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QUO VADIS, AIDA?

Un film de/Een film van
JASMILA ŽBANIĆ



Date de sortie/Releasedatum : TBC (juin/juni 2021)

Drame/Drama - 2020 - Bosnie Herzégovine/Bosnië Herzegovina - 102 min

En co-production avec/in co-productie met :
Autriche, Roumanie, Pays-Bas, Allemagne, Pologne, France, Norvège et Turquie
Oostenrijk, Roemenië, Nederland, Duitsland, Polen, Frankrijk, Noorwegen en Turkije

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SYNOPSIS

FR

Srebrenica, juillet 1995. Modeste professeure d'anglais, Aida vient d'être réquisitionnée comme interprète auprès des Casques Bleus, stationnés aux abords de la ville. Leur camp est débordé : les habitants viennent y chercher refuge par milliers, terrorisés par l'arrivée imminente de l'armée serbe. Chargée de traduire les consignes et rassurer la foule, Aida est bientôt gagnée par la certitude que le pire est inévitable. Elle décide alors de tout tenter pour sauver son mari et ses deux fils, coincés derrière les grilles du camp.

NL

QUO VADIS, AIDA? is een Bosnische speelfilm van Jasmila Žbanić (GRBAVICA, winnaar Gouden Beer) die een fictieve weergave geeft van de genocide in Srebrenica. Met onder anderen Raymond Thiry (PENZOZA) en Johan Heldenbergh (THE BROKEN CIRCLE BREAKDOWN) als Dutchbatters.

Aida (Jasna Đuričić) werkt in Srebrenica op de Nederlandse VN-basis als tolk in dienst van de Verenigde Naties. Samen met haar gezin en 20.000 andere Bosnische moslims zoekt zij een veilig onderkomen vanwege het oprukkende Bosnisch-Servische leger. De film toont de uren voorafgaand aan de dramatische evacuatie van de vluchtelingen. Tot dan is Aida er zeker van dat de VN ze zou beschermen, maar als de chaos steeds groter wordt, probeert ze uit alle macht zelf haar man en zonen te redden. Meer dan 8.000 Bosnische vluchtelingen worden omgebracht.

QUO VADIS, AIDA? werd geselecteerd voor de Officiële Competitie van het filmfestival van Venetië. 'Meeslepend, aangrijpend en hartverscheurend,' aldus Variety. De film is tevens geselecteerd voor International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) en is de Oscarinzending voor Bosnië en Herzegovina.

"This film is about a woman caught in a male game of war. It is about courage, love and resilience - and also about what happens if we fail to react on time to warning signs. I survived the war in Bosnia. One day you have everything, and the other day most of the things you know no longer exist. Just because we deem certain things unimaginable, doesn't mean they cannot happen."

Jasmila Žbanić, director



JASMILA ŽBANIĆ

Screenwriter, director

Born in Sarajevo in 1974, Jasmila is a graduate of her native city's Academy of Dramatic Arts, Theatre and Film Directing Department. Before filmmaking, she also worked as a puppeteer in the Vermont-based Bread and Puppet Theater and as a clown in a Lee DeLong workshop.

Her feature debut GRBAVICA won the 2006 Berlinale Golden Bear (as well as the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury and the Peace Prize), the AFI (American Film Institute) Fest Grand Jury Prize, Grand Prix Odyssey of the European Council and was sold to 40 territories with great success. Nomination Best film and Best actress European Film Award.

ON THE PATH, Jasmila's second feature film, premiered at the 2010 Berlinale, in the Competition section. The film had worldwide distribution on 25 territories and won numerous awards including Filmkunstfestival Schwerin Award for Best Director, Golden Apricot IFF Yerevan – FIPRESCI Prize, Pula Film Festival 2010 – Golden Arena for Best Director, Nomination – European Film Award for Best Actress.

