



IN THE DARKROOM



SYNOPSIS



Magdalena Kopp was married to the most wanted terrorist in the world: Carlos »the Jackal«. She followed him through the birth of international terrorism, of which he became the star.

From the small conservative Bavarian town where she grew up, to the '68 revolutionary zeitgeist of Berlin and the radical leftist cells of Frankfurt, Magdalena was easily influenced. Driven by a need to belong, she found herself in the arms of the man who was fast becoming the first celebrity-terrorist in the world. She trained with Palestinian freedom fighters, fought alongside their national heroes. She followed him into dangerous international intrigues, from Damascus to Bagdad and Paris, in a nebulous world of secret services and shady governments, and gave birth to their daughter Rosa on the way. When Magdalena realized that the political ideals were long gone, and only greed for power stood behind their violent struggle, it was too late, she was too deeply involved. For some Carlos is a revolutionary, to others a murderer, but for Rosa he is a father, one she has not seen since she was five, one she only knows through the media.

While Carlos stands trial in Paris, mother and daughter take a courageous journey beyond the shadows of his myth.



INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR NADAV SCHIRMAN

What made you want to make *IN THE DARKROOM*?

A meeting had been arranged with Magdalena through a series of intermediaries. I was a little hesitant before meeting her; her father was a Nazi, while most of my family, which had been rooted in Germany since the 15th century, perished in the death camps. She fought with Palestinian terror groups in the 80s at a time when my dad was an Israeli diplomat and we lived under constant threat of pro-Palestinian terror attacks.

We were living in Paris in 1982 when Magdalena was in prison in France and Carlos unleashed a wave of bombings in order to have her released. I remember each of these bombings. I was a kid then, and I remember each time my parents went out at night I couldn't fall asleep until I heard my mother's footsteps in the hallway, as I always feared they would be bombed, shot, or kidnapped. The father of one of my schoolmates was shot by a pro-Palestinian terrorist right in front of him. The terrorist was a woman. So this was all very vivid to me as a kid.

And yet, when I met Magdalena for the first time I felt a tremendous empathy for her. Before me stood a woman, filled with regret, and willing to confront what she was part of. I was fascinated by her personal drama and by the world in which she had lived. A world of young revolutionaries, of terror cells, of training camps in Yemen, luxury hotels in Damascus and Budapest, secret services and shady dealings, ideals, money and fame.

I was struck by the ambiguity that emanated from her story. Was she a victim or a manipulator? Was she propelled by ideals or opportunism? I was intrigued ... All the right ingredients for a film, right?

How come Magdalena seems to look straight at the audience?

To film the interview with Magdalena we used the »Interotron«, which was invented by Errol Morris (Oscar winning documentary filmmaker, director of *FOG OF WAR*, *STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE*, etc.) It's a simple and brilliant invention in which a teleprompter, like the ones used by news anchormen, is placed in front of the camera lens. An image of the director is then screened. So in effect, Magdalena was looking at my video image, which was screened onto a teleprompter. This allows for a direct contact with the audience. I wanted her to talk directly to the audience, as at times she seems as if she were in a confessional, at others as if in an interrogation or at a trial.

On a poetic note: we built the set of the darkroom in an old cinema in Frankfurt, which was the only one screening original-language versions, mostly for the GIs. But as the cinema was being torn down, we rented it and made it into our studio. All the seats had been removed, so we could build the set in one of the halls. I was seated in the projectionist's room, in front a video camera and a teleprompter, conducting the interviews

from the projection room, while Magdalena was in the main theatre in a set consisting of the darkroom. I find it somewhat poetic to shoot a film in a cinema.

There seems to be a mix of genres and formats in the film, was this intentional?

Very much so. It was clear to me from the beginning that, as the film is set over three or four decades, I'd want to progress through the visual language and formats of each decade. It was clear to me that we had to shoot Rosa on 16mm in order to connect her journey of today to the unfolding events of the 70's and 80's. I think that we're one of the last documentary productions to shoot on 16mm. And Tuomo Hutri, our DOP, did an amazing job with this.

For IN THE DARKROOM, I had originally planned that Magdalena's interview would have something of a theatrical element to it, a reference to the films being made in Germany in the 70's and 80's by filmmakers such as Fassbinder and Schloendorff. It was also clear that we would mix this with a verité style of that period and shoot it on 16mm so as to give it a »cinema time« authenticity.

Cinema time?

I love to reference the cinematic style of the period in which my stories are set. In THE CHAMPAGNE SPY we

adopted the look and style of spy films of the 60s – the era of its action.

The story is the queen and she rules over the cinematic realm that she inhabits. So if the story of IN THE DARKROOM is set in the 70s and 80s in Germany, there was a distinct cinematic look and style, the new German cinema, the cinema of Fassbinder, Kluge and Wenders, of which we captures some essentials in the look and feel so as to set it as background to our story.

This also goes for the »private sphere«, the home video, which moves from 8mm in the 60s and 70s, to hi-8 video in the 80s. I think it's essential to create an atmosphere for the setting of the film so as to affirm the tone of the period. That's cinematic time, I guess.

