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Movie Review

"Iraq in Fragments": Anarchy in Iraq, through the eyes of Iraqis

By Tom Keogh

Special to The Seattle Times

Movie review ★★★★★

[Showtimes and trailer](#)

"Iraq in Fragments," a documentary directed by James Longley. 94 minutes. Not rated; includes scenes of wartime violence. In Kurdish and Arabic with English subtitles. Varsity.



TYPECAST PICTURES

Followers of Moqtada al-Sadr attend a rally in Kufa Mosque in this scene from the documentary "Iraq in Fragments."

Arriving so soon after "The War Tapes," a remarkable documentary shot by U.S. soldiers about America's occupation of Iraq, the equally astonishing "Iraq in Fragments" plays like a companion piece told from the other side.

A feverish blur of eyewitness horror in the post-Saddam nation, "Iraq in Fragments" is a much-honored documentary by the intrepid James Longley ("Gaza Strip"), who has spent a lot of time in the Middle East filming in conflict-ridden areas and now lives in Seattle.

Longley's access to public and private developments in the wake of the U.S. invasion of Iraq is often stunning.

"Fragments" was shot during the first two years of the Iraq war and has three distinct chapters. Part 1 concerns 11-year-old Mohammed Haithem, whose parents disappeared, forcing him to find a way to survive alone in Baghdad, where he fears the escalating, sectarian conflicts between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Mohammed is an apprentice in an auto-repair shop, working for a man he clearly wants to be his father surrogate. But (as we see repeatedly on camera), the shop owner belittles the boy's intelligence and strikes him.

Another section concerns Kurdish farmers who are happy about the U.S. presence, as it has given them, a beleaguered minority, a sense of freedom.

But the most powerful chapter focuses on the then-emerging power and organization of Moqtada al-Sadr's fundamentalist Shiite followers in southern Iraq. Demanding a government based on strict interpretation of Muslim law, Sadr's militiamen rally and cruise the streets, violently enforcing their vision. They also battle with American troops.

More than once, in both the Sadr and Mohammed parts, we hear ordinary Iraqis say that America threw out one Saddam and replaced him with many others — a reference to the occupation's heavy-handed detentions and torture of citizens without warrants or charges. But with the rise of militias, as one Muslim man detained by Sadr's people says, Arabs are doing it to themselves.

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