

Cercamon Docs, MADE IN GERMANY Filmproduktion, Gloria Films Production & TS Productions present:

SEVEN WINTERS IN TEHRAN

Germany / France, 2023, 97 min.

A film by
Steffi Niedertzoll

With
Zar Amir Ebrahimi
(**HOLY SPIDER - Best Actress Cannes 2022, Oscar Shortlist 2023 for Best International Film**)
as Reyhaneh's voice



PRESS NOTES

Berlinale 2023

Perspektive Deutsches Kino (opening film)

world premiere

Press materials can be downloaded [HERE](#)

CONTACTS

SALES

Cercamon Docs

Suzanne Nodale

+33 6 81 70 18 90

suzanne@cercamon.biz

www.cercamon.biz

INTERNATIONAL PRESS

NOISE Film & TV

Mirjam Wiekenkamp

+31 6 28652249

mirjam@noisefilmpr.com

noisefilmpr.com

GERMAN PRESS

Kleber Film PR

Dagny Kleber

+49 171 4024803

dagny@kleberfilmpr.de

kleberfilmpr.de

PRODUCTION

MADE IN GERMANY Filmproduktion

Melanie Andernach

+49 221 999 898 21

mel@madeingermany-film.de

www.madeingermany-film.de

GLORIA FILMS Production

Laurent Lavolé

+ 33 1 42 21 42 11

mel@gloriafilms.fr

www.gloriafilms.fr

TS Productions

Céline Loiseau

+33 6 03 49 39 38

cloiseau@tsproductions.net

tsproductions.fr

LOGLINE

Iran, 2007: Reyhaneh Jabbari, 19, is convicted of murdering the man who tried to rape her. Her subsequent protest makes her a symbol of resistance and women's rights even beyond the borders of Iran.



SHORT SYNOPSIS

Tehran, July 2007: Reyhaneh Jabbari, 19, has a business meeting with a new client. When he tries to rape her, she stabs him in self-defense. Later that day, she is arrested for murder. Her trial results in a death penalty sentence. Thanks to personal and secretly recorded videos provided by Reyhaneh's family, their testimonies and the letters written by Reyhaneh in prison, the film retraces the fate of a woman who becomes a symbol of resistance and women's rights even beyond the borders of Iran.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Tehran, 7 July 2007: Reyhaneh Jabbari, 19, has a business meeting with a new client. For her, this is just another regular day, however her life will change forever when he attempts to rape her. She stabs him in self-defense and flees the place. Later that day, she is arrested and soon charged with murder. Despite much evidence pointing to self-defense, Reyhaneh doesn't stand a chance in court as her attacker was a well-connected and powerful man who is – even after his death – protected by patriarchal society. Reyhaneh is sentenced to death.

Thanks to personal and secretly recorded videos provided by Reyhaneh's family, their testimonies, the letters written by Reyhaneh in prison and other archives, the film retraces her trial, detention and fate of this woman who became a symbol of resistance in the country. Her fight for women's rights echoes the struggle of so many women shedding lights on how Iran treats them.



ABOUT THE PROTAGONISTS

Reyhaneh Jabbari

Reyhaneh Jabbari was born on November 6, 1987 as the first child of Shole Pakravan and Fereydoon Jabbari. Together with her two sisters, she grew up in Tehran in a protected, loving, artistic home. She studied computer science and worked part-time as an interior designer in the office of a family friend. She was a young, modern woman with ambitious plans and dreams. But her acquaintance with the former secret service agent Morteza Sarbandi changed everything. When he tried to rape her, she defended herself with a knife and stabbed him once in the back. She fled the apartment. A short time later, Morteza Sarbandi succumbed to the stab wound. That same night, Reyhaneh was arrested. For 58 days, she had no contact with legal counsel or her family. During this time, forced confessions were made that led to her death sentence in a show trial under Qisās' retribution law of blood revenge 1,5 years later. Reyhaneh spent 7,5 years in prison - first in Evin Prison, then in Shahr-e Rey Women's Prison. Here she got to know women from different social strata of Iranian society and began to write texts about the systematic oppression of women by Islamic laws, which she published through her mother Shole. She tirelessly campaigned for better conditions for her fellow inmates until her execution on October 25, 2014 in Rajai Shahr prison.



