



EXILE



a film by
VISAR MORINA

LOGLINE

A chemical engineer feeling discriminated against and bullied at work, plunges into an identity crisis.





SYNOPSIS

Xhafer, a 45 year old, Kosovo-born pharmaceutical engineer living in Germany suddenly feels discriminated against and bullied at work because of his ethnic background.

When Xhafer finds a dead rat hanging from the gate in front of his home, it is immediately clear to him that his racist colleagues could be behind it. Every occurrence, every word, every gesture is taken as evidence. Xhafer's uneasiness grows every day. His German wife Nora is tired of him playing the race card all the time. Do his colleagues simply dislike him? Or is there more to their hostility? Is this all in his mind or is it the actual reality?

EXIL chronicles a steadily growing, though possibly imagined, threat. As Xhafer loses his job, wife, and his family, he walks a delicate tightrope between his life as an integrated, middle-class family man, and foreigner in his adopted country.

A thriller about paranoia and identity that's simultaneously dark and surreal, with echoes of genre cinema and an unconventional sense of humor.





DIRECTOR
VISAR MORINA

Visar Morina was born in Kosovo and studied at the Cologne Academy of Media Arts. His much-acclaimed debut Babai received multiple awards such as Best Director and European Cinema Label in Karlovy Vary and Best Script at Filmfest München. **EXIL** is his second feature. The script was honored with the German Federal Award Lola in Gold for an unfilmed screenplay.

2020

EXIL

2015

BABAI

2013

OF DOGS AND WALLPAPER

2010

DEATH BY SUFFOCATION

INTERVIEW WITH VISAR MORINA

The question comes up time and time again, so please gratify the curiosity:
how much of **EXIL** is autobiographical?

The conflict the film portrays is of course autobiographically driven, be that in terms of my family or of myself. I came to Germany at the age of fifteen, didn't speak the language and had to fight for my position both at the school I couldn't initially attend, and in private.

In this respect, the basic conflict and emotional timbre of the film are very close to me. There are autobiographical aspects – sometimes these are little details that were important during the writing process. My mom, for example, really did sing when she was sad, and she still does now, and my brother always goes to lie down when he's stressed. But the film isn't per se autobiographical. I don't have children, I'm not married, and I don't work in an office. And when I meet an idiot, I don't think he's an idiot because I'm a foreigner, but because the poor guy really is an idiot.



INTERVIEW WITH VISAR MORINA

In your debut *BABAI*, you described a departure into a new life, a new country. EXIL's Xhafer could've found his place in life, but hasn't. He says: «You have no idea what it's like to be foreign in this wannabe-cultivated, phony country.» Who's speaking to whom, who's accusing whom?

I think Xhafer has found his place in life, or at least I don't know how he might've done so to a greater extent. He's part of this society's middle-class. He has a job, a wife, three children, a house, he pays taxes and tends to his garden. One couldn't be more bourgeois. As to the line of dialog you quoted – before that, he'd been talking about an old man who'd fallen from an apple tree and only wants to be visited in the hospital by those who have also fallen from an apple tree. Apparently the man considers his fall so special that he can only find comfort and meaning in people who are familiar with that precise pain. I think there's something to that.

As for the matter of who is accusing whom: of course there's a lot of dishonesty in how racism comes into play. Where being racist doesn't play well, other forms of exclusion are employed. For example by subtly emphasizing manners and behavior. To quote Urs in the film: «Do you know what a secretary is for? So people like you sign in. Did you sign in?» This need not be racially motivated, but it can be and often is. Or saying something like: «It's remarkable that you're interested in German literature.» What other literature would I be interested in? I live here. From my point of view, it's not so much that I'm interested in German literature, but that I, as a foreigner, am interested in literature at all.

I find that in the West there's often this great arrogance towards people from economically weak countries. There's a perceived superiority when it comes to education, freedom of thought and manners. In everyday life this can take on completely absurd proportions and bring dubious views to light.

Depending on their circumstances, this can make people feel uneasy. You're more inclined to question

yourself if you've had to struggle to simply belong, and this in turn has an effect on those around you. Which in turn makes people more uneasy and more likely to «act funny», which continues the cycle. I think that's the case with Xhafer in the phase of life in which we encounter him.

As for integration, I don't know what the concept means. If we're talking about whether someone has found their place in life, then I can relate to it. I remember meeting a woman in a Swiss club years back. She seemed to be interested in me, at least I thought she was. We spoke a few words. It was loud and she didn't catch my accent. When she heard I was from Kosovo, she looked baffled and said, «But you're integrated, aren't you? Oh, yes, you're integrated.» I wondered if she was referring to some costume I was supposed to wear.

