



DIRECTOR
GOZDE KURAL

10.07.2025



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
Crystal Globe Competition

A FILM BY GÖZDE KURAL

CINEMA JAZIREH

PRESS KIT

128', 4K, TURKEY, BULGARIA, ROMANIA, IRAN



CAST&CREW

LEILA
FERESHTE HOSSEINI
ZABUR
MAZLUM SÜMER
AZAD
ALI KARIMI
WAHEED
HAMID KARIMI
ASHRAF
MEYSAM DAMANZEH
SANJAR
REZA AKHLAGHIRAD
WRITER&DIRECTOR
GÖZDE KURAL
CINEMATOGRAPHER
ADIB SOBHANI
PRODUCTION DESIGNER
BABAK TAHMILI
COSTUME DESIGNER
EZGİ KARAYEL
EDITOR(S)
GÖZDE KURAL
BÜNYAMİN BAYANSAL
SOUND DESGINER
ALIREZA ALAVIAN
PRODUCER(S)
GÖZDE KURAL
BULUT REYHANOĞLU
MILAD KHOSRAVI
CO-PRODUCER(S)
SVETLA TSOTSORKOVA
ANDREEA DUMITRESCU
HAKKI YAZICI
BÜNYAMİN BAYANSAL
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER(S)
GÖZDE AKPINAR
MELODİ TOPRAK
DEMİRURAL
ARCA YİĞİT
PRODUCTION COMPANIES
TOZ FILM PRODUCTION
KOSKOS FILM
SEVEN SPRINGS PICTURES
FRONT FILM
AVVAMMIX STUDIOS
SOBERWORKS
ORION
MINTYFARE PRODUCTIONS

LOGLINE

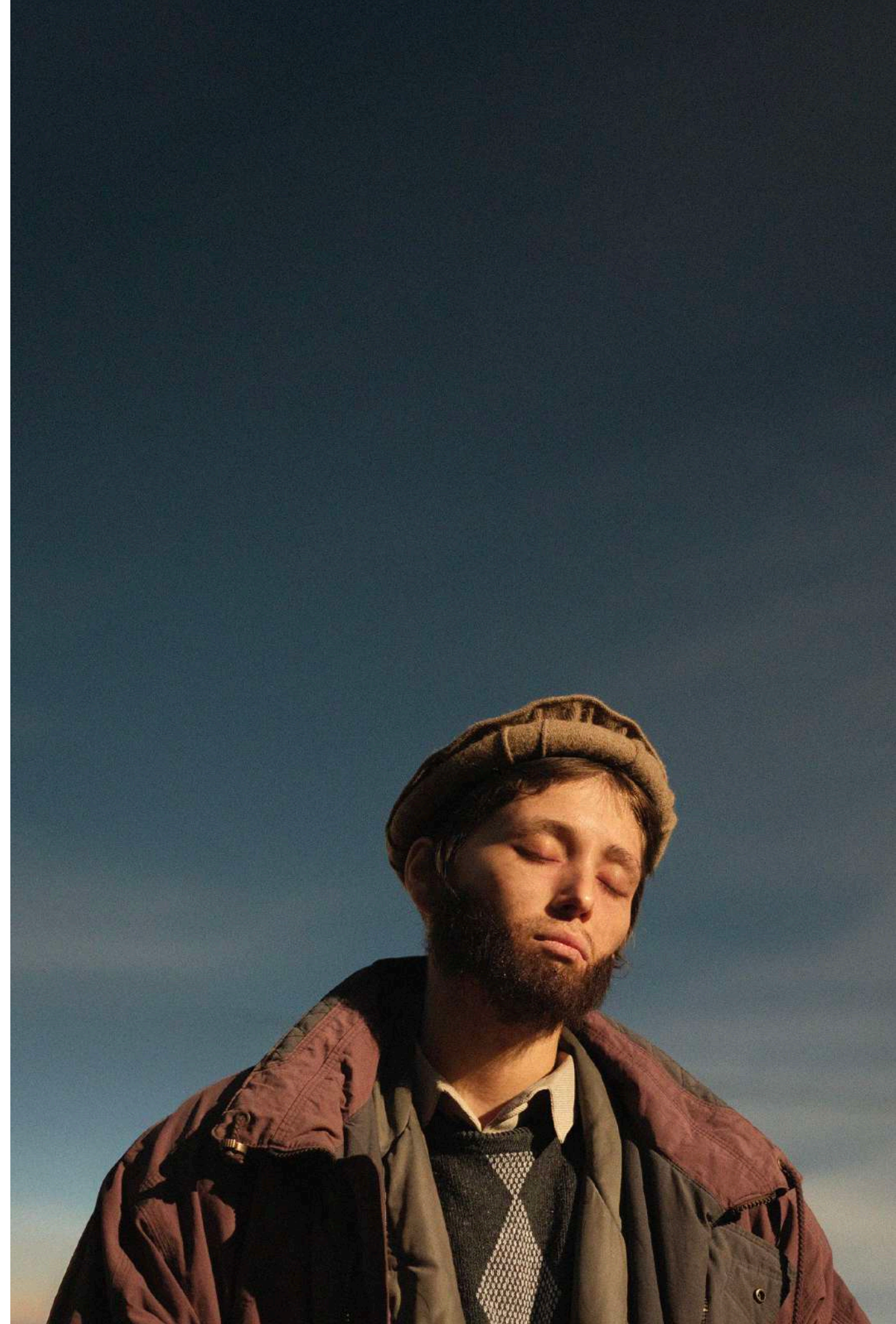
To find her son, she became him. To find hope, she must risk everything in a land where both are vanishing.

