



Ascent Film with Rai Cinema  
in coproduction with Caviar and Antitalent

present

# SEMBRA MIO FIGLIO

## Just Like My Son

A film by Costanza Quatriglio

**Italian release on September 20th, distributed by Ascent Film**

**Press Office**

Daniela Staffa [press.staffa@gmail.com](mailto:press.staffa@gmail.com), 335 1337630

Claudia Tomassini [claudia@claudiatomassini.com](mailto:claudia@claudiatomassini.com),  
334 3075066 / +49 173 2055794

A film by **COSTANZA QUATRIGLIO**

WITH  
**BASIR AHANG DAWOOD YOUSEFI TIHANA LAZOVIC**

WRITTEN BY  
**DORIANA LEONDEFF COSTANZA QUATRIGLIO**  
IN COLLABORATION WITH  
**MOHAMMAD JAN AZAD**

AN **ASCENT FILM** with **RAI CINEMA PRODUCTION**  
IN COPRODUCTION WITH **CAVIAR** and **ANTITALENT**

IN COLLABORTION WITH **FILM IN IRAN** WITH SUPPORT OF **EURIMAGES**  
WITH CONTRIBUTION OF  
**MINISTERO PER I BENI E LE ATTIVITÀ CULTURALI E DEL TURISMO** AND  
**CROATIAN AUDIOVISUAL CENTRE**

WITH THE SUPPORT OF  
**BELGIUM TAX SHELTER** AND **FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA FILM COMMISSION** AND  
**REGIONE LAZIO FONDO REGIONALE PER IL CINEMA E L'AUDIOVISIVO**

SUBJECT **COSTANZA QUATRIGLIO**  
PRODUCTION DESIGNER **BEATRICE SCARPATO**  
COSTUM DESIGNER **NATHALIE LEBORGNE**  
SOUND **ALESSANDRO PALMERINI**  
MUSIC **LUCA D'ALBERTO**  
EDITING **LETIZIA CAUDULLO** and **MARIE-HÉLÈNE DOZO**  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY **STEFANO FALIVENE** and **SABRINA VARANI**  
ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR **FABRIZIO MARTELLI**  
FINANCIAL DIRECTOR **DANIELE BENI**  
DELEGATE PRODUCER **INES VASILJEVIC**  
COPRODUCED BY **IVY VANHAECK** e **DANIEL PEK**

PRODUCED BY **ANDREA PARIS** e **MATTEO ROVERE**

DIRECTED BY **COSTANZA QUATRIGLIO**

- *Hello. Who is this?*

- *I'm Ismail, your son.*

- *I don't have any son named Ismail.*

## **Synopsis**

Since fleeing from Afghanistan as a little boy, Ismail has been living in Europe with his brother Hassan. Their mother, who never gave up waiting for news of her sons, doesn't recognize him anymore. After several unsettling phone calls, Ismail decides to face his family's fate, buoyed by the story of his people, the Hazara.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

*A son addresses the mother whom, until that moment, he had believed was dead, but she does not recognize him. Since then, a mysterious force pushes him to find a way to reunite with her.*

*Ismail's body, his gentle face, his voice suspended in the darkest corners of Europe, carries us to an elsewhere that belongs to us much more than we are willing to admit. From evoking places that are very far from us in time and space, to a substance of flesh and blood, the movie proceeds in search of answers that do not exist. What does exist is the chance for Ismail to claim his voice, a negated voice that nobody has heard before. In the mother tongue we find the language of the world, the language of an old compassion that has neither homeland, nor country, nor boundaries, or frontiers.*

Costanza Quatriglio

## THE STORY OF THE FILM

### Jan

*«When I meet Afghan boys on the street I always ask them how they got here, where in Afghanistan they are from, if they come from my region ... maybe one day I will meet someone that will give me a chance to find my family ... I always look for someone to ask them where my family is.»*

Mohammad Jan Azad utters these words at the end of the documentary *Il mondo addosso* (*The world on their shoulders*) I shot in Rome in 2005-2006.

Jan arrived in Italy, where he lived in a centre for unaccompanied minors, after crossing Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and Greece. He left Afghanistan on foot when he was still a child, like so many other boys of his age who fled the Taliban's fury in the years preceding September 11. Since leaving home, he has never received news of his mother.

Nobody would have ever imagined that Jan's words would come true.

In the summer of 2010 I learned from Jan that his life had changed after his first phone conversation with âbay, mother.

And so begins my journey of transcription of his tales: pages upon pages, hundreds of sheets that I dive into and break from, only to dive back into and break from again. They soon inspire the short film *Breve film d'amore e libertà* (*Short film of love and freedom*) where Jan re-experiences with courage and generosity the phone conversations with his mother until the day of identification, the moment where his emotions break.

More years go by, I let life run its course, then the time comes and I make my decision.

## **Ismail, two brothers, one family, one people**

The hundreds of pages I gathered over five or six years become the inspiration of a story that goes dives in and out of reality, centring on a young man named Ismail, his two brothers, one family, and one people. A broadening that brings what is off camera slowly into focus – a presence, that of the mother, whom the timeless law of the stronger condemned to absence.

