

Official Selection

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Toronto International
Film Festival 2019

CROSSING BRIDGES FILMS, ON FILM PRODUCTION AND ALIEF PRESENT

ZANA

A FILM BY ANTONETA KASTRATI





SYNOPSIS

An Albanian woman, Lume, lives with her husband, Ilir, and mother-in-law, Remzije, in their small Kosovar village. Haunted by night terrors, childless and unable to get pregnant, Lume is relentlessly pressured by Remzije to fulfill her wifely duties – if Lume cannot produce a child, her mother-in-law threatens, it will be Remzije's responsibility to bring in a younger and more eager prospective wife for her son to consider.

Bowing under the pressure of being replaced, Lume concedes to abandon modern medicine and seek the help of witch doctors and mystic healers to treat her infertility. Lume's appointments, first to a local witch doctor and then to a famed (and costly) televangelist healer, do seem to yield results as Lume finds herself pregnant at last. But while the family celebrates, Lume's long-suppressed traumas from the war slowly rise to torment her again, convincing Remzije and Ilir that Lume is possessed by evil spirits, and extreme caution must be taken to protect the unborn child.





DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"I am coming back from the field with my cow... as I approach my home I hear wailing. I come near the crowd I see him covered in blood -- my boy -- they are burying him. 'But he is still breathing' I scream, 'he is not dead, you are burying him alive' but to no avail.

"My boy was being buried alive and I couldn't do anything about it", a woman tells me in a husky voice as she smokes a cigarette, her face aged before time. She tells me about this dream and graphic others she has had of her boy whom she witnessed being brutally killed in the Kosovo War, in this remote village 17 years before. "The nightmares don't stop", she tells me, "but that's all I have left of him".

This is one of many stories I heard during my research with women who lost children in the war. The stories that remind me of my own battle with nightmares, a reality of our sleeping-world from which we cannot escape...even as we attempt to move forwards, to find some remaining meaning from the life shattering effects of war and brutality.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I was 18 during the war in Kosovo, living in my village with my family. Two days before the war ended, my mother and sister were killed.

A mother now myself, the question that has kept coming back to me, that I wanted to explore cinematically, is who are we as women besieged by post-war trauma and the existential dilemma of motherhood in a society where deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs make healing harder by limiting women's choices.

This is a community that still has one foot deeply rooted in the mystic, where curses and witches are still real and psychological & mental issues (as well as medical) are treated with amulets and rituals.

After many years of documentary work and short films on the same subject and years of developing our script, I went back to my home village and together with my younger sister Sevdije, (Cinematographer and Co-Producer) made ZANA.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In capturing the journey of my protagonist (Lume) 10 years after the war, I wanted to tell this story in a way that captured the expansive world of the small village, the lush and beautiful nature, animals, loud and ironic characters -- a world that on the surface seems as if life has moved on.

Although not always easy to be living this story again, it was a meaningful experience, and deeply encouraging having all the community and amazing cast and crew come together, making ZANA a tribute to the killed children and homage to motherhood.

WRITER/DIRECTOR: ANTONETA KASTRATI is a Los Angeles-based filmmaker from Kosovo. After surviving the war in the late 1990s, she began making documentary films of the issues of postwar society with her sister, Sevdije. She has a Masters in Journalism and completed the AFI Directing Workshop for Women. She has since directed a number of award winning documentaries and narrative shorts. Her most recent short *She Comes In Spring* premiered at Busan Film Festival. *Zana* is Antoneta's debut feature film.





FILMMAKERS

CO WRITER/PRODUCER: CASEY COOPER

JOHNSON: Prior to Hollywood, Casey lived for 10 years in post-war Kosovo, producing documentaries and television, including internationally syndicated current affairs show, *Life in Kosovo*. At the American Film Institute, he wrote and directed short film *Unmanned*, it screened at AFI Fest and Tribeca Film Festival. He has participated in Film Independent and the Rotterdam Labs. Creator/EP of the Oculus VR series, *Campfire Creepers*, was Director/EP of *Urban Nightmares* series on the blackpills channel. Currently completing a documentary for Brave New Films on voter suppression in US elections.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY/CO-PRODUCER:

SEVDIJE KASTRATI first female DP in Kosovo. In 2011 completed her Masters in Cinematography at the American Film Institute. Her work includes documentaries, shorts, TV and narrative features. 2012 SHORT by her *The Return* won Best International Short at Sundance Film Festival. She is in production on her seventh feature film. Sevdije and her sister, Antoneta, have worked together as filmmakers throughout their entire careers.

