



برترین دشمن

# MY WORST ENEMY

PRESS KIT

A film by  
**Mehran Tamadon**



**73** Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin  
**Encounters**

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# SYNOPSIS

Mojtaba, Hamzeh, Zar are among other individuals who have been thrown into prison and ideologically interrogated in Iran. In this documentary, the director wants them to interrogate him as agents of the Islamic Republic might. He would like the real torturer in Iran to see himself through the film as if in a mirror. The violent experience of putting themselves in the torturer's head confronts them with their own limits and the ambivalence of the project itself.

« I ask Iranian political refugees in France to interrogate me on camera as an agent of the Iranian regime would. My initial intention was to take this recording to Iran to show it to an interrogator working for the regime and to confront him with his own violence. Would it be possible to awaken his conscience ?

My Worst Enemy raises questions regarding filmmaking and ethics. Is there something wrong about proposing such a re-enactment to a political refugee? What are the risks for him and for me? What is the nature of the pact with the audience? Is it possible to change a system from the inside? »

**Mehran Tamadon**





# INTERVIEW WITH MEHRAN TAMADON

**Mehran, let's start by situating *My Worst Enemy* in your career. As in your previous films, namely *Bassidji* and *Iranien*, it seems you aspire to engage with people who are very different from you, with people who could harm you. *My Worst Enemy* has been released at a politically complicated time in Iran with many Iranians having lost all hope of dialogue. Based on your opinion and what you have learned by making your films, do you think dialogue remains possible?**

In principle, people dialogue to understand one another better and try to agree. Perhaps the question of dialogue should be considered differently today. Given the brutal repression that Iranians are currently experiencing, it would be difficult to reach an agreement on anything with the people who support the regime.

Looking back, I wonder if in my previous films I was truly engaged in a dialogue that attempted to agree on anything. I'm not sure. I would say, however, that I was trying to establish a relationship in the hope of moving these people. I'm convinced that this was useful. I'm not necessarily seeking a dialogue to agree politically, but rather trying to establish a relationship to achieve acceptance and tolerance.

Is this relationship still viable? Is it possible to move such dangerous and violent men? Undoubtedly it is, but we have yet to find the key to open their doors, which are intensely locked.

For *My Worst Enemy*, my initial idea was to film a final sequence in Iran. Up until June 2022, I had hoped to go there and take the time I needed to locate the interrogators working for the regime and to convince them to participate in the film. But for many reasons, I gave up this approach.

In my films, I tend to work with living material, in other words, I question the relationships and conflicts between people at a given time as they occur. The present situation in Iran is continuously changing, therefore, it repeatedly calls into question the initial idea behind the film. That's why I don't quite think the same way when I write the script of a film, as when I shoot it, edit it, or show it to the public. This is because the social context is never quite the same. This is enriching on a personal level but makes it difficult to build a consistent approach. I finished editing *My Worst Enemy* before the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement began in Iran. During this period, I experienced anger, hatred, and a desire to take up arms. Since September 2022, I have felt like doing many things rather than creating any bonds. Despite that, deep down I have principles that urge me to try to meet other people half-way.

**Your intention therefore with *My Worst Enemy* was to confront the torturers in Iran with a kind of re-enactment of their actions to disturb them? However, it seems your characters do not share your point of view, in the same way that your film does not reveal such optimism.**

What I constantly seek to do is to create a bond and initiate a relationship. Now that I live far from Iran, my main way of interacting with these people is to make films in which I give them an existence and to address these films to them so they may recognise themselves. My aim with this film is for it to be seen by the interrogators and torturers working for the Iranian regime. How could it affect them? I don't know. They may never change. I don't know what goes on in their minds. I

only know what goes on in my mind which makes me think that other people, whoever they are, must have a conscience, as I do, and that they are also affected by conflicting feelings. They too, suffer from a form of cowardice, deceitfulness, and perversity. If I can succeed in grasping my own contradictions, I can give them the chance of discovering their own. This is my view, but I know that few people share it. Even the people I film don't believe it. My films are not there to prove I'm right but rather to raise questions and bring to light different paradoxes. Each spectator, each character, interpret my ideas in their own way and if they disagree with me, that's completely fine. I don't seek to be right, neither in my films nor when I discuss ideas. I accept being contradicted, being destabilised by the characters in my films. I think in my films that's what I'm best at: getting people to question themselves.

**Let's talk about Zar Amir Ebrahimi: she is a key figure in many sequences in the film. How did you come to give her this role ?**

Zar plays an essential role in *My Worst Enemy*. However, this was not the initial plan. As you can see at the beginning of the film, I meet several former Iranian political prisoners, mainly men, with the aim of choosing one who would be willing to interrogate me in front of the camera. Among the refugees I met, Zar was one who had undergone very painful and lengthy daily interrogations during more than a year, without being imprisoned. At the end of each day of interrogation, she was allowed to go home.

It was during the shooting that I realised her acting skills enabled her to overcome the psychological problems that could be brought about by the role I was asking her to play.