Jasmila's third feature, FOR THOSE WHO CAN TELL NO TALES, made its world premiere at the Toronto Film Festival and won the 2013 Femme de Cinema Award at Les Arcs European Film Festival. LOVE ISLAND premiered at Locarno film festival Grand Palace and was screened at TV ARTE for more than half a million viewers. ONE DAY IN SARAJEVO experimental documentary had an international premiere at DOC LEIPZIG DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL and 30 more festivals worldwide.

All her films were produced through Deblokada, an artists' association that she founded.

Jasmila's films and video works have been displayed at dozens of art exhibitions worldwide such as Manifesta 3, the Istanbul Biennial, Kunsthalle Fridericianum Kassel, Swedish Contemporary Art Foundation, New Museum in New York...

She is the recipient of the 2014 KAIROS Prize which honors European artists whose work is judged to have a major cultural and social impact.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2020 QUO VADIS, AIDA?
- 2019 AIRBORNE (DOCUMENTARY)
- 2015 ONE DAY IN SARAJEVO (DOCUMENTARY)
- 2014 LOVE ISLAND
- 2012 FOR THOSE WHO CAN TELL NO TALES
- 2010 ON THE PATH
- 2008 PARTICIPATION (SHORT)
- 2007 BUILDER'S DIARY (DOCUMENTARY)
- 2006 GRBAVICA
- 2004 BIRTHDAY part of the omnibus LOST AND FOUND (DOCUMENTARY)
- 2003 IMAGES FROM THE CORNER (DOCUMENTARY)
- 2002 TO AND FRO (SHORT)
- 1998 WE LIGHT THE NIGHT (DOCUMENTARY)
- 1998 LOVE IS... (SHORT)
- 1997 AFTER, AFTER (DOCUMENTARY)
- 1996 AUTOBIOGRAPHY



INTERVIEW JASMILA ŽBANIĆ

Tell us about this particular story and what it has meant for you in your life. Where were you in 1995, how old were you, and has this been a passion of yours to tell this story on film?

The systematic execution of over 8,000 residents of the east Bosnian town of Srebrenica at the end of the Bosnian war (1992-95) is a huge trauma for all Bosnians.

During the war Srebrenica was declared a UN safe zone for civilians and citizens. However, when Bosnian Serb forces overran the town in July 1995, the outgunned UN troops who requested help from the UN in New York were totally let down together with the population.

Srebrenica is a 40 minute flight from Vienna, less than two hours from Berlin and it is scary to think that such an act of genocide happened directly in front of European eyes - after we all repeated a million times over "Never again".

The sense of security, the trust in institutions like the UN, was lost and thousands of people died-many more mourned for them.

Personally, Srebrenica is very close to me because I survived the war in Sarajevo which was also under siege and we could have easily ended up as Srebrenica did. I always thought someone must make a film about what happened there, but I never thought it should be me. Yet the story always haunted me. I read everything I could about Srebrenica and only after four films did I feel ready to do this one – knowing there would be many obstacles.

What were the obstacles?

Bosnia is a country that produces only one film per year. We have almost no industry and our Film Fund is very small. We received only 5% of the budget from the Film Fund. Bosnia used to be part of a bigger story with Yugoslavia and its strong film industry but after the war where everything was destroyed connections to other countries became limited - we were left in a film production desert. So, production wise and because of the standards we set for this film it was a big challenge.

After the war and the internal division of Bosnia, Srebrenica remained in the part of the country run by Bosnian Serbs. Our government has many right-wing politicians who are still denying that the genocide in Srebrenica happened. They celebrate war criminals as heroes denying the Hague International Criminal Court's decision that what happened in Srebrenica constitutes a genocide. Thus, another enormous obstacle was politics.

Yet on the other hand many people did want this film to be born and were really supportive. Many Bosnians helped. Also we have 9 European countries who are co-producers, who wanted this story to be told.

