



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

The UK's largest rural film festival

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Burma VJ –Reporting from a Closed Country (12A)

Director: Anders Østergaard

Denmark, 2008, 1 hour 24 minutes, subtitles

How did "Burma VJ" begin?

AO: I was invited to do a film on Burma three or four years ago. We had some early thoughts of trying to portray this closed country from life on the borderline -- people going in and out -- to reflect what was going on in there. It was maybe too conceptual. We became aware that a lot of people are trying to shoot inside the country, many of them regular citizens. We realized that next door in Norway there was actually a TV station broadcasting reports that were smuggled out of the country. It seemed like a perfect platform to make a film about the country: not just the footage, but also the people who were actually doing this: why, how and what went through their head. I went to see a group of reporters who came out to be trained in Thailand. Through that, I met Joshua, who understood intuitively what we were trying to do and was very generous about trying to describe how life as a secret reporter really is. That got us started, way before the uprising. I was planning to do a short documentary, a human interest, intimate thing about his life and thoughts and then it exploded into a much bigger story.

When did the decision come about for the majority of the film to be footage that was shot by the reporters?

AO: That was born into the project from the beginning, even in the small format. My approach was that the film should be based on the footage, but with an audio soundtrack that would give more insight. That survived into the ultimate film, as we developed these reconstructed conversations, telephone conversations. That's really the spinal cord of the film when you look at it, the understanding of dramatic developments.

And the choice to filter the point of view through Joshua, even as he's removed from the main action and forced to stay in Thailand?

AO: We really had no choice. [to Joshua] You did, as you said yourself, take a little bit too much of a risk and had to escape. But we slowly realized that it was actually quite a gift, that we had this guy who was trying to follow what was happening inside because we could hold his hand, trying to understand what was going on. And I learned that this distance had some tremendous suspense value, that we are with him trying to find out what's happening over there, which became the dynamic of the film.

Joshua, how long ago did you first get involved with the DVB?

Joshua: I first worked with the DVB during 2003, and I became one of the first cameramen on the ground. But I got my first professional training as a cameraman in Bangkok, in 2005, I first met with [the "Burma VJ" filmmakers]. I didn't really know at the time how big this project was, and what I had to do at the time. [It was] just an assignment from my college. They just introduced me to these people, and I talked with them. That's all I knew about, at the time. But after I'd seen their demo about what they had done on the project, I thought I really had to go on... I mean, I need to talk for everybody, not only for me, not only for our group, but also for everybody in Burma.

Interview with Anders Østergaard and "Joshua" of *Burma VJ*, www.ifc.com

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