I never formally studied cinema and was propelled into it by intuition and passion more than anything else. So my knowledge of cinema came from all the films I watched growing up, films which took me to different periods, different corners of history and the world. In a way I came to see the world through its films, and today I can't detach a place and era from the films that took me there.

How was it to shoot with Rosa, the daughter of Carlos?

It was intense. Rosa had never really spoken about her





relationship to her father whom she hadn't seen since she was 5 years old. She grew up hearing stories about him through the media and from her mother. She was born in Syria, so her mother tongue was Arabic, and they spoke English at home. Then, when she was five, Carlos sent them to Venezuela and made her swear not to speak Arabic anymore (for security reasons), so she had to learn Spanish, which became her mother tongue. When she was eight, Carlos was captured and her mother took her to Germany where she had to learn a whole new culture. So she suffered something of an identity crisis, as did I, growing up all over the world.

In Venezuela, Carlos is a hero. In Germany he's a terrorist. So it was hard for her to formulate a real view of him. Also she broke off contact with him at the age of 18. I think she was very brave to undertake this journey with us.

I remember when we shot in Palestine, Rosa realized her father was a popular hero there (unlike in Europe, where most view him as a terrorist) and it was special for her, maybe it gave her a little something to be proud of.

Rosa is the daughter of two terrorists, she moved countries and changed mother tongues three times, it's a miracle she's the way she is: strong, stable, with a stable relationship and a career ahead of her (she's

studying to be an architect). She's a very strong woman. And quite similar to her father in some ways.

What struck you the most during the process of filming? Were there unexpected »surprises«?

There were many surprises. But I was particularly struck by the fact that many of the German radical leftists scene (of '68, '69 and in the early 70s, partly as a protest against the silence of their parents' generation, who generally said nothing about their role in WW II and the Nazi regime. And now the same people who were blaming their parents for not talking, the same people who used to write graffiti such as »Father, what have you done?«, the same people are today hiding behind the same silence and don't want to talk about what they did as young leftist radicals. I found that ironic.

I was also surprised to discover that Carlos is still considered a hero in Palestine. But after all, this makes sense as, in his early days he fought for their freedom and was of the few Westerners who actually risked his life for them. I think that for Rosa, this was also a surprise. It was fascinating to observe her emotions – as she says in the film »perhaps it was not all just death and murder, perhaps [Carlos] did manage to offer some people hope.« This ambiguity was striking.

Another thing that struck me was when I went to interview Bassam Abu Sharif, the former spokesman of the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine). I went to Jericho to interview a »terrorist«, yet after meeting him I could no longer use that word, and felt I had interviewed a »freedom fighter«. I really understood what made him and others take up arms in the late 60s: the fact that they had no choice. They were mostly very well educated people, doctors, lawyers and such. Totally different to the religion-driven terrorism of today.

What is the film about?

The film has different layers. It's about the place of the individual in the group, it's about a woman who took wrong decision after wrong decision, who did not stand up for her core-belief, who lived in fear for many years, and who only now dares to confront the demons of her past. A woman who is still very much imprisoned by her past.

Towards the end of filming, Magdalena said something that struck me. She said that Carlos, who is in prison, seems to be much more free (in his mind) that she is, even though she's not incarcerated. She's a prisoner of her past, is haunted by it every day; she has nothing else but her story and her regrets.

The film is also about the perverse relationship between the media and terrorism. Long before Bin Laden,

Carlos was the first celebrity terrorist. His »exploits« were broadcast live all over the world, he filled press and tabloid pages. This is when it all started. When terrorists became »celebrities«. So you could say it's partly about the perverse relationship between the media and terrorism.

It's fascinating to see how some of the family photos that Magdalena took of her baby daughter, private photos, found their way into the press and in the tabloids. The publication had a direct impact on her life, she had to move and hide. So the private becomes public and in turn affects the private. It's most interesting.

The film is also about a photographer, Magdalena, who actually never took photos. She used her talents to forge passports. Only now, in the film, does she develop the photos of her past, and faces their »realness«.

And of course, the film is about Rosa, who journeys to see if she can have a relationship with her father, who to half of the world is a terrorist, and to the other half a revolutionary, but to her is the only father she has. And she's afraid she may like him ... It's quite intense.

So you could say it's about these two women, the mother and the daughter, living in the shadow of a man who still very much affects their life.

