

Where law ceases, only humanity can prevail.

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# IN EXILE

THE STORY OF A BURMESE FILMMAKER

A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY TIN WIN NAING



## SYNOPSIS

Tin Win Naing, one of Myanmar's important Video Journalists, had to flee his country. Leaving behind his family, unsure whether he will ever be able to see them again, he crossed the border illegally, entering Thailand. Upon his arrival, he was 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. Their numbers range from 2 to 3 million.

Touched by their fates, Tin Win Naing realised he had found the subject for his next film.

In *In Exile* he follows three Myanmar migrant workers in their struggle for survival. Together with Tin Win Naing, we witness how they are exploited ruthlessly through back-breaking farm labour for a daily salary of just 3 USD. And even this salary is not something they can count on. They live in constant fear of the police and are vilified by most Thais. From the economic desert of Myanmar, they travelled into modern Thailand - where they are deserted of their human rights - hoping to find greener pastures and a future for the families they have left behind.

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 military dictatorship 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. We get a beautiful insight in to how they keep their spirits and culture alive.

The director himself is also one of the film's subjects who shares in the dreams of his protagonists through his personal narration. At the end of the film, tentative political changes in Myanmar mean Tin Win Naing will have the chance to fulfill those dreams and return to Yangon to be reunited with his family.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

A Myanmar filmmaker must flee his country. As refugee in Thailand, his camera becomes the most important tool to overcome the many days away from home. He begins documenting the plight of Myanmar migrant workers working under slavery-like conditions.

## LOGLINE

After filming political footage, a Myanmar filmmaker must flee his country. As refugee amongst refugees in Thailand, his camera becomes the most important tool to survive and overcome the many days away from home.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Until recently, I was a filmmaker and activist, risking my life to record my country's situation. 2008 the Oscar-nominated documentary "Burma VJ" used some of my footage to portray the lives of me and my fellow activists. However, in the aftermath of this popular film, the government became more aware of our activities and started cracking down on us. 2009, I had to flee my country. I only escaped a cruel prison sentence within a hair's breadth.

I fled to Thailand and like other Myanmar migrants had to hide from the police in the daytime and try to escape hooligans who were after Myanmar migrants in the night. During my time in Thailand I experienced the condition of my country and my landsmen from a very different angle. I saw that many of the over 2 Million Myanmar living in Thailand migrated here with the hope to find some financial security in this capitalist, "democratic" neighbouring state. I saw that most of them find themselves confronted with a situation in which their human rights are violated – again. The financial security they were seeking, becomes a broken promise, leaving the families, once again, struggling with insecure livelihoods.

I found yet another extremely disturbing fact: many migrant workers are working in Thailand as farmers. Now, how can this be, given the fact that our homecountry was once considered to be the rice chamber of Southeast Asia?

In the past few years my country's people have been struck by and suffered greatly from many natural disasters. Just how many people have actually left the country to seek greener pastures, however, stunned me.

But are these pastures really as green as my compatriots thought they would be? 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, tried to keep us from filming in his fields. Myanmar workers are sexually assaulted and beaten every day. Their general working conditions are far from anything people would call "fair" in 'Western' countries.

It is my government's mismanagement which has made these people favor such a situation over the dire life in their homeland. When I got to talk to them, I was amazed how they could keep their heads up and be happy in such circumstances. It seemed that the ones who struggled the most, also had the biggest smiles. Where do they gain the strength for this?

After the recent elections things have changed in Myanmar politically. However, the economic situation still remains the same. After seeing all I saw in Exile, it is my belief that our main issue in Myanmar is economical and educational. As long as children have to work hard instead of going to school, they will not be educated and they will not be able to carry our country into a true, informed Democracy – politically as well as economically.

It is these thoughts that have guided my reflections and investigations during my time in Exile. I want to tell Myanmar's story from the perspective of a Myanmar, who once was an urban activist fighting corrupt authorities, then became a refugee, experiencing his home country's situation from a distance, quite literally.

## **ABOUT THE DIRECTOR**

Born in Yangon, Myanmar, Tin Win Naing had an immense fascination with filmmaking and camera work. He began his career as a filmmaker in 1995 and was picked as one of the first students to attend the Yangon Film School (YFS) in 2005. A year later, he was the cameraman on the feature-length documentary 'In the Shadow of the Mountain'. In 2007 he won an award from the Heinrich Boell Foundation for his camerawork on the film 'Into the Ring'.

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.

## CREW

DIRECTOR	Tin Win Naing
PRODUCER	Yasmin C. Rams
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS	Melanie Sandford Rodney Charles
CINEMATOGRAPHERS	Aung Ko Ko Tin Win Naing
EDITOR	Melanie Sandford
ADDITIONAL EDITORS	Jessica Ehlebracht Aung Nwai Htway Win Thu
SOUND DESIGN & MIX	Ivan Horak
ORIGINAL SCORE	Derek Baird
COLOURIST	Matthias Ricke
POST PRODUCTION	Cine Chromatix Berlin
SOUND RECORDISTS	Jai Jai Tin Win Naing Yasmin C. Rams Sai Nyi Nyi Slyne Mon
TITLE DESIGN	Saw Eh Doh Poe
CAMERA ASSISTANTS	Soe Lwin Sai Naw Kham San Kyaw Htun