





About the Director

Born in Kuwait, to Sudanese parents, Rolla Tahir is a filmmaker and director of photography currently based in Toronto. She's lensed short, narrative and experimental films, which screened across Canada and internationally, including the UK, the States and Guatemala. Obsessed with the durability, longevity and spontaneity of the analog film medium, Rolla has worked with Super 8, 16mm and 35mm to explore the analog process and its possibilities. Her passion in film and cinematography stems from the need to bring narratives to life, work with visionary creatives and to understand and be understood. Rolla's upcoming film *Sira* will be screening at the 42nd Toronto International Film Festival.

Websites:

<https://www.smokingapples.ca/>

<https://vimeo.com/240313341>

Artist Statement

I started digitizing and archiving my family's home videos in 2015.

My family is a silent one. Since my experiences were primarily shaped in a bubble of silence, I am therefore unable to verbalise them and furthermore, recall them at all. There is a tendency, that I think is not exclusive to my family, but to my culture, to not dwell over hardship but to somehow sweep it under the proverbial carpet. I feel this to be out of self-preservation and most likely pride, which on the one hand allows us to persevere but on the other, hinders our understanding of how hardship shapes us.

Arabs are a people known for their oral tradition; through this work, and others I will embark upon, I hope to permeate my works with oral folklore and poetry so as to somehow preserve them. I, first, wanted to start with my own 'Sira', literally translated, means biography. In Arabic, however, the word carries a more profound, almost epic connotation as it is often associated with one of the most famous Siras in Arabic culture, that of Banu Hilal, a people exiled from Egypt to Tunis.

The main theme explored throughout this visual essay is that of memory, the memory that I have constructed versus that of my family's actual lived experience, which I have no recollection of.

The film starts in Kuwait, where I was born, and lived till I was two years old, when we were forced to evacuate due to the Gulf War. Through visuals and narration provided by my parents and older siblings, I recreate the journey out of Kuwait to Sudan and eventually to Egypt, where I grew up before moving to Canada. My memory of this period is based on photographs and videos of celebrations of birthdays and newborns. The evacuation during the War marked a major shift in this bliss that shaped each and everyone of us and dictated the rest of our lives.



Synopsis

Sira is an experimental essay that traces the exodus of a Sudanese family from Kuwait as a result of the Iraqi invasion. Excavated footage disrupt constructed memories as a mother recounts the evacuation, marring the bliss of her new family.

Year: 2018

Genre: Autobiography, Experimental

Shooting Format: 16mm, Super8, Video

Sira is produced as part of the MADVO Project, commissioned by the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto. The Project was funded by the Canada Council for the Arts and was supported by the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto.

The film consists from found footage from the Jacques Madvo collection of 16mm films, digitized home videos, and recently shot Super8 films by the director during family visits. Footage was collated and rephotographed using the Oxberry Camera Transfer System at the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto.

Footage was processed at Niagara Custom Lab and transferred at Frame Discreet.



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