Shole Pakravan

Shole Pakravan was born in 1964 in Kermanshah, Iran. She started studying at the University of Arts in Tehran in 1986 and graduated with a bachelor's degree in puppetry. She married Fereydoon Jabbari and had her eldest daughter Reyhaneh in 1987. Two more daughters followed. Alongside her studies, she began working as an actress and decided to focus entirely on this profession after completing her university education. She successfully performed on Iran's stages for 28 years and managed a collective cultural center. On July 7, 2007, her daughter Reyhaneh was arrested and sentenced to death a year and a half later. Shole Pakravan was instrumental in the fight against her daughter's execution, which sparked a worldwide outcry in 2014. Through Reyhaneh's fate, Shole has become an important Iranian human rights activist against the death penalty. In 2017, she left Iran with her youngest daughter, Shahrzad, as she faced imprisonment for publicly denouncing the death penalty. Since then she has been living in Germany



Fereydoon Jabbari

Fereydoon Jabbari was born in 1958 in Kermanshah, Iran. In 1986 he married Shole Pakravan and had his eldest daughter Reyhaneh in 1987. Two more daughters followed. He is the owner of a retail store in Tehran for brake pads and truck accessories. After Reyhaneh's arrest, he mainly took over the household and care of the other two daughters so that Shole could fight for Reyhaneh. During Reyhaneh's trial, Fereydoon in particular was slandered by Judge Tardast and the newspapers. But Fereydoon also tried everything to save his daughter from the death penalty. He tried, primarily through official channels and Iranian organizations, to obtain the possibility of a retrial for Reyhaneh. He also participated in the negotiations with the Sarbandi family about a possible blood revenge forgiveness. To enable Shole and Shahrzad to escape, he and his middle daughter Sharare stayed in Iran. He is now the only member of the family still not allowed to leave Iran, as he is denied a valid passport. He is interrogated at regular intervals and is subject to reprisals if Shole protests too loudly for the observance of human rights.



Sharare Jabbari

Sharare Jabbari is the second daughter of Shole and Fereydoon. She started taking care of the family from a very young age due to Reyhaneh's imprisonment, in order to relieve her parents. Despite many limitations and the emotional stress, she was able to complete her studies to become a food engineer in Tehran. When Sharare tried to leave Iran in 2017 shortly after her mother and little sister, her passport was taken away at the airport without giving any reason. It was not until 2021 that she managed to get her passport back and follow her sister and mother to Germany, where she has lived ever since.



Shahrzad Jabbari

Shahrzad Jabbari is the youngest daughter of Shole and Fereydoon. When she was only 14 years old, after Reyhaneh's arrest, she was also arrested on the account of being an accessory to murder and used as leverage against Reyhaneh to extort a confession. After she was released, her hair started falling out. She did not attend school for months. Despite all the reprisals, restrictions and emotional pressure, she did not lose her zest for life and always made sure that there was some joy and laughter within the family. She finished school and studied accounting in Tehran. In 2017, she and her mother left Iran for Germany, where she has lived ever since.



INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR STEFFI NIEDERZOLL

By Teresa Vena

Presumably, you first heard of Reyhaneh Jabbari's case via the media. That was in 2014. How did work on the film start? Did you already have a connection to Iran?

Yes, I read about Reyhaneh in the newspaper. Coverage of her case was particularly high in Germany, because an uncle of Reyhaneh's lives here. Still, back then it was just one of many harrowing news stories on my radar. Then, in 2016, through my Iranian partner at the time I met Shole's cousin and his wife in Istanbul – they had fled Iran and were now stuck in Turkey. They left Iran to rescue video material related to Reyhaneh Jabbari's case that had been shot covertly. I found one video particularly moving: it shows Shole sitting in a car in front of the prison waiting to see whether her daughter will be granted clemency or executed. This moment full of hope and exhaustion left an indelible mark on my consciousness. Over the course of multiple months, I travelled repeatedly to Turkey, we slowly became friends and they asked me if I could make a movie with this material.

