

 **70^e** Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Panorama

FIRE

IS

MY

CHILD

A FILM BY
SIAMAK ETEMADI

PARI

MELIKA FOROUTAN

SHAHBAZ NOSHIR SOFIA KOKKALI LENA KITSOPOULOU ARGYRIS PANDAZARAS DIMITRIS XANTHOPOULOS KIMONAS KOURIS BIJAN DANESHMAND VASSILIS KOUKALANI

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY SIAMAK ETEMADI DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY CLAUDIO BOLIVAR GSC EDITOR PANOS VOUTSARAS ORIGINAL SCORE AVIA PRODUCTION DESIGNER WILBERT VAN DORP ART DIRECTOR ELENA VARDAVA SOUND BORISLAV TRAYANOV, VINCENT SINCERETTI,
JAN SCHERMER COSTUMES DESIGNER MAYOU TRIKERIOTI CASTING DIRECTOR MAKIS GAZIS MAKE-UP ARTIST VALENTIN VALOV PRODUCERS KONSTANTINOS KONTOVRAKIS, GIORGOS KARNAVAS CO-PRODUCERS GABRIELLE DUMON, FRANS VAN GESTEL,
ARNOLD HESLENFELD, LAURETTE SCHILLINGS, BORISLAV CHOCHKOV, VICTOR CHOCHKOV, DAN WECHSLER, JAMAL ZEINAL ZADE, DIMITRIS KONTOVRAKIS PRODUCED BY HERETIC CO-PRODUCED BY LE BUREAU, TOPKAPI FILMS, THE CHOCHKOV BROTHERS,
BORD CADRE FILMS, BLOKON WITH THE SUPPORT OF CREATIVE EUROPE, EURIMAGES, GREEK FILM CENTRE, ERT, CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE, BULGARIAN NATIONAL FILM CENTRE, NETHERLANDS FILM FUND, NETHERLANDS FILM PRODUCTION INCENTIVE



LE BUREAU

TOPKAPI

THE CHOCHKOV BROTHERS



BLOKON

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EURIMAGES

GREEK FILM CENTRE

EPT

ERT

Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée

NLM FILM FUND





PARI

by Siamak Etemadi

Greece, France, The Netherlands, Bulgaria
2020 | 101' | Colour



LOGLINE

The search of an Iranian mother, Pari, for her missing son in Athens will force her on a journey to the dark corners of the city, as well as the hidden depth of her own self.

SYNOPSIS

Babak, an Iranian student in Greece, doesn't show up to welcome his visiting parents at the Athens airport. Pari and her older husband, both devout Muslims abroad for the first time, are ill-prepared to search for their son in an intimidating and alien environment. All their attempts to find a clue that might lead them to him prove to be in vain and they soon reach a dead end. But Pari can't give up looking for him, even when returning to Iran seems like her only choice.

Following the steps of her rebellious son in the darkest corners of the city, she will exhaust her inner strength to achieve more than a mother's search for her missing son.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

What happens when our longing for a love doesn't let us continue our lives as we used to? What if whom we long for is nowhere to be found? Can a mother's search for her missing son turn into a journey of self-discovery?

These were the questions in my mind when I set out to make "Pari".

Pari is a woman completely conditioned in her environment: a housewife, a Muslim, an Iranian, a mother. But there is more to her underneath this persona. Her longing to see her child becomes the driving force taking her further and further into an unknown world. We will follow her in this suspenseful ride where step by step her layers of protection, secured by past compromises, are taken away. She will be left alone, exposed, a stranger in a strange land. Is it possible that her loss could now be a catalyst for her inner transformation?

"Pari" is a story of love and longing, of separation and search. Just as in the poems of the Persian Sufis, I hope it is a story of a rebirth.

Pari is the name of my mother.



DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Siamak Etemadi was born in Tehran, Iran. In 1995, he moved to Athens, Greece, where he lives to this day, holding a dual Iranian-Greek nationality.