I think the way the term «integration» is used in the public debate, at least in Germany, often stands in for the question as to whether one is a so-called «savage» or whether one is «civilized.»

INTERVIEW WITH VISAR MORINA

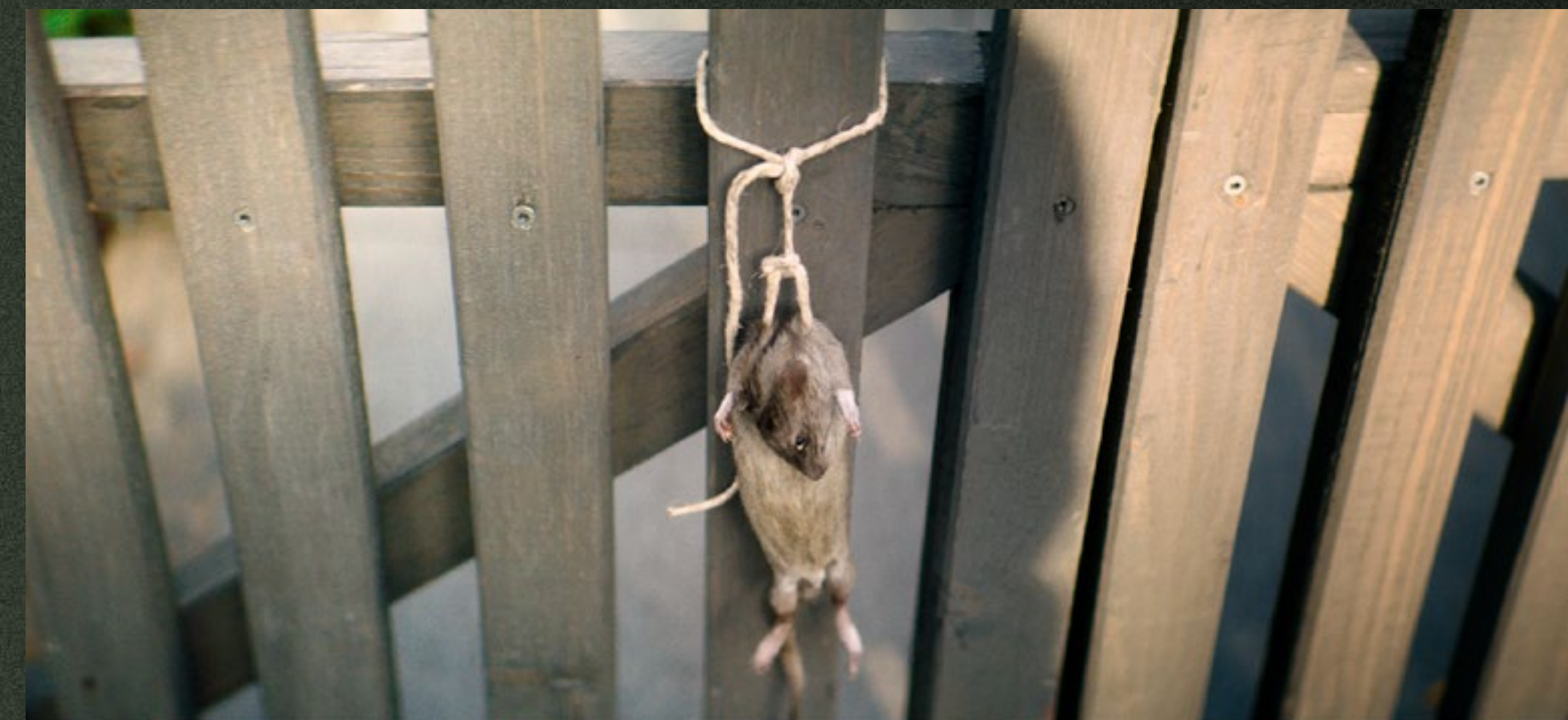
Racism, integration, being a foreigner, assimilation, bullying, exclusion... the issues you feature are all psychologically and emotionally complex in terms of communication dynamics. It's a dramatic tour-de-force with many peaks and sensations all the way to the end – is the obvious interpretation that this conflict is endless and unresolvable?

I think the conflict will continue as long as I judge people based on ready-made schemata. Racism and sexism – and I think they have a lot in common – I understand to mean that the individual as such is essentially negated. The consequence is often that the victims adopt that same mode of thinking as if it were a virus. It gets into one's bones. The victim then views things and acts as if they were part of an underclass. At least that's what I've often observed at close hand and it's painful to see. Some react with aggression, some

are submissive. Or worse still, the racist thinking is transferred to other groups that are even worse off.

