

KINO LORBER

PRESENTS

TEHRAN TABOO

A film by Ali Soozandeh

Technical Specs:

Germany-Austria | 2017 | 96 Minutes | 2:35
5.1 Sound | In Farsi with English subtitles | Rotoscopic animation

International Festivals:

Cannes Film Festival – 2017
Jerusalem Film Festival – 2017 / Winner FIPRESCI Prize (First Film)
Montréal Festival of New Cinema – 2017 / Winner Creativity Prize
Animation is Film – 2017
Annecy International Animated Film Festival – 2017
Hamburg Film Festival – 2017
Montréal Festival of New Cinema – 2017

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Synopsis:

TEHRAN TABOO chronicles the day-to-day struggles of three young women and a male musician in modern-day Tehran, Iran's largest city.

Pari (Elmira Rafizadeh), a single mother who makes a living as a sex worker, is hoping to legally separate from her drug-abusing (and imprisoned) husband. After presenting her case to a judge (Hasan Ali Mete) in the Islamic Revolution, the judge signals to her that he'll only sign her papers if she enters into a concubine arrangement with him. Without a better way forward, Pari accepts the judge's conditions and moves into an apartment he owns with her son Elias – beginning a clandestine affair with a married man.

Pari's new neighbors are a young couple about to have their first child: on the surface, Sara (Zara Amir Ebrahimi) and Mohsen (Alireza Bayram) seem very happy. But deep inside, Sara longs for a job that will get her out of her in-laws' house, and is disturbed at the thoughts of becoming a fulltime housewife. As Pari and Sara become closer friends, the former begins to empower Sara's aspirations and wishes for a more independent life.

Also living nearby is the talented young musician Babak (Arash Marandi), who works at a club known for drug-fueled, 24-hour parties. One night, he has an intense one-night stand with the beautiful Donya (Negar Mona Alizadeh), only to learn the day after that she is weeks away from marrying her future husband – and has lost her virginity to him.

Worried about having her reputation destroyed, Donya pressures Babak to find her a doctor who can perform an operation to restore her virginity. Even though Babak is committed and willing to help Donya, he begins to see life in Tehran through a different lens and becomes interested in moving to another country.

As we watch these characters' stories intersect, we come to see the hypocrisies of life in contemporary Iran, where sex, drugs, and corruption flourish despite the harsh restrictions imposed by an overbearing theocratic regime.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH ALI SOOZANDEH

What is the origin of the project? Is it adapted from any existing material?

TEHRAN TABOO is an original screenplay, not based on a novel. The idea came to me a few years ago when I overheard a conversation between two Iranian young men in the subway who were talking about their experiences with girls. They mentioned a prostitute who brought her child along on the job. This made me think about themes on sexuality in Iran. I began researching social media and explored my own memories of dealing with such issues when I was a teenager and in my twenties, and the story developed from there.

Was it always your intention to make an animation film?

The initial goal was not about making a rotoscoping animation film, but animation is my main professional background. I have also worked as a camera operator, photographer, painter, storyboard and VFX artist. The most important thing for me was to make the story work. For this project, the problem with shooting a live-action film was the location. Tehran was not an option, for obvious reasons. I watched some films which used Morocco or Jordan in place of Iran, but this was not very convincing. After many discussions and tests, we concluded that the rotoscoping technique would be the best way to go. I chose that technique because it allows us to feel the characters more realistically despite the animation.

Tell us about your relationship to Iran.

I was born in Iran and lived there until I was 25. I'm the only one in my family who now lives abroad. I was nine years old when the Islamic revolution came. I felt the impact when boys and girls were suddenly separated in school. This was the first of many shattering experiences. At 25, I emigrated and have been living in Germany since 1995. Of course, I still love Iran and my people, who are among the best in the world when it comes to enduring hardships.

The research and reflection on our society in preparation for this film has given me a very different perspective on Iran. Now I understand better the circumstances, how complex the society is and why there is no simple answer. My relationship to Iran is now much deeper now.

Please summarize the social atmosphere in modern Iran and tell us about the taboos referred to in the movie's title.

By making this film, I wanted to break the silence that is a common practice in Iran. I would say breaking taboos is a way to protest against the restrictions. In Iran, legal prohibitions and moral restrictions are the forces that shape everyday life. When sexuality is regimented strongly, people can become very industrious at working around the many taboos. Iranians are a creative people and learn quickly how to handle the prohibitions and work around the restrictions. We

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find places free from rules. To compensate for forced public fronts, private life can go out of bounds in regards to sex, alcohol, drugs. The lack of freedom can push people into living with double standards. TEHRAN TABOO focuses on these double standards used to circumvent sexuality in Iran. This creates many social complications, which occasionally manifest themselves in absurd situations, often comic.

Tell us about the atmosphere of secrecy and paranoia that is often experienced in the film.

In the middle-class district where TEHRAN TABOO is set, restrictions come from people's mindsets as much as the actual laws. Family honor is much more important in Iran than in Europe. Iran has a society where social contacts are very important and play a big role in achieving success. An individual and his or her whole family can lose their honor for an extramarital relationship, of which the slightest is forbidden by law. But being sent to prison and paying the fine are not nearly as detrimental as the police releasing such information to the public. This means all your relatives, all your neighbors, will find out about your crime. For you and your family, it means complete loss of honor.

The women are crucial to the storyline in your film. Tell us about Iran's female population and the role that they are currently playing in society.

