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Un film de Pierre-Alain Meier

LOVE OF FATE

JHR FILMS présente **LOVE OF FATE** - Une production **THELMA FILM AG** - Réalisation **PIERRE-ALAIN MEIER** - Image **PETER INDERGAND**
Son **JÜRGEN LEMPEN** - Montage **BÉATRICE BABIN** et **MEYS AL-JEZAIRI** - Musique **ARVO PÄRT** - Mixage **DENIS SÉCHAUD** - Avec la participation
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Synopsis

1.5 million Syrians have been forced to flee to Lebanon and now find themselves at a stalemate. Their only glimmer of hope are the resettlement programs and the chance to be relocated to one of 20 Western countries.

Having left Syria in 2012, two Syrian families have been put through a veritable obstacle course. Five years later, they are now on the brink of finally being able to depart for Germany.

But as they take the final step, fate intervenes. One of the two families won't be leaving in the end.

When fate strikes, there is no escape. There are cures for ailments, there is none for fate



The Jarad family, Mohsen, Huriya and their 9 children

Pierre-Alain Meier, Director and producer

Between 2015 and 2018, I produced the film *Eldorado* by Markus Imhoof, which was presented at the Berlinale in 2018 and was later selected to represent Switzerland at the Oscars for Best Foreign Language Film.

The film accompanies migrants as they set off by their own means, across the Mediterranean sea, their subsequent disembarking in Italy and their arrival in Switzerland.

But another part of the film, shot in Lebanon and Germany, was meant to show the resettlement in Germany of two Syrian refugee families from Lebanon, the Jarad and Alsouki families.

Last day of shooting in Lebanon: Markus Imhoof has already left Beirut, he is in transit at the airport in Istanbul, on his way to Hanover to welcome the refugee families. He calls me at 3 a.m. and tells me that he has just learned from his assistant, who is still in Beirut with the cameraman and the sound engineer, that a tragedy has shattered the dream of Mohsen Jarad, the main protagonist of the film, and that of his wife Huriya and their 9 children, who were no longer leaving.



The happy days, Huriya, Zouzou and Mohsen Jarad

The tragedy, which lasted about three hours between the Beqaa Valley and a hotel in the center of the Lebanese capital, was captured in a fearless and courageous manner by Peter Indergand and Jürg Lempen, two exceptional film technicians, who took it upon themselves to film this moment.

This twist of fate completely undermined Markus Imhoof's project. After a year of editing, he finally abandoned all the footage shot in Lebanon, because the Jarad family's misfortune overpowered the issues of the film he had in mind.

Eldorado then headed in a different direction. Nevertheless, Beatrice Babin, one of the film's editors, and myself, have always been convinced that this dramatic moment, which took place only a few hours before the Jarad family's departure, could carry a film in its own right. And more importantly, we felt it was necessary - crucial even, for this dramatic event to be told, especially as the images and sounds recorded were so unique.

With the agreement of my partners, I got these images. During the editing of *Love of Fate*, I essentially tried to reproduce the emotions Peter Indergand and Jürg Lempen experienced, by arranging their images and sound recordings in a way that tries to provide meaning or sense to this obscure, unfathomable event.

It became all the more important for me to show the deep pain of a whole family that has been hit so hard, so suddenly, leaving them without hope or future. I decided to vouch for them, it is my immutable debt to the Jarad family. I share their tragedy each time I watch the film and it has become beneficial to me today that others, as much as possible, share it too.

Peter Indergand, cinematographer

Mohsen Jarad lived with his family in the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon, not far from the Syrian border, in a small refugee camp. However, the difficulties of everyday life were now no longer of any importance. Mohsen knew that his dream was going to become a reality. He, his wife Huriya and their children would soon be in Germany. Not as Syrian refugees undertaking the dangerous journey by sea organized by smugglers, but instead by plane, on a flight organized by the German government.

An utopian alternative in a world of deportation and flight?

But I could still feel a certain tension in him. He, who was always so relaxed, charming, funny. And yet there was a sense of stress emanating from him. Was it because of all the uncertainties that awaited him in a country with incomprehensible rules and roles? Was it because he had no knowledge of all that was going on behind the scenes, to make it possible for them to travel? Mohsen relaxed by smoking. Three to four packs a day.