Damir Ibrahimovic, our main producer, made so many brave and risky choices. It took us years to make this film. But we made it because we were driven by the need to tell this story because we believe it is a story not only about Bosnia or the Balkans but about human beings, how we behave towards each other when we are unleashed from morality, when we destroy every human form.

How did it start to emerge in your head that you would try to make a film about Srebrenica?

I was reading a lot, listening to many women and their stories about their sons, husbands, brothers, fathers who were abandoned by the UN and captured by the Bosnian Serb army. These stories which were every day in the media deeply affected me emotionally. Today, 25 years later, 1700 people are still missing. The story of Srebrenica is a drama that completely consumed me as a filmmaker.

How did you deal with dramaturgy – it is a fiction film based on true events?

I had felt a huge responsibility in how I chose to tell these events. Sometimes it felt as if I was

walking in a minefield. I was committed to creating a film that would enable people to understand these 100 minutes, to understand the story while at the same time remaining truthful to the emotions, characters and facts. I was aware that it was not possible to tell every aspect of this complicated historical situation story. I had to make choices.

I had to fictionalize many things because film has its own rules. For example, in reality Dutch UN commander Karremans had several meetings negotiating the town's destiny with Bosnian Serb general Mladic in Hotel Fontana. There are video clips of these meetings available on the internet. Yet it didn't work in the film to have several scenes, so I decided to make it into one scene. I had to dramatize certain elements, invent characters.

A very valuable book for me was UNDER THE UN FLAG by Hasan Nuhanovic whose story inspired the film.

Tell us about the character of Aida.

Her character is between two worlds: she is Bosnian, her family is in the same situation as thirty thousand other residents of Srebrenica, yet she works for the UN making her position ambiguous. She believes in the UN. She believes a UN base is the safe place for her family and that she has certain privileges because she works for the UN. The film is her journey when everything falls apart.

Obviously, there's so much in the film that shows your creative skills, it's an incredibly tense film to watch. But let's look at the casting first: the performance of your actress. Did you target her early on? And how did you work together?

When the script was ready to be shared with the team, I started talking about actors with producer Damir Ibrahimovic, and we immediately said "It's Jasna, we don't have to search any further". I worked with Jasna Djuric in my film "For those who can tell no tales". I have also seen a lot of her theatre performances and other films. She has profound acting skills and incredible energy. She is truthful, precise, always expecting the best and totally trusting the director, a joy to work with. Our cooperation felt so natural. After reading rehearsals, where we discussed every situation, and did a lot of improvisations. For example, the history of the family: how she met her husband, how they got married, how their kids went to school... everything before the moment the film begins. We rehearsed in the apartment where we later shot the film. Nothing of this was in the script or in the film but it was important for the actors and I to feel the past and to bring this backstory in the film even if it is invisible.

Then we rehearsed the entire film in continuity in actual locations. This was crucial as our crazy shooting schedule which had to adapt to the actors' availability was totally out of continuity. Our actors are from all over: Netherlands, Belgium, Serbia, Poland, Romania, Croatia, Bosnia-adjusting to their timetable was a nightmare. So, going through the film in continuity allowed the actors to memorize the energy, the level of emotions, the rhythm for each scene. At that stage DOP Christine Maier and I designed each shot.

You had great ensemble of actors. Tell us about them.

All the actors are diamonds for me: Izudin Bajrović (Nihad), Dino Barjović (Sejo, who is also the real son of Izudin) and Boris Ler (Hamdija). Izudin brings the energy of a Bosnian man who is at the same time naive, intelligent and good-hearted but gets many things wrong.

Emir Hadžihafizbegović (Special Orizzonti Award for Best Actor at Venice 71). When we were shooting the scene where he, as a Serbian soldier, entered the base full of refugees, his acting felt so real that two female extras fainted. These women were kids during the Bosnian war and his acting triggered old traumas. It was very emotional for Emir and all actors to play these roles.