As far as Xhafer is concerned, I believe that every person, even «non-foreigners,» can end up in his situation. You don't have to have left your village or hometown to grasp this. The fact that Xhafer was born elsewhere makes it more tangible and immediate to him, but it's the same experience.

Once I was at a film festival standing next to an actor. Suddenly a man approached us and greeted the actor with the words, «Well, sober again?» This very much bothered the actor. The two of them knew each other only superficially, and I thought it wouldn't take more than two more complete strangers approaching him with the same question for his nonchalance and sense of well-being to be gravely impacted.





INTERVIEW WITH VISAR MORINA

Do you also see the film as a criticism of Germany domestically? And what does origin mean to you?

I see the film as an examination of what I understand to be Western. Western in terms of the «First World», which believes it sets the pace. That sounds critical and it is. But that wasn't what EXIL was about for me. It was much more the individuals in the group. I think groups can easily turn threatening.

For me, the human aspect of an individual's uncertainty towards a group was much more important than criticism of Germany. Yes, there's a lot to criticize, but there's a lot that's good, too. I like living in Germany.

Coming back to my view of Germany domestically: I wrote the script in 2016 and found it to be a very special year. Sentiment towards refugees had turned. The media's interpretation of New Year's Eve 2015/2016 in

Cologne was all-intrusive. The Alternative for Germany (AFD, a right-wing party) flourished. I had the feeling the country was changing, that paranoia reigned. My impression was naturally also colored by the material I was dealing with every day, but nonetheless... I travelled from Vienna to Cologne and was stuck at a border checkpoint for an hour. Six months earlier, I would've considered a checkpoint impossible. But apparently, everyone waiting with me at the border found nothing was wrong with this, as if it were completely normal, and I reflected on how quickly good things hard won can turn into their opposites.

And what origin means to me? Everything that shaped me one way or another and to which I generally have an emotional connection or memory. But that can be anything and I find it hard to generalize, because then the specifics and coincidence, which can be equally

important, are lost. For instance, ours is a big family, five children, and all of us are so different, which is sometimes surprising.

I don't mean to say that so-called hard facts like family and social status don't play a part, they certainly do, but that's only an aspect of experience.





INTERVIEW WITH VISAR MORINA

In their insecurity, Xhafer, Urs and Manfred fail to recognize each other and become rivals; Nora offers Xhafer support and resistance that he can't accept. Communication breaks down throughout and Xhafer's perception of his exclusion continues. Does this give the film a specific intent, a concern that it wants to communicate?

I always understood Xhafer, Urs and Manfred as characters who have all experienced different forms of exclusion. I think Manfred has it worst. Xhafer can say that they don't like him because he's a foreigner. Urs can say that this stupid foreigner came along and ruined everything. But Manfred doesn't know how come. A reason, however implausible, can be a relief, and Manfred can't even enjoy that. He's kind and helpful to everyone. He abides by all the rules of friendly cooperation, but no one wants him around and with a smile they instead exclude him from life itself.

I didn't make the film with a specifically formulated concern. But I definitely tried to make tangible the structures that can lead to exclusion, and, as I say, the aspect of seeping uncertainty was very important to me. At a certain point, the insecurity doesn't even stop at yourself.

I don't mean to say that so-called hard facts like family and social status don't play a part, they certainly do, but that's only an aspect of experience.

Is Xhafer imagining it all or is he actually being bullied? The question as to the internal and external threat remains unanswered, but it rightly occupies the viewer as a matter of course throughout the film. Why did you choose this narrative form?

Personal and subjective storytelling is important to me, or rather I find that one can only narrate subjectively and personally. Everything else is an imposition and I get the feeling I'm being fooled.

I understand the film as an attempt to tell a story about seeing and doubting. I see an object and don't know how to place it in relation to myself. To me, this was the core and pivotal point of the story. So it was imperative for me to remain in Xhafer's point-of-view, and this comes very close to real life for me.

INTERVIEW WITH VISAR MORINA

How did you and cameraman Matteo Cocco prepare for the film having already worked together on BABAI?

Collaborating with Matteo was very rewarding. His calmness cancels out my hectic ways. It was very important that we were so familiar with each other's way of working. This is our third collaborative piece. Before BABAI we'd made a short, OF DOGS AND WALLPAPER.

From the start we'd agreed to narrate the film in as physical a manner as possible – that the camera wouldn't be clingy and that a lot would remain off screen. Just before preparation began, I saw this fun clip online of a man driving a car while dancing. The camera was mounted to one side. A moment later the man gets out, leaves the door open, and dances along parallel to the car while smiling into the camera. Suddenly he runs into a tree, falls down and vanishes out of shot. The camera didn't care that the protagonist

was no longer visible. It was in this spirit that we wanted to shoot EXIL.

