

**DHARAMSALA & DARIUS FILMS**

present

# **YOUNG TIGER**

(Bébé Tigre)

a film by **Cyprien Vial**

France / 2014 / 87min / Color / 1.85 / DCP / 5.1

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## **SYNOPSIS**

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Many, a 17-year-old Indian boy from Punjab, has been taken care of by the French Government when he arrived in Paris 2 years ago. On the way to an exemplary integration, he divides his time between school, friends, his girlfriend Elisabeth and the Sikh temple.

His life could be the one of an average teenager if he didn't feel the pressure to send money to his parents back home...

## **INTERVIEW WITH CYPRIEN VIAL**

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### **Where did you get the idea for this film?**

From 2007 to 2010, I conducted film workshops with a French teacher at a junior high school in Pantin in what is called a “priority education zone.” Every year we made a film with the 8<sup>th</sup> graders. One year, the kids wanted to work on the subjects of social diversity, sharing and dialogue. They dreamed up playlets depicting escalating conflicts and I filmed them. At the same time, they wanted to show where they came from. One day they turned up wearing traditional dress from their native countries. I photographed them and made recordings of the students explaining what they liked about their culture. Our little film was thus a mixture of scenes of upheaval and portraits where they introduced themselves. Finally, a rather mysterious but charismatic boy from Bangladesh named Jacky, who was older than the others, was able to convince everybody to end the film with a Bollywood dance number! I got such a kick out of making this little film that it made me want to shoot a movie with teenagers.

### **So the experiment continued beyond the workshops?**

Among the students, there was one young girl, Élisabeth, who I really wanted to film more. She had expressed a wish to do some acting. It took several years, but finally she became Élisabeth in *Young Tiger*. Jacky, the young boy from Bangladesh triggered something else. I was very intrigued by the mystery surrounding him. He lived alone without any relatives in a foster family. I started asking questions about him - his teachers seemed a little embarrassed. After the workshops, I kept in contact with him and I started researching. Finally, I discovered his status: unaccompanied foreign minor. I had never heard of this status before. According to French law, a minor under the age of eighteen who arrives alone on our territory must be taken in hand and assisted by public authorities. He or she might be, because of their young age, in danger. Thus the State must help him or her even if they are illegal immigrants. I was struck by this law’s humanism, especially during an era when the debate on national identity was growing.

Jacky was a very good student and strongly wanted to integrate. I then realized that all unaccompanied minors shared this profound desire to be integrated into society. The social workers at the Children's Social Welfare office stressed the children's fighting spirit. They often play the role of peacemakers in junior high schools, highly motivated and motivating to others.

Meeting someone with such a surprising otherness, so far from anything I personally knew from experience about adolescence, and the strength of these life stories made a deep impression on me. That point was the opening for fiction to step in, for I had the impression of being faced with true heroes.

### **So you did some research?**

The unaccompanied minor status isn't in of itself a subject for fiction. I continued to meet with judges, foster families and heads of associations. I spent some time with the Chinese community, without being able to successfully gain people's confidence. Very quickly, I started lingering with kids from Punjab in Northern India, the land of the Sikhs, a warring people who proclaim their independence from the Federal Indian State. From the youngest age the boys are raised to be little warriors, proud and independent men who must not disappoint their family in any way.

### **Then you met Many...**

Yes, I kept his first name in the film even if it is not his story I am telling. But the story of his life helped me to learn about the Punjabis who arrive in France. All of the children have been "commissioned" by their parents, who go into debt with smugglers from the mafia to obtain false passports; or they use real passports but pay off custom workers in Punjab so that the children can get on the plane. It is this precise situation of illegal immigrants that interested me, because I didn't want to treat the trauma of the illegal immigrants' journey by land, which is another subject altogether and has already often been addressed in cinema. These children are assisted by the State, go to school, learn French and are taken in charge by a judge, a social worker and a foster family. However, some of them remain in the grip of smugglers, who are often looked upon like big brothers. And the parental pressure remains omnipresent.

This subject brings out themes that are very dear to me: the transition to adulthood, making your first grown-up decisions, one's relationship to authority and the authorities. For these children and the paths their lives have taken, all of these themes have been condensed and intensified. In fact, they are modern adventurers, at once alone and yet very much surrounded.