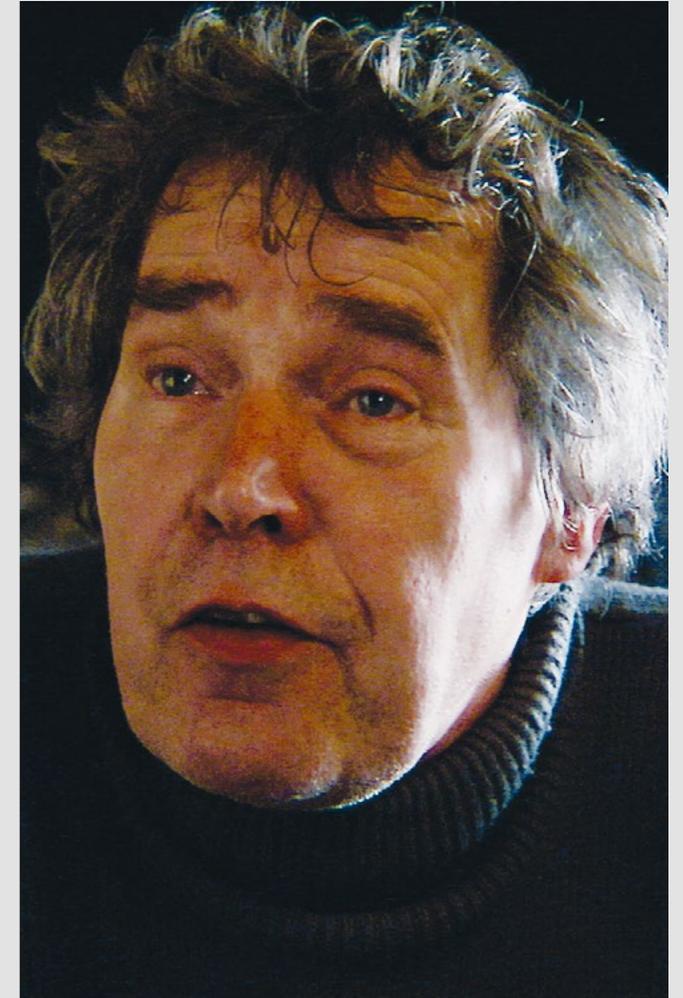
I'd say that ultimately the film is about a twist of fate,

and about the price one pays for not standing up for one's identity.

How did the idea to make a trilogy come about? And what will be the third part of the trilogy?

It was at IDFA's FORUM two years ago while we were pitching IN THE DARKROOM. One of the commissioning editors at the round table mentioned that the theme was similar to my first film, THE CHAMPAGNE SPY. In THE CHAMPAGNE SPY a boy discovers that his father is a Mossad agent and has to live with the secret for 40 years - only in the film did he finally open up and talk about his father. Similarly, IN THE DARKROOM, Rosa, the daughter of Carlos and Magdalena, talks for the first time about living in the shadows of a father who was a terrorist. Both films are personal dramas which take us into a secret and dangerous world.

I am now in production of the third part of this trilogy, it's a film called THE GREEN PRINCE and is based on the New York Times non-fiction bestseller SON OF HAMAS, which tells the story of Mosab Hassan Youssef, son of Sheikh Hassan Youssef, who was groomed to be a Hamas leader but for 10 years was an Israeli spy. I am making THE GREEN PRINCE together with John Batsek, who won an Oscar for ONE DAY IN SEPTEMBER, and with Simon Chinn, who won an Oscar for MAN ON WIRE. It will be the final part of this cinematic documentary trilogy.





NADAV SCHIRMAN
DIRECTOR – BIOGRAPHY



Schirman's first film, *THE CHAMPAGNE SPY* (Israel-Germany 2008) won the Israeli Academy Award for Best Documentary, was nominated for the European Film Prize, and won the John Schlesinger Award for Outstanding First Feature, as well as garnering many other international awards and nominations. It is currently being adapted into a large-scale fiction production by Oscar and Palme d'Or winning director Bille August and Oscar nominated producer Uli Limmer.

IN THE DARKROOM is Schirman's second feature-length documentary, part of a trilogy that continues with *THE GREEN PRINCE*. Currently in production, based on New York Times non-fiction bestseller *SON OF HAMAS*, *THE GREEN PRINCE* is also produced by Schirman through his Frankfurt based A List Films GmbH, in collaboration with Oscar winning producers John Batsek (*ONE DAY IN SEPTEMBER*) and Simon Chinn (*MAN ON WIRE*).

Schirman was born in Jerusalem. Son of a diplomat, he grew up in Paris, Montreal and in the United States. He served as a Liaison Officer to the United Nations forces in Syria and Lebanon. Schirman lives and works in Frankfurt, Germany.

CREW



Script & Director:
Nadav Schirman

Protagonists:
Magdalena Kopp
Rosa Kopp

D.O.P.:
Tuomo Hutri F.S.C.
Sound:
André Zacher, BVFT

Editing:
Joelle Alexis
Original Score:
Lasse Enersen

Production Design:
Stephanie Brenner
Visual Effects:
Florian Dötsch
Dramatic advisor:
Koby Gal Raday
Assistant Director:
Hanne Reinhardt

Line Producer:
Stephan Limbach

Producers:
Karl Baumgartner
Frank Stephan Limbach

Co-Producers:
Eilon Ratzkovsky
Yossi Uzrad
Guy Jacoel
Pauli Pentti
Ada Solomon
Carlo Degli Esposti

Commissioning Editor:
Hans Robert Eisenhauer (arte)

Production:
Pandora Film (Germany)
July August Productions (Israel)
First Floor Productions (Finland)
FSL Filmproduktion (Germany)
Hi Film Productions (Romania)
Palomar (Italy)

Television:
ZDF/ Arte (Germany)
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TECHNICAL DETAILS

Duration: 88 minutes

Color: color

Format: DCP

Language: German, French,
English, Hungarian, Spanish

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