The Dutch actors were also great to work with, I loved them so much especially Raymond Thierry who found his Franken in a way that allowed the audience one moment to understand him and the other moment you want to die because he is not doing anything. I must also mention Johan Heldenbergh, the Belgium actor who plays Karremans, who created amazing different layers of the complicated position of his character.

As for Mladic the main question was: how to portray him since he is still alive? Everybody knows what Mladic looks like. Not many people know what Karremans looks like. We explored different methods – not to show him, to film him only from behind but we did not want to make a mysterious figure out of him. He is a human being, yes, he is a war criminal but not a mythical figure, he is flesh and blood. We wondered which actor can deliver his inner energy, who can embody this personality. And we choose the amazing Boris Isakovic. He has an incredible acting range and energy. There is a lot of video footage of Mladić available, but Boris found an original and powerful approach that is so truthful to this story.

Is it significant that some actors who are Serbian played roles of Bosnian Muslims and the other way around?

No, I don't care about nationality; I choose the best actors. We all speak the same language and have a common history and culture; we look the same. Nations are not important for films and should not be important in life either.

Do we assume now that Mladic was always going to kill the men? Were these negotiations just a performance?

In 1991, the leader of Bosnian Serbs Radovan Karadzic (sentenced to life in prison for war crimes) said in Parliament that if Bosnia does not stay in Yugoslavia Muslims will disappear in the hell of war because they cannot defend themselves. There is footage of this statement on YouTube. Thus, began the genocide proven in the cases of Karadzic, Mladic and others. Every small town on the border of Bosnia with Serbia had 3000, 4000 citizens brutally killed in May 1992. What happened was obviously planned.

What about the UN. They were in a really tough position, since nobody supported them. How do you want them to be perceived?

This film is not against the institution and ideas that the UN stands for. On the contrary, my film warns us that we must improve and support our institutions. The UN was blocked politically by certain world politicians. To abandon Srebrenica was primarily a political decision. Everything possible was done to tie the hands of the UN. But that does not exonerate the Dutch. They had a lot of prejudices toward Bosnians Muslims, as well as a quite colonial view of people in general. Florence Hartmann explains this in her book "The blood of Realpolitik". I recommend this book because it is not only about Srebrenica but about how the political system functions. If Srebrenica happened now in 2020 it would have the same outcome! The EU would not move a finger! This terrifies me.

Where did you film the UN base?

We built it. The hall was there, but we had to modify the look of it according to the feeling we wanted the space to convey. This location needed to be Nowhere, we needed a big field where people could stand, and a road which led them to life or death. Surprisingly it was very hard to find a convenient place to shoot in Bosnia, despite the fact that there are so many abandoned factories there. We found the perfect location an old concentration camp during the war, so we couldn't use it. We shot it in the building next to it. Many locations were places of violence, even schools.

Some of our extras were actually former prisoners. Discovering this was a very strange. We were shooting a scene where men are forced to climb on a truck, so we told extras how to do it. One man responded: "That is not the way they took us". I did not understand at the beginning. He continued, "I was here, in this camp for 12 months and this is not how soldiers gave us orders". This man explained what actually happened and we filmed it according to his instructions. That is how I found out that many people of our 400 extras were actually former prisoners of the Heliodrom camp.

The interiors were in Stolac ; the exteriors in Mostar 40 minutes away. We shot first the interiors and then the exteriors which is pretty complicated. We shot the exterior in June and July in 40 degree heat; Everyday we had about 10 emergency interventions, people fainting from the heat. I fainted only once (laughing).

How did you create the incredible sense of tension throughout the film?

While writing the script I wanted to have a thriller element, to have this big flow of energy of

Aida's attempts to rescue her family. During the editing I worked with the wonderful editor Jaroslaw Kaminski (*Ida, Cold War*), our main concern was that Srebrenica is not so known and it is important that the audience understands the premise. When one makes a film about the Holocaust one can count on the fact that people know a lot about it, so there is no need to explain. But with Srebrenica's genocide it is not like that. For example, we did a test with Jarek's students from the editing department in Lodz film school who are in their 20s. Five of them had heard of Srebrenica but did not know what exactly happened and ten of them never even heard of it. I think this is the situation with most of Europe not to mention other parts of the world.

