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For the program companion website, visit pbs.org/independentlens/garbage-dreams

**GARBAGE DREAMS
GOES INSIDE THE WORLD OF THE ‘ZABALLEEN,’
THE GARBAGE PEOPLE OF CAIRO**

*Acclaimed Documentary Premieres Nationally on the PBS series Independent Lens
on Tuesday, April 27, 2010 at 10 PM*

(San Francisco, CA)—Filmed over four years, *Garbage Dreams* goes inside the world of Egypt’s Zaballeen (Arabic for ‘garbage people’) to reveal the lives of two teenage boys born into the trash trade. For generations, the residents of Cairo have depended on the Zaballeen to collect their trash, paying them only a minimal amount for their garbage collection services. These entrepreneurial garbage workers survive by recycling 80 percent of all the garbage they collect, creating what is arguably the world’s most efficient waste disposal system. Recycling to lift themselves out of poverty, the Zaballeen have, through necessity, devised ingenious solutions to one of the world’s most pressing problems. Directed by Mai Iskander, *Garbage Dreams* premieres on Tuesday, April 27 at 10 p.m. (check local listings) on the PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Maggie Gyllenhaal.

Adham and Osama live in Mokattam, a garbage ghetto on the outskirts of Cairo, a city with 18 million residents and no sanitation service. Laila, the neighborhood’s activist and teacher at their neighborhood’s Recycling School, guides Adham and Osama as they transition into manhood. A busy recycling and trading enclave, Mokattam’s plastic granulators, cloth-grinders and paper and cardboard compacters hum constantly. When the city they keep clean suddenly decides to replace the Zaballeen with multinational garbage disposal companies, the Zaballeen community finds itself at a crossroads. Face to face with the globalization of their trade, the teenage boys are forced to make choices that will impact their future and the survival of the community.



Scenes from Garbage Dreams, coming to Independent Lens April 2010.

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Garbage Dreams is the winner of over 17 festival prizes and was shortlisted for the Academy Award for Best Feature Documentary. Among the many prizes the film has received is the Nashville Film Festival's Reel Current Award, chosen and presented by Al Gore to a documentary that provides extraordinary insight into a contemporary global issue. *Garbage Dreams* is "a moving story of young men searching for ways to eke out a living for their families and facing tough choices as they try to do the right thing for the planet," Mr. Gore remarked. "The film makes a compelling case that modernization does not always equal progress."

To learn more about the film and its subjects, visit the companion website for *Garbage Dreams* at pbs.org/garbage-dreams. Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmaker and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section where viewers can share their ideas and opinions.

Participants

Osama is an impish 16 year-old boy who can't seem to keep a job and endures the wrath of his mother, who calls him lazy and a failure. In their garbage village, it is expected that boys his age work and help out with family expenses, but in Osama's family, where everyone is suffering from illness related to the trash trade, the situation is much more dire. Osama, soulful and sensitive, prays that when he becomes an altar boy, God will help him find his way. Although he professes that the multinational waste companies have ruined his neighborhood by putting the Zaballeen out of work, he cannot pass up the economic security of working for the conglomerates. Although his friends call him "a traitor," he secretly confesses that he loves wearing his new uniform and feeling the wind in his hair when he rides the giant corporate "Kut-Kut" trucks through the chaotic streets of Cairo.

As the only man of the house, **Adham**, a precocious 17-year old, is the family breadwinner, supporting his mother and four sisters. Adham's job consists of painstakingly shearing off the top of discarded soda cans separating the more lucrative aluminum tops from their tin canisters. In light of the arrival of the foreign multinational waste companies, he has been working to develop and modernize his trade. When Adham finds out that he is selected by the school to take part in a long week foreign exchange program in Wales, United Kingdom, he is ecstatic. He now fancies himself a trash mogul and hopes he can make the Zaballeen famous, teaching the world the latest recycling techniques. He inspires a campaign to "modernize" the Zaballeen's practices and teach Cairo's citizens how to sort their trash for recycling.

Laila is the neighborhood community activist and teacher at The Recycling School. She was born and raised in the Mokattam settlement, and its well-being is of tantamount importance in her life. Since the coming of the multinationals, her commitment to helping the Zaballeen find their place in the new global waste management industry has grown dramatically. Laila passionately works with her students at the Recycling School, taking pride in their accomplishments but also feeling the sting of their setbacks. When she's not teaching, Laila makes rounds in Mokattam administering vaccination shots. Though at times Laila wonders if her efforts are futile, she cannot imagine leaving her neighborhood.

About the Filmmaker

Mai Iskander (producer, director, cinematographer) has worked as a cinematographer on TV shows for A&E, PBS, and LOGO, and has filmed numerous dramatic films (*Roof Sex*) and commercials. She has had the privilege of working with the legendary Albert Maysles on the documentary *Profiles of a Peacemaker*. Iskander recently returned from Tchad, where she worked with Academy Award Nominee Edet Belzberg on her documentary *Watchers of the Sky*.

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Iskander started her career working as a camera assistant for the Academy Award nominated cinematographer Miroslav Ondricek (*Amadeus*, *Ragtime*). As a camera assistant, Mai has worked on over a dozen features, such as *The Preacher's Wife*, *Men in Black* and *As Good As It Gets*, and on over a hundred commercials. She graduated from New York University, Tisch School of the Arts with a BFA in Film Production and a BA in Economics.

Garbage Dreams is Iskander's directorial debut.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10:00 PM on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history. Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at www.pbs.org/independentlens. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

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