On the day of their departure, a Tuesday, April 28th, the Jarad family, alongside the other chosen families, were taken to a hotel in Beirut to fly to Germany the next morning. Markus Imhoof, the director, was already on his way to Hannover to film the plane's arrival. Marion, the assistant director, Jürg, the sound engineer, and I were going to shoot the bus journey to Beirut and the departure the following day at the airport.

Mohsen started to feel unwell during the bus trip. As soon as we arrived at the hotel, the situation got worse. What then happened is documented in detail in the film.

It is never very pleasant to film a situation in which people are hurt and perhaps even lose their lives. I experience moments like these, feeling a constant inner tension. A kind of dialogue between a defiant person, who questions themselves about the ethics of it all, and then someone who can remain cold and analytical and wants to make the most of the situation for the film.

"Are you sure you want to film this?"

"Maybe we can talk about it later! If I don't film it now, we might regret it later. Let them decide, in the editing room. You can only take something out of the film, that has actually been filmed..."

"You could try to help!"

"No, I can't. There are people here who are more capable than I am medically, and better suited to ask for the help needed."



Mohsen Jarad, already not feeling well on the bus from the Bekka plain to Beirut

That's more or less what happened most of the time while those present were fighting to save Mohsen. Looking back, we always know everything better. There were also moments of hope. I imagined that Mohsen would finally come through and the story would have a happy ending and that this difficult moment would then become a powerful scene. For that alone, I was obliged to film. At the same time, I knew that this spark of hope was terribly small.

We regularly interrupted the shooting and consulted with the team. There wasn't much we could do. So we continued to film.

A few hours later, Marion, Jürg and I returned to our hotel. The shooting was over, fate had imposed its will. What was left was a big void.

The next morning we met the Syrian families at the airport during check-in. We had no news of the Jarad family. For a moment I thought that maybe Huriya would show up with the children. But of course, that was unrealistic. Her husband was dead, she couldn't leave him behind. And to make this clear, I shot the scene shortly afterwards of a German embassy employee carefully crossing out the Jarad family's visas with a ruler. The picture on the visa, a red line across the face: this was the last image I saw of Mohsen. It was then that I realized that his dream of a new future, the dream of a better life for him and his family, had come to an end.

Thierry Jobin, artistic director of the Fribourg Film Festival

The Material of Life.

There is the material of the film, that strikes you unlike anything else on a screen. This material that Pierre-Alain Meier organizes with the sensitivity and honesty that characterizes him. Indisputable.

And there is – just as rare in cinema – the material in the film. To watch this sensorial path that sets off in the dust of exile, almost melting in the sun, and ends surrounded by marble of hope, cold as a 4-star hotel lobby. And right there, in a fragile balance, a human being who wavers, gets up, walks, carries and who, having reached his goal, collapses. So, he hangs on. Not grasping, but he clings on by touching the skin of others.

The love of the title is likely a caress. That gesture that the Coronavirus crisis now forbids us, is at the center of this film, which makes it all the more poignant. Hands. Skin. Fingers running through hair. Tears that are wiped away. Palms of tenderness. Love's embraces. What we have left, when all hope is gone.

The caress, a rare act in the 7th art. Rohmer gives us Jean-Claude Brialy's furtive caress of Claire's knee. Or those – a true ode - in Pascale Ferran's *Lady Chatterley*. Rummaging through cinematic sensations, they can also be found in Bergman or Truffaut. But here, it is not that kind of sensual caress we are talking about.

Here it is, "just" a humane, fragile caress. And it is immense. To touch someone to feel alive again. As simple as that. To feel alive in this world which is ours, because it is theirs. Feel their beauty. To stop talking about refugees as an abstract entity. To watch this film. Touch its miraculous sensitivity. Feel our brothers and sisters, so far and yet so close. To realize. To finally cry with them.

This film is a miracle.

Thierry Spicher, distributor

The viewer is awestruck when the twist of fate in *Love of Fate* is presented to them in all its force. The very way in which the film was born makes the fate of Mohsen Jarad and his family a story, a tragedy better written by reality than any fiction ever could: entities of place, time and action leave no room for escape. And the film gives everyone the opportunity to experience in the true sense of the word, this tragedy and to be an actor, powerless albeit, but an actor, nevertheless.

