

**“The definitive non-fiction film about the occupation of Iraq!**

Indispensable, heartbreaking, and ferociously wise. Time and again Poitras manages to be where platoons of U.S. telejournalists were afraid to go.... The most valuable piece of film to emerge about the war in all of its three years.”

—Michael Atkinson, THE VILLAGE VOICE

موطني

# MY COUNTRY MY COUNTRY

A FILM BY LAURA POITRAS



A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

# MY COUNTRY MY COUNTRY

Working alone in Iraq over eight months, director/cinematographer Laura Poitras creates an extraordinarily intimate portrait of Iraqis living under U.S. occupation. Her principal focus is Dr. Riyadh, an Iraqi medical doctor, father of six and Sunni political candidate. An outspoken critic of the occupation, he is equally passionate about the need to establish democracy in Iraq, arguing that Sunni participation in the January 2005 elections is essential. Yet all around him, Dr. Riyadh sees only chaos, as his waiting room fills each day with patients suffering the physical and mental effects of ever-increasing violence. Dramatically interwoven into the personal journey of Dr. Riyadh is the landscape of the US military occupation, with Australian private security contractors, American journalists and the UN officials who orchestrate the elections. Unfolding like a narrative drama, MY COUNTRY, MY COUNTRY follows the agonizing predicament and gradual descent of one man caught in the tragic contradictions of the U.S. occupation of Iraq and its project to spread democracy in the Middle East.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

This film was motivated by a sense of despair about the contradictions of the U.S. occupation of Iraq and its project to implement democracy in the Middle East through the use of military force. I wanted to understand these contradictions from the perspective of the people living them, on the ground.

I spent eight months in Iraq, from June 2004 to February 2005. I worked alone in the field, operating camera and sound. I met Dr. Riyadh in July 2004 at Abu Ghraib Prison while he was conducting an inspection.

Although *My Country, My Country* focuses on the January 2005 elections, it is a broader story about U.S. foreign policy post-9/11. The use of preemptive military force and the goal of implementing democracy in the Middle East mark a radical shift in U.S. and world politics. The January 2005 elections were the first to be held after the U.S. invasion, and thus are in some ways a testing ground for this new era.

—Laura Poitras

## ADDENDUM

### **Returning to the U.S., August 22nd, 2006**

When I landed in Vienna from Sarajevo they announced that there would be a passport control inspection as we exited the plane. Once I got into the airport they paged me, telling me to report to the gate. I was met there by security. They then escorted me out of the terminal, into a van, to the police inspection area to search all my bags (hand-held and carry on). I learned from them that not only am I on a threat list (I already knew this from the last times I traveled), but that my threat rating—400—is the highest that the Dept. of Homeland Security gives. They explained that the U.S. measures threat level in “points”—they said that if your score is 300-350 points you get checked closely, but 400 is the highest level. After they cleared my bags, I was escorted back to the boarding gate. When I landed at JFK they announced again on the plane that they were doing a passport control check at the ramp exiting the plane. Two armed INS guards were stationed to meet passengers. They were looking for me. When I handed my passport, they stopped the inspection and escorted me out of the line to a separate room where they called Homeland Security to get permission for me to enter the country, then I was escorted to pick up my bags, which were searched again. The security guards at both Vienna and JFK realized how absurd it all was after I explained to them I was a filmmaker who did a film in Baghdad. I showed them the catalogs from Edinburgh and Sarajevo Film Festivals where I was showing my film, and I gave them all copies of my film on DVD. I explained the irony that while the Dept. of Homeland Security considers me a terrorist threat, the U.S. military are inviting me go to bases and military colleges to show the film to high ranking officers.

*Note: please do not republish this addendum in an abbreviated form.*

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

### KADHUM AL SAHIR

Composer / Singer

MY COUNTRY, MY COUNTRY features an original music score by world-renowned Iraqi singer/composer Kadhum Al Sahir, the top-selling singer in the Arab world today. Born in the northern city of Mosul, Al Sahir has been living in exile since 1993.

Al Sahir's haunting theme song composed for the film, "Oh My Country," is a mournful plea for an end to Iraq's suffering.

#### **"Oh My Country"**

by Kadhum Al Sahir

Oh my country, may you have a happy morning.  
Reunite everyone; heal your wounds.  
I yearn to see you smile some day,  
When will sadness set you free?

Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds,  
Take them all under your wings.  
You are their father; you are their mother,  
Stay firm, no matter how your winds gust.