**In the film, moreover, the relationship between Many and Kamal, his smuggler, is almost filial.**

During my research I realized that the men who handled receiving the children had an undefined role: they are outlaws, yet are considered by the teenagers and in certain cases even by the social workers as referents! They represent an emotional balance for this youth. Foster families are paid by the State to house and feed the unaccompanied minors; sometimes these families save this money for themselves behind the minors' backs thus making money at the minors' expense. Not to mention the real parents who find nothing wrong with asking their sons to provide for them: it's rooted in their culture and that's just how it is. I like cinema that reveals a number of ambivalent positions. I want to make movies that explore blurred areas and the ambivalence that can be found in individuals.

**And once your research was finished?**

I started to write the screenplay, interweaving the numerous accounts I had gathered to come up with one individual life story. Many is an emotional composite of all the information I collected. Above all, I wanted his personal trajectory to be a straight line from a sort of cruel initiatory journey leading to his transition into adulthood.

**Does the film have a happy ending?**

I wanted to see my main character grow up and have to face tough choices. Go to the end of things with him, through situations that others had told me about: undeclared work, the relationship with the law.

I chose to bring him to the point - under the pressure of the legal authorities, both judiciary and the police - where he has to make the decision that he least wants to

make: that of betraying Kamal. The system cruelly and ironically pushes him to denounce the person to whom he owes having been assisted and having been given a chance of integrating into society.

I wanted the movie to bring out State authority, Republican authority, in all of its ambivalence. Many only has one solution to save his skin – choose the Republic, which in this case, is a dishonorable decision to make. For me, the point is to ask questions. Far from a happy ending, this life-saving ending for my hero, albeit inglorious, highlights the State's incapacity to integrate without assimilating.

**Why didn't you use the form of a chronicle narrative like many filmmakers do as soon as it is a question of adolescence or immigration?**

I wanted to confront genre cinema on my own terms - have the adolescent saga, the energy of a school class meet with the codes of a thriller or film noir. I wanted my hero to have to make a choice, and a moral choice is a film noir code. In choosing to confront a thriller, I myself wanted to take on the unbending codes of that specific genre.

**Were you helped with the writing of the screenplay?**

I had two consultants at two pivotal moments in the writing process. Marie Amachoukeli, who'd already worked with me on the screenplay for my short film *MADAME*, helped me to transform my investigation into a clear narrative thread. She helped me in the task of simplifying reality, in the popularization of the concept, in the noble sense of the term. I then isolated myself to take a step back to overcome my obsession with details and construct the fictive narrative. At another stage in the writing, Céline Sciamma helped me to polish the structure of the film and part of the dialogues. Then, I once again immersed myself in "reality" with the casting, which ended up having its own influence on the screenplay. For example, in the beginning I had written a character who was Many's best friend in school. With the casting director, Aurore Broutin, we met two boys who were wonderful. So I split the role and now Many has two best school friends.

### **How did you find Many?**

For the role of Many, I was looking for a boy who spoke French and Punjabi, both very well, and who would be the main character's age: 17 years old. He had to look young at the beginning of the film, but also look like a man at a certain moment, especially at the end.

His magnetism had to be as strong as that of the boys I had met while doing my research. We covered all the places that served as meeting places for the Sikh community in Seine-Saint-Denis: temples, cultural meeting halls and places where people meet to play sports. We met Harmandeep during a demonstration in Paris against the death penalty in India. He was at the head of the procession. We were immediately struck by the intensity in his eyes. He had a beard that day, and seemed too old for the role. Nevertheless, we asked him to shave and come do a screen test. And suddenly, he seemed too young for the role! So he had the face I was looking for: changing, readably mutable. He was perfect in the texts we asked him to learn, and perfect in improvisation. It was an obvious choice. Furthermore, even if he was born and raised in a cocoon in Aulnay-sous-bois, he was very familiar with the situation of unaccompanied foreign minors and was very happy to represent his community.

### **How did you direct him?**

He perfectly understood the screenplay, but he didn't agree with the ending. He would have preferred for his character not to commit a betrayal. I had to convince him! He has a rather scientific-thinking mind, with a visual sensibility. Together we developed a working tool: a notebook with one word and photo per sequence that evoked the mindset; a sort of fun, metaphorical storyboard. The audience often forgets that films aren't made in chronological order and it is difficult for a nonprofessional actor to play his character's evolving emotion in random order! Especially when the character, like Harmandeep's, is in every scene of the film.

### **And for the role of Kamal?**

That was much more complicated. We were looking for a man between thirty and thirty-five years old who spoke French well, and there are very few Franco-Punjabi men of this age. Vikram had heard about the casting, but wasn't interested. We

had to keep after him until we were able to convince him to do it! In fact, Vikram is Harmandeep's soccer coach!