Love of Fate immerses the viewer in reality, leaving them stunned.

Of course, this could lead the viewer to react defensively and refuse to accept the emotions provoked, by intellectualizing, contenting themselves by questioning (legitimately, but so poor in terms of what the film has to offer) the film's moral legitimacy, from the moment these images were captured to their editing. We believe that not revealing the unfolding drama will allow viewers to experience it for what it is and thus have access to a unique experience.

Interview with the director

Pierre-Alain Meier explores the fate of refugees in a hard-hitting film that recounts a tragic event that occurred during the shooting of the documentary *Eldorado*.

Interview by Mathieu Loewer Le Courier, 19.1.22

Under what circumstances were the images in the film shot?

Pierre-Alain Meier: During the shooting of the documentary *Eldorado*, the crew - cinematographer Peter Indergand, sound engineer Jürg Lempen and assistant Marion Glaser - accompanied the two Syrian families to film the final hours before their departure to Germany. In Hanover, a second team was waiting for them. When the tragedy occurred, the team, in the absence of the director, took it upon themselves to film, without really knowing whether the footage would end up being used. Had Markus Imhoof, the director, been present, the footage might not have been shot. Indeed, he later recounted that he would probably have intervened. Like most documentary filmmakers, he shoots what he thinks is useful for his film and the tragedy that took place was naturally not planned. He might not have filmed those uncomfortable moments for several hours. But Peter Indergand decided to film this painful tragedy to the end.

How did the decision come about to make it into a film?

For months, the editing team tried in vain to integrate this footage into *Eldorado*. The event was cut down to about ten minutes in a two-hour montage. It was a bit obscene. In the end, Markus Imhoof, Thomas Kufus and I took the difficult decision to abandon this entire important part of the film, shot in Lebanon, particularly the scenes surrounding the Jarad family. I very quickly had the feeling that in order for these very powerful images to make sense, we had to devote an entire film to them, to safeguard their truth and their inner breath. But my real motivation was that I felt indebted to these two families, whom we had filmed for two weeks, who had invested a great deal in a project that finally ended without them. I made *Love of Fate* with the idea that I had to take responsibility for each of these precious images and sounds of Peter Indergand and Jürg Lempen, but also with a certain apprehension to show them.

The film raises an ethical question: Can we show everything in a documentary?

First we asked ourselves what the family could accept. Of course, I wondered how the public would react to such a brutal event. Editors in charge of the German and French-speaking Swiss Television stations vehemently rejected the film, which I can partly understand.

In a cinema, the audience is in principle better prepared for what it is going to see. The first official screening took place at the Fribourg Festival, where the film was well received. Only one of the hundred or so spectators criticized me for a shot in which the camera came too close to an agonizing face. I have often wondered why this story fascinated me so much. Because it is above all a film about destiny, which reminded me of Nietzsche, of his concept of *Amor Fati* (Love of Fate): when a tragedy occurs, you have to accept things as they are, consent to your destiny. What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger...I share this worldview.

What principles guided the choices you made while editing, the fact of favoring immersion without voice-over or the use of music?

Voice-over is a way of explicitly including your point of view. In this film, I essentially followed the cameraman's point of view. We edited the film exactly as Indergand had seen and experienced the event, removing only the camera movements. There are no cuts in the film other than those made by the cameraman, when he changed his viewpoint. I chose not to cut out any words or attitude of any of the protagonists in order to construct a more concise and effective sequence, because by doing so, you risk losing a certain amount of trust that the audience has in the reality and veracity of the images filmed in their continuity. For this film, we had to banish any hint of manipulation. The only exceptions: we built and announced a chronological narrative at the beginning of the film based on the five days preceding the departure. And I added music by Arvo Pärt after the tragedy, which accompanies the long sequence of the plane's departure, until the Alsouki family lands in Hanover; which allowed the audience space to recover from their emotions. To conclude the film on this tragic event would have been a bit too brutal, I think.

Love of Fate poses another question: how to talk about refugees in cinema?

