

Extract from the article

JAFAR PANAHI GOES THROUGH RED LIGHTS

By Ghazal Golshiri

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Fifteen days of shooting

After having limited himself to enclosed spaces in order not to get noticed, Panahi has bitten a bit more at the red line imposed by his conviction. Transformed into a taxi driver, he set up video cameras inside his car and took several passengers on board, with whom he shared a bit of time on the road while having discussions, sometimes of a very political nature.

According to Solmaz Panahi [Jafar Panahi's daughter, who lives in Paris], the idea for this film came to him during one of his trips in a collective taxi: *"He heard a conversation between the driver and two other passengers and he thought to himself, 'I cannot do anything else but make films. What if one day I was forced to become a taxi driver?'"*

In order to film, he had to take a series of precautions: *"Jafar and his collaborators could not use extra lights, in order not to raise the authorities' attention. They removed the car's roof to be able to work with daylight. Afterwards, in the editing stage, they put the roof back using special effects."*

Shooting and editing only lasted fifteen days and every evening Jafar Panahi would edit the rushes shot that day. *"He had to finish the film and have it taken out of Iran as quickly as possible, before rumours started to circulate,"* Solmaz Panahi recounts. *"As for his collaborators, most of them are very young and have just started their career.... Their names are kept secret. The day circumstances become favourable, their names will be published."*

Society's ills

These are necessary measures, because those who have worked with Jafar Panahi since his conviction have sometimes been harassed. Kambuzia Partovi and Maryam Moghadam, who participated to the making of *Closed Curtain*, had their passports confiscated upon their return from Berlin. The awarding of the Golden Bear to *Taxi Tehran* did not leave the Iranian authorities indifferent either. In a letter to the Berlin Film Festival's Jury, the Cinema Organization of Iran's director, Hojatollah Ayoubi, criticized the festival's *"purely political approach."*

The letter pushed Jafar Panahi to transgress another of the terms of his sentence by giving an interview to the official information agency ILNA (Iranian Labour News Agency): *"People*

in power accuse us of making films for foreign film festivals (...). They do not, however, reveal that our films are never authorised to screen in Iranian cinemas”, Panahi lamented.

With the release of each of his films, Jafar Panahi reminds the most conservative of Iranians that he is free and that he keeps filming, despite his conviction . This attitude increases his risk of being summoned to jail to serve his sentence, a possibility he is ready to confront. *“He is not scared”* according to his daughter. *“Cinema is the most important thing in his life, he is even ready to die for it. If he does not film, there is no difference for him between being free and being in jail.”*

Does he have other ongoing projects or ideas for a new work? *“I frankly don’t know,”* Solmaz Panahi explains. *“He doesn’t tell me anything and everything is secret until someone visits me and gives me a DVD saying: ‘Here is your father’s latest film’.”*

Despite all these tensions, Jafar Panahi has never stopped repeating that he is not a political director, but a filmmaker who wants to talk about society’s ills. If one is to believe his daughter, today he has only one dream: to place his camera freely in the midst of people again and tell their stories.

Translated by Diane Gabrysiak