

AGAT FILMS & CIE PRESENTS



WHO KILLED Lady Winsley?

A FILM BY
HINER SALEEM



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2018 / FRANCE, TURKEY, BELGIUM / 90 MIN / SCOPE 2.39

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SYNOPSIS

Lady Winsley, an American novelist, is murdered while on a small Turkish island. The renowned Inspector Fergan arrives from Istanbul to conduct the investigation. He very quickly finds himself faced with well-kept secrets in this remote part of the country where the taboos are numerous, the family ties strong, the traditions ancestral and ethnic diversity broader than people's frame of mind.





BIOGRAPHY **HINER SALEEM**

My love for motion pictures, cinema, was born in a cave. I come from a forbidden country in this Middle East that I fondly call the Pittle East.

In the darkness of the cave, under the socialist Soviet “brothers” MIG jets’ shellings, then the bombarding by the F-16s and the Mirage jets, my father passionately read to us: Mem u Zin (Ahmede Khani 1650-1707), our own Romeo and Juliette, a masterpiece of Kurdish literature, secretly printed by the resistance. My father would oblige us to listen, but I was particularly fascinated with the miniatures that illustrated the book: sublimely beautiful women wearing traditional low-cut dresses standing at the foot of the Kurdistan Mountains. For me these images were a manifestation of God.

After these naïve drawings, I discovered, in front of a television set at the age of ten, moving pictures. Fascinated by this funny talking box, I watched indoctrinated men raise their hands and sing in Arabic to the glory of the Baas party and Pan-Arabism. A cigar between his lips and a rifle in his hands, Saddam Hussein would appear among these people that I didn’t know and whose language I didn’t understand. I then swore to myself that one day I would make this talking box speak in Kurdish.

I wanted to go to film school in Bagdad, Iraq. But I very quickly understood that it wasn’t possible to be accepted if you were Kurdish, unless you blended in by becoming a collaborationist and thus a traitor. I had to flee my country when I was a teenager and put my dreams of filmmaking on hold. My grandmother used to tell me that our first exile is when we leave our mother’s womb; the second when we leave our hometown; the third time when we leave our country. I thus took the road for exile, the worst of maledictions for a Kurdish person.

When I finally could have attended film school, it was too late for me. Yet I was consumed with desire and passion so I learned by making my own films. I knew nothing of the grammar or the cinematographic codes. And I discovered how a camera worked for the first time while shooting my first film. I didn’t know it was so hard, so I just did it. I went into the mountains of Kurdistan during one of the numerous Gulf Wars (the occupation of Kuwait) and Christine Gouze-Rénal gave me some film. Upon my return, Gillo Pontecorvo liked what I had shot and then my 30-minute short film was shown at the Venice film festival.

To date I’ve directed about a dozen movies and I find myself in Dante Alighieri’s limbo: a Kurdish or French filmmaker, or a Franco-Kurdish filmmaker, who knows? Simply said, I love Europe and I freely subscribe to Western civilization. My home is France, my heart is in Kurdistan, and my country is in my head.

INTERVIEW WITH HINER SALEEM

How did this film come about?

After having been inspired by westerns for MY SWEET PEPPER LAND, I wanted to make a detective film, but my way. Above all, I'm a storyteller, so the concept of a film genre was more like a springboard for my imagination, rather than a constraint that I imposed upon myself. Without being sententious, I wanted to talk about Kurdish and Turkish society today and the relationship between the two peoples. It's a story intended for everyone, a universal subject that deals with timeless relationships between individuals. My characters are accompanied by humor, absurdity and madness, as is every human being who wants to live their life or is trying to survive.

WHO KILLED LADY WINSELY? does resemble a real detective comedy that is in the spirit of some of Agatha Christie's best novels.