What motivated you to make this film?

I was very aware of the great responsibility. Up to that point, I had considered myself more of a fiction-feature director. I was working on a screenplay for my fiction-feature debut, but was in a phase of stagnation at that point in time. That's why I wanted to avoid making empty promises at all costs, so I offered to take the material back to Germany, in order to have it translated and to reflect initially on how I could possibly make a documentary film out of it in the first place.

While I was copying the video material, I was looking out the window and caught sight of a woman in a blue headscarf watching the sea. Shortly thereafter, she was standing in front of me: it was Shole, Reyhaneh's mother, who had also just left for Turkey with her youngest daughter. The first moment was awkward. I felt very familiar with her, having seen her in the most extreme, personal moments through the video material. To her, I was a stranger who she was seeing for the first time. After a while, I told her exactly that. She looked at me, sizing me up, then smiled and hugged me. She began to tell stories, we drank tea, looked at childhood photos of Reyhaneh. I knew right there that I had to make this film.

Reyhaneh's mother and sisters have since resettled here in Germany. Did you do the interviews here?

Yes, I interviewed all three women in the family here in Germany. Shole continued to be involved in activism in Iran following Reyhaneh's death. She formed the group "Madaraneh" – "Motherhood" – with other mothers, to oppose the death penalty in Iran. She was interrogated on a regular basis as a result. After her interrogators unambiguously threatened the well-being of her other daughters

during a session and one of her closest fellow activists was imprisoned, Shole left for Turkey with Shahrzad. To conceal their escape, the family decided collectively that Sharare and Fereydoon would remain behind and join the others later. Sharare attempted to follow, initially without success. Her passport was taken away and she didn't manage to emigrate to Germany until 2021. Fereydoon still doesn't have a passport and is the only family member still living in Iran.

What does the material that was passed on consist of exactly?

The video and audio recordings that were made during Reyhaneh's imprisonment were primarily made by family members, to preserve evidence. Many of the videos were captured by cell phone cameras. And although they are of low quality at times from a technical standpoint, or shaky, it was clear to me from the start that they have to be the core of the film. They are incredibly powerful, they provide a glimpse into places that are otherwise off limits, such as an Iranian prison, and they enable us to join in experiencing the most incredible moments, like for instance the moment where Reyhaneh calls her mother to tell her that they are picking her up for the execution.

How did you come into possession of the images of the family, which date from the time before and during Reyhaneh's case?

Shole had taken a large portion with her when she left, VHS and MiniDV cassettes, some things were smuggled out of Iran to Germany after the fact, pictures were scanned. We searched through countless hard drives. The cell phone recordings that Shahrzad gave me were extremely important in particular for the film. Shahrzad made quite a lot of recordings with her cell phone of situations within the family which show how a family lives on while one of the family members is in such existential peril. I am very grateful for that, because I can imagine how much she had to trust in me that I would treat these sensitive moments appropriately.

What is the origin of the outdoor shots of Tehran?

It was clear from the beginning that we would not be permitted to shoot any of this film in Iran. With the assistance of Zebra Kroop, an Iranian production company, we gained access to an amazing archive from a collective group from Iran that made high-quality shots of Tehran during the exact period that Reyhaneh was imprisoned. Even though that enabled us to cover a lot, we were missing shots of specific places that play a role in the story, like images of the prisons seen from the outside, for example, or of the family's former residence, or the house in which Reyhaneh was assaulted. It was clear to us that recording images of these places is extremely dangerous in part, and that the individuals recording them could end up in prison themselves. The people who recorded these images for us took this risk because they were so adamant that this film must be made and that Reyhaneh's story must be kept from fading into oblivion.