The shots are dominated by darkness, claustrophobia and tension. How did this stylistic choice come about?


It was important for us to create a contrast between the form and that which it depicts. I felt the characters in the film were like a «human mass» that at any moment threatened to leak out of its too-small container. So a fixed form was important. And the claustrophobia then ensued.

Since the film works a lot with latent space, we had to be very clear in our ambiguity. For example, someone smiles at me seemingly casually. The smile lasts too long to be perceived as friendly or thoughtless, but is too short to suggest a clear intention behind it. That was our yardstick, and the composition of almost every scene resulted from it.

Mišel Matičević and Sandra Hüller carry the film with their magnetic, tense performances. How did you work with them and the other actors?

Working with actors is always a pleasure. And having such great people on EXIL was a gift. In terms of acting, I'm very much influenced by theater. Before studying film, I worked as an intern assistant director on a number of productions, and then later as a director's assistant, so I got to know different ways of working. I found that period very valuable.

The biggest challenge for me on EXIL was to understand what the respective actor needed and what motivated him or her. Sandra, for example, wanted to understand the essence of a scene, and often a sentence was enough for her to begin, while Mišel looked to find a physical approach to a given scene.

A close-up portrait of actor Mišel Matičević, looking slightly to the right with a thoughtful expression. He has dark hair and is wearing a blue shirt. The background is softly blurred, showing a green plant and a light-colored wall.

Mišel Matičević joined the cast of the Berlin Ensemble and the Deutsches Theater in Berlin immediately after completing his studies. During this time, directors such as Caroline Link, Dominik Graf, Oskar Roehler and Thomas Arslan became aware of his work. They cast him in film and television productions such as **IM ANGESICHT DES VERBRECHENS** (In Face of the Crime), **IM SCHATTEN** (In the Shadows) and **LOST KILLERS**. An international audience came to take note of him through the role of Arpad Zelk in Ridley Scott's Emmy nominated series **THE COMPANY**. Mišel Matičević's acting talent has been honored many times, including with the Adolf Grimme Prize and several times with the German Television Prize.

MIŠEL MATIČEVIĆ

SANDRA HÜLLER

Sandra Hüller studied acting at the University of Dramatic Arts Ernst Busch in Berlin. She has received numerous awards for her theatre roles and she has been voted actress of the year three times (2010, 2013 and 2019) in the critics' survey of Theater heute. Sandra won multiple awards for her first main role in Hans-Christian Schmid's feature film **REQUIEM** including the Silver Bear, the German Film Prize and the Bavarian Film Prize. She

received the European Film Award, the Toronto Film Critics Association Award, the German Film Award and the Bavarian Film Prize for her performance as Ines Conradi in Maren Ade's **TONI ERDMANN**. **TONI ERDMANN** was also nominated for a Golden Globe, César, BAFTA and Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. Most recently, Hüller starred in Justine Triet's movie **SIBYL** and in Alice Winocour's astronaut drama **PROXIMA**.





MAIN CAST

Mišel Matičević: Xhafer

Sandra Hüller: Nora

Rainer Bock: Urs

Thomas Mraz: Manfred

Flonja Kodheli: Hatiqe

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Original title: EXIL / **International title:** EXILE

Duration: 121 min / **Aspect Ratio:** 2.39:1 / **Format:** 2K / **Sound:** 5.1

Year: 2020 / **Original Language:** German, Albanian

Countries of Production: Germany, Belgium, Kosovo

MAIN CREW

Producers: Janine Jackowski,

Jonas Dornbach, Maren Ade

Co-producers: Jean-Yves Roubin, Cassandre Warnauts,

Yll Uka, Valon Bajgora

Commissioning Editors: Andrea Hanke/WDR,

Birgit Kämper/ARTE

Line Producer: Ben von Dobeneck

Production Manager: Peter Kreutz

Cinematography: Matteo Cocco

Production Design: Christian Goldbeck, VSK

Editing: Laura Lauzemis; Hansjörg Weißbrich,

BFS; Visar Morina

Music: Benedikt Schiefer

Casting: Susanne Ritter

Costume Design: Gitti Fuchs

Hair and Make-up: Diana Dreesen

Original Sound: Dirk Bombey

Sound Design: Kai Tebbel

Re-recording mix: Emmanuel de Boissieu

Director & Scriptwriter: Visar Morina

Production Company: Komplizen Film

Co-production companies: Frakas Productions,

Ikonë Studio, WDR, ARTE, VOO, BeTV

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Cinematography Center, German Federal Film Board

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