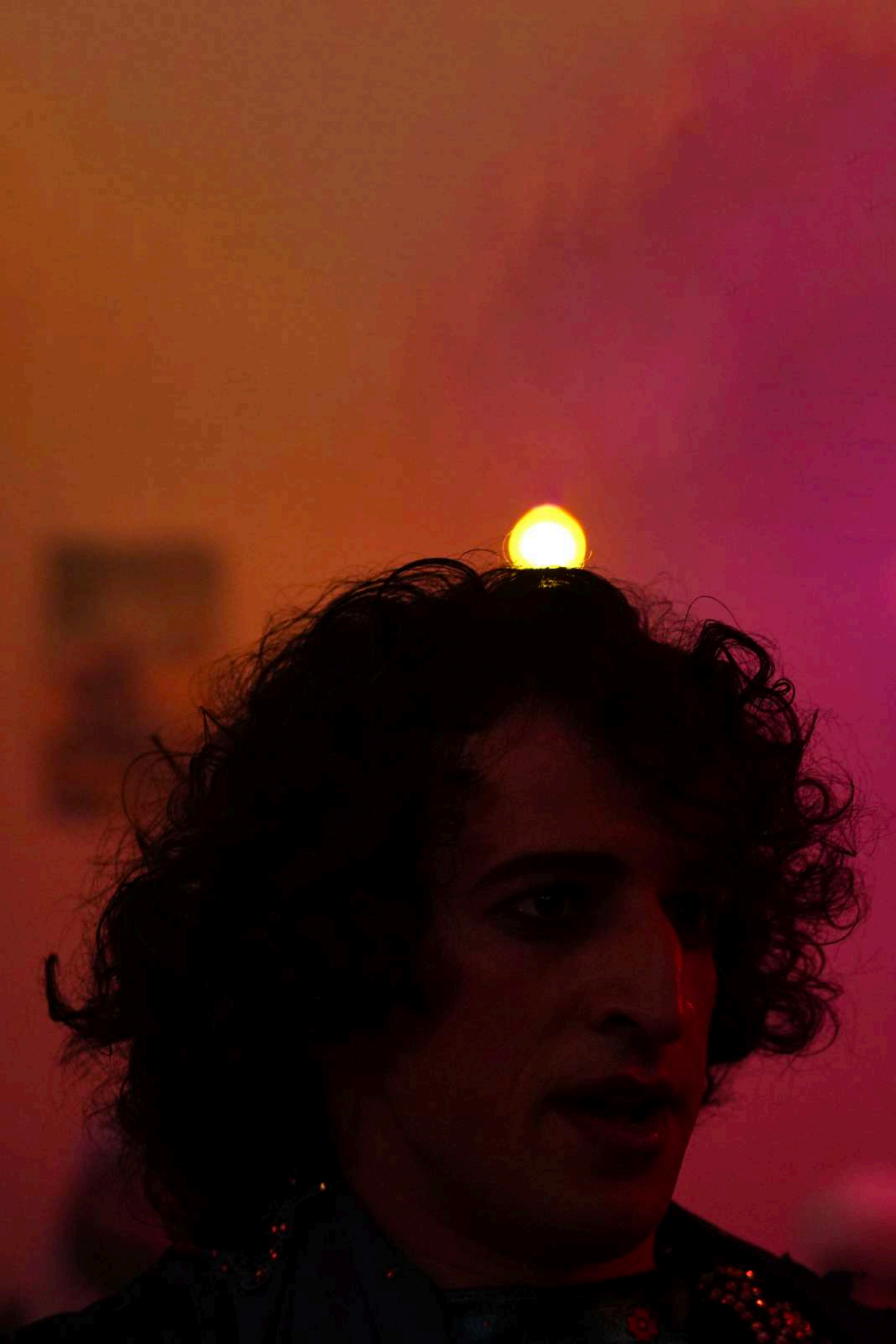
SYNOPSIS

After surviving the brutal massacre of her family in a Taliban raid on a rural Afghan village, Leyla is left with nothing but the desperate hope of finding her missing son, Omid. In a world where her existence as a woman is a danger in itself, she does the unthinkable.

Disguising herself in her husband's clothes, pressing his freshly cut beard to her own skin, Leyla becomes someone who is allowed to move through a world that would otherwise consume her. Cloaked in borrowed masculinity, she sets out on a perilous journey across an unforgiving land, chasing faint hope.

Along the way, in one of the journey's bleakest moments, she encounters a boy whose silent presence tests the limits of her endurance and her heart in a place where young boys serve dressed as women. With the shadows closing in and time running out, Leyla must face a harrowing decision: to continue her dangerous search for Omid, or answer a new and unexpected call to protect the innocent.





DIRECTOR'S NOTE

"Nothing is as it seems" perfectly captures the Afghanistan experience.

When I first set foot in the country, I was overwhelmed by fear—fear of the unknown, of isolation, of my own inexperience. That initial fear was visceral, and yet strangely magnetic. Over time, it evolved, deepened, and began to take root. Twelve years have passed since that first encounter, and while the fear still lingers, Afghanistan has become an obsession—a place I return to, again and again, both physically and inwardly.

In 2015, I gave shape to that inner journey through my first film, *DUST*, shot in Kabul. We scrawled "We were here" on the walls—as if trying to claim a fleeting presence. But it wasn't fleeting. Something of me stayed behind. The real journey began after I left. It turned inward, unfolding as the Afghanistan I now carry within me.

There's a line from a book that has stayed with me:

"When we encounter great beauty or pain, our view of the world changes and suddenly, anything feels possible."

