

JACQUES BIDOU & MARIANNE DUMOULIN PRESENT

SADAF
ASGARI

BEHNAZ
JAFARI

BABAK
KARIMI

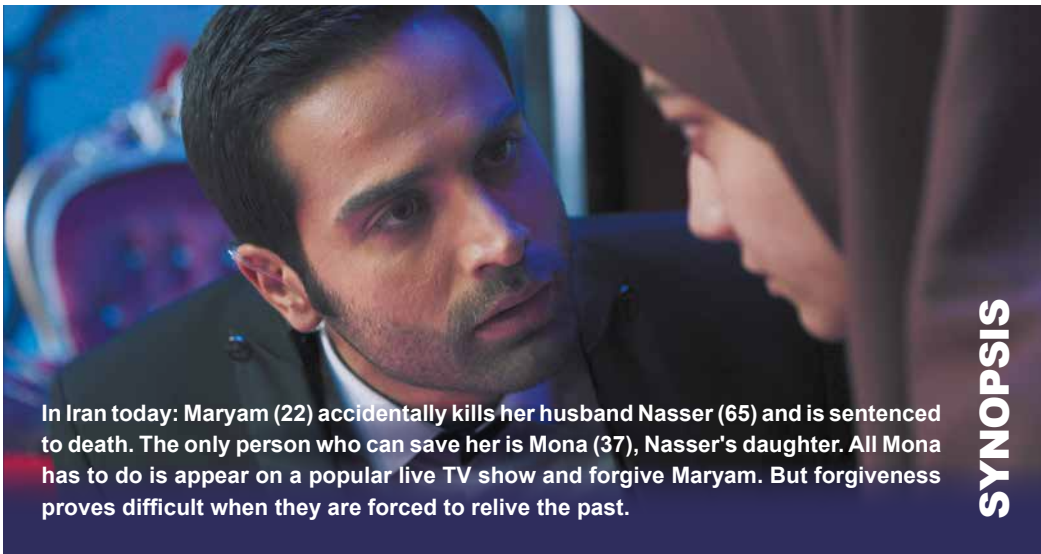
YALDA
A NIGHT FOR FORGIVENESS

A FILM BY MASSOUD BAKHSHI

sundance
film festival
WORLD CINEMA
DRAMATIC
COMPETITION



70th Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Generation



In Iran today: Maryam (22) accidentally kills her husband Nasser (65) and is sentenced to death. The only person who can save her is Mona (37), Nasser's daughter. All Mona has to do is appear on a popular live TV show and forgive Maryam. But forgiveness proves difficult when they are forced to relive the past.

SYNOPSIS



WHERE DID THE IDEA OF THIS TV SHOW COME FROM?

This kind of reality show really exists in my country... They stage and put at stake the pardon of convicts in various ways. The show that inspired me the most has been on air for about ten years, it is a big hit during the month of Ramadan in Iran. A friend who knew what I had in mind for my next film - the story of a woman who is sentenced to death for killing her husband - advised me to watch it. I was astounded: a live TV show about the life and death of a human being! It inspired the programme in the film, which I satirically called *Joy of forgiveness*.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE FILM'S TITLE?

Yalda is a Zoroastrian celebration that marks the beginning of winter, the longest night of the year. Families gather with their relatives and friends; people tell stories and recite Hafez poems, one of the pillars of Persian culture. This celebration has always made a big impression on me, ever since I was a child, and I thought that it was the perfect setting for my story: a long night, where anything can happen, and an opportunity for Maryam, the main character who has been sentenced to death, to give her side of the tragic event. This night is also Maryam's last chance of getting Mona to forgive her, hence her constant struggle to deliver her truth, after the trying wait in jail.

THE LAW OF RETALIATION AND FORGIVENESS ARE AT THE HEART OF YOUR FILM...

The law of retaliation, this idea of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", is an integral part of Islamic law. It is a right which has been granted to civil society. If the victim's family is willing to forgive, there is no execution, the convicted person must serve a prison

sentence, depending on the crime, and pay off the "price of blood" to the victim's family. That price is set according to precise criteria (there are more than 80 types of cases).

MARYAM MARRIED NASSER ZIA AS PART OF A TEMPORARY MARRIAGE... CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF TEMPORARY MARRIAGE?

Temporary marriage ("*sigheh*") is a contract of marriage for a defined duration, agreed upon in advance. Such a marriage may last for a day or for months. The married couple must respect that duration. Temporary marriage dates back to the beginning of Islam. War was a common thing back then, there were many widows, therefore men could have several wives to take care of their children. With such a contract, the wife may receive a certain amount of money, also agreed upon - or nothing at all - but in no case is she entitled to her husband's inheritance. However, any child conceived through such marriage can claim a piece of the father's inheritance. But men often leave their "temporary" wives; their children end up without a name, without a father, just "bastards". Recent laws on temporary marriage try to protect more efficiently the women and the children born out of such marriages.

A CLASS STRUGGLE ALSO SEEMS TO BE HAPPENING IMPLICITLY ON THAT TV SET... MARYAM IS FROM A DIFFERENT SOCIAL CLASS THAN MONA, HER DEAD HUSBAND'S DAUGHTER...