Are the individuals who captured those images among those credited anonymously in the film? What sort of risks should we assume they are exposed to?

There are a lot of people listed anonymously in the closing credits. Not only those who provided the images in question. Each team member was free to choose whether they wanted to be mentioned by name in the credits. Many Iranians or individuals with Iranian roots chose to go unnamed or use a pseudonym. They had to assume that they could face reprisals, problems entering Iran or interrogations there, also for members of their families who had not even been involved in the film at all and still live in Iran. The worst-case scenario is receiving a conviction for "corruption on Earth" (ifsad fil-arz) for participating in the film, since the film implicitly advocates against the death penalty. Because the death penalty is based on Sharia law, and therefore on the word of God. But for me it was nevertheless important to list anonymously all the people that I wasn't able to name. They were meant to leave a mark.

What sorts of security measures did you have to take to protect yourself and your team?

I never operated on the assumption that something could happen to me personally, but protecting my team members and my protagonists was the highest priority. To that ends, I never spoke about the film, I always kept what I was working on a secret, I communicated using secure channels, encrypted passwords, used fake details about content. A mishap led to the disclosure of the real content in a large email distribution list. And even though my producer Melanie Andernach did everything within her power to delete this announcement from the Internet as quickly as possible, from that point on all of my Iranian friends discouraged me from travelling to Iran, as I had actually planned to do.

That wasn't very easy for me to accept, since I wanted very deeply to travel around in the country that had preoccupied me for years, the native land of my partner at the time, of so many of my friends, where I myself, however, had never set foot. At some point, Shole said to me: "Hey, what do you want to go to Iran for? We're all right here, aren't we?" And I had to admit to myself that she was right again.

I hope with all my heart that Reyhaneh's family members are not in jeopardy due to the release of the film. Realistically, one must assume that they will be threatened verbally at the least. But the family has decided to raise its voice and not let itself be intimidated.

How did the contact take place with Reyhaneh's father, who still lives in Iran?

The family was in constant contact with him online via video calls, which meant I was also frequently able to talk with him briefly now and then. Then when we started shooting, I wanted really badly for our Iranian team to do the interview with him. But I got the news that it was too dangerous for them, since he is potentially still being monitored. That's why we recorded the interview online in the end. He told me that he was doing the interview for his daughter Reyhaneh and all the women in a similar situation to his daughter's.

In the closing credits, you write that you made attempts to initiate contact with the deceased's family, without success. Did you also try to seek out participation by other involved parties from the side of the authorities, like the first judge, for instance, or is that too dangerous or perhaps a hopeless undertaking?

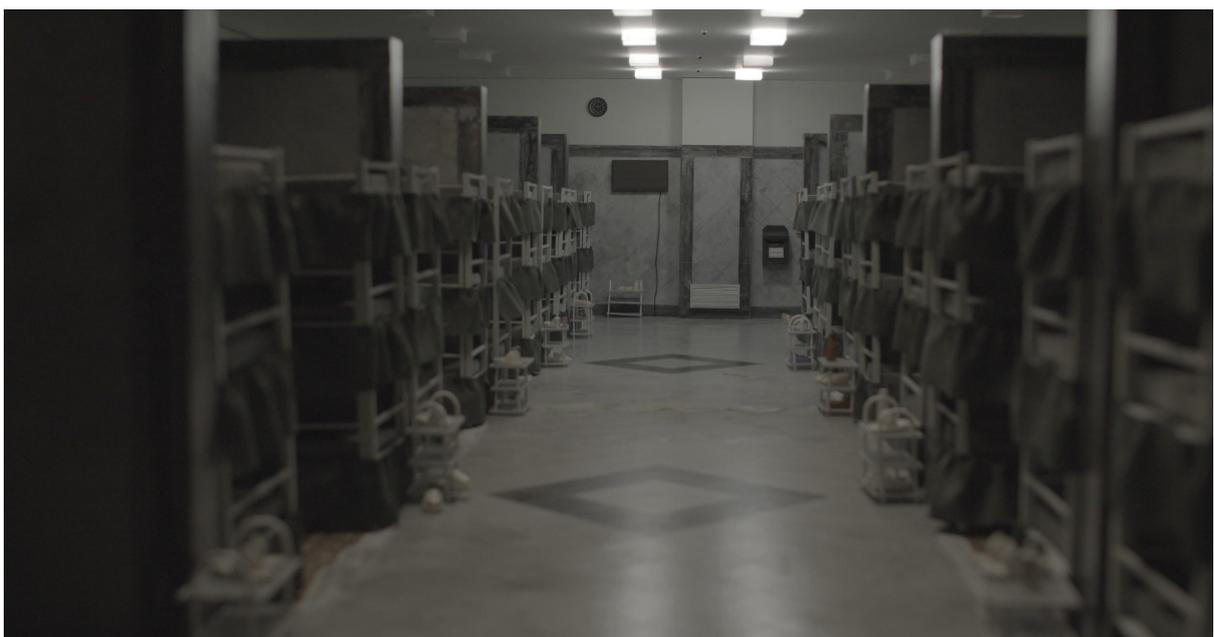
In order not to endanger the film or the individuals involved in making it, we were only able to contact the family of the deceased very late in the process. Shole and I called Jalal Sarbandi together, but we were cut off pretty quickly. We were told to call back later, but no matter how many times we tried, no one ever picked up again.