That truth crystallized when I came across two haunting images. The first: a mother laying blankets over the snowy graves of her three sons. The second: a woman gripping a Kalashnikov, her gaze fierce with pride after killing 25 Taliban fighters to avenge her child. Two mothers. Two kinds of love. Two forms of fear both erupting into raw, instinctive action. These images revealed that fear is not just paralysis; it can also be propulsion. It can move us. It can transform us.

Cinema Jazireh was born from that fracture. Its central character, Leila, is shaped by fear but also carried by it. Fear becomes her companion, her compass, her mirror. Through her, I explore how fear strips us bare and drives transformation. She is not fearless. She is forged by fear.

What continues to haunt me is this: under radical regimes, nothing stays where it belongs. Language fractures. Concepts blur. Things lose their names. Meaning becomes fluid, displaced. The very fabric of reality shifts and suddenly, life becomes a terrain with no coordinates. This erosion of meaning, this existential drift, is what I try to confront in my work.

My cinematic language is grounded in emotional extremes, moral ambiguity, and the tension of human dualities. Though *Cinema Jazireh* is rooted in a specific geography, its core speaks to something universal. We all wear shifting skins. We all navigate the wreckage in search of meaning. And always, as Rumi reminds us:

"Where there is ruin, there is hope for treasure."

in conversation with
GÖZDE KURAL

Let's start with the most frequently asked question: Why Afghanistan? Where does this interest come from?

G.K.: I shot my first film, *Dust*, in Kabul, Afghanistan. Back then, I had a different answer to this question, mainly because I didn't fully understand the root of this interest myself. Looking back now, I realize that, as a 20-year-old recent graduate, I can say that I had a deep need to understand the world better.

I had already read and researched a lot about the region. Even then, the world had already turned its back on it, 5,000 kilometers away, left to its own fate, barely seen, barely acknowledged. I wanted to love deeply, but I didn't know how. Maybe I was trying to love the wound to find beauty in the abandoned, meaning in what no one else seemed to notice.