I like American "film noir" from the 1940s and 50s, but I also wanted to play with the genre's codes. The starting point was a drop of blood, the one found in Lady Winsley's eye and which we surmise is the murderer's. It was during the writing process that the story's own mechanisms took shape. Véronique Wüthrich, who wrote the screenplay with me, is fond of "Agatha Christie" stories. It's thanks to her contribution that perhaps unconsciously this hushed atmosphere emerged, this "retro" side that I immediately liked. Detective stories are a genre that has been widely revisited on television in recent years; we thus had to go down a different road, directly from our imaginations, to find the right tone for this film.

The movie goes beyond a simple police investigation: it also questions the place of women in Turkish society...

I wanted to tackle head-on the question of adultery in a conservative society like that of the Middle East. An unfaithful wife is systematically considered guilty whereas it's the exact opposite for a man. His unfaithfulness can even actively participate in the construction of his virility. This is one of the consequences of a patriarchal system that one rarely or never questions. This said, I didn't want the film to be a sociological analysis. Approaching the subject through the prism of a comedy and murder mystery perfectly suited my initial intentions. There is something absurd in this adultery that is a quasi-generalized behavior for the women on the island. But their husbands' reactions also mirror the state of mind specific to this society.





The village's typically insular scenery adds a touch of mystery to the story. Was this an intention from the onset?

At first, I had imagined the film taking place near Antalya, on Turkey's Mediterranean coast, but once there, I quickly realized that the blocks of buildings facing the sea were too modern-looking with respect to what we were writing. It's upon my return to Istanbul that I discovered Büyükada Island, which is right in the middle of the Bosphorus Strait. I wanted insular scenery to convey the feeling of being trapped, with no way out, and to emphasize the link of intermarrying among people who live in small numbers in a place cut off from the world like in some isolated villages. This island is a timeless place with its multi-colored house facades. Cars are not allowed except for the police and an ambulance. This island was mostly inhabited by Greeks and Jews until the middle of the last century. It then became a vacation spot for the Istanbul upper middle class. Today, two thirds of the homes are empty in winter and some of them have hardly been lived in for the last half century, which doesn't exclude the presence of gardeners or guardians who tend to them for the owners and their heirs.

When I went there, I immediately knew that I had found the backdrop I was looking for. The first shot that opens the film, in which we discover Büyükada from the boat that Inspector Fergan is taking, corresponds exactly to my first visual contact with the island. I then made sure to avoid touristy clichés. I even made sure not to linger on beautiful landscapes or houses, which only are in the frame if they actually serve the story.

For that matter you chose to place the story in the dead of winter.

Yes. The movie would have been very different if it had been shot in summer, as the island is teeming with tourists at that time of year. I wanted the scenery to serve the story, without it being overbearing. The fog rising from the Bosphorus strait and the rain soaking the harbor are visual elements that reinforce the insular nature of the place and its mysteries. Above all, I think about my films in terms of images; I visualize them in my mind in their entirety before shooting. I know what my frames will be ahead of time, the light that will make them up, the dominating colors. In this case, I had imagined empty streets, gray skies that intensify the green cliffs. During the film shoot, which lasted seven weeks, I would at times wait for the sun to be covered by clouds to film a scene the way I had imagined it beforehand.

Lady Winsley is American. Why did you choose a foreigner as the plot's central figure?

Firstly, I didn't want the victim to be Kurd or Turkish. Secondly, I wanted to give the story a cosmopolitan dimension. Lady Winsley had been a correspondent for the New York Times in Turkey for over a decade. A solitary person who lived alone, her entire life was dedicated to her work as an investigative journalist. Her being foreign gives her the necessary distance to freely tackle without any taboos the problems of a country that isn't hers. Through her, and through Inspector Fergan's character, I was able to speak about the place of Kurdish people in Turkish society.

Indeed, the film adopts Fergan's point of view. It's through his eyes that the audience discovers the island.

Yes. It is a subjective approach to a story through Fergan's character. We discover the island when he does. And his arrival upsets the inhabitants' everyday routine even more so than Lady Winsley's murder. He's a singular man: he still lives with his mother although he's well into his forties; he's methodical and invested in his investigation work as opposed to the island police who are looking for a guilty party to blame at all costs, even if it means accusing an innocent person. He relies on his instinct and at the same time he is very sensitive. In fact, I didn't want to make him an infallible hero. I wanted a more subtle character, someone intelligent and especially extremely human.