Moreover, my films, to each their own degree, all have an introspective

dimension to them. Each time, I am led to being self-critical and to calling myself into question in front of the camera. Zar pushed me in that direction by referring to the total power of the director and what he puts his characters through to achieve his ends. These questions are important in my filmmaking and Zar was astute enough to understand this and was able to destabilise me.

**That's true, we end up in a situation where the spectators doubt what they're seeing is true. The limits between reality and fiction are blurred and we wonder whether what we are seeing is improvised. That's the sign of a special form of documentary, and I would like to ask you about the creative process and what it managed to produce.**

Two days of interrogation by Zar produced approximately twenty hours of footage. The director of photography, Patrick Tresch, filmed two-hour long shots without interrupting us. Nothing had been written even though Zar had investigated me and prepared questions I didn't know about. But you spoke about doubt: it is precisely the emergence of these doubts that is at the heart of the film. We no longer know what's being acted out or what's real. Is it Zar the individual speaking or is it Zar the actor? I have the impression that I am a documentary character, that Zar is a fictional character, and that reality gradually catches up with her drawing her into the documentary.

But the doubts also reside elsewhere: who is the torturer in this story? Is it her or me? Zar interrogates me, but I'm the one torturing her. The beauty of documentary is that it doesn't necessarily lead to where you imagine it will when you write it, and that's just even better.

# MEHRAN TAMADON



Graduated as an architect, Mehran Tamadon directed *Behesht Zahra, Mothers of Martyrs* in 2004, then *Bassidji* in 2010, in which he attempted to dialogue with the defenders of the Iranian regime. He continued this approach with *Iranian*, where he convinced supporters of the regime to live in cohabitation with him. His new films, *My Worst Enemy* and *Where God Is Not*, presented at the Berlinale in 2023, deal with the violence of interrogation and detention in Iran.

## Filmography (director)

**2023** *My Worst Enemy* - Switzerland, France, 82'

**Selection** Berlinale Encounters 2023

*Where God is Not* - Switzerland, France, 112'

**Selection** Berlinale Forum 2023

**2014** *Iranian* - Switzerland, France, 105'

Mehran Tamadon has persuaded those who defend the Iranian regime to come and spend a few days, living with him in a house, to discuss a fundamental issue: how, in practical terms, could we find a way to co-exist? How can public space in Iran be shared by atheists like himself as well as by the religious, who have the monopoly of power?

**Selections** Berlinale Forum 2014 | Cinéma du Réel Paris 2014 | Visions du Réel Nyon 2014 | Edinburgh Film Festival 2014 | Melbourne Film Festival 2014 | États généraux du film documentaire Lussas 2014 | Vancouver Film Festival 2014 | NIFF Namur 2014 | Mostra del Cinema Sao Paulo 2014 | CPH:DOX Copenhagen 2014 | IDFA Amsterdam 2014 | Torino Film Festival 2014 | Entrevues-Festival Belfort 2014 | Festival des 3 Continents Nantes 2014 | Göteborg Film Festival 2015 | Zagreb Dox 2015 | Beldocs Documentary Film Festival 2015 | Festival dei Popoli Firenze 2015

**Awards** Visions du Réel 2014, Bueynes-Chagaoli Award | Cinéma du Réel 2014, Best Film | Documenta Madrid 2014, Jury Special Award

**2009** *Bassidji* - Switzerland, France, 114'

During close to three years, Mehran Tamadon encountered the most extreme defenders of the Islamic Republic of Iran (the bassidjis) to try and better understand them. As an Iranian living in France, atheist and the son of communist activists, the director had everything to offend the beliefs of the people who respect the regime's dogmas. However, a dialogue was established. But in between the games of seduction rhetoric, the moments of truth and the reality of the religious and political Iranian system, how far will they go to understand one another?

**Selections** Visions du Réel 2009 | États généraux du film documentaire Lussas 2009 | TIFF Toronto 2009 | Doclisboa 2009 | Leipziger Festival für Dokumentar- und Animationsfilm 2009 | Festival dei Popoli Firenze 2009 | Black Nights Tallinn 2009 | One World Human Rights Film Festival Prague 2010 | Rio de Janeiro Film Festival 2010 | Mostra de Cinema Sao Paulo 2010 | Ronda Film Festival 2011

**Award** Jilhava International Film Festival 2009, Best documentary





# ZAR AMIR EBRAHIMI



Born in Tehran, Zar graduated Azad University of Tehran, majoring in dramatic arts. She first directed a short film named *Khat*, produced by the Iranian Youth Cinema Society. Her career took off after starring in the feature film *Waiting* by Mohammed Nourizad (2000) and gained national attention with series such as *Help me* (2004) and *Nargess* (2006). She also appeared in other films such as *Journey to Hidasou* by Mojtaba Raei (2006), and *Shirin* by Abbas Kiarostami (2008).