Siamak studied cinema in Athens and worked extensively as assistant director in various feature films, TV series, and series of documentaries. He has also had occasional work experiences as actor, both in theatre and cinema. His short film CAVO D' ORO premiered in Locarno International Film Festival in 2012 and was nominated for the Best Short Film in the Greek Film Academy Awards. The movie was theatrically distributed in Greece and enjoyed a successful international festival journey. PARI is his first feature film.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

Vignette | 2001 | Student short film

Paramithas | 2003 | Short film

Cavo d'Oro | 2012 | Short film



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

How did you come up with the idea for the film?

Pari is the name of my mother. Every few years she visits me in Athens. She is a gentle woman who speaks very few words of English. Each time she comes, I pick her up from the airport. Once, when I was waiting for her in the arrival lounge, I imagined what would happen if I had an accident and couldn't go to the airport or even inform her where I was. What would this woman do alone in a foreign land? I asked her. She said she would move mountains to find me. I knew what she meant. Neither the language barrier nor her natural shyness would stop her from turning every stone in this city to find her son. I wondered what this inner drive is that makes us go past our limits and overcome our inhibitions, our fears. Is it not a desire, a deep craving for something or someone that is not fulfilled? In classical Persian poetry it is called 'longing for the beloved'. This feeling was the starting point for the story.

How does the story and its characters reflect your own experiences in Iran and Greece?

There are autobiographical elements in the story: like Pari, I was once a total stranger in Athens. Like the son's character, I was once a student here. I live in Exarchia, a neighborhood that is the centre of political dissent in the city, and so on. My identity is as much shaped by my Iranian roots as it is by my life in Greece. And these experiences are reflected in the story. On the one hand, there are cultural values from my Iranian background: its Islamic state, as well as its classical Persian poetry, with themes of love, longing, and rebirth. On the other hand, there is this Greek culture and setting: its Western freedoms and urban energy, along with its ancient tragedies and their psychological insights. A key scene in the film, when Pari is finally given crucial information about her son, was inspired by Oedipus meeting Tiresias and takes place in a stone theatre. I feel that the clash and merge of these cultures inside Pari can reflect a crucial experience of our times.

Why did you choose to tell the story of a Muslim woman?

The image presented of Muslim women can be shallow and stereotypical at times. We tried to avoid clichés of Muslim this and Western that. Pari's social limitations were the first layer to play with. It was fun to crack. As Pari follows her son's steps, she is having an immigrant experience in a more condensed and intense way. The challenges one faces when moving to a new country can be liberating and exciting. But then she comes up against her inner conflicts. In this aspect, she could be from anywhere; it is universal. It is important to identify the role of society in the struggles we face, but we must also explore our own mistakes. What is the source of our existential agonies, and what ways do we find to postpone dealing with them? I kept asking these questions about her, which pushed the story in new directions and, in turn, made her character more compelling. I felt that, at its core, this is a story about identity. If layers of our ascribed identity are stripped away, what will be left? If your religion, your mother tongue, your social class, even your motherhood can no longer define you, then who are you? Again, Sufi poets used the metaphor of wheat going through a stone-mill, where the husk is crushed away and only your essence is left. Pari's story is about these stages of change, our ability to adapt to a new world, and find our true identity. In order to understand her transformation, I needed to move through a reverse process than the one she faces in the film: traversing back through the social, then political, then personal to reach the core of her character.

Melika Foroutan plays the title role. How was your work with her?

It was a challenging process. Pari is in every single scene. She goes through a lot and has a total transformation. Together with Melika, we followed the stages that the character goes through. First, we needed to place her in the specific social setting that Pari comes from. That included weeks of practice to wear the chador and be able to go

through the daily chores of a traditional Iranian Muslim housewife, wearing it. This work shaped a lot of her physical performance, which in turn had to evolve, as she is pulled into her unexpected adventures in Athens. We also worked a lot on her language and the specific English that she speaks as she is forced to communicate with the Greeks. The final stage was the esoteric world of Pari and her psychological states that became more of discoveries for both of us. As the shooting days progressed, Melika got so familiar with the character that some dialogue and even actions in many scenes changed, making them more real and immediate. Her commitment and courage made the difference. Even the physical task of shooting on location in the middle of the winter for hours on end was exhausting. I felt that I had a partner on all levels and it helped a lot.

The story starts with a poem. It sets the tone and plays an important part in the plot. What is the significance of it in the centre of the story?

