In Exile

Where law ceases, only humanity can prevail

a 73min documentary
by Tin Win Naing
Synopsis

After filming political footage, Myanmar filmmaker Tin Win Naing has to flee his country. Unsure whether he will ever be able to see his family again, he crosses the border illegally, entering Thailand. Upon his arrival, he is astonished to see how many of his fellow countrymen have escaped the disastrous economic situation in Myanmar, only to find themselves trapped on the other side of the border, working under conditions of modern slavery.

He decides to portray three Myanmar migrant workers in their struggle for survival. The award-winning filmmaker - a refugee amongst refugees - observes his compatriots in close and empathetic detail. *In Exile* takes us on a deeply felt journey into the hearts and minds of a people who have been tormented by Myanmar's system for decades and who are now mistreated in a new foreign home. In spite of this, however, they have emerged as fighters – fighters against despair.
Director's Note

Some years ago, all members of my video group were arrested. I was the only one who could escape. Not knowing where to go, I fled across the border to Thailand. There, I found the opposite of a safe place. When we began filming "In Exile", I had been in Thailand for two years. Alike many other Myanmar migrants and refugees, I had had to hide from the corrupt Thai police in the day and try to avoid Thai hooligans who beat up Myanmar migrants at night. However, during these dark times I gained an insight in and perspective on my country as well as my fellow landsmen from a different angle.

Our homeland was once not only considered to be the rice bowl of Southeast Asia but until recently promoted to us as such by our government. How can it be that many farmers from this supposedly prosperous country have left their homes to work in a foreign country? In the past few years my country's people have suffered greatly from many natural disasters. Restricted humanitarian aid and the ineptness of the regime has left most people with the dilemma of finding strategies for recovery on their own. As a filmmaker who has documented many of these situations, I have experienced that if at all, recovery happens only very slowly. But just how many people have actually left our country to seek greener pastures has stunned me.

Thailand is regarded by most Myanmar as the neighbouring green paradise, where freedom and liberty come as natural as the air you breathe. However, most of my Myanmar compatriots find themselves confronted with a situation in which their human- and labor rights are violated – again. The first night we got to our filming location, a Myanmar migrant was knifed in the fields. After that the landlord, whom everybody suspected to be the murderer, threatened us to not film in his fields. Myanmar workers are beaten and sexually assaulted every day.

It is my country's mismanagement which has made these people favour this situation over the dire life in our homeland. When I talked to them I was amazed how they could keep their spirits alive in such circumstances. It seemed that the ones who struggled the most, also had the biggest smiles. How can they gain the strength for this?

It is these thoughts that have guided my investigation of my countrymen's conditions as migrant workers in Thailand. In my career I have filmed my people in extreme situations - many times. However, through In Exile's protagonists as well as my own situation, I feel like I began to understand my country's situation more deeply this time. I want to show this situation from the perspective of a Myanmar.
Tin Win Naing began his filmmaking career in 1995 at a local Myanmar TV station. He became one of the first students of the pioneering film school YANGON FILM SCHOOL in 2005. In the following years he filmed many documentary films such as "In the Shadow of the Mountains" or "Into the Ring" which was awarded "Best Film" by Heinrich Boell Foundation in 2007.

Tin Win Naing continues to make many more short films with Yangon Film Services and acted as the lead cinematographer for the multiple award-winning feature-length documentary "Nargis: When Time Stopped Breathing" as well as the internationally distributed feature “The Monk”.

Besides his activities as a filmmaker, he is teaching cinematography at Yangon Film School, Myanmar.

Awards:

“Nargis – When Time Stopped Breathing”:
** FIPRESCI International Critics Award, Mumbai International Film Festival, 2012
** Special Mentioning Award, Film South Asia Festival, Nepal, 2011
** Special Mentioning Award, Section Regards Neufs, Visions du réel, International Filmfestival, Nyon, 2010
** Special Mentioning Award, Festival International du Film d’Environnement, Paris, 2010

“Into The Ring”:
** Short Documentary Award, Heinrich Boell Foundation, 2007
Director's Filmography (selection)

2016
Director & Cinematographer
In Exile (73min documentary)
Perennial Lens/Lokanat Productions, Germany/Myanmar

2015
Cinematographer
Missing (20min short documentary)
YFS Productions, Yangon, Myanmar

2014
Cinematographer
Yangon By Night (43min documentary)
YFS Productions, Yangon, Myanmar

2013
Director of Photography
The Monk (Feature)

Cinematographer
Stigmatize This! (25min short documentary)
YFS Production and UNAIDS, Chin State, Myanmar

Cinematographer
Staircase (5min short experimental film)
FAMU student project, Yangon, Myanmar and Prague, Czech Republic

2008
Cinematographer
Nargis: When Time Stopped Breathing (90min documentary)
YFS Productions, Ayeyarwaddy Delta, Myanmar

2007
Cinematographer
Like A Bubble In Water (10min short docu-fiction)
Yangon Film School Workshop, Yangon, Myanmar

2006
Cinematographer
In the Shadow of the Mountain (90min documentary)
Independent filmproject , Kayah State, Myanmar

Cinematographer
Into the Ring (12min short documentary)
YFS Productions

Cinematographer
Yangon Film School Workshop, Yangon, Myanmar