

PRESSKIT

VICTIM



Official Selection
tiff
Toronto International
Film Festival 2022

A FILM BY MICHAL BLAŠKO
Slovak Republic, Czech Republic, Germany, 2022, 91 minutes,
color, Czech/Ukrainian, English subtitles



CREW

DIRECTED BY
Michal Blaško

WRITTEN BY
Jakub Medvecký

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Adam Mach

EDITED BY
Petr Hasalík

PRODUCTION DESIGNER
Stella Šonková

SOUND DESIGNER
Clemens Endreß

SOUND MIXER
Matthias Schwab

STILLS PHOTOGRAPHERS
*Milan Jaroš
Adam Mach*

PRODUCED BY
*Jakub Viktorín
Pavla Janoušková Kubečková*

CO-PRODUCED
Saar Yogev, Naomi Levari, Michael Reuter

PRODUCTION COMPANY
nutprodukcía, nutprodukce

CO-PRODUCTION COMPANIES
*Electric Sheep, Czech Television,
Radio and Television Slovakia*

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM

*Slovak Audiovisual Fund, Czech Film Fund,
Eurimages, MOIN Filmförderung Hamburg
Schleswig-Holstein, German Federal Film
Fund, Creative Europe Programme – MEDIA,
Jihomoravský fond, Ústecký kraj, Plzeňský kraj*

CAST

IRINA
Vita Smachelyuk

IGOR
Gleb Kuchuk

OFFICER NOVOTNÝ
Igor Chmela

SELSKÝ
Viktor Zavadil

IRINA'S FRIEND
Inna Zhulina

MANAGERESS
Alena Mihulová

LENKA
Veronika Weinhold

MAYOR
Gabriela Míčová

NEIGHBOR
Claudia Dudová



TECHNICAL INFORMATION

ORIGINAL TITLE

Obet

INTERNATIONAL TITLE

Victim

GENRE

Drama

COUNTRIES OF PRODUCTION

*Slovak Republic
Czech Republic
Germany*

YEAR OF PRODUCTION

2022

LENGTH

91 minutes

SHOOTING FORMAT

2K

SCREENING FORMAT

*DCP 2K (2048x858)
(1:2,39, 5.1, un-encrypted)*

LANGUAGES

*Ukrainian
Czech*

SUBTITLES

English

COLOR OR B/W

Color

SHOOTING DATE

Spring 2021

SHOOTING LOCATION

Czech Republic

POST-PRODUCTION LOCATION

Germany

TECHNICAL DETAILS

*24 fps
Sound 5.1
Aspect ratio: 1:2,39*



SYNOPSIS

Irina is an immigrant single mother from Ukraine living in a small Czech town. One day, her son is assaulted and severely injured. While the police investigate the crime, the whole town stands up in solidarity with the mother and son and condemns their Roma neighbors, who are allegedly responsible for the assault. After Irina's son wakes up in hospital, the truth about his incident begins to emerge. At the same time, a political campaign is gaining momentum in town, and different actors from media, politics and civil society strategically manipulate reality to their own ends. Truth and lies become difficult to tell apart. As a caring mother trying to make a new life for herself in a foreign country, Irina has to contend with the xenophobia, discrimination, and prejudice around her. Torn between protecting her family and searching for the truth, she is ultimately forced to make a fateful decision.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Both storylines, the mother-son storyline and the individual-society storyline, are intimately connected, constantly overlap and influence each other. By painting an emotional portrait of Irina, I wanted to expose the central European society for which she becomes a temporary mascot, until eventually ending up as its caricature. Manipulation as such is a kind of leitmotif of the entire story and has many layers during the narrative but everything starts with something childish, Igor's story, that suddenly gives society a false reason to uncover all the hatred that is in there. Irina and Igor being Ukrainians, a part of the minority that is most present in Czech Republic and still not fully accepted, gave the main characters also different perspectives and understanding.



DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Michal Blaško

Year of Birth: 1989

Michal Blaško studied film and television directing at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava and FAMO Písek. His short films were premiered at the most prestigious film festivals around the world and won several awards. His bachelor short film *Atlantis, 2003* premiered at the Cinéfondation in Cannes. Besides reaping awards on the festival circuit, it won the Czech Lion for Best Student Film, and ARTE bought the film for its schedules. Except for successful short films, Michal has a lot of experience as a director of TV series e.g. *Professor T.* -nominated for the Czech Lion - or miniseries *Suspicion*, based on the script by Štěpán Hulík that premiered at Berlinale. *Victim* is his feature film debut.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

Oběť / Victim

- 47. Toronto International Film Festival - Contemporary World Cinema
- World Premiere: 79th Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica, Orizzonti Section
- 72. Cannes Film Festival 2019, France – L'Atelier
- When East Meets West 2018, Italy – "Flow Post-production Award"

Podezření / Suspicion (2022)

- 72nd Berlin International Film Festival – Berlinale Series
- 55th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, Czech Republic - Special Screenings

Atlantída, 2003 / Atlantis, 2003 (2017) – short film

- 70th Cannes Film Festival, France - World Premiere in the Cinéfondation competition
- 52nd Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, Czech Republic - Future Frames

The Truck (2017) – short film

- 33rd Warsaw Film Festival – World Premiere in the Short Films Competition

Strach / Fear (2015) – short film

- 63rd San Sebastián International Film Festival, Spain - World Premiere in the International Film Students Meeting competition
- 21st Vilnius International Film Festival, Lithuania - "Best Short Film Award"



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

by Martin Kudlac

*Your work on **Victim** has spanned several years. Could you elaborate more on the central narrative in which a single lie between mother and son spirals out of control and the snowball effect it has on society?*

I came up with the story during my second year at film school when I presented my short film **Fear** in San Sebastian. At the beginning, there was the idea that somebody had been assaulted. However, we cannot be certain if the events unfolded as the victim claims they did. And the story should be told from the perspective of a different character. When Tomáš Hrubý of the Czech company nutprodukce boarded the project, he brought in the idea to make the central characters immigrants in a foreign country. It opened the door for a minority to confront another minority. This process was gradual, and different layers of the story kept being added. Although the initial idea has been much simpler than the final version you can see. I wanted to make a film about a lie that might not be a lie at all.

Have you considered altering the original script in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its aftermath?

We talked about it a lot. The war has turned **Victim** into a semi-historic film. In the end, we decided not to include the event since the story has little connection to the country. The story is about people who happened to have Ukrainian passports and live in the Czech Republic. Ukraine as a country does not play any role in the film. But what is important is that the protagonists feel they are not Czech and they are regarded as foreigners.

Two minorities are at the epicenter of the narrative: Ukrainians and Romani. The situation of Romani in central Europe has been already addressed in local fiction and documentary works, however they were not set against another minority but the majority society. Why did you decide to explore the dynamics of two minorities?

We chose Romani as the other minority because of the numerous cases in which people have been attacked and blamed it on Romani. Since Romani in our country are perceived as more aggressive due to social prejudices, we decided to set them against the Ukrainian characters. People tend to blame the weaker one rather than someone who is stronger. As a result of social inequality, Romani are usually weaker and unable to defend themselves. I wanted to tap a bit into the social prejudices to influence the viewing experience so that the audience would think that Romani could have beaten up the boy. And halfway through, I wanted the audience to feel what Irina is feeling that they might have been duped. From the beginning of the project, the story's power dynamic was not about two minorities in a confrontation but the incident is more related to the prejudices of the majority society.

Another minority, this time political and ideological not ethnic, emerges throughout the story triggered by the central incident – right-wing extremists. This is also a very up-to-date motif since not only the COVID crisis left society extremely polarized. Did you research right-wing extremists for the film and why did you decide to keep the movement on the local level in the film, i.e. not referring to higher politics?

With Jakub Medvecký we watched Jan Gebert's documentary *When the War Comes* about Slovak paramilitary group Slovak Recruits. And the protagonist Peter Svrcek fascinated us. We thought that seeing this kind character would be even truer than putting a skinhead in the story. And we liked how subtly he is handling the politics. People can think that he is acting out his own personal belief and then you gradually start to recognize his political agenda. When we talked about who to cast in the role of the right-wing activist in our film, I immediately thought that it would be great if Viktor Zavadil, who portrayed the lead role of Jan Palach in the eponymous film, could take on the role. And his character is very suave about racism. But the right-wing worldview is represented solely by this one supporting character portrait by Viktor Zavadil. They have the smallest space in the story, and he represents just one part of society that is trying to take advantage of the situation. He is certainly not a key factor since we did not want to make the film overly political.