Forty years ago, at the time of the revolution, Iranian society was 30% urban and 70% rural. Today, it is the other way around. Since the era of the so-called "reconstruction", after the war against Iraq, Iran has

been facing both the good and the harmful effects of the neoliberal world, of global market, even though it is not fully integrated. Major sociological and demographic changes affect the countryside and the small towns, the traditional culture is evolving. And in this society, there are now more female students than male students, universities are filled with girls. Class struggle is happening in this context. And Maryam's family moved to Teheran as a direct consequence of these changes. Her father was the driver of Nasser Zia, a rich adman, who was to become Maryam's husband. He helped her family when her father died. There is something really traditional about this. The issue of class is manifest in the temporary marriage between Maryam and Nasser Zia. At the end of the film, Mona forgives Maryam, but she won't allow her son to bear her father's name, and so the child won't inherit. There is a tragic feeling in how she won't debase herself with some driver's family, and how she disowns her own half-brother.

HOW DOES YOUR FILM REFLECT TODAY'S IRANIAN SOCIETY?

In my opinion, all genres, even melodrama, reflect reality. But since I started out as a documentary director, it was important to me that each detail in the story was believable, and that the story was rooted in today's Iranian society. The twists and turns in the story, like the appearance of Maryam's child, or Mona's escape, the way facts and hidden motives are revealed, everything is based on real events happening in Iran today. Over the course of my research, I notably visited a maternity ward for female inmates, in the suburbs, 60 kms away from Teheran. As for Mona's accident with a motorcyclist, to me, it is quite symbolic: it shows the injustice in modern societies, the clash between the rich and the poor. The motorcyclist who was knocked over by Mona could be the grandson of the old man who passes around a tray of beverages at the studio, whom nobody notices. I was once in a cab in

Teheran with an eighty-year-old driver who could barely drive, but who had to work anyway. These characters stand for that stratum of society, for people who are proud, who won't beg. The motorcyclist run over by Mona's big car shows such pride. He does not insult her, he just gets angry because Mona despises him. In this world, the poor are often prouder, more human and dignified.

AND HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YALDA?

To me, *Yalda* is first and foremost a "trial film", in which I invite viewers to question their own roles as judges. I would also like the film to be a reflection on television. Critical distance is about showing how the machine of the show is made, how it works, including behind the scenes. The commercials about some ideal life that are broadcast during the show seem absurd compared to real life... Television is selling us a recipe for happiness, an image of social success, an illusion. Many people despise such shows without watching them, without arguing their points, even though they have become part of our daily lives and millions of Iranian people subscribe to them. I think that it is really important to show that it exists. Admittedly, it is a spectacle, with a kitschy ring to it, yet it is real.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YALDA HAS A HAPPY ENDING?

What happy ending are you referring to? From now on, Maryam will only face misery in this society. If in this world, morality seems to have died out, we need to build a new one, that we might call "humanity", in which forgiving is all about putting yourself in someone else's shoes. Rather than some emotional twist, I chose to show, from afar, cars driving away in different directions into the night. Destinies diverge, and it is up to us to imagine the long nights to come.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Born in Tehran, Iran, in 1972, Massoud Bakhshi has worked as film critic, scriptwriter and producer, before making 12 documentaries and short films which were awarded internationally. His first feature film *A Respectable Family* was selected at Cannes Film Festival 2012 (Quinzaine des réalisateurs). *Yalda, a night for forgiveness* is his second feature film, selected at the World Cinema Dramatic Competition Sundance Film Festival 2020 and at the 70th Berlin International Film Festival Generation 14+ Competition 2020.



CAST

Maryam **Sadaf ASGARI**
Mona **Behnaz JAFARI**
Ayat (the producer) **Babak KARIMI**
The mother **Fereshteh SADRE ORAFAEE**
Keshavarz **Forough GHAJEBEGLOU**
Omid (the TV host) **Arman DARVISH**
Anar **Fereshteh HOSSEINI**

Written & directed by **Massoud BAKHSHI**
Produced by **Jacques BIDOU, Marianne DUMOULIN**
Camera **Julian ATANASSOV**
Editor **Jacques COMETS**
Sound **Dana FARZANEHPOUR, Denis SECHAUD**
Art **Mahmoud BAKHSHI, Leila NAGHDI PARI**
1st assistant director **Arash NAIMAN**
Costume **Rana AMINI**
Gaffer **Helder LOUREIRO ALVES DA SILVA, Pouya EGHBALI**
Production manager **Kambiz SAFARI**
Coproducers **Nicole GERHARDS, Joëlle BERTOSSA and Flavia ZANON, Bady MINCK and Alexander DUMREICHER-IVANCEANU, Georges SCHOUCAIR, Fred PREMEL, Ali MOSAFFA**

CREW



A production **JBA PRODUCTION, NIKO FILM, CLOSE UP FILMS, AMOUR FOU LUXEMBOURG, SCHORTCUT FILMS, TITA B PRODUCTIONS, ALI MOSAFFA PRODUCTIONS**
in coproduction with **ZDF Das kleine Fernsehspiel in collaboration with ARTE, RTS, SRG SSR, VOO BE TV / PANACHE PRODUCTIONS and LA COMPAGNIE CINEMATOGRAPHIQUE**
with the support of **EURIMAGES, CNC, FILM FUND LUXEMBOURG, PICTANOVO avec le soutien de la REGION HAUTS-DE-FRANCE et en partenariat avec le CNC, MEDIENBOARD BERLIN-BRANDENBURG, FILMFÖRDERUNGSANSTALT, OFC, NORDMEDIA, REGION BRETAGNE, CINEFORUM, BREIZH FILM FUND, TORINOFILMLAB, PYRAMIDE, COOPERATION BELGE AU DEVELOPPEMENT, SUNDANCE, BON GAH, ANGOA**

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