

MOSUL MOVIE

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Over the last 17 years, I have watched countless American T.V. shows in the realm of NCIS and CSI, where Iraq is the culprit. We, Iraqis, have been portrayed as terrorists and villains. I shed a tear when I see a former American soldier or nurse traumatized, suffering from PTSD after losing a friend or injured owing to a tour in Iraq, in medical drama episodes akin to "Mercy." In reality, we are terrorized. Ever since the U.S. rolled its tanks into our land in 2003, we Iraqis have been fleeing our homeland to save our children, leaving loved ones and livelihoods behind. Overnight, our country became a battlefield with elusive borders, creating the largest diaspora in modern history, including us.

Recently, during the pandemic, I watched a movie named MOSUL on Netflix by powerhouse Hollywood filmmakers Joe and Anthony Russo. MOSUL movie is named after the City of Mosul, which was obliterated by ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) in 2014. When I first heard about the movie, I reckoned, argh, another fundamental presentation of Iraq's forged image. Perhaps, in the same token as American Sniper, where Iraqis were depicted as idiots! However, I took my chances. Besides, it's pandemic times!

The movie is in Arabic, according to the Russo brothers, not an easy task, yet MOSUL captured the genuine core of the Iraqi spirit: in its anger, foul language, empathy, improvising, and wittiness. Ultimately, it is a sense of humour. During a bartering scene, a narcotic for weapons, an Iraqi soldier, despite his dismal surroundings, jeers, "Cigarettes and weapons unify the world."

In the MOSUL movie, the city is a total departure from the Mosul, I remember. During the 1993 March break, we vacationed in Mosul-Nineveh. We booked at Oberoi Nineveh, a five-star hotel. Their breakfast buffet was exquisite! Decades later, ISIS leaders subsisted on its guest list.

Mosul, Iraq's second-largest City, has historically been inhabited by diverse faiths and ethnicities. All used to practice their culture, religion, cuisine, and language freely until 2003. Snaked Bazars, from goldsmiths to nightgown vendors, were run by names like Toma, Shamon, Zakaria, Yahya, and Jalil. The bustling City embraces centuries-old shrines of prophets Sheet, Jonah, Zarzis, and the Humpback Minaret, A revered testament to coexistence. This concurrence was embodied in the movie, bereft from embellishments. When "co-star" Kawa Faili joins the squad, one of the squad mutters sarcastically, "Now we are recruiting Kurdish boys." his comrade indifferently says, "Why not Kurds?". The performance was perfect in its imperfections.

The movie's plot runs over one day in 2017, over a stretch that does not encompass the archaeological damage ISIS caused to Hatra. Founded in the third century B.C., Hatra was the capital of an independent kingdom on the peripheries of the Roman Empire. It became a UNESCO World Heritage in 1985.

As we drove out of Mosul, the sun bathed the vast wheat fields in golden light. It was the 1990s, a time when Iraq faced the heat of internationally imposed sanctions. As a result, there was a pressing need for rigorous efforts to achieve agricultural self-sufficiency, crucial for our survival. That moment marked the last time I witnessed Mosul in this context.

I was in Mosul was in 2010, when working for the New York Times. Islamic State was gaining momentum, massacring Christians. Rev. Gabriele Tooma, who heads the Monastery of the Virgin Mary, part of the Chaldean Catholic Church in Qosh, opened its monastic rooms to 25 families fleeing Mosul. Unhinged, he said, "...where is Bush? Allegedly, a devout Christian!". We could not venture out into Al Qosh Village -Tel Kaif, a predominately Christian area renowned for its traditionally -hundreds of years old- freshly made tahini by manually grinding two massive stones. The Mosul I experienced long ago no longer exists, not even in movies.

In MOSUL, the brief interaction scene between the Iranian officer and the leading SWAT commander touches on Iran's meddling in Iraq's affairs. A factual incident corroborated the scene. I went to my hometown, Baghdad, in November 2019; I came across Khalid (25), a driver. He had joined the Popular Mobilized Movement (Hashid) earlier to fight the Islamic State (I.S.). He said, "Our commanders were Iranian." He scornfully added, "They speak Arabic better than you and me. They pocketed our salaries".

Another scene upsetting yet equivalently profound was the long line of displaced civilians, Where I met its trail of tribulation in Toronto. My job involves scripting narratives of refugees. An Iraqi father (33) of three children from al Qosh in 2015, with beads of sweat on his forehead, vividly describes their dusk getaway: "Jesus as if we were chased by satin himself. We could hear their rumble". He and his family were seeking Canada's protection. He was a pharmacist. They fled their village to a safer area when ISIS was around 3 km close. As is often the case, they left behind two pharmacies and a vast new house. His wife said, "We are lucky we came out alive. Our neighbor faced a gruesome fate. They sought refuge in a church, sleeping on its floor for months. An elderly lady sarcastically said "I left them a month of food supply."

The Iraqi writer Hamid al Maliki tweeted, "MOSUL movie overlooks important matters, in al Mosul battle." Critics, tweets, and bad reviews aside, finally a non-condescending movie in our favor, out of the past 6570 days, we watched a day of albeit scripted rehearsed tragedy.