



a film by justin mashouf

WARRING F A C T I O N S

.synopsis.

As forces in American government and media have fueled the feeling of an unavoidable war with Iran, *Warring Factions* is a call to (dis)arms. An American born Iranian breakdancer finds cultural awakening by exploring his multi-ethnic roots. Faced with dual nationality in two conflicting countries, he travels to Iran to both explore the political issues first hand and discover his cultural identity with a group of Iranian b-boys. By combining documentary and studio reenactments, *Warring Factions* looks at the blurring of world borders and the looming threat of another war in the Middle East.

Justin Mashouf, an Iranian-American, analyzes his identities by exploring the threads of his life as a Muslim, a competitive bboy, and an Iranian national in the United States. His plans to travel to Iran are preceded by a breakdance competition and a visit to a military air show, which initiates his exploration into the perceived threat of Iran and the standoff between the two nations.

A discussion on memories of 9/11 sparks a sequence recounting the aftermath of the attacks from Justin's high school humanities class. The chaotic dialogue of the classroom as to who the enemy is begins to shrink Justin into his seat where he feels transformed into "the enemy." This conflict triggers Justin's reassessment of his identity and challenges his position in society.

Justin's journey to Iran begins with his father's instructions of switching his passports in Paris for his connecting flight to Tehran. Upon landing, the film takes a look at life in Tehran, accompanied by Justin and his family. Conversations with ordinary Iranians reveal people's perceptions of what Americans think of them. Mashouf meets with Hossein "Battle" and his crew of Iranian b-boys who invite Justin to team up with them in a competition against a rival city. Justin acts as an addition to the all star team from Tehran who goes head to head against a team from Mashad.

The film moves onto an exposé of the traditional Persian martial art of Varzesh Bastani. Mashouf visits multiple training centers in Tehran learning the epic history of his Iranian roots through the tradition of Zurkhaneh and its connection to the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. Justin converses with his fellow b-boys about their thoughts on the threat of the US attacking their country. Their dialogue consists of the multiple concerns Americans have regarding the perceived threat and Iranian concerns that the US is plotting an invasion of Iran. This conversation reveals the large discrepancy of understanding and communication between the two societies.

Upon Justin's return to the US, he is detained by Homeland Security where he is questioned regarding his time in Iran and the extent of his "paramilitary" Zurkhaneh training leaving him feeling threatened by his fellow Americans. His release from customs is followed by a phone call to Iran to tell his family about the confiscation of his tapes and the possible derailing of his whole project.

Justin's return to Arizona after the incident yields the return of his tapes 5 weeks after their confiscation. Mashouf seeks the advice of his family in the wake of being suspected of terrorism and subject to visits from US intelligence agencies. His experience inspires his moment of clarity regarding the role of the individual in improving the world.

.credits.

Director Justin Mashouf
Executive Producer Neda Mashouf
Iran Unit Producer Omid Mashouf

Camera Operators

Gholamreza Valadkhani
Randall French
JorDan Fuller
Katie Harris
Hazem Shahin
Mohammad R Eslamlou
Mahdi Bagheri
Allen Menasco
Justin Stern
Shiraz Jafri

Featuring

Tim Robles Sekyu Kim Lexi Obara
Mahdi Pessaraki Enrinque Bribiesca Mellow Drama Crew
Hosain Bagheri Jeff Enos Maryam Marwa
Bijan Mashouf Houshang Mashouf Omid Mashouf
Mehregan Vosough Hossein "Battle" Bakhshi Akbar Mohammadi
Gholamreza Hamidi Amir-Ali Nafisi Saed Mohammadpour
Nasser Mohammadpour Farid Gorgin Azizolah Fattahi
Carolann Mashouf

Studio Scenes

Teacher	Ruth Rickman
Rachel	Dana DiRado
Brian	Jason Bush
Patrick	Aaron Sosa
Girl in class 1	Heather Grace Hancock
Girl in class 2	Amanda Apodaca
Girl in class 3	Lauren Farrell
Homeland Security Agent	David Morden

