

## **No more fear – Ende der Angst?**

### **First reflections of the political upheavals in North Africa in film**

On a Sunday at the end of June, hundreds of Islamist thugs (Salafists) stormed the “Africart Theatre” in the centre of Tunis. They smashed the glass doors and attacked visitors, in order to hinder the screening of the recent documentary of Nadia EL Fani. In the film with the title **Ni Allah, Ni Maître** (freely translated “No Master and No God” the director criticises the growing influence of Islamic regulations in the Tunisian everyday life (from the fasting requirement during Ramadan, to the ban on alcohol for Muslims and the discrimination of women). Three months before and immediately after the fall of the Tunisian dictator Ben Ali, she confronted people of different origins in front of running cameras with the demand for a secular Tunisian constitution and society free from any religious positioning. Amongst her interview partners were waiters and artists, young people on the beach and political activists. She also filmed during demonstrations and events, where people argued about this subject. The pictures give fascinating insights how active and controversial one of the main problems during the democratisation of the North African societies is discussed locally. For some this is already too much freedom of thought in today’s Tunisia. After six Islamists were arrested because of the attack on the Movie Theatre in Tunis, two days later supporters tried to storm the court building. They were prevented doing so only by the use of tear gas, whereby there were 21 further arrests.

In order to calm the heated mood down Nadia El Fani selected the new title **Laïcité Inch’allah** (freely translated: “Secularism for God’s sake” for her film.

Despite this she still received death threats, which were partly disseminated via Facebook, while in Tunisia, people from the areas of film and culture declared their solidarity with her in “The call for the defence of the freedom of opinion”.

The example shows how controversial politically committed films are, also in the post-revolutionary Tunisia and the risks directors take who clearly position themselves politically.

These are enough reasons for FilmInitiativ to invite Nadia EL Fani to Cologne to discuss with her the political development in Tunisia in general and the disputes around her film in particular. (Saturday, 8<sup>th</sup> October, 19.30h)

We use this occasion to show also the feature film **Bedwin Hacker** in Cologne for the first time (Saturday, 8<sup>th</sup> October, 21.30h, in presence of the director). This political thriller from Tunisia, about a computer hacker, who transmitted from a remote oasis via satellite political messages into TV programs, was in 2003 presented at a series of international film festivals – et al at the FESPACO in Ouagadougou. The film proves retrospectively as almost prophetic considering the relevance Internet, Facebook and mobile phones attained for the movement in North Africa.

A recurrent message from protagonists in the recent films from North Africa is that with the fall of the dictators in Tunisia and Egypt “the fear” to stand up against injustice vanished and gave way to the campaign for a free society. The Tunisian documentary **No more fear** refers to these important changes already in the title. By the example of a human rights lawyer, a journalist, a blogger and a person with mental health issues the film conveys impressively what liberation it presents for many Tunisians no longer to be spied on or to be persecuted because of their political position after decades of dictatorship. (Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> October, 19.30h)

FilmInitiativ tries, following the screening, to connect the blogger Lina Ben Mhenni by Skype live from Tunisia.

For the discussion of the recent developments representatives of the Tunisian community of Cologne – from the association “Helfft Tunesien e.V. “ - are invited.

The short film **Yasmine et la revolution** by Karin Albou, which is shown as a supporting film, displays how women are encouraged by the dynamic of the revolt to oppose the patriarchal dictation.

However the further development of the political upheaval in North Africa is still not foreseeable. Also after the fall of the dictators Ben Ali and Mubarak, their military and supporters in Tunisia and Egypt have power and influence. So in the last month, indeed thousands of demonstrators were prosecuted in summary proceedings, but not a single one of Mubarak's governors had to justify themselves in front of a court for the political killings, tortures and firing orders at unarmed demonstrators as yet (as of July 2011). When at the end of July, again Thousands stood up against the authoritarian power of the military and for a real democratisation of the society in the Tahrir Square, again groups of thugs emerged to drive apart the demonstrator with sticks and stones thrown from roofs, whereby they injured dozens and there were deaths.

Against this background it is impressive to see how film makers in Egypt reacted in film to the 18 days of continuous protest in the Tharir Square, which led to the fall of Mubarak. The episode film **18 Days** illustrates this impressively (Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 19.30h). It consists of 10 short films, which were made by independent directors on their own initiative and without a budget. The film reel had its world premiere in Cannes in May 2011 and triggered also a ferocious political debate. The two producers involved, Sherif Arafa and Marwan Hamed, were accused that they had filmed election spots for Mubarak still in 2005. The Egyptian film director Khaled El Hagar, already several times guest at the Africa-Festivals in Cologne, would have rather seen represented in Cannes "since the eighties active critical directors" and "young talents", that had found "so far no hearing and no promotion". Others, like Ahmad Abdalla, who in May 2011 was guest in Cologne and who contributed a part

to the Cannes film, defended the criticised producers by testifying that they actively participated in the protests at the Tharir Square and even did not withdraw during brutal police operations.

The active debates, which take place since the beginning of the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt, about the current filmmaking, are reflected in the program of this film series and the selection of the guests.

A special event with film screenings and panel discussions (Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 17.00h) focuses on the consequences of the war, which is taking place in Libya since the beginning of 2011 and which in the first six months has already forced more than a million people to flee, most of them to Tunisia (555.000) and Egypt (350.000).

The event will take place in cooperation with „Helft Tunesien e.V.“, an association of the Tunisian community of Cologne, which is amongst other things concerned with the support of the Lebanese war refugees. The association will offer more information and Tunisian food at their stand in the lobby of the Filmforum during the film series.

We hope for much interest from Cologne`s audience and the (North) African communities of the city.

FilmInitiativ Köln e.V., End of July 2011

*PS Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup> October at 11.00h a reading of the Libyan author Ibrahim Al-Koni from his book "Das Herrscherkleid" takes place as part of the literature series "Stimmen Afrikas" at the quare-Joest-Museum. An event of the Allerweltshaus in cooperation with the Heinrich-Barth-Gesellschaft.*