I had this inexplicable instinct, a quiet certainty that what I was looking for could be found there. So, after doing enough research and meeting a few key people, I didn't waste much time. I packed my backpack and went.

So, what did Afghanistan teach you?

G.K : It was hard, there's no denying that. But I can honestly say it matured me deeply and slowly, both as a person and as a filmmaker. As a person, it taught me how to understand hardship—and how to love wounds. It taught me how to care for something that no one really wants to look at, and even when they do, they often choose not to see or love it. Learning to love and understand something that's been overlooked or abandoned—that's what it gave me.

As a filmmaker, it forced me to work under pressure, with limited resources, to plan meticulously and still find a way out. If I hadn't made *Dust*, **Cinema Jazireh** would never have been possible neither emotionally nor logistically.

What was the core emotion or issue you wanted to explore in this film? What compelled you to tell this particular story?

The core emotion was fear; the underlying issue was hope. What first came to my mind was a striking contrast: a woman disguised as a man stumbles upon a man disguised as a woman. I kept wondering how could they have possibly gotten there?

While traveling across Afghanistan, city by city, I heard countless stories. Some were told to me, others I witnessed, and a few I experienced myself. I began to filter them all through a personal lens, and from that emerged the story of *Cinema Jazireh*. Fear, I realized, is a powerful engine especially the fear that comes with the instinct to survive. It pushes you to do unimaginable things; it forces you to redefine yourself entirely.

In this story, a woman, Leyla, loses her husband in an attack. When she regains consciousness, her son is missing. There's no time to grieve. She has to leave immediately and search for him. But under this repressive regime, the very last person who can safely roam the streets is a woman alone. So she does what she must: she disguises herself as a man. With a beard hiding her face, she becomes invisible. And she sets out.

But what she's searching for isn't just her son. In this desolate, ghost-like city, she is also chasing the lost dreams of a nation. Beneath this colorless, haunted world, there's another layer; vibrant, musical, full of laughter. A hidden world where women still do not exist, but where young boys and teenagers are trained to look and act like women. That's the only space where femininity is tolerated through imitation, not presence.





While the film strongly reflects Afghanistan's social and political realities, it also deals with universal human themes. How would you define both the political dimension and the universal messages of the story?

I have been watching my own country slowly slip away before my eyes. In these difficult times, I try to hold onto my strongest weapon—hope. That is why, at its core, this film is about hope. While developing the story, I was deeply influenced not only by what I witnessed in Afghanistan, but also by what has been happening in Turkey—and around the world. There's a growing tendency toward control, fear, and regression. It feels like the world is collectively turning inward, forgetting how to move forward.

Here's an example that really illustrates the kind of changes my own country has been going through in recent years. I initially received funding from Turkey's Ministry of Culture for this film. But after watching it, they withdrew their support. Why? Because the realities portrayed in the film; oppression, fear, silenced voices aren't just distant issues anymore. These are things increasingly happening in parts of Turkey too. And although the film takes place in Afghanistan, they no longer want to be associated with a story that too closely reflects their own trajectory. One of the film's darker layers also deals with child abuse, something that tragically exists not only in Afghanistan, but is also a deeply rooted, unresolved issue in my own country. It's one of those open wounds that societies often choose to ignore, or worse, normalize through silence.

Another subtle yet powerful contrast in the film is how society perceives gender transgression. Leyla dresses as a man to survive, and somehow that is tolerated even romanticized as an act of bravery. But when a man dresses as a woman, even within the coded world of performance, it instantly becomes something to mock, to fear, or to criminalize. That hypocrisy says a lot about what kinds of power society accepts and what it violently rejects.

When the truth gets too close for comfort, it's easier to reject the mirror than to face the reflection. Instead of questioning the systems that create fear and repression, they punish those who dare to reveal it. That's what authoritarian regimes do. Nothing stays in its rightful place, justice becomes fragile, corruption spreads, and people are left to navigate fear on their own. I tried to embed this atmosphere into the film: abandoned schools, empty playgrounds, streets without women, and an underground world forced into shadows.

While the film deals with a deeply heavy and disturbing subject, it avoids dramatization and instead adopts a style that feels almost Shakespearean. There's an observational, at times avant-garde approach to the cinematography. What led you to make this stylistic choice?

I read a book years ago by Antoni Casas