I choose to use a non-linear narrative, where the process of unveiling lets the repressed unconscious emerge via ellipses, displacements and alleviations, pulling Ismail and us together into one prayer, and joining us to the history of a people that knows no peace. This leads me to prefer a progressively widening framing technique: from tight shots that hint at the off-screen world to huge spaces where the subject disappears into the anonymous mass.

Getting to the heart of the tale about Ismail and his mother helped me to learn about the context in which the story plummets: the Hazaras are perhaps the world's most prosecuted ethnic group. But few people know and want to learn about this peaceful people who were once Buddhist and are now mostly Shia. Those familiar with the story told in *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini's best-selling novel, will perhaps remember that the young protagonist, the victim of terrible hatred and violence, is a Hazara.

Jan and his brothers are children of the diaspora. Displacement is their existential condition: it is impossible to belong to just one place.

The magic of Hazaragi, a Indo-European language like every other Persian dialect, unveils roots that it shares with the furthest corners of the West: *mâdar... padar... or barâdar* for brother...

I am reminded of what I wrote about *Il mondo addosso*: that film concerned the future of our Country. Today I say that our Country and all of Europe should begin again from stories like that of Jan and his brothers to find again the humanity that we seem to have lost for good.

## **All the possible mothers**

The movie took a long time to make. Nothing was easy. On the contrary, the making of this impossible movie put countless challenges in front of us. Perhaps and because of these adventures it was more than exciting.

With the actors, the poet Basir Ahang and the cast, we experienced forms of sharing that I would have never imagined, going through unique and engrossing emotional moments.

The time of its realization was a never-ending mixing, taking (learning) and constantly giving back, like when Dost Ali (meaning “Ali's friend”), an old man we encountered in a tiny village in Iran and eventually cast as an actor in the movie, replied to the question «What do you think a movie on the Hazara should tell?», his eyes full of the horror of the Mazar-e-Sharif massacre of '97 that the Talibans perpetrated on defenceless civilians, «That we should not be killed».

Or when a woman who had kept quiet and apart for a long time spoke up when she heard that I knew many Hazara boys in Italy. She asked the name of each of them and whether I knew where

exactly they were from, just to tell me that she is a âbay who survived by holding on to the secret dream of one day meeting someone that could have information on her beloved son.

So many possible stories, so many possible mothers.

Among them is Mrs Ahang, who landed one night at Teheran airport from Kabul. She hadn't seen her son Basir in many years, since the time he was forced to leave Afghanistan.

She was with us for him, because Basir is the protagonist of the movie.

Never had I known it so clearly as on the day that, with the heart pulsating in my throat, I realized that life and cinema can overlap, and that its happening is the most rare and precious gift.

### **Notes on the Hazara**

There are about 8 million Hazara in the world today. They are victims of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, where they are routinely hit by attacks by Sunni terrorists. Once Buddhist, the Hazara mostly occupy Afghanistan's central region, where the two statues of the Buddha, symbolizing their history and culture, were destroyed by the Taliban in March 2001. Their Mongolian features suggest that they might be descendants of Genghis Khan's army which invaded Afghanistan in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. However, some historians claim that the Hazara are the indigenous population of Afghanistan. The first genocide attempt dates back to 1890, when Abdul Rahman Khan, the Afghan king, exterminated 62% of the population. A century later, starting in the late 1990s, the Taliban unleashed an endless stream of violence. In the first five months of 2018 almost 1000 people from the regions inhabited by the Hazara have been killed in attacks.

## COSTANZA QUATRIGLIO

Born in Palermo, Costanza Quatriglio presented her first feature film, *L'isola (The Island)*, in 2003 at the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs at the 56<sup>th</sup> Cannes Film Festival (CICAE Art Cinema Award). After being presented at all the main film festivals (including Pusan, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Kiev, Montreal, Rotterdam, Gijón, Bratislava) – Nastro d'Argento for Paolo Fresu's score – *L'isola* was released in France and in Latin America in Spanish. That same year *Racconti per L'isola (Tales from the Island)*, *making of* came out, which showed the methodology used with non-professional actors in *L'isola* and was presented at the “New Territories” section at the 60<sup>th</sup> Venice Film Festival.

The love for cinema du réel and for mixing reality and fiction is evident in Quatriglio's previous movies (including *Ècosaimale?*, which won an award at Torino Film Festival in 2000, and *L'insonnia di Devi*, co-produced with Tele + in 2001), so much so that, after *L'isola*, she dedicated herself to documentaries.

Her documentaries include the miniseries for Rai Tre TV channel *Rai3; Il mondo addosso* (2004), shown at Rome Film Fest 2006, and *Il mio cuore umano (My human heart)*, Special Event at Locarno Film Festival 2009.