Your previous works are also mostly centered on social dramas and you seem to be interested in the intersection of morality and conscience and individual and society.

Yes, you are right. The stories I have told are on the intersections of morality and conscience and individual and society. Furthermore, together with scriptwriter Jakub Medvecký, we wanted to get to know the characters better and make them

jump through some hoops before we ultimately confronted them with a moral dilemma. I did something similar in *Suspicion and Atlantis, 2003*. I consider this a good storytelling approach – to spend some time with the character, get to know them better, make the viewer understand the character as well as possible, and only then confront the character with a moral dilemma that basically anyone could find themselves dealing with in real life. And make the audience contemplate the character's decision.

You noted you wanted to combine a social drama with genre storytelling. How did you approach it? Why were you attracted to the idea of inserting genre into the film?

The investigation of how the main character is harassed by ringing her doorbell in the middle of the night or breaking glasses on her car all stem from the genre toolkit of the story. But the genre aspects are an organic part of the story when the main character is submitted to the psychological pressure. We knew since the start that we did not want to make a political film and we also knew we didn't want to have Irina sitting every other scene next to her bedridden son. We decided to employ a hybrid storytelling to have an entertaining film so that the audience would be invested in the narrative and enjoy it.

When you say you had interpreted more freely the script, does it mean your directing was also looser?

Not entirely. Each shot has an average of three minutes and we did 25-30 takes. We needed just one take, but that take needed to be perfect in its entirety. And it took some time for the actors to get accustomed to this mode. And it was big math in some scenes mostly due to the camera's logistics on the set and how it navigated the scene's space. One of the most difficult scenes has been the confession of the protagonist to her friend. The scene is six minutes long and we rehearsed it for half a day. But what has really helped us is that we shot the whole film beforehand, with my producers and I standing in for the characters. It's the same approach we used for the miniseries *Suspicion*, since the shooting was postponed due to COVID. And once we started shooting the actual film, the director of cinematography already knew how he had to light each scene.

The miniseries Suspicion and Victim seem to belong in the same universe, not solely by virtue of the central story but also the shared aesthetics. The hospital scenes in both films could take place in the very same building. This is partly due to set design,

*lighting, and cinematography as you work on both films with DoP Adam Mach who also lensed your short films, **Atlantis, 2003** among them, and the architect Stella Šonková. How did the collaboration come about and why do you prefer the work with Adam Mach?*

Both stories take place in a small Czech town. Otherwise, the shared aesthetics is a coincidence. Furthermore, we wanted to have the environment of *Suspicion* more upbeat whereas with *Victim* we went for a bleaker milieu. But the story would simply not work should it be set in Prague. The small town has its own rules and circumstances. But we have always had intensive discussions with cinematographer Adam Mach regarding the project and vision. We were exchanging references and films and then we did the location scouting together and were already thinking about the locations: what type of shot would be best, whether to use a hand-held shot, a more dynamic or fixed shot, a steady cam. But we always found out together. In addition, the way Jakub Medvecký wrote the script made it easy to visualize.

*The aesthetics and cinematography of **Victim** resemble Myroslav Slaboshpytskyi's Ukrainian drama *The Tribe*. Was the film of any influence or inspiration?*

I like *The Tribe* and it was among the references we discussed with the cinematographer. But *The Tribe* employs more wide shots and the camera is floating since they used a steady-cam, whereas we wanted to have a more dynamic cinematography. But we did not have any explicit reference we would like to reflect on. How-

ever, I know Adam Mach watched Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days* twice before the shooting. Since we use frequent shots from behind the protagonist, it was mostly due to technical details on how to rotate around the character, or how to shoot a character when it's retreating from the camera.

*Based on your previous work and pretty visible in **Victim**, your signature style is heavily steeped in civility, authenticity, and a staple of social realism. Why do you prefer an almost documentary-like style without much of a visual mannerism?*

In this case, it was our intention to have civil visuals. When we were working on *Suspicion*, we spent an equal amount of effort on the visuals as we did on the story itself. That's how different the aesthetics of the storytelling are on each project. And for our upcoming film *Cowgirl*, we want to focus more on the environment. But we intended to concentrate the entire focus on the protagonist in *Victim* and that's the way we avoided over-aestheticization.