### **How did you put together Many's school class?**

I wanted to shoot at the junior high in Pantin where I had given my workshops, four years earlier. It's a surprising place: somewhere between a nursery school and a prison! I wanted to film a real 9<sup>th</sup> grade class, so that the kids would be comfortable during the film shoot, having already spent time together as a class – an already established group. There's a class I liked in particular at this junior high. Unfortunately, not all the students returned the permission slips signed by their parents, as some of the kids were in difficult situations. I had to "fill in" the group with students from other classes. I wanted to be overwhelmed by the kids' energy: and I got what I was asking for! I was able to recreate the atmosphere of social diversity, freedom and improvisation that I had experienced during my workshops.

I shot a great deal in the junior high; significant, meaningful raw material. In fact, it was heart wrenching for my editor, Albertine Lastera, and myself when we had to strip away and only use a part of it. But it was important for me to keep a maximum number of faces. I wanted to have faces of every age in close up. They had to be integrated into the tone of the film and its thriller pace. I also wanted to wax lyrical with romantic moments, like when Many and Élisabeth kiss. Élisabeth was a big help in making Harmandeep feel comfortable. He was really embarrassed to begin with for nobody ever kisses anyone in Indian films!

### **The music in the film is important.**

Yes, because I wanted a radiant film. At the beginning of the shoot, I listened to music composed by a young electro musician, Léonie Pernet. Her universe is very adolescent and I was enchanted by her melodies. I chose some of her existing songs, Butterfly in particular, which is very pop, and I asked her to compose others which would slightly recall Erik Satie. I wanted the music to be omniscient, above the images, above the characters; it had to bring a touch of additional romance, and it had to be sexy, carefree. On several occasions we also hear a Punjabi rap song with an energetic beat: "Baagi music".



**Thriller codes, the importance of the music: it looks as though you are trying to avoid the “pitfalls” of the documentary?**

My film has been documented, but it is in my language, which is fiction. It is important to me to respect reality without being a slave to it. I wanted to work around the tension of a thriller and have the purity of a simple romance. Élisabeth embodies reason, as is often the case of the hero's companion in a thriller.

**Young Tiger?**

When I met all these boys, these unaccompanied foreign minors, during my research, the image of the tiger quickly came to me: An instinctive animal that protects his own. The baby has teeth, claws, but he doesn't know how to use them yet. This is the story the film tells: Many is a young tiger who has to try out his claws for the first time.

**Do you see your film as a political film?**

I prefer to envision it with a humanistic dimension. I'd like it to be thought-provoking on the integration of this youth, and on an idealistic system that has its limits, but one in which I believe. And then if my film could encourage people to see these youths with interest and admiration, as real adventurers, I would be happy. In fact, YOUNG TIGER is a film about superheroes without superpowers.

*Cyprien Vial is 34 years old. He holds a directing degree from La Fémis and has directed four short films, including DANS LE RANG, which received a Director's Fortnight award in 2006. YOUNG TIGER is his first feature film.*

## CAST

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Many	HARMANDEEP PALMINDER
Kamal	VIKRAM SHARMA
Élisabeth	ÉLISABETH LANDO
Sami	BILAL BAGGAD
Daniel	BILLÈL BRIMA
Sony	AMANDEEP SINGH
Frédéric	KARIM LEKLOU
Patricia	AUORE BROUTIN
Gérard	GÉRARD ZINGG
The judge	MARIE BERTO

## CREW

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Director	CYPRIEN VIAL
Screenwriter	CYPRIEN VIAL
Cinematograh	PIERRE COTTEREAU
Sound	MATHIEU DESCAMPS
	JOCELYN ROBERT
	GURWAL COIC-GALLAS
Casting	AUORE BROUTIN
Script Supervisor	CAMILLE GANIVET
Production Design	SOPHIE REYNAUD-MALOUF
Costumes	CAMILLE ASSAF
Editing	ALBERTINE LASTERA
Sound Mixing	SÉBASTIEN PIERRE
Music	LÉONIE PERNET
1st A.D.	GUILLAUME PLUMEJEAU
Production Manager	DIEGO URGOITI-MOINOT
Location Manager	JULIEN FLICK
Producers	ISABELLE MADELAINE (DHARAMSALA) ÉMILIE TISNÉ (DARIUS FILMS)

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