We made no attempt to contact the judges or any other government officials, on one hand due to the fact that there was nearly zero chance that they would make themselves available for the film, and, on the other, because my focus was not on painstakingly rehashing the case one more time in all its detail, but instead on showing the effects the death penalty has had on the family.

Your film has taken on an additional urgency in light of the current political developments in Iran. What do you believe that a film can accomplish in this context?

Right here and now, we can read in the newspapers that 26 demonstrators have already been sentenced to death, four of whom have already been executed*. I hope, through the film, that we do not simply just read these numbers, but that we can grasp the human destinies behind these numbers, that there is also a mother there like Shole, a father like Fereydoon and siblings like Sharare and Shahrzad. That through the film one can sense how much suffering is behind these sentences, how much violence and how much hope. I hope that motivates us to look closer and to demand that our governments do so too.

** as of the time of writing, January 9, 2023*



INTERVIEW WITH REYHANEH'S MOTHER, SOLE PAKRAVAN

By Teresa Vena

After everything you experienced, it must be difficult to trust others. How did you know you could entrust your story to the director?

In the past, I met several people who wanted to make a film out of our story. I accepted every time, but after a few weeks or months I always found signs that I couldn't trust them after all. And I stopped the project. At the beginning I thought that it would be the same with Steffi. My cousin had put me in contact with her, and I trust him, but still, I had my experiences. When I met Steffi, I saw that she is different. I knew she was the right person for it. We met several times and each time I gave her something to work with. I waited to see what she did with it. She was very transparent, very clear. By now, I trust her as much as my own daughters.

How does it make you feel to watch the film?

I haven't watched the latest version yet. I want to watch it at the cinema. Working on the film, seeing the video footage we documented with our mobile phones, and hearing Reyhaneh's voice was very hard for me. It was an emotional distress. My therapist recommended I shouldn't watch it again if I am not very balanced, so I decided to wait for the official premiere. But overall I am happy that the film has been made. It feels as if I am finally able to at least comply with one of Reyhaneh's last wishes. She wanted me to let her go with the wind, as she put it, to let her go, to find peace. The film and the book I have been writing together with Steffi could be these wings for her. She will fly away now.

What was the most difficult situation while working on the film?

To confront myself with the material, to watch the pictures. In the seven years when Reyhaneh was in prison, I reviewed every sentence every night, every newspaper article related to my daughter. Then, when I started therapy in Germany and the year passed, I began to forget some of the details. I only realized this after watching the material for the film. This in itself was like torture to me. Forgetting details felt like I might be able to forget my daughter at some point. This gave me a sense of guilt. It was really hard.