With *Eldorado*, we wanted to make a great feature-length documentary, that neither prosecutes nor defends migration policies, and which would simply describe the complexity of reality. A film that aims to understand a phenomenon from the reality of the people who experience it, migrants, customs officers, civil servants, etc. Unfortunately, with 17,000 box-office admissions in Switzerland, but very few in other countries, *Eldorado* has mainly interested those who favor unconditional support for migrants.

When I was an expert in the documentary commission of the Office of Culture in Bern, between 2016 and 2018, half of the projects submitted were about migrants, their painstaking journeys or their fragile situation in Europe. The migrant often became a figure whose cause was embraced to ease one's conscience! In most of the projects, the authors censored whatever didn't serve their demonstration, they got rid of the paradoxes in order to show exemplary migrants, with whom they identified. Unfortunately, they had more empathy for them than for the migrants.

Isn't invoking destiny a way of avoiding political questions?

When you see the difficulties a relatively well-off family like the Alsoukis have to face after two years in Germany, you start to wonder if it was not in some way a "blessing" for the Jarads that they did not leave in the end... When refugees arrive in Europe, weakened and exhausted by the journey, they must undoubtedly be helped. But only a minority of them will manage to integrate. The others will stay, because the return is problematic in many ways. The refugees I filmed in Farewell to Africa often left for Europe with grand idealistic plans, only to find themselves, in the best of cases, exploited as underpaid farm workers in Spain or Italy. I think they would have had a better life in Africa, where they will always have something to eat, and where they will retain a certain dignity that they will not necessarily enjoy here.



Hussam and Nour Alsouki learning German

When Syrian rhymes with destiny

Norbert Creutz 14. January 2022

Love of Fate by Pierre-Alain Meier is a documentary of its own, presented as a film made up of "scraps" from another film, the remarkable *Eldorado* by Markus Imhoof. Much more than a DVD supplement or a militant film, it takes advantage of an unforeseen event to delve deeper into the issues of the migrant crisis, in this case Syrian, and our view of them.

Everyone knows about the migrant crisis and has their own opinion on it, more or less formed and informed, confessed to or not. For the past fifteen years, there have been countless films, documentaries or fiction, inspired by it, applauded by the left, shunned by the right and most often ignored by the general public in search of entertainment. What can be added to this? Perhaps *Love of Fate*, which gives us a new reality - fateful in its own right - to the issue.

In 2018, Markus Imhoof's *Eldorado* (*The Boat is Full*, almost four decades earlier) sought to remobilize through introspection, to take a look at the conditions migrants face and to question our capacity to welcome them. But every documentary is a construction, and as is so often the case, much of the material filmed did not end up in the finished product. In this case, a whole section of the project was compromised by a twist of fate. Looking back, the film's producer Pierre-Alain Meier felt that there was enough material to make a completely different film, whose title *Love of Fate* (from the Latin expression "amor fati") clearly indicates its value as an observation rather than a militant strategy. It happened, these images were recorded, perhaps they also have something important to tell us.

Two families, one hope

With no "off" commentary, we are invited to accompany two Syrian families, chosen by the High Commissioner for Refugees for relocation to Germany (following Chancellor Angela Merkel's famous decision to welcome one million refugees). The film alternates between the two families, the Jarads a family of eleven and another, of five. Two interviews provide a minimum of context: a UNHCR employee explains the difficulty of choosing which refugees are chosen to travel and the young Nour describing in detail how they fled from Syria five years prior. But for the most part, we are there to witness their last days in Lebanon and finally their departure. And that in itself is already very interesting.

A Syrian "protectorate" for two decades, Lebanon has in fact become a refuge for 1.5 million Syrians driven out by Bashar al-Assad's bloody repression. In reality, it is more like a purgatory, a trap with no way out, in slum-like camps that have nothing temporary about them. The two families at the heart of the film are among the luckiest, but it is clear that they are deluding themselves about their future life in Germany, based on information they are given on a preparation course. But isn't anything better than this miserable, hopeless existence, summed up by a few living room sofas that are too fancy for these refugee tents and barely protected from the weather?



The moment of departure: The Jarad family waits for the bus to Beirut.