In 2008, she moved to Paris, making documentary films, and continued her acting career by appearing both on stage and in front of the camera. Her film *Tehran Taboo* by Ali Soozandeh (2017) premiered at the Cannes Film Festival and in 2018 she won Best Actress at the Nice International Film Festival for her performance in *Bride vs. Democracy* by Reza Rahimi (2016). The film *Tomorrow We Are Free* by Hossein Pourseifi (2019)

screened at the Talinn Black Nights Film Festival and Filmfest Hamburg, among others.

Her work can currently be seen in *Holy Spider* directed by Ali Abbasi (2023), for which she won Best Actress at the Cannes Film Festival, at Seville European Film Festival, at London Film Week and at Centre Film Festival. The film is based on the real-life case of the Spider Killer who strangled sex workers, often with their own head scarves, in Iran in 2000-2001. One of her last film, *Shayda*, directed by Noora Niasari, made its world premiere at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival. Zar stars as a young Iranian mother who finds refuge in an Australian women's shelter during the two weeks of Iranian New Year (Nowrooz). In France, *Les Survivants* (*White Paradise*), a contemporary western film directed by Guillaume Renusson, was released in January 2023. Zar plays an Afghan woman who tries to cross the border into France illegally.

Zar has two films premiering at the Berlin Film Festival in February 2023 : *Seven Winters in Tehran* directed by Steffi Niederzoll, which will open the German Cinema session ; and *My Worst Enemy* directed by Mehran Tamadon, which will premiere in the Encounter session.

Zar also founded Alambic Production in Paris in 2019 and continues producing movies.

As a result of using her film projects and voice to bravely demand change for women in Iran, Zar was recently selected for BBC 100 Women 2022, a prestigious list of inspiring and influential women from around the world.

She continues to make Paris her home.







# PRODUCERS' NOTE

*My Worst Enemy* and *Where God Is Not* are the result of a renewed collaboration between filmmaker Mehran Tamadon and the two co-producing companies, Box Productions and L'atelier documentaire who, for more than fifteen years have shown their support and commitment to the filmmaker who has lived in France since his teenage years. In his films, Mehran Tamadon addresses the question of his country and its governance with relevance by seeking to dialogue with supporters of the regime (*Bassidji, Iranien*) or by focusing on the repression of the Iranian people exercised by the State. With *My Worst Enemy* and *Where God Is Not*, he pursues his cinematographic and documentary work signing two complementary documentary films that were coproduced and directed simultaneously and which refer to one another.

The filming of Mehran Tamadon's previous film, *Iranien*, was ended abruptly with his arrest and the confiscation of his Iranian and French passports by the Islamic Republic's Intelligence Services. When he was finally released, he was "advised" not to return to Iran. This experience inspired his next film, *My Worst Enemy*, a filmed re-enactment of an interrogation which seeks to challenge the authorities regarding their practices. The interviews he organised during the preparation of *My Worst Enemy* prompted him to go further and make a second film,

*Where God Is Not*, in which he gives a platform to those who have been interrogated for them to recount their experience by recreating the conditions of their interrogations and their detentions. With these two films, Mehran Tamadon raises two key questions:

How can we continue to make ourselves heard by our "enemies" even when they have complete power over us and refuse to listen to us? How can we continue to face up to them and resist? Is there still any sense in holding up a mirror to them so they may experience doubt question themselves?

The director's posture shows courage and sincerity. The need for us to support his work seems evident to us. It is a necessary form of action that enables discussion, challenges preconceived views, brings about new ideas, and seeks to understand and unveils the mechanisms of a repressive regime.

**Elena Tatti, Box Productions (Suisse)**

**Raphaël Pillosio, L'atelier documentaire (France)**



# CREDITS

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>With</b>                            | Zar Amir Ebrahimi                                      |
| <b>Written and directed by</b>         | Mehran Tamadon   |
| <b>Written in collaboration with</b>   | Philippe Lasry   |
| <b>Director of photography</b>         | Patrick Tresch   |
| <b>Sound engineer</b>                  | Laurent Malan  |
| <b>Editing</b>                         | Mehran Tamadon<br>Luc Forveille                        |
| <b>Sound editing</b>                   | Simon Gendrot  |
| <b>Mixing</b>                          | Philippe Grivel  |
| <b>Color editing</b>                   | Robin Erard  |
| <b>France-Switzerland coproduction</b> | l'atelier documentaire<br>Box Productions              |
| <b>Producers</b>                       | Raphaël Pillosio<br>Elena Tatti                        |
| <b>Associate producers</b>             | Fabrice Marache<br>Emeline Bonardet<br>Thierry Spicher |

## **With the support of**

Centre national du Cinéma et de l'image animée  
Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine, in partnership with the CNC  
PROCIREP  
Federal Office of Culture (FOC)

## **With the participation of**

Cinéforum et the support of Loterie Romande  
Outside the Box  
Cristal Groupe

## **In association**

with CINEMAGE 16

## **This film benefited from**

Fonds d'Aide à l'Innovation Audiovisuelle du Centre national du cinéma  
et de l'image animée  
Une aide à la conception de la Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine  
Soutien de Brouillon d'un rêve de la Scam du dispositif La Culture avec la  
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