Studio Crew

Cinematographer	Randall French
Art Director	JorDan Fuller
Sound Mixer	Michaela Pentacoff
Boom Operator	Hank Knaack Justyn Buske
Production Assistants	Katie Harris Fadel Abul Rahi

Still Photographer	Lexi Obara
Editing	Justin Mashouf
Sound Editing	Michaela Pentacoff Adam Valencia
Colorist	Bob Demers
Music	Ian Sugarman
Translation	Hossein Abbaszadegan Bijan Mashouf Omid Kazemi
Cover Art	Marco Oliva
DVD Authoring	Thomas Madrid

Additional Funding
Gillette Production Grant
Hanson Film Institute
Jewish Studies Baylor University

Production/Post Production facilities provided by
The University of Arizona School of Media Arts

.about the director.

Justin Mashouf was born in Pennsylvania in 1984 and moved to Tucson, AZ at age 9. He graduated from the University of Arizona in 2008, where he studied Media Arts in the BFA production program. Outside of his university projects, Mashouf worked extensively on independent films as well as Iranian broadcast projects. In early 2007 he produced and co-directed *The Runners*, a 20-minute short narrative film about a Mexican immigrant who marries an American woman and tries his hand in the human trafficking business. The film was selected at various film festivals in the southwest including the Lonestar International Film Festival.

Mashouf began shooting *Warring Factions* in April of 2007 as a feature length film project sponsored by the University of Arizona. He traveled to Iran for 5 weeks to shoot and on his return, was detained by American Homeland Security and his footage was confiscated for review. After a follow up interview with the FBI, Mashouf's tapes were returned and his was able to complete the film. Mashouf and his family live in Los Angeles, where he works as a freelance editor and producer.

.filmography.

Director/Producer

Warring Factions	(2008) 78 min.
The Runners	(2007) 20 min.
Elephant Man	(2006) 10 min.
2 Men From Iraq	(2006) 8 min.

.production notes.

Warring Factions was a project shot over one year starting in April 2007 while Justin was a Junior at the University of Arizona. When making his plans for his senior thesis, Mashouf decided to shoot a feature length documentary based on his Junior film which now serves as the first studio sequence in the film. The plan was to shoot two more studio sequences and gather vérité footage of his life in the US before leaving to shoot in Iran December of 2007. Using equipment from the U of A, Justin traveled to Tehran for 5 weeks. Justin's family in Iran became full time staff for the project. He stayed in his uncle's Tehran apartment and his cousin Omid became a dedicated producer to the project. After finding veteran camera operator Gholamreza Valadkhani, the crew worked 5-6 days a week for 5 weeks. Over the course of filming in Iran, Mashouf shot 15 hours of footage.

On his return trip to the US, Mashouf was detained by Homeland Security in Atlanta International Airport. Justin's hard drive, mobile phone, electronic media, and written documents were backed up and became the subject of questioning. At the conclusion of the ordeal, all the footage shot in Iran was confiscated for review.

Upon his return to Arizona, Justin's story spread quickly throughout his professors in the College of Media Arts, who tried to speak to various representatives of Homeland Security to release Justin's footage. 5 weeks later, University of Arizona attorney, Susan Ferrell, was able to locate the tapes and speak to agents about returning the footage, which was now in the custody of the FBI. After meeting with the FBI regarding his suspected involvement in various militant groups and the contents of the footage, the tapes were returned to him.

.technical notes.

Warring Factions was shot on the Panasonic DVX100B in 24p.

All audio was recorded using the Seinheiser ME66 which was mounted onto the camera during the vérité shooting.

The film was edited by J Mashouf in the College of Media Arts, on Final Cut Pro over the course of 7 months completed in May 2008.

Sound editing and mixing was done using Logic by Michaela Pentacoff and Adam Valencia in the Mix to Pix suite at the Advanced Editing Suites of the UA College of Media Arts.

Color grading was performed using Color by Bob Demers at the AES in the UA College of Media Arts.

DVD screener authoring was done at Mixtape Studios by Thomas Madrid.

Running time: 78 minutes

Aspect Ratio: 4:3

.Episode with Homeland Security- An account from J Mashouf.

بسم تعالی

1/26/08

On 1/13/08 I was exiting Air France 0388 from Paris to Atlanta at 3:45pm. Upon exiting the aircraft into the jet way I noticed that there were two homeland security officers in uniform checking passports. I found this odd considering my last international flight had no such passport check before the customs line. One of the officers was Officer James Thompson and I never noticed the name tag on the other officer who was a medium height African American man. After looking at my passport Officer Thompson looked over to the other officer and told me to follow them into an elevator which went directly to the customs baggage claim area. Both officers stopped checking passports and accompanied me in the elevator. During this time my passport stayed in the hands of Thompson. The other officer inquired as to what the contents of my metal case carry on was.

“A camera. I'm a film student.”

He followed that response with “Oh yea? Have you ever seen that movie *The Kingdom*” in a semi threatening tone.

I replied, “No.”

I was instructed to collect my luggage from the carousel and bring it to a table and to include all of my carry on and items on my person. This area was in plain view of the baggage carousels and a general holding area for those being singled out by customs. I asked Thompson if there was anyway I could make my connecting flight to Tucson in an hour and he said that I wouldn't be making my plane.

“Can I make a phone call to my folks to tell them I won't be making my flight.”

“We'll see,” he said.

The two officers began removing the contents of my bags and separating clothing from papers and any electronic and optical media.

The other officer asked me a question as he opened the camera case. “What religion are you?”

“I'm a Muslim,” I said.

“Did you go to any religious schools when you were there?”

I sarcastically replied “Of course.”

“Oh boy,” he sighed. After this comment the officer was called away by another officer and I never saw him again.

My luggage was all taken out and searched by Officer Thompson who was now wearing latex gloves while sorting through my belongings. After sorting my things into three main piles, Officer Thompson instructed me to pack up my belongings in the pile containing clothing. The other two piles consisted of CDs, DVDs, my laptop, cell phone, Ipod, and digital still camera. The other pile consisted of my magazines, papers, notebooks, and film documents. Officer Thompson collected both piles with difficulty and carried them to another area in which I never saw.

I was made to wait in a general holding area where others were being singled out from the customs line. I sat there for about two hours while Officer Thompson, backed up data and made photo copies. About 45 minutes into my waiting I asked another Homeland Security Agent whether I could use a bathroom or not. A blank face fell on this agent.

“Let me check,” he said, I wondered how many people were denied this request and hope I wasn't one of them. A few minutes of waiting inspired me to display to this man that I had a plastic water bottle and I was ready to use it. I got his attention and shook the bottle over my head.

“Any word yet on the potty break?”

After checking with my holding officer who was in an undisclosed location at the time the other agent instructed me to use the bathroom within the customs area. I was given a foot long red plastic square

with the words "BATHROOM PASS" on it to take with me to the lavatory.

I returned to the general holding area where I made small talk with a man from Brazil and another man from Iran. When talking with the Iranian man we both silently acknowledged the routine matter of our situation as Iranians returning to the US even though mine was a bit exceptional. After another half an hour of waiting Officer Thompson returned with all of my other belongings and a binder filled with xeroxed copies of my documents.

We moved into a small disorganized office with two desks with computers and a few chairs. I sat across from Thompson's desk.

"Now we have a lot of questions," he said. "But before we get started do you have any questions?"

"No," I said in my best poker face.

"Most people ask us why they are here."

"I guess that's a good question," I replied.

"Our other departments view travel histories, backgrounds, occupations and then tell us who we should be talking to. What we do is interview and do an initial evaluation. So let's get started. First of all what were you doing in Iran?"

"I was there to visit family and work on my documentary film."

"You said you were staying in Tehran. Did you go anywhere else?"

"I went to Qom which is about an hour away," I said preparing for the onslaught of new questions.

"What did you do there?" He said this while starting a new page in his notebook made for my file.

"I was there to visit a religious shrine and do some shopping. I can tell you what I bought there but you already saw all of it."

"You didn't visit any training camps while you were there?"

"No, nor did I see any 'training camps.' I didn't go to Pakistan."

He looked at me and saw that I was visibly offended of the notion of going to the kinds of terrorist training camps shown on television at any mention of Al Qaeda.

"Are you working with the Iranian government in any capacity? Did you meet anyone in high levels of the Iranian government?"

"No."

"Who is Alexander Kluge?"

"Who?"

"Alexander Kluge. We found his name in your things."

"Where in my things?"

"In your notebook. Who is he?" He said this while showing me the copy of the pages in my notebook.

"You see, I'm a filmmaker and I use that notebook to write down ideas. So anything you see in there might not make any sense to you. Alexander Kluge is the name of a filmmaker that one of my professors recommended."

"Ok. But now you see how this is going to work."

"This is going to take forever," I whined.

"What is 'Reenact a martyr video'?"

Oh God. That doesn't look good I thought. I started to explain the entry in my note book.

"That was an idea for the film that I scrapped. Do you know what a martyr video is?"

"No," he said, waiting to see how I was going to get myself out of this.

"Before most suicide bombings, the bomber makes a video of himself saying his goodbyes and stating his reasons for doing the bombing. They are generally shot really poorly on VHS cameras with some kind of Islamic banner behind them. I thought it would be an interesting and provocative aesthetic to shoot some kind of confessional scene using the same kind of style."

He clearly didn't understand half of what I said but dismissed the original inclination he had about the notebook entry.

"Who did you stay with in Iran?"

"My uncle."

"What's his name and where does he live?"

"Houshang Mashouf, Sarhang Sakhai and Hafez St. Building 60 Apt #9"

"How old is he? Has he ever been to the US?"

"He's 68 I think. He's never been to the US."

"Why not?"

"He can't get a visa. He tried for a few years but could only get a visa to Canada so everyone went there to visit him. I never met him until I went to Iran in 2006."

"I'm sorry to hear about that."

"I'm surprised you wouldn't know that it is very hard for Iranians to get visas to the US."

"Let me tell you something. We don't know very much. We are given something called 'cultural sensitivity training.' It's actually a packet about this big." He took his thumb and forefinger and displayed the size of the packet, which from how wide his fingers were was probably around 20 pages. He continued, "I know that when I handle your Koran, that I shouldn't put anything else on top of it and that if I'm sitting with my legs crossed, I shouldn't face the sole of my foot towards you."

"That's unfortunate, because if you knew a little more you may be able to understand what is normal behavior and what is suspicious... which is your job."

"So what's in the film?" He asked obviously changing the subject.

"A lot of stuff. Me with my family, me break dancing with kids in Iran, some footage from the Zurkhoone, which is a traditional exercise or martial art."

"It says here you went to a military base."

"Yes but I only went to work out. You know how military bases have gyms that guests can come work out? That's what I did."

"Where was it?"

"I have no idea. It was in Tehran. We went there at night."

"You understand how this could be flipped on you?" He said.

"I don't understand. Because I went to a military base?"

"You went to a military base and received para military training."

I laughed to myself at how ridiculous that sounded and then feared the actual notion of that being made into a case.

"Oh God. Are you serious?"

"You should be glad that you have me as your detaining officer. Most of these guys would really hate you. You would not be going home."

"Well I am glad that you wouldn't flip this on me."

"Most of the reports I have written on people have been ok but a few have been bad. A few people ..., " he paused remembering those cases, "Let's just say they didn't go home."

Officer Thompson then asked me about every name that was associated with my papers asking me the ages, locations, and education levels of each in addition to whether any of them had ever been in the US or wanted to come to the US. The languages I speak eventually came up in the interview.

"Would you ever consider doing this?" he said, meaning working for Homeland Security.

"Never." I said confidently.

"Not even if they paid you \$80,000 a year."

"They could never pay me enough to work for them."

"You don't really like the government do you?"

"Can you tell?" After I said this an awkward silence fell in the room. "How much longer is this gonna take and where am I gonna sleep in here?"

"How long does it take to fast forward through each of those tapes?"

"Probably about 5 minutes."

"You said there was 15 so times that by 15 minutes. I'll be back." He stood up and left the office in the

direction that he left before.

He returned in 5 minutes with a grim face. "I got some bad news for you. I know I told you that we were going to review the footage here but my supervisor is not having it. I'm sorry. He really thinks there is more to this."

I looked at him with the attempt to express how angry I was without making sound.

"I know your pissed," he said in consolation. "If you want to punch a hole in the wall I won't say anything."

"Putting a hole in the wall won't help me keep my tapes. I know I should probably call a lawyer but I want to ask you that if I start making noise about wanting a lawyer will it help me keep the tapes?"

"You don't want to do that. Your case is not closed. Like I said before, your whole case can be flipped against you, easily. You might never get them back." That statement chilled me to the bone.

"Well you may just be saying that to shut me up but it seems like your giving me sincere advice."

"I am," he said.

Officer Thompson opened his desk drawer to find a plastic seizure bag with a zip top and various lines and numbers.

"This is a seizure bag. Most things that are put in these are destroyed but I'm writing here that these are being held for review. Okay?" He put the tapes into the bag and made me sign a chain of custody receipt releasing the tapes to him.

"These will stay in your hands?"

"No, but whenever the custody changes you should be notified at the number you leave on the form"

Officer Thompson separated the receipt from it's white page and gave me the yellow carbon copy page.

I was released along with both of my passports at 10:30 pm.

.screenings.

Filmstock Film Festival - Saturday, Nov 15, 2009
Luton, United Kingdom

Noor Film Festival - Saturday, May 2, 2009
Fine Arts Theater, Beverly Hills, CA

NYU Shuruq Festival - Wednesday, March 25, 2009
New York University, New York, NY

.press.

“Justin Mashouf, a senior at the University of Arizona, traveled to Iran this winter to film footage showing the positive side of Iran. He had no trouble with officialdom in Iran, but he hit a brick wall on returning home to the United States.

Mashouf, 22, said he went to Iran to get footage for a film he hoped would portray Iran in a positive light, humanizing Iranians to the outside world, forcing viewers to think critically, and fighting the negativity in the world.”
-Grace Nasri, *Iran Times*

“University of Arizona senior Justin Mashouf has taken a cinematic approach to the adversity he's encountered as an Iranian-American. In his film, *Warring Factions*, Mashouf addresses issues surrounding how he balances the two cultures he represents in light of a post Sept. 11 world. Born in the United States, Mashouf has only spent close to two months of his life in Iran.

The first trip he took to Iran was with his father as a tourist. The second, he took as a filmmaker, returning with 33 hours of film representing a side of Iran the world doesn't generally see, he said.”
-Shannon Daily, *Baylor Lariat*

“After being held and questioned by the department for more than five hours in Atlanta, without the use of his cell phone, Mashouf was sent home to Tucson a day later without any of the footage he had spent five weeks in Iran collecting for his senior project...

Then he made a call to Susan Ferrell, an attorney with the Associated Students of the University of Arizona's Legal Services, who changed everything.

Homeland Security, and later the FBI, had possession of Mashouf's video tapes for a month until Ferrell was able to get through to the agent who held the tapes and get the footage back in the hands of its owner.

"This could have taken a year for me to get my footage back," Mashouf said. "I attribute me getting my tapes back so much faster because of (Ferrell)."
-Aly Van Dyke, *Daily Wildcat*

"While Best Documentary Nominee “*Warring Factions*” did not win any awards, it was an intelligent and well-filmed piece directed by Iranian American Justin Mashouf, a young Muslim of mixed race (Iranian father/American mother). Justin documents his journey to Iran as he hooks up with family and bonds with a group of Iranian b-boys. An interesting parallel to the break-dancing scenes are his workouts at a zurkhaneh (house of strength), practicing the ancient Persian martial arts tradition of varzesh bastani (sport of the ancients), which dates back to pre-Islamic times and combines warrior style physical training with Sufi ideals. Thoughtful, imaginative and open, Justin seems to represent the new generation of Muslims in the Middle East and U.S. that balance Islamic culture with hip, contemporary lifestyles.”
- Susanna Whitmore, *The Levantine Press*, May 5 2009

"*Warring Factions* a new documentary film by Justin Mashouf, explores an unusual link between American and modern Iranian culture - the underground b-boy scene. In it, we see a reminder of the human connection that is often lost in politics."
- Hena Ashraf, *altnuslim*, April 17, 2009