Jesus and Prophet Muhammad said,  
Their unity is your weapon.  
Love, peace, intellect and construction,  
May God in the heavens bless your success, my country.

Oh my beloved Iraq; oh Iraq,  
Oh my beloved, oh my beloved, oh my beloved Iraq.

## AWARDS

**Inspiration Award**  
**Full Frame Documentary Film Festival**

**Best Long Documentary**  
**Flahertiana Film Festival, Russia**

**Human Rights Award**  
**Durban International Film Festival**

**Henry Hampton Award**  
**Council on Foundations Film & Video Festival**

## FESTIVALS

Berlin International Film Festival - World Premiere - Berlin, Germany, February 2006

SXSW Film Festival - US Premiere - Austin, TX, March 2006

New Directors/New Films - New York Premiere - New York, NY, March - April 2006

Full Frame Documentary Film Festival - Durham, NC, April 2006

Flahertiana Film Festival - Perm, Russia, May 2006

Maryland Film Festival - Baltimore, MD, May 2006

Seattle International Film Festival - Seattle, WA, May-June 2006

Sydney Film Festival - Sydney, Australia, June 2006

Durban Film Festival - Durban, South Africa, June 2006

Karlovy Vary International Film Festival - Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic, June-July 2006

Pesaro Film Festival - Pesaro, Italy, June-July 2006

Jerusalem International Film Festival - Jerusalem, Israel, July 2006

Melbourne International Film Festival - Melbourne, Australia, July-August 2006

Napa Sonoma Film Festival - Napa Valley, CA, July-August 2006

Edinburgh International Film Festival - Edinburgh, Scotland, August 2006

Sarajevo Film Festival - Sarajevo, Bosnia, August 2006

Vancouver Film Festival - Vancouver, Canada, Sept-Oct. 2006

Viennale-Vienna International Film Festival - Vienna, Austria, October 2006

## THE FILMMAKERS

### LAURA POITRAS

Director / Producer / Camera / Editor

Laura Poitras received a Peabody Award for her last documentary, FLAG WARS (2003). FLAG WARS received numerous other awards, including Best Documentary at the 2003 SXSW Film Festival, Best Documentary, Seattle Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, and the Filmmaker Award at the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival. FLAG WARS had its U.S. television premiere on PBS's P.O.V. documentary series and was nominated for both a 2004 Independent Spirit Award and a 2004 Emmy Award.

Laura's past work include OH SAY CAN YOU SEE...? (2003), and EXACT FANTASY (1995). She studied filmmaking at the San Francisco Art Institute and the New School. Before making films, she worked as a chef. She currently resides in New York City.

### JOCELYN GLATZER

Producer

Jocelyn Glatzer has directed, produced and edited numerous documentary films including THE FLUTE PLAYER, about a survivor of Cambodia's genocide, which had its national broadcast premiere on P.O.V. in 2003, and won numerous awards including an audience award for 1st Documentary Feature at SxSW (2003) and a CINE Golden Eagle Award. It was also an Emmy Award nominee for outstanding achievement in Arts and Cultural Programming. Though she's a New Yorker, she now resides in Boston, MA.

### EREZ LAUFER

Editor

Erez Laufer has worked on numerous projects with renowned documentary filmmakers Chris Hegedus and D. A. Pennebaker, including the Oscar-nominated THE WAR ROOM, and STARTUP.COM. As a director, his film MIKE BRANT-LAISSE MOI T'AIME premiered at the Cannes International Film Festival and won the 2002 Israeli Academy Award for Best Documentary. He recently completed his new documentary, THE DARIEN DILEMMA, which premiered at DocAviv in March 2006.

# MY COUNTRY MY COUNTRY

Featuring  
Dr. Riyadh

Also Featuring  
Peter Towndrow, Australian private contractor  
Carlos Valenzuela, U.N. Elections Support  
Capt. Kris Scarcliff, U.S. Army, Civil Affairs

Director/Camera/Sound Laura Poitras

Producers Laura Poitras & Jocelyn Glatzer

Editors Erez Laufer and Laura Poitras

Singer/Songwriter Kadhum Al Sahir

Co-Producer Aliza Kaplan

Associate Producer Rosie Bsheer

MY COUNTRY, MY COUNTRY is a co-production of Praxis Films  
and The Independent Television Service (ITVS).  
Produced in association with P.O.V./American Documentary.

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The Wellspring Foundation, and The Appleman Foundation.

2006 • USA • 90 mins  
In Arabic, English, and Kurdish with English subtitles

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