I came across this poem in Athens. It was in English. Imagine my surprise when I found out that it is actually a Rumi poem! It looked nothing like the original, as it was a free interpretation by Coleman Barks, an American poet. Still the power of the poem was there. Here was a classical Persian poet of the 13th century who through Coleman's interpretation had become a best-selling poet in 20th century US. It resonated with me. In the film, Pari follows this game, reinterpreting the poem from English back to Persian. A new text through re-writing. It functions as a window onto the inner world of her character, like a strange prayer. It also connects different aspects of my transnational experience; born in Iranian, living in Greek, working in English.

Most of the scenes in the film are set in the streets of Athens. How does the city interact with your characters?

This is the story of a mother looking for her missing son in Athens. She feels compelled to search the city as much as she can in the hope of finding a sign. Everything is new for her, exciting and frightening. She is a stranger in a strange land. So, the cityscapes become new material to decipher, both as the outside world but also as reflections of her inner search. Every neighborhood is associated with a stage in her journey; the city centre represents the status quo, Exarchia is the site of political dissent, the red-light district is the area of the blasphemous and the profane. It is as if the city is showing her the way. There is a unique energy to Athens, from its small churches to its riots, and between its run-down back streets and its ancient monuments. It offers the right balance of the opposites for the story; the modern and the ancient, the sacred and the revolutionary, the vibrant and the decadent. Athens is my city, I love it, and I dare say that cinematically it has not been fully discovered yet.

What were the difficulties and challenges in creating your first feature film?

Money is always an issue, especially if it is your first film. You have a lot of convincing to do before you can have enough of your budget in place to start. Collaborations are another major challenge. Cinema is the ultimate collaborative art. You need talented artists at all stages of the work to bring their experience and imagination to the table. And then all this input should serve a coherent vision, your vision. It is a steep learning curve to know when to listen to your collaborators and when to push with your own vision despite disagreements and doubts. As a new filmmaker, you need to find your own voice and avoid mediocrity as much as you can. And this cannot be achieved without taking risks and entering new territories especially in our crazy content laden world. For “Pari”, I was looking for the right balance between the realistic parts of the narrative and the more lyrical, transcendental elements. The story had to find its own tone, real but not documentary style. Finally, after the work is finished, there is still the challenge of sharing your movie with the world. You need to learn how to receive and filter the reactions, both positive and negative, learn from them, and when to let go, moving on to a new adventure.

MAIN CREDITS

Directed by | Siamak Etemadi

Written by | Siamak Etemadi

Cinematography | Claudio Bolivar GSC

Editing | Panos Voutsaras

Cast | Melika Foroutan (Pari), Shahbaz Noshir (Farrokh), Sofia Kokkali (Zoe), Argyris Pandazaras (Anarchist), Lena Kitsopoulou (Nawal), Dimitris Xanthopoulos (Sailor)

Produced by | Heretic (Greece), Le Bureau (France), TopKapi Films (The Netherlands), The Chouchkov Brothers (Bulgaria)

Co-produced by | Bord Cadre Films (Switzerland), Biokon (Greece)

Supported by | Greek Film Centre, ERT S.A., CNC, Netherlands Film Fonds, Netherlands Production Incentive, Bulgarian National Film Centre, Creative Europe Media, Eurimages

Producers | Konstantinos Kontovrakis, Giorgos Karnavas

Co-producers | Gabrielle Dumon (Le Bureau), Frans van Gestel, Laurette Schillings, Arnold Heslenfeld (Topkapi Films), Boris Chouchkov, Victor Couchkov Jr. (Chouchkov Brothers), Dan Wechsler, Jamal Zeinal Zade (Bord Cadre), Dimitris Kontovrakis (Biokon)

Production manager | Kostas Sfakianakis

Production coordinator | Leda Bouzoukou

Production design | Wilbert van Dorp

Costumes | Mayou Trikerioti

Art Director | Elena Vardava

Make-up | Valentin Valov

Music | Avia

Casting Director | Makis Gazis

Sound | Boris Trayanov, Vincent Sinceretti, Jan Schermer

Assistant director | Miltos Ntzounis

Production assistants | Takis Papadopoulos, Grigoris Livieratos, Petros Papakyriakou

VFX | IKE NO KOI

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