*Both your works, **Victim** and **Suspicion**, are defined by aesthetic minimalism. Why are you inclined to this visual approach?*

I like this approach because it does not draw attention to itself. And the cinematographer knows what is really important to each particular scene. In the case of *Victim*, we had to be careful to not misguide the audience's attention so they do not get lost in the plot.



VITA SMACHELYUK /UA/ *as Irina*

Year of Birth: 1981

Vita is a Ukrainian actress, mostly known from various local TV series. She studied at Kiev National I. K. Karpenko-Kary Theatre, Cinema and Television University. Victim is her first feature film.

"When I got the draft of the script, I was impressed by the realistic dialogues. It has a great atmosphere, and everything is psychologically accurate. There is a logical transformation of the heroes under the influence of the events. I like drama and have wanted a role like this. First, I wanted to dive into the relationship between mother and son because today, one of the essential questions for me is how not to lose the kids' trust. And so they know that they have a mother, I'm there, and I can understand them no matter what happens. But also, when I applied for the role, my family and I moved from Ukraine to Germany and have lived here for one and a half years. I could understand Iryna's feelings since I knew what it is like to live in a vacuum when a person has no social safety net and nothing to rely on at the beginning. I was familiar with that."



GLEB KUCHUK /UA/ *as Igor*

Year of Birth: 2004

Gleb studies at the Prague British International school. He has already acted in multiple short and student films and also has acting experience from his school's productions. He took acting classes from Brian Caspe. Victim is his first feature film.

"I wanted to work on this film because I could relate to the character of Igor. It was easy for me to understand him since we are both from the same country and both moved to Czechia with our mothers. I also really wanted to work on this film later on when I got to know the whole crew and Irina, everyone was extremely friendly and kind on and off set. I enjoyed working with Irina because besides having a good relationship with her, I also learned a lot from her. I really liked Michal's previous projects and it was an honor for me to work with him on his first feature film. I would also like to say that the fact that Michal decided to explore the issue of discrimination along with justice really impressed me because I knew the movie was going to have an impact."

PRODUCERS

NUT

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The company's editorial line is defined by high quality projects rich in audience appeal, artistic originality, and international potential. nutprodukcia recently produced *Spoor* (Berlinale), *Circus Rwanda* (KVIFF), *By a Sharp Knife* (IFF Cottbus) or currently *Victim* (Venice IFF). The company prepares various projects by young Slovak and Czech filmmakers such as *Velvet Generation* by Ivana Hucíková (Fipadoc), *Forrest* by Tomáš Weinreb and Petr Kazda (Cannes L'Atelier), *Tony, Shelly and the Spirit* by Filip Pošivač (Cinekid Eurimages Co-production Development Award), and *Caravan* by Zuzana Kirchnerová (Torino Film Lab Award).

SELECTION OF PROJECTS:

- *Spoor*, dir. Agnieszka Holland – 2017
- *Circus Rwanda*, dir. Michal Varga – 2018
- *By a Sharp Knife*, dir. Teodor Kuhn – 2019
- *Eco Terro*, dir. Matúš Vizár – in production
- *The Ark*, dir. Filip Pošivač, Barbora Valecká – in production
- *Tonny, Shelly and the Spirit*, dir. Filip Pošivač – in production

NUT®

Nutprodukcje is a Prague-based production company. Their main goal is to seek and find new approaches to film and television. They are interested in work that is innovative, distinctive and universal. Films and series produced by Nutprodukcje have been awarded at the Berlinale, Cannes, won 15 Czech Lions and 6 Czech Film Critics Awards, among others. *The Burning Bush* was selected as the Czech Republic's nominee for the Oscars and Golden Globe Awards in 2013.

SELECTION OF PROJECTS:

- *Wasteland*, dir. Ivan Zachariáš – 2016
- *Burning Bush*, dir. Agnieszka Holland – 2013
- *Pandas*, dir. Matúš Vizár - 2013
- *Nothing Like Before*, dir. Lukáš Kokeš – 2017
- *Spoor*, dir. Agnieszka Holland – 2017
- *By a Sharp Knife*, dir. Teodor Kuhn – 2019
- *Gottland*, dir. Čakányová, Hátle, Kokeš – 2014
- *Great Night*, dir. Petr Hátle - 2013

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