What are your thoughts on what is happening in Iran right now?

I am so sorry for the families that go through this experience. Hearing about four people already that have been moved to a prison to be executed and not knowing exactly what will happen makes me feel weak. I have trouble sleeping. In Iran I knew more than 100 families that were in the same situation as I was. Now there are even more added to this. With some I am in contact.

Do you hope the film will have a political impact?

It's a film about human rights and I hope it can make some changes. Most Western people can't understand what happens when the death penalty is executed. What it does to the families involved. It would be great that with more understanding there will be more pressure on the government of Iran. Every single rope that can be avoided is a success.

How is the situation for your husband right now?

He still has no passport and is alone. There are no other family members left in Iran. With the film and the book to be published, it's possible that he will be confronted with some new pressure.



ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Steffi Niedertzoll

Steffi Niedertzoll was born in Nuremberg in 1981. She studied audiovisual media arts at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne (KHM) and the Escuela de Cine y Television in Cuba (EICTV) from 2001-2007. Her short films have successfully screened at numerous renowned national and international film festivals such as Berlinale. She participated in various directing master classes and was a scholarship holder at the Cultural Academy Tarabya, Turkey.

In addition to her film work, she is also involved in interdisciplinary artistic works. She was a member of the core group of the collective “1000 Gestalten”, which caused a worldwide sensation with its performance during the G20 summit in Hamburg. Her collective works have been presented at the Brecht Festival, the Kunsthalle Baden-Baden and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde and Vejle, Denmark, among others.

Together with Shole Pakravan, she wrote the book “How to Become a Butterfly” about Reyhaneh Jabbari, which will be published by Berlin Verlag in 2023.

SEVEN WINTERS IN TEHRAN is her first feature-length documentary.



FILMOGRAPHY

IN BETWEEN (WT) | Feature film, 90 min (director, writer, production) | in post-production

SEVEN WINTERS IN TEHRAN | Feature documentary, 96 min (director, writer) | 2023

Production: MADE IN GERMANY Filmproduktion, in co-production with Gloria Films, TS Productions, WDR | Premiere: 73rd Berlinale - Perspektive Deutsches Kino

LEA | Short film, 43min, (script, director, producer) | 2008

Production: KHM | Premiere: 58th Berlinale - Perspektive Deutsches Kino

ONE LONG SUMMER | Short film, 29 min, (screenplay, director) | 2006

Production: KHM, Münchner Filmwerkstatt | Premiere: 40th International Hof Film Festival

COMO SI EL PAISAJE PASARA | Short film, 9 min (screenplay, director) | 2005

Production: KHM/EICTV | Premiere: 13th Festival de Cinema Independente de Barcelona

PETUHTANTES | Short documentary, 11 min, (concept, director) | 2004

Production: KHM | Premiere: DocuDays: Beirut International Documentary Festival Lebanon

CREDITS

Seven Winters in Tehran

Original title: Sieben Winter in Teheran

Germany / France, 2023, 96 min.

with	Reyhaneh Jabbari Shole Pakravan Fereydoon Jabbari Shahrzad Jabbari Sharare Jabbari Parvaneh Hajilou Mohammad Mostafaei Samira Mokarrami
With the voices of	Reyhaneh Jabbari Zar Amir Ebrahimi
Script & Director	Steffi Niederzoll
Producers	Melanie Andernach Knut Losen
Co-producers	Laurent Lavolé Milena Poylo Gilles Sacuto
Associate Producers	Eva Laass Céline Loiseau Sina Ataeian Dena
Editing	Nicole Kortlüke
Dramaturgy	Sina Ataeian Dena
DoP	Julia Daschner, bvk
Composer	Flemming Nordkrog
Sound	César Fernández Borrás
Sound Design	Andreas Hildebrandt

Re-Recording Mixer Jocelyn Robert

Model Supervisor Gali Blay

Commissioning Editor Jutta Krug, WDR

World sales CERCAMON

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A MADE IN GERMANY, Gloria Films Production, TS Productions and WDR production

