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Bagdad on Fire

John C. Lyden

University of Nebraska Omaha, johnclyden@gmail.com

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Abstract

This is a film review of *Bagdad on Fire* (2023), directed by Karrar Al-Azzawi.

Keywords

Iraq, Revolution, Protest, Nonviolence, Youth Movement

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Author Notes

John Lyden is the Department Chair and Blizek Professor of Religious Studies at University of Nebraska Omaha. He has been the Editor of the *Journal of Religion & Film* since 2011. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press), and the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*. He also co-edited, with Ken Derry, *The Myth Awakens: Canon Conservatism, and Fan Reception of Star Wars* (Wipf and Stock 2018).



Bagdad on Fire (2023), dir. Karrar Al-Azzawi

In October 2019, an anti-government protest movement began in Bagdad in which young people gathered in Tahrir Square and remained there, living in tents, for hundreds of days. This film follows Tiba Fadhil, who was 19 at the start of the protest, as she and her friends deal with the violence the government used to suppress them. The protests were put on hold in April 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but by that time there were already 700-1000 young people who had been killed by the police, including some of Tiba's friends.

The protest called for reform of the government, widely viewed as corrupt, itself a product of the American occupation. The young Iraqis resent the intervention of the US in their country, and they don't find things have improved. "There are more funerals than weddings," states Tiba. She was married at 14 as she believed this would bring freedom to her, but when she found she was mistaken, she divorced her husband. Now she prizes the ability of men and women to sit together and talk, a simple freedom, but this is a right that she is not guaranteed in the current Iraq.

This short film chronicles her experiences for the six months that the protests continued, as the young people deal with tear gas, injuries, and death. But they do not lose hope. “We will win, with peace,” she says. In their demonstration, a leader asks, “Are you American? Are you Sunni? Are you Shi’ite?” Each time, the answer from the crowd is a resounding, “No!” until the final question: “Are you Iraqi? YES!”