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TORONTO
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
OFFICIAL SELECTION
2006

TAKVA

BY
ÖZER
KIZILTAN

THE MATCH FACTORY

TAKVA



CAST

Muharrem

ERKAN CAN

Rauf

GÜVEN KIRAÇ

Sheikh

MERAY ÜLGEN

Dream woman / Sheikh's daughter

ÖZNR KULA

Muhittin (Assistant)

ERMAN SABAN

Mahmut

MURAT CEMCİR

Mr. Ali (Boss)

SETTAR TANRIÖGEN

SYNOPSIS TAKVA – A MAN'S FEAR OF GOD BY ÖZER KIZILTAN

Muharrem has worked quietly as a simple clerk for over 30 years in the same traditional Istanbul neighborhood where he was born. The humble introvert lives a solitary and meager existence of prayer and sexual abstinence, adhering strictly to the most severe Islamic doctrines.

Muharrem's extraordinary devotion attracts the attention of the leaders of a rich and powerful religious group. His acclaimed trustworthiness and conscientiousness inspire them to offer him an administrative post as rent collector for their numerous properties.

Provided with new clothes, a cell phone and a computer, Muharrem is thrown into the modern outside world he has successfully avoided for so long. His naive eyes are soon witness to hypocritical attitudes toward alcohol consumption and goodwill.

To his dismay, Muharrem becomes domineering and proud, eventually even inadvertently cheating in a business deal. To make matters worse, Muharrem's inner peace is unnerved by the tormenting image of a seductive woman who tempts him in his dreams, both night and day.

Muharrem has built his life around being able to distinguish between carnal and spiritual values. But the balance of his devotion is now upset. His fear of God begins to eat away at his senses ...



RELIGION AND MODERNISM

Kiziltan: “Takva” means fear of God. I wanted to work with themes surrounding religion and modernism. The main character Muharrem is a person who tries to truly live up to the requirements of 7th Century religious life. Is living a 7th Century lifestyle still possible in our global capitalist system? This is what I wanted to explore in the film TAKVA.

Çakar: We wanted to show that if you’re really determined to live your life today by an ancient ideology, you’ll find out you can’t. If you insist, you’ll lose your mind. It’s impossible to live the old religious way and perpetuate a system of thought which dates back to the 7th Century. It’s just not possible to find answers to today’s problems in ancient ideologies. The confrontations dealt with are those from the past, as well as new ever-changing problems. This applies to Muslims, Jews and Christians. Progress is limited for any ideology which believes ignorance is a virtue.

MUHARREM’S WORLD

Kiziltan: Muharrem’s life revolves around the triangle of monastery-home-work. He feels no need to open himself up to the outside world. He doesn’t want or need anything more.

Çakar: You’ll notice in the film that there are no women in Muharrem’s world. The only real female presence is the woman in Muharrem’s dreams. For Orthodox Muslims, women are excluded from social life, private or public. Women cannot even be looked at. This is probably how Muharrem became so socially awkward and why he never married. He is afraid of marriage and sex. His sexual urges can only be lived out in his dreams.

MUHARREM’S DILEMMA

Kiziltan: When he goes out into the world for his new job with the monastery, Muharrem experiences conflicts which he cannot comprehend. He finds it difficult to live in accordance with his religious beliefs. He loses the proper rationale for questioning which activities makes us “good” or “bad”.

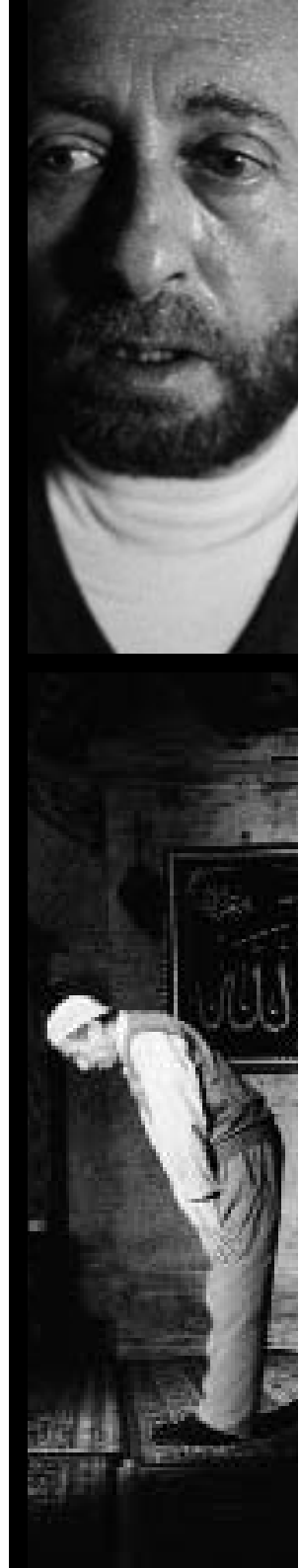
This occurs because he has been fed by a discipline which denies individual reason. Muharrem has given up being an individual. He seeks only to be a good Muslim.

