

## Entertainment

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IRAQ IN FRAGMENTS (UNRATED) \*\*\*

### The Iraqis' stories -- in their own words

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Perhaps we think that we've seen enough or read enough of Iraq after the U.S. invasion: the daily bombings, the deterioration of an elected government, the division within. But if all those images and long articles have become indistinguishable one from another, James Longley's compelling documentary *Iraq in Fragments* puts all the elements into focus.

Divided into three acts, a reflection of the ethnic tripartite that makes up Iraq, Longley takes us deep within sections of a split society that needs more than U.S. weapons to glue it together. We hear Iraqis speak, but not the politicians or the rich businessmen or the educated. Instead, Longley focuses on the poor who for generations have dreamed of a better life only to receive one disappointment after another.

Mohammed of Baghdad, the main character in the first act of that title, says, "I dreamed of work. Now I work and stopped dreaming." He's a boy about 10, illiterate and besieged by his employer, yet with the depth of intelligence to understand about broken dreams. His father was a Saddam Hussein supporter who was taken to prison after he began criticizing the regime. Mohammed works to help support his grandmother and longs for the Baghdad that existed before the U.S. occupation.

The second act takes you to the South, where Shia fervor is heightened by extremists. A vendor of alcoholic beverages in Naseriyah is beaten, blindfolded and taken away in a car with masked men. "I lived during the oppression," he says, "and this is a new form of oppression." Yet many feel free to return to the ritual of flagellation, forbidden during the Saddam regime, in a practice that is as repulsive as it is mesmerizing.

The third segment takes place in Kurdish territory, where an old man talks about the suffering under Saddam while showing the pride over his native Kurdistan. "If violence stops," the old man says, "every place lit by sunshine will pray to Islam." In addition to the interesting camera work, the documentary's undeniable appeal comes in how close Longley gets to the characters, who are all male. They speak openly of the past, the U.S. forces, the uncertain future. It is heartbreaking to listen to the children while disheartening to see the long road to democracy still ahead. Iraq is fragmented, with large portions of its population living in poverty, longing for peace and distrustful of the U.S. presence. What we conclude from Longley's documentary is that the solutions must come from within.

Director, screenwriter and producer: James Longley.

Running time: 94 minutes. Graphic scenes. In Arabic and Kurdish with English subtitles. In Miami-Dade: Cosford Cinema.