His human side surfaces in his love story with Azra...

The movie isn't just a murder mystery; it's also a hymn to love. It was important for me to go beyond the traditional codes of a specific genre. Here, the love story fleshes out Azra and Fergan's characters and reveals more about them than even they would want to disclose about themselves. Fergan turns out to be much less cold than he lets himself appear; as for Azra, this is an experience that teaches her tolerance when she falls in love with him.

How did you choose Mehmet Kurtulus who plays Inspector Fergan?

I worked with Harika Uygur who is certainly the best casting director in Turkey. She's the one who introduced me to most of the actors in the film, including Mehmet Kurtulus. She spoke to me about him and showed me several photos, one of which (in black and white) caught my attention: I was intrigued by his face, his posture and physical presence. As for me, before working with an actor, I need to feel comfortable with him or her, and have the feeling that I know how I'm going to shoot them. So I decided to meet him. Mehmet lives in Germany, he travelled to Istanbul so that we could meet and talk. I discovered an excellent actor and a very beautiful person. I very quickly knew that he was the actor to play the inspector.

And Ezgi Mola who plays Azra?

She's a very well-known actress in Turkey. The same is true for her, it was obvious to me when we met that she was the one. It was also important for me that Mehmet Kurtulus and Ezgi Mola completed each other on screen, for paradoxically, their characters are opposites. Fergan shows up from Istanbul while Azra has always lived on the island. He embodies modern Turkey while she is the reflection of a more traditional Turkey. Each represents an aspect of Turkish society. Azra also embodies a part of the new generation in Turkey, which is more progressive.

How did you work with your actors?

I first gave them the screenplay on the day we all met for the first reading. Some of them were embarrassed by the Kurdish issues involved, but I explained that I wasn't doing a militant film, that it was not propaganda, and that I speak of my Kurdish origins without any complexes or embarrassment – it's very natural for me. It was all about establishing a relationship based on a solid foundation of trust; indeed that's how I've always worked.

FILMOGRAPHY HINER SALEEM

- 2018 Who Killed Lady Winsley?**
- 2016 Tight Dress (Dar Elbise)**
- 2013 My Sweet Pepper Land**
Cannes Film Festival 2013 – Un Certain Regard
Chicago International Film Festival 2013 – Best Film
Abu Dhabi International Film Festival 2013 – Award of the Jury
- 2011 If You Die, I'll Kill You**
Hong Kong International Film Festival 2012
Dubai International Film Festival 2010
Cabourg Film Festival 2011 – Jury's Favourite Prize
- 2009 Après la chute**
Locarno Film Festival 2009 – Here and Elsewhere Section
- 2007 Beneath the Rooftops of Paris**
Locarno Film Festival 2007 – Leopard for Best Actor for Michel Poccoli
- 2007 Dol**
Berlin Film Festival 2007 – Panorama Section
- 2005 Kilometre Zero**
Cannes Film Festival 2005 – Official Competition
- 2003 Vodka Lemon**
Venezia Film Festival 2003 – San Marco Prize
Mons International Love Film Festival 2004 – Grand Prize
- 2001 Absolitude**
Arte Telefilm
- 2000 Beyond Our Dreams**
- 1998 Vive la mariée... et la libération du Kurdistan**
International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg 1996 – Audience Award

MEHMET KURTULUS

(FERGAN INSPECTOR)

Mehmet Kurtuluş is an actor and producer born in Usak, Turkey, in 1972. He grew up in Germany, where he studied to become an actor in Hamburg with the great actress Anne Marks-Rocke. He directed stage plays at the Hamburger Kammerspiele Theater and the Theater am Kurfürstendamm in Berlin. After appearing in a few television projects, his breakthrough role was in the gangster film *SHORT SHARP SHOCK* (*KURZ UND SCHMERZLOS*) by Fatih Akin, for which he won the Bronze Leopard at the Locarno International Festival in 1998, and the Golden Alexander award at the Thessaloniki International Film festival, as well as the Adolf-Grimme award in 2001 (the German equivalent of the Emmy Award).