Çakar: There are many contradictions between reality and how Muharrem thinks life should be. Muharrem has strict definitions of good and bad which he tries to apply to the modern world. In the end, even he admits his own failure at living up to those expectations.

THE SÜLEYMANIYE NEIGHBORHOOD OF ISTANBUL

Çakar: The home and immediate surroundings of Muharrem were shot in the Süleymaniye neighborhood, which is very special to Istanbul. It was built in the immediate vicinity of the Ottoman Palace, right after the conquest of Istanbul by the Turkish Muslims. The old wooden houses are today somewhat impoverished. This fits with the character of Muharrem, who leads a life connected to some past glory which has never been refurbished.

Kiziltan: Süleymaniye was one of the most significant cultural and commercial centers of the Ottoman period. Since the 1980s, it has become a district where immigrants



from the east constitute the majority. In addition to Süleymaniye, the film was also shot in Haseki and Eminönü, where Muslims were placed after the conquest of Istanbul.

THE DERGAH

Kiziltan: A dergah is an Islamic monastery, a complex of buildings for both theological training and public worship. As seen in the film, men worship on the first floor of the big Prayer Hall and women, apart on the mezzanine. Believers of all age groups sit or kneel on the floor, most of them generally dressed in line with Islamic requirement (baggy trousers, long sleeved gowns, shirts with no collars). Everyone covers his or her head.

Çakar: The dergah in the film, interior and exterior, is a normal ancient building decorated to resemble a real religious one. The building used in the film is actually located in another traditional area of Istanbul, Haseki. But Muharrem's geographical world is shown as one small area, confined within walking distance. We wanted to stress that the character is enclosed in a very narrow world, far from modern Istanbul.

PRAYER CEREMONIES

Kiziltan: Muharrem finds absolute peace in the Prayer Hall. He listens to the readings of the Koran and chants along with the other believers. All in an atmosphere lit completely by candles and with the accompaniment of tambourines (the "dhikr" ceremony.) The whole group is eventually driven into an ecstatic mood as the reciting advances. Like everyone else, Muharrem sways back and forth, his eyes closed. His face has a blissful expression.

Çakar: The energetic prayer ceremonies seen in the film are not everyday forms of Islamic worship. It's actually quite rare to see this in Turkey. We had long rehearsals to show our extras these movements. The coaches were practicing members of religious orders who practice such ceremonies.

RESEARCH

Çakar: All the prayer scenes in the monastery are re-enactments based on discussions with practicing Muslims. Some of our consultants actually participated in the ceremonial scenes. We wanted to be as accurate as possible, down to the costumes and signs on the wall.

Kiziltan: We observed many prayer ceremonies before we shot the film. We also watched recordings of such events from all over the world. The scenes are very close to real prayer ceremonies, but we re-designed them slightly so that they would not be distinguished as any specific religious order.

Çakar: We researched various orders existing in Istanbul. These orders practically remain invisible, as rituals like those depicted in the film are actually illegal in Turkey. Nevertheless, they are practiced by tens of thousands of people all the time. My late father was a member of a religious order. I also integrated some of my memories of his attitudes.

REAL SERVICE IN THE FATI H MOSQUE

Çakar: We were able to get permission to shoot at the 15th Century Fatih Mosque. We filmed the actual Friday prayer with real worshippers. We put our actors in there among them. They were not recognized during the shooting. The respect is real which the worshippers show to our actor playing a sheikh (religious leader). Real people were actually coming up to greet him, not realizing he was just an actor. No one paid much attention to the cameras, because filming often takes place there for TV broadcasting of holiday ceremonies.

AWARDS

TORONTO 2006
Swarovski Cultural
Innovation Award

ANTALYA
GOLDEN ORANGE 2006
Best Actor Award for
Erkan Can
Best Art Direction Award
Best Cinematography
Award
Best Costume Design
Award
Best Music Award
Best Screenplay Award
Lab Competition Award
Make-Up Award

MUHARREM'S OUTCOME

Kiziltan: At the end of the film, the sheikh describes the condition of Muharrem as that of a man stuck between perfection and imperfection. He sermons on the various stages that a true believer goes through to reach the presence of God and transcend worldly existence.

Çakar: How the ending is interpreted is dependent on how strict a believer you are. It's possible to look at the end as a tragedy, and it's equally possible to see it as a happy ending. Muharrem could be seen by some as having arrived at the threshold of becoming one with God.

