



PROJECT TITLE: BOTA (ALBANIA)

LOGLINE

Three young Albanians, the son and daughters of political exiles, work in a small café at the edge of a swamp and find their destinies forever altered with the arrival of a modern highway.

CREDITS

Director: Iris Elezi

Scriptwriters: Iris Elezi and Thomas Logoreci

Production Company: i's continuum

Producers: Iris Elezi, Thomas Logoreci (i's continuum)

Co-producers: Sebastian Koren (Feil Film) - Borjan Zafirovski (Novo Makedonski Film & Video)

Total Budget: €586,890

Secured Financing: €200,000

Percentage of Secured Financing: 34,6%

SYNOPSIS

Albania, present day. Juli, Ben and Nora live in a small, far off village where their entire families were exiled during the country's half-century of communist rule. A big, green neon sign that reads 'Bota' (Albanian for 'world') hangs above the door of the one-floor café. Next to this charming hideaway is a mysterious, murky swamp.

The café is run by the fast talking Ben, early 40's, yet its real heart is Ben's waitress cousin, Juli, late twenties. Juli dreams of leaving the desolate swampland to pursue art but is unable as she takes care of her aging grandmother, Noje.

Juli constantly presses Ben for answers as to what happened to her missing brother, Pandi. Though Pandi regularly sends money home, Juli has not heard from her brother since he took a trip with Ben to Greece. Behind the back of his depressed wife, Dita, Ben juggles an affair with Juli's best friend, the lively and lost Nora, mid-twenties.

In the space of a single week, things begin to change when a two-lane highway under construction nears the café area. Juli finds herself starting to fall for Mili, a young engineer working with the German contractor, Phillip, to help build the road. Juli also begins to recall the final days of the Marxist dictatorship after a retired teacher, Engjell, leaves her an old magazine article written about her dead mother, Alba.

As the section of highway gets closer to Bota, the inhabitants of this place that have suffered so much trauma, have a final night of celebration and fireworks. Mili tells Phillip of the dark day long ago when several top government officials and camp witnesses were shot and dumped into the nearby swamp. This is the lasting wound that continues to haunt the lives and dreams of Juli, Ben & Nora.

A simple phone mistake forces Ben to reveal to Juli that her missing brother is serving time in a Greek jail after a failed crime spree. Pandi will not be released for another nine years. Juli is devastated to learn that it was the jailed Pandi who insisted this secret be kept from her.

The following night Nora tries to take Pandi's money from Ben to give to Juli. As she removes the cash from Ben's hiding place, Nora is accidentally killed by Ben who believes he has stopped a robbery. An utterly destroyed Ben buries Nora in the swamp.

Juli confronts her horrifying memory when as a seven year old she watched her mother's bones being lifted from the bottom of the water. Exhausted Juli returns home only to find out that her grandmother, Noje, has died. When it rains, it pours.

The following day, after Noje's funeral and just missing Mili, Juli stands waiting for a bus to the Albanian capital. She doesn't look back.

After Ben disappears, it is left up to his wife, Dita, to open the doors of cafe Bota as the first customers from the newly opened highway begin to arrive.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

No matter how hard we try to forget, our past is always present and influences us in the oddest of circumstances.

The three years I worked on the UNDER CONSTRUCTION documentary series inspired me to delve deep into my Balkan heritage and to wonder: What are the daily confrontations and lingering traumas of men and woman, born and raised in extreme circumstances? How does one survive? How do we go on?

With this foundation I intend to create a vivid and honest portrait of the Albanian people. To capture not only the surface dramas but also the tiny nuances that reflect the lasting truth of these radiant and desperate people.

BOTA, my first fictional film will most resemble a contemporary DAYS OF HEAVEN, with spare, precise framing that will move at times from wide vistas to extreme close-up's of objects amid naturalistic settings.

I'd like to imbue BOTA (the Albanian word for 'world') with the real sense of a fever dream, sometimes silent in sections, and by utilizing colour, space, light and sound to illuminate the very specific geography of this desolate region where time has its own unique pace and rhythm.

I strongly feel that BOTA while opening a window in the little known Albania, will also have an appeal to all people who will see a reflection of their own struggles the world over.

Welcome to my BOTA!

DIRECTOR'S PROFILE AND FILMOGRAPHY

Albanian born Iris Elezi studied film theory and criticism, anthropology and women's studies in the USA before completing her film production studies at the Tisch School of the Arts (NYU) in 2001.

Collective memory and the preoccupations of time are some of the essential inquiries underlying her work. Her editing and directing skills on the award-winning six-part documentary series UNDER CONSTRUCTION (2007) resulted in Amnesty International "Films That Matter" selection for the episode DISPOSABLE HEROES.

Iris Elezi continues to live and work in the Albanian capital of Tirana where she teaches film analysis at the Academy of Film and Multimedia Marubi. She's currently in preparation of her first feature length film, BOTA.

COMPANY PROFILE

I'S CONTINUUM is a production company based in Tirana, Albania founded by filmmaker Iris Elezi in 2008. Working with Kosovar and American co-producers, i's continuum created the award-winning UNDER CONSTRUCTION Balkan documentary series. These six half-hour films explored regional themes and perspectives integrating found footage with interviews.

Apart from the upcoming feature 'BOTA', i's continuum is developing a essay doc on the history of Albanian cinema as well as a video installation piece set to tour museums in 2012.