When the unexpected happens

On D-day, the team is of course there to film the bus transfer from Beqaa (the backcountry valley of Lebanon) to a hotel outside Beirut airport. The wait, the goodbyes, some stress - nothing out of the ordinary. And then the unimaginable happens, the *pater familias* starts to feel unwell and everything is put into question. Is it possible to continue filming when the fate of an entire family is at stake, even if they have given their consent beforehand? Cameraman Peter Indergand and sound recordist Jürg Lempen were the only ones in charge at the time and followed their instincts. So then, can we pretend that these images do not exist? *Love of Fate* provides its answer, with transparent music by Arvo Pärt, and it seems eminently respectable.

His testimony gains unprecedented strength, a poignant dimension that the film nevertheless has the intelligence to go beyond, by following the other family's arrival in Hanover and the cold discussion of the "case" by the competent authorities. At first, we may have been seduced by the image, empathy and observation qualities, then captivated by the turn of events, while we inevitably question ourselves about voyeurism. At the end, it is the whole question regarding the reception of refugees that is posed with a whole new understanding.

Is it the fact that nothing was specifically shot for this film, that makes *Love of Fate* so subtly different? In any case, this "little film" is becoming one that counts. Perhaps better than the "world" accumulation of *Human Flow* (Ai Weiwei), the frustrating stasis of *L'Escale* (Kaveh Bakhtiari) or the prim aestheticism of *Fuocoammare* (Gianfranco Rosi), it invites us to get an insight into the precarious condition of migrants, their hopes and illusions, and even the cruelty of their fate. Nothing more than that, without trying to convince anyone of anything. But that's already an enormous feat.

Technical specifications

Switzerland 2022

DCP, 16 : 9, 88'

Filming Locations : Lebanon, Germany

Languages : Arabic, English, German, subtitles French, German, English

Production and World Sales:

Thelma Film AG

Coin-Dessus 3, CH – 2863 Undervelier

www.thelfilm.ch

BIO-FILMOGRAPHIES

Pierre-Alain Meier, réalisateur et producteur

After studying at the INSAS in Brussels, Pierre-Alain Meier produced forty fiction films and documentaries in different countries, including in Argentina, *Memoria del Saqueo* (Berlinale 2004, Golden Honorary Bear) by Fernando Solanas, in Cambodia, *Rice People* by Rithy Panh (Cannes 1994, International Competition), in Senegal, *Hyenas* by Djibril Diop Mambéty (Cannes 1992, International Competition), in Burkina Faso, *Yaaba* by Idrissa Ouedraogo (Cannes 1989, Directors' Fortnight) and *Laafi Tout va bien* by S. Pierre Yameogo (Cannes 1993, Critic's Week), in Palestine, *Salt of this Sea* by Annemarie Jacir (Cannes 2008, Un Certain Regard), etc.

Also works by Swiss filmmakers, including films by Olivier Zuchuat, Markus Imhoof (*More than Honey*, Nominated for the Oscars 2013, *Eldorado*, Nominated for the Oscars 2018), Jeanne Waltz (*A Parting Shot*, Berlinale 2008), Alain Tanner (*Men of the Port*, 1995).

He has also directed several documentary films, among them *The Dance of the Monkey and the Fish* filmed in Cambodia in 1993, and most recently *Farewell to Africa* filmed in 2017 in Senegal, as well as the fiction film *Thelma*, made in 2001.

Peter Indergand, cinematographer

Peter Indergand studied at the American Film Institute AFI in Los Angeles. His collaboration with Christian Frei marks a particular place in his work, which culminates with the film *War Photographer* being nominated for an Oscar, a film that has a great international impact and for which Indergand is nominated for an Emmy-Award. Peter Indergand has received several awards for his work as director of photography: including the Swiss Cinema Prize for *Eldorado* in 2019.

Jürg Lempen, sound engineer

Has been working since 2003 as a freelance sound engineer as well as an editor, sound editor and mixer. He recently provided the soundtracks for Antoine Russbach's *Ceux qui travaillent*, Germain Roaux's *Fortuna* and Ursula Meier's *Sister*.

Beatrice Babin, editor

Beatrice Babin, born in Munich, has recently edited *Eldorado* by Markus Imhoof, *Lou-Andreas Salomé* by Cordula Kablitz-Post, *Die schönen Tage von Aranjuez* by Wim Wenders. She edited *Love of Fate* with Meys Al-Jezairi as co-editor.