Kiziltan: We don't really know if the sheikh has any understanding of the dilemmas and inner conflicts poor Muharrem has gone through. Maybe he is trying to cover up the situation and protect his spiritual example in front of the religious community. Or maybe he actually does believe that, in that pitiful, crippled state of mind and body, Muharrem is now set forth as an example of a miracle to the religious community.

Çakar: What we do know is that Muharrem is taken good care of when he is bedridden. What some may not recognize is that, at Muharrem's bedside, the Sheikh's daughter's hands are red with henna. This is a sign that she has been recently married. We can suspect it was to Muharrem, but we can't know for sure.

A SEARCH FOR UNDERSTANDING

Çakar: This film may present for Western viewers the chance to understand Muslims also have their own values and they do know how to differentiate between good and bad, even if their system is very different.

For Muslim viewers, the film could present some criticism or self-criticism to allow the chance to re-evaluate their own system of values.

Kiziltan: As an atheist director, I searched to understand and tell Muharrem's story through my search for understanding. It was not my goal to judge, criticize or deliberately offend anyone.

Çakar: Yes, it wasn't our aim to criticize any specific organization or ideology. It's more about trying to urge people to ask themselves questions they may not have before. For example, we did not want the monastery to come across as a place where people are exploited or abused. Muharrem could not be depicted as having lost faith from being deceived by those around him. What happens in the film is that his beliefs become invalid. The film is about his discovery that he cannot function in the world with his outdated beliefs.

THE YOUNGEST RELIGION

Kiziltan: At only 1400 years old, it's important to note that Islam is the youngest of the great religions. It's also the least developed and hasn't lived through any reforms and it is still resisting change. All ideologies and all religions declare that they exist for the sake of happiness yet none have been able to stop war. All religions and ideologies which deny individuality produce people who are oppressed and deny humanism and rationalism. This results in insanity. If the Koran continues to be interpreted as it is interpreted today by people like the character of Muharrem, then they, too, are living bombs of madness.

Çakar: Muharrem destroys his own mind. By doing this, he destroys his own life. The essence is similar to that of a person who puts a bomb on a train and kills many lives. The value of human life is negated when a person regards this world as a deception and death as a beginning, not an end. This is a general problem in today's world. The first step to changing that is to cherish the life we have.

TECHNICAL DATA

FORMAT

35 mm / 1:1,85 / Colour /

Dolby Digital

LENGTH

96 MINS

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

Turkish





ÖZER KIZILTAN DIRECTOR

Özer Kiziltan has directed several TV series and mini-series in his native Turkey, including 2005's YAGMUR ZAMANI (Rain Time), 2004's MÜJGAN BEY, 2003's KURŞUN YARASI (Bullet Wound) and 2002's GÜLBEYAZ. After studying law at the University of Istanbul, he graduated in 1994 from the Cinema & Television Department of the University of Mimar Sinan.

ÖNDER ÇAKAR SCREENWRITER

Önder Çakar founded the production company Yeni Sinemacilik with director Serdar Akar and producer Sevil Demirci. Çakar has written and produced films for over 10 years, including 2002's MARUF (dir. Serdar Akar), which won the Special Jury Award at the 2002 Istanbul Film Festival; 2001's DAR ALANDA KISA PASLAŞMALAR (Offside) (dir. Serdar Akar), which was named Best Film by the Writers Union of Turkey; 1998's GEMID (On Board) (dir. Serdar Akar), which was presented at the 1999 Cannes Film Festival (Critics' Week). GEMIDE also won Best Film at the Ankara Film Festival and Istanbul

ERKAN CAN AS MUHARREM

Actor Erkan Can was recently seen in ANLAT ISTANBUL, which won "Turkish Film of the Year" at the 2005 Istanbul Film Festival. Can starred in the award-winning GEMIDE (dir. Serdar Akar), which was presented at the 1999 Cannes Film Festival (Critics' Week). GEMIDE was an Istanbul Film Festival "Turkish Film of the Year" and won Can several "Best Actor" awards. Can's other credits include 2005's O SIMDI MAHKUM (dir. Abdullah Oguz), 2004's YAZI TURA (dir. Ugur Yücel) and 2000's DAR ALANDA KISA PASLAŞMALAR (dir. Serdar Akar), another Turkish Film of the Year winner at the Istanbul Film Festival. Can also recently starred in the Turkish TV mini-series "Kapilari Açmak." A graduate from the Theater Department of Istanbul University, he is also an accomplished theater actor. Can is currently shooting Fatih Akin's new film ON THE OTHER SIDE OF LIFE (tt).

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