Her most recent works reflect a constant attention to genre mixing. *Terramatta;* won Nastro D'Argento for Best Documentary in 2013 and several accolades at many events, was screened at Giornate degli Autori 2012, and was named Film della Critica by the National Union of Italian Film Critics. *Con il fiato sospeso (Holding my breath)*, shown at the 70<sup>th</sup> Venice Film Festival 2013 in the Non-Competing Section, was awarded the Gillo Pontecorvo Award as Best Movie in a Latin Language and commended at Nastri d'Argento for the interplay of fiction and documentary. *Triangle*, Nastro d'Argento for Best Documentary in 2015, won the Cipputi Award for Best Movie about the world of work at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Torino Film Festival. *87 ore* won the Special Award at Nastri d'Argento 2016 in the Documentary section.

## **BASIR AHANG**

Basir Ahang was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. Since 2008 he has lived and worked in Italy, where he was granted citizenship. As a professional journalist with a degree in Persian History and Literature he focuses on Afghanistan and human rights, particularly on women and refugees. He has worked for several newspapers and international agencies. His interviews and articles have appeared in BBC Persian, Al Jazeera, and Deutsche Welle.

He is also a poet translated in Italian, Spanish, and English. In 2014 was at the International October Poetry Festival of Sassari, where he won the Special Jury Award. In 2015 he was at the International Poetry Festival of Medellin, Colombia. That same year he was awarded the Special Jury Award at the National Poetry Contest organized by the town of Sant'Anastasia.

He collaborated on the screenplay of Amin Wahidi Behind's documentary *Venice Luxury: un Hazara in Italia* (2017), which won at the 24<sup>th</sup> of Premio Città di Venezia, a satellite event of Venice Film Festival. He also acted in Amin Wahidi's short film *L'ospite*, which won Premio Città di Venezia 2014.

## **DAWOOD YOUSEFI**

Dawood Yousefi was born in Daykondi, Afghanistan in 1987 and since 2006 has lived in Italy as a refugee. He is in the second year at "Dante Alighieri" University for Foreigners, studying to earn a degree in Intercultural Mediation Studies and Social Cohesion in Europe. He is an intercultural mediator, interpreter, photographer, entertainer, human rights activist, and he also does volunteering work. He is a member of Genti Di Pace movement at Community of Sant'Egidio. He is one of the founders of Binario 15 Association that looks after unaccompanied Afghan minors in Rome.

## **TIHANA LAZOVIC**

Tihana Lazović (Zadar, Croatia, 1990) graduated at Zagreb's Academy of Dramatic Art in 2013. In 2014 she appeared in *Zvizdan (The High Sun)*, directed by Dalibor Matanić and winner of Jury the Prize at Un certain regard, 68<sup>th</sup> Cannes Film Festival. Tihana won the Golden Arena for Best Actress at the 62<sup>nd</sup> Pula Film Festival, and awards as Best Actress at the 25<sup>th</sup> Film Festival Cottbus, Cinoche International Film Festival, Quebec, and at Pristina Film Festival, Kosovo.

In 2016 she was among the Shooting Stars of Berlin Film Festival.

In 2016 she acted in *On the Other Side* directed by Zrinko Ogresta (2016) and presented at the Panorama section of the Berlinale.

In 2017 she was the protagonist of *Aleksi*, directed by Barbara Vekarić.

She debuted in 2013 in *Svećenikova djeca (The Priest's Children)*, Vinko Brešan's award-winning comedy. That same year she received the award as best actress for *Šuti (Husb)*, directed by Lucas Nolaal, at Pula Film Festival.

As a theatre actress Tihana has worked with Vinko Brešan, Dalibor Matanić, Franka Perković Dražen Ferenčina and Oliver Frlić. She is also the lead singer of the jazz band One, Two, Trio and Tihana Lazovic.

## **ASCENT FILM**

Ascent Film is one of the most reliable and long-lived independent production companies in Italy. Founded by Andrea Paris in 2003, it has produced a great number of short films, feature films, and quality documentaries, always monitoring market developments and new audiovisual talents.

The considerable experience made in these areas allowed Ascent Film to consolidate its “light” approach and become a veritable “hive of talents”, which aims at becoming the reference for future generations of independent producers and filmmakers. Ascent intends to be the group's “searchlight district”, a hub where the young generations can find a home and grow in light of the increasing need of a new and well-developed audiovisual sector.

Ascent Film is always in search, on the national and international markets, of new authors, experimental and festival productions, innovative and unique realities and techniques, trying to provide aid and financial support to young and talented directors who often cannot find serious and trustworthy contact points for the complex process of developing and financing independent films.

The screenwriter is therefore at the heart of Ascent Film's editorial strategy, with the knowledge that formats, languages, ideas, and techniques are constantly evolving but can never exist without the creativity and vision of the individual artist. Ascent Film pays attention to emerging experimental screenwriters, the documentary genre, special formats and innovative techniques with the goal of becoming the engine that drives the development of film, including non-conventional ones.

In its ten years of activity in the film and TV production, Ascent Film has produced successfully short films and documentaries, presenting works at major festivals, including Cannes, Berlin, Venice, and Rome. Since 2011 it has produced feature films, always championing research, experience, and enthusiasm.

Thanks to the new tax credit law for the cinema that encourages productions to distribute their films autonomously, Ascent brings a new, light, and flexible structure to the distribution market, adopting a theatre-by-theatre approach to screening.