The film must function for people who don't know it's history.

This film is not a historical documentary where is the heart of your story?

Aida's drama and her emotions are the heart of this story. I want people to take away the feelings and questions the film raises. If Dutch soldiers had more empathy, would this tragedy have had such a terrible outcome? Even if institutions and governments let us down, we still have freedom to feel for others and help others. We are constantly led by feelings of selfishness – capitalism needs selfishness to survive, but it is leading our Earth and all of us towards disaster.

I would love for people to connect to the story of Srebrenica with their own lives and question who would be there for them in difficult times. How many things would have been different if we had more solidarity?

Also, there is a question of the trauma we transfer to our children: both children of perpetrators and children of victims. There is a huge amount of energy that perpetrators invest in denial creating a massive burden for the next generations..

Some of your films are about the war others aren't. How does this film sit with the rest of your work?

Most of my films are after-war films, stories of life today affected by the past. This war that we survived still has a lot of consequences on our lives. But this is my first war film with tanks, guns, soldiers... As a feminist I see a war as a male game. Virginia Woolf put it nicely: "War is a man's game ... the killing machine has a gender and it is male". I believe every war is just a platform for sociopaths and psychopaths. While we are talking right now, some people are getting very rich from wars. Actually, a few get rich and millions suffer.

This film shows the patriarchal and bureaucratic structure of war. Responsibility is always with the authority somewhere else. It shows the woman in the labyrinth of this system and consequences. For me, war is this: a woman laying down, shot in the back, while soldiers loot her home.

Narratives of wars are usually wrapped in decorations of freedom, democracy and justice so we don't notice the truth behind the narrative nor its inherent banality. We need narratives which show us what is hidden, to show stories from other perspectives.



CAST

Aida Selmanagic JASNA ĐURIČIĆ
Nihad IZUDIN BAJROVIĆ
Hamdija BORIS LER
Sejo DINO BAJROVIĆ
General Ratko Mladic BORIS ISAKOVIĆ

Colonel Karremans Johan Heldenbergh
Major Franken Raymond Thiry
Lieutenant Rutten Juda Goslinga
Captain Mintjes Teun Luijkx
Colonel Dr. Robben Reinout Bussemaker
Soldier Lammerts Sol Vinken
Adjutant Rave Job Raaijmakers
Soldier Ils Sanne den Hartogh
Major De Haan Micha Hulshof
Boudwijn Joes Brauers



CREW

screenwriter and director JASMILA ŽBANIĆ

Producers DAMIR IBRAHIMOVIĆ
JASMILA ŽBANIĆ

Director of photography CHRISTINE A. MAIER
Production Design HANNES SALAT
Costume Design MALGORZATA KARPIUK
ELLEN LENS

Make-up/hair design MICHAELA PAYER,
Editing JAROSŁAW KAMIŃSKI
Sound design IGOR ČAMO

Music composed and orchestrated by ANTONI KOMASA-ŁAZARKIEWICZ
Casting NARCISA CVITANOVIC
REBECCA VAN UNEN

Art Direction ZELJKA BURIC
SABINE ENGELBERG

Producers DEBLOKADA (BOSNIA)

Co-producers & partners COOP99 FILMPRODUKTION (AUSTRIA)
DIGITAL CUBE (ROMANIA)
N279 (NETHERLANDS)
RAZOR FILM (GERMANY)
EXTREME EMOTIONS (POLAND)
INDIE PROD (FRANCE)
TORDEN FILM (NORWAY)
TRT (TURKEY)
ZDF ARTE (GERMANY)

Languages BOSNIAN, ENGLISH, DUTCH