The images Westerners have of Iran are always very distorted and full of clichés. They are characterized by stereotypes ranging from the exoticism of «1001 Nights» to the nuclear dispute to the fierce Islamic regime. But the reality seen on Tehran streets is much more diverse. Women in Iran are often more educated than men and have a more visible role in daily life than in many other Islamic countries, such as Saudi Arabia. But there is no one modern Iranian woman. There are many types, from religious fundamentalists to Western feminists. Of course, the latter have no means to express themselves in public. I was especially interested in the role that women play and must play in Iranian society's game of virtues. They are the ones who suffer most. At the same time, women are expected to impose the rules and taboos that restrict their liberty onto the next generation.

Tell us about your characters' spirit and the tone they give to the film.

I believe people and their dreams are similar everywhere in the world. Only the circumstances are different. Any audience anywhere could probably identify with these characters. They all suffer in one way or another from the taboos of sexual relationships and the restrictions of Iranian society. They are victims, but also offenders at the same time. No one in the film is absolutely good or bad. A character can seem very offensive by his actions, but we can understand his behavior when we discover the backstory.

The film adopts in large parts the perspective of a small boy. Not wanting to make an overly dark film, I preferred to adopt the optimistic, hopeful and colorful perspective that children

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usually have on life. This and careful storyboarding enhance the tone and look of a graphic novel or comic book given by the rotoscoping technique.

Please summarize the technical process involved in the making of your film.

Upon finishing the storyboards and casting, we started shooting in green screen with the actors. During this stage, the work is with a normal film crew and camera in studio. The first step in the animation stage is pre-visualization. We couldn't go to the edit stage with only green screen footage. We needed to create placeholders for backgrounds. After the editing was done, we started the animation process. We created the final backgrounds (which are a combination of 3D-elements and drawn images) and the drawn characters separately. Finally, we combined all of the elements in the compositing stage, combining all the elements to provide the final image. It took 13 months just to shoot and complete the animation process, and more than 40 artists were involved.

Will you continue in the field of animation or do you see yourself working on live-action films?

I feel safe in the animation world, but I can imagine working on live-action films too. It depends strongly on the story. If live-action would be the better way to tell a story, I would not necessarily make an animated film.

BIOGRAPHY – Ali Soozandeh

Director Ali Soozandeh was born in 1970 in Shiraz Iran. He studied Art in Tehran. After emigrating to Germany, he had his diploma in Media Design at the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne. He founded his own company Cartoonamoon and was involved in many feature/ documentary films and TV-series as an animation specialist.

He also directed several music videos and short films before helming his feature debut TEHRAN TABOO. Ali's credits as head of animation include among others the animated documentaries *The Green Wave* (2010) – Grimme Prize winner for Best Documentary and in competition at Sundance Film Festival – and *Camp 14* (2012) – in competition at Locarno and Toronto International Film Festivals.

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خلاصه:

مادری که به تنهایی مسئولیت پرورش فرزند ناشنوای خود را بر عهده دارد در مرکز پر آسمان خراش شهر زندگی می کند. او در حالی که وانمود می کند که به عنوان پرستار در شیفت شب مشغول به کار است، در واقع به منظور تامین اجاره خانه و طلاق از همسر زندانی اش به خود فروشی تن می دهد. او راز خود را با همسایه باردار خود که از فرزند او مراقبت می کند در میان می گذارد، همسایه ای که از روزمرگی زندگی جانش به لب آمده و به دنبال تغییر و تحولی جدی در زندگی خود می گردد. یک دانشجوی جوان موسیقی نیز در همان منطقه زندگی می کند و متعاقب همبستری با یک دختر باکره هجده ساله با مشکلاتی رو به رو می شود.

علی سوزنده، کارگردان

علی سوزنده در سال 1970 در شیراز دیده به جهان گشود. او در تهران به تحصیل هنر مشغول شد و پس از مهاجرت به آلمان مدرک خود را در رشته طراحی رسانه ای از دانشگاه علوم کاربردی در گُلن دریافت کرد. او شرکتی را به نام کارتونامون (Cartoonamon) تاسیس کرد و به عنوان متخصص انیمیشن در ساخت فیلم های سینمایی، مستند، و سریال های تلویزیونی مشارکت داشته است. او همچنین پیش از کارگردانی اولین فیلم سینمایی خود، تهران تابو، استعداد خود را با ساخت تعدادی نما آهنگ و فیلم کوتاه به آزمایش گذاشته بود. آقای سوزنده همچنین در ساخت فیلم های انیمیشن مستند زیر به عنوان متصدی انیمیشن همکاری داشته است: موج سبز (ساخت سال 2010) – این فیلم جایزه گریم (Grimme) بهترین فیلم مستند را به خود اختصاص داد و همچنین در جشنواره فیلم ساندنس به رقابت پرداخت – و اردوگاه 14 (ساخت سال 2012) که در جشنواره های جهانی لوکارنو و تورانتو رقابت نمود.

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Cast

Elmira Rafizadeh – as Pari
Zar Amir Ebrahimi – as Sara
Arash Marandi – as Babak
Bilal Yasar – as Elias
Negar Mona Alizadeh – as Donya
Alireza Bayram – as Mohsen

Crew

Written and directed by Ali Soozandeh
Produced by Frank Geiger, Ali Samadi Ahadi, Mark Fencer & Armin Hofmann
Cinematography by Martin Gschlact
Edited by Frank Geiger & Andrea Mertens
Music by Ali N. Askin
Art direction by Ali Soozandeh
VFX Supervisors: Ali Samadi Ahadi & Christian “Pingo” Schiffler
Head of Digital Painting: Alireza Darvish
Lead Shading/Texturing Artist: Carlos Cursors