He then appeared in Fatih Akin's *IN JULY* with Moritz Bleibtreu as well as in Roland Suso Richter's film *THE TUNNEL*.

In *NAKED*, by Doris Dörries, he was the first person to play a leading role in a German film that was not linked to his Turkish origins. *NAKED* was selected for competition at the Venice Film Festival.

Kurtuluş coproduced and played a role in Fatih Akin's *HEAD ON*, which won the Golden Bear in Berlin as well as the European Cinema prize.

Kurtuluş achieved his dream as a professional actor in Germany when he was chosen to play the first Turkish-German detective in the criminal series *TATORT*, shown on prime time on Sunday evenings. According to the weekly magazine *Stern*, with this role he revolutionized German television. He received the Adolf-Grimme award for the second time.

In 2014, he played Samuel L. Jackson's adversary in *BIG GAME*, which was selected for the Toronto International Film Festival in the same year.

After *FAMOUS FIVE* and *8 SECONDS*, he worked together with Til Schweigr in *HEAD FULL OF HONEY*, which was the year's biggest box office success in Germany in 2015 with more than 7 million tickets sold. In the summer of 2015, he started shooting *MAGNIFICENT CENTURY*, the series known the world over.

In 2017 he shot *WHO KILLED LADY WINSELY?* by Hiner Saleem and finished a series for Netflix in 2018, *PROTECTOR*, which will be soon released.

Mehmet Kurtulus is a member of the German UNICEF.



CASTING

Mehmet KURTULUŞ
Ergün KUYUCU
Ezgi MOLA
Turgay AYDIN
Arın KUŞAKSIZOĞLU
Mesut AKUSTA
Korkmaz ARSLAN
Şenay GÜRLER
Haydar ŞİSMAN
Hülya DARCAN
Ahmet VARLI
Aytaç UŞUN
Aliye UZUNATAĞAN
Aslı SAMAT
Feriha EYÜBOĞLU
Goncagül SUNAR
Laçin ÇEYLAN
Lila GÜRMEN
Serhat MIDYAT
Tuğçe TANIŞ

Fergan
Police chief Çelik
Azra
Burak
Fuat
İsmail
Sercan Birol
Lady Winsley
Gardener
Birol's Mother
Sadullah
Gardener's son
Dünya
Sadullah's wife
Necmiye
Fatma
Handmaid
Eylem
Bar owner
Nurse



CREDITS

Director
Screenwriters
Writing collaboration
Original Music
Additional Music
Casting
Director of Photography
Sound

Production Designer
Costume Designer
Editors

Assistant Director
Production Director
Postproduction
Coproducers

Producers
Production
In coproduction with

With the support of

With the participation of
French Distributor
World Sales

Hiner SALEEM
Véronique WÜTHRICH and Hiner SALEEM
Thomas BIDEgain
Xavier DEMERLIAC and Florence CAILLON
Halkawt ZAHER
Harika UYGUR
Andreas SINANOS
Fabrice OSINSKI, Marc BASTIEN,
Armelle MAHE, Emmanuel DE BOISSIEU
Burak YERLIKAYA
Selin SÖZEN
Marion MONNIER, Sophie REINE,
Claire FIESCHI, Thomas GLASER
Sevgi Melis SİLAHTAROĞLU, Johana KATZ
Bünyamin BABAOĞLU
Pierre HUOT, Nicolas SACRÉ
Emre OSKAY, Adnan M. SAPÇI,
Sadik EKINCI, Alican YAZICIOĞLU
and Buğra PAMUKSÜZER,
Jacques-Henri & Olivier BRONCKART
Marc BORDURE, Robert GUEDIGUIAN
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