CAST-LUME

ADRIANA MATOSHI is a rising star Kosovar actress who first found acclaim with her lead role in *The Return*, directed by Blerta Zeqiri, which won the Best International Short Film at Sundance Film Festival 2012. She has since gone on to play unforgettable roles in *Babai* (2015), *The Marriage* (2017), *Cold November* (2018) and *Unwanted* (2017), for which she won the Best Actress Award at the South East European Film Festival.

CAST-ILIR

ASTRIT KABASHI is a critically acclaimed Kosovar actor, best known for his award winning lead role in *Babai* (2015) for which Kabashi won Best Actor at the Munich Film Festival. He also played a supporting role in the Oscar nominated short film *Shok* (2015). At home, he is well known for his acting and writing on Kosovo's popular sitcom *Our Cafe*.





PRODUCTION

CROSSING BRIDGES FILMS (KOSOVO)

Production Company established in 2003 by Antoneta Kastrati, Sevdije Kastrati and Casey Cooper Johnson. Based in Kosovo and Los Angeles 12 documentaries and 10 narrative shorts - festivals include Sundance, Tribeca, AFI Fest, Sarajevo, Busan and Toronto. Zana is their first feature (TIFF '19).

ON FILM PRODUCTION (Albania) Owned by producer, Dritan Huqi, On Film has produced titles like The Albanian (2010), Amsterdam Express (2014) and Distant Angels (2017). Huqi is a member of the European Film Academy and was selected for "Producers on the Move" in 2011.

ALIEF (Georgia) Productions; Mal Nosa (2017) (Brazil) MIFF 17 World premiere. Negative Numbers (2019) (Georgia) co-produced with Wide (France), 39 Films (Italy). Zana (2019) (Kosovo/Albania) world premiere Toronto 2019. Distributors of award winning titles; Scary Mother (2017) (Georgia) travelling to 72 film festivals. The Whistler (2018) (Venezuela/Mexico) sold to US, Latin America, UK and Spain. Recent hits My Thoughts Are Silent (2019) (Ukraine) Winner KVIFF Jury Prize, Odessa FF winner FIPRESCI award. Inhale Exhale (2019) Winner Grand Prix Shanghai FF.

SUPPORTED BY:

KOSOVO CINEMATOGRAPHY CENTER: Kosovo's national film fund, has supported ZANA first through a Development Grant, and most recently a Production Grant. Arben Zharku newly elected member of the board of directors of European Film Promotion has championed the film throughout.

PANAVISION: Through their New Filmmaker Grant, Panavision supported the production of ZANA with a camera and lens package for the shoot.

ALBANIAN NATIONAL CENTER OF CINEMATOGRAPHY: Albania's national film fund awarded for Minority Co-production.

FFILM Rainin Grant: program winner for independent narrative features covering for post production.

MIDPOINT: Feature Launch 2017 participant, MIDPOINT Development Award Winner, MIDPOINT Editing Room participant

CITY OF PEJA: In-kind support for cast/crew accommodations during the shoot.

LIGHT IRON: In-kind DI Post support

CREW

WRITER/DIRECTOR: Antoneta Kastrati

CO-WRITER/PRODUCER: Casey Cooper Johnson

CO-PRODUCERS: Sevdije Kastrati, Dritan Huqi,
Brett Walker, Miguel Govea

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Sevdije Kastrati

EDITING: Antoneta Kastrati, Brett W. Bachman,
Michal Reich

PRODUCTION DESIGN: Burim Arifi, Shawn
Bronson

COSTUME DESIGN: Stela Laknori

COMPOSER: Dritero Nikqi

Kosovo/Albania 2019

Running time: 97 MINUTES

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