasting you. But you don't make fun of this kind of thing. That wasn't a roast, he wasn't roasting himself, he was giving a talk.’ It says a lot about his mindset and the climate of the time that he could do that in front of the Washington Press Corps – and they laughed! There was no accountability. Nothing.

WE ARE MANY

110 min. – Documentary, Great Britain

(Eligible for voting into Academy Awards Category DOCUMENTARY)

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