



Counting Tiles (Bimchi w B'idd) **بمشي وبعد**

Content

In February 2016, a group of clowns travel to the Greek island of Lesbos on a mission to bring laughter to the waves of refugees crossing the sea to escape from war and enter Europe. Unwittingly, the clowns find themselves greeted with closed gates witnessing the effects of new policies enacted by the European Union towards the refugees.

Cynthia, the sister of one of the clowns, joins them on their journey which slowly becomes a reflection on the sisters' own tale of displacement during the Lebanese civil war.

Moments of humor and joyful laughter bring the clowns back to their original mission, ironically playing with reality to a point where the lines between their clown personalities and their real selves are blurred.

Credits

Lebanon/Germany 2018, 87 min, Arabic with English subtitles

Writer	Cynthia Choucair
Director	Cynthia Choucair
Producers	Dimitri Khodr & Cynthia Choucair
co-produced by	Lara Abou Saifan, Nicola Sangs, Farah Kassem
Camera	Joelle Abou Chabké
Editor	Farah Kassem
Sound Design	Victor Bresse
Recipient of	AFI/Pixelmob post-production support
Characters	Sabine Choucair, Tamara Palmer, Kolleen Kintz, Jan Damm, Jean-Sébastien López



Film-maker Cynthia Choucair

Born in Beirut in 1975, Cynthia Choucair graduated from ALBA in 1998 and obtained a maîtrise in film directing from Ilesav-USJ in 2002. For more than 10 years, she has worked as an editor, director and producer on Lebanese short films and documentaries.

In 2007 she established her own production house, Road2Films, where she produces documentaries, fiction films and cultural TV programs for local, Arab and European television networks.

Cynthia Choucair is a member of the Lebanese Cultural Association Beirut DC.

Filmography

El Haouch, fiction, 14' 1998
Anonymes, experimental, 5' 1998
Des Choux et des Chous?, fiction, 8' 2000
Pictures of Life, experimental, 6' 2000
Al Kursi, fiction, 22' 2002
Elie Fairuz, documentary, 14' 2003
Safar, documentary, 28' 2003
Powerless, documentary, 52' 2012
Counting Tiles, documentary, 87' 2018

Director's Note

In October 2015 my sister Sabine went to Lesbos, as part of a group of clowns with the organization Clowns Without Borders to perform for refugees who were making the dangerous journey across the sea to Europe. Media organizations from all over the world were covering the migration and I was overwhelmed by the coverage. I needed to see it first hand to understand.

In February 2016 I followed my sister when she returned to Lesbos. After I arrived, all of my plans changed. We were denied access to all of the refugee camps.

We ended up being in the middle of nowhere, unsure of what we were even waiting for. I felt as if I was a refugee myself, my anxieties about war came back and I wanted to return home. But going back home meant returning to the memories of war and of our family being displaced from one place to another.

All of these memories swirled in my head while I was filming the clowns waiting, and wondering...

When I was two years-old, my parents fled the civil war in Lebanon and went to Athens. Today, 40 years later, history is repeating itself, with different people and myself in that same place looking at it from a different perspective. (Cynthia Choucair)



Background Information

The idea for the film *Counting Tiles* came up when Sabine, the director's sister and a professional clown, was at the Greek island of Lesbos in October 2015 as part of the Clowns Without Borders. By that time, according to publications by the European Union, an average of 7.000 refugees arrived at Lesbos from Turkey every day. What was called the refugee crisis was covered by media from all over the world. Countless volunteers came to Lesbos and other places of arrival inside the EU to help welcoming the refugees.

On November 29th, 2015 the EU and Turkey implemented the Joint Action Plan which's main aim is to prevent migration flows to the EU.

When Cynthia Choucair and her film-team, together with a group from the Clowns Without Borders, arrived in Lesbos in February 2016 the situation was completely different from October 2015: the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, had started its Operation Poseidon to strengthen the surveillance of the Greek maritime borders which leads to sight of huge vessels at the horizon and abandoned coasts. Those refugees who made it to Lesbos were imprisoned in Moria Registration Camp, unauthorized assistance to refugees was now punished and bulldozers had cleaned the beaches and piled up the live jackets into huge piles of rubbish.

On the mec film website you find information on the sites of the film, on the new EU legislation, as well as on Clowns Without Bordes and the protagonists of *Counting Tiles*.

The Characters of the Film

The main character of the film is the group of clowns consisting of Sabine Choucair from Lebanon and Kolleen Kintz, Jan Damm and the logistician Tamara Palmer from the United States. Along the way we meet Jean-Sebastien Lopez who decides to join the clowns on their trip and have a closer look to what the media has been propagating during the refugee influx on the Greek islands.

Sabine is a Lebanese clown and storyteller, certified in social therapy and performing arts. She has been clowning around the world with her group Clown Me In and Clowns without Borders for the past 10 years. She initiated and was the team leader of the first trip to Lesbos with CWB in October 2015. Sabine's presence during the Lesbos trip is shaped by a an empathetic energy and motivation. Even though the group of clowns is faced with challenges and difficulties from the very beginning, she mostly resists frustration. Yet, the narrative layer of the film revealed in a conversation with her sister turns the trip to a highly personal one of remembrance. In order to survive the displacement, Sabine the child used to thrive in the company of two imaginary friends, Hadi and Madi: An unconscious reaction to her stolen childhood.



Kolleen is an American clown, photographer and musician. She joined the Clowns Without Borders team in 2011, and performed in Indonesia and Haiti. Joining the Lesvos mission was an opportunity to connect with families in need of empathy as they navigated unimaginable challenges. Her presence in the film is verbally very subtle, and is mostly expressed through her clown Character. She is the only one to maintain her clownish attitude throughout the journey. Her presence highlights the irony of the clowns trying to break through the bureaucratic red tape.

Jan is an American clown, juggler, and circus creator. He has traveled on relief missions with Clowns Without Borders to Haiti, Indonesia, Lebanon, and beyond. It is through Jan's frustration that the spectator gets to understand the limitations faced by the clowns. He is the only character to reveal the presence of the camera by addressing it directly and therefore questioning the functionality of the medium in this context.

Tamara is not a professional clown herself but an exveteran. Joining CWB, she found a space where her input is highly appreciated and regarded as meaningful. Coming from a farmer family, she ended up joining the American army in order to finance her higher education. This resulted in her being sent to Iraq, serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom. By volunteering with the clowns on their mission as the project logistician, Tamara tries to make up for the atrocities she witnessed during the Iraq war.

Sebastien is a French/Belgian scriptwriter and director. He saw a viral video made by AJ+ covering the performances of CWB on Lesvos in 2015. He was very much moved by the joy and the laughter resulting from the refugees' interaction with the clowns, got in touch with Sabine, and decided to join the clowns on their second mission to Lesvos. Being the only European among the group, Sebastien's presence and critical thinking allows us to reflect on Europe's refugee politics. It also brings to the front a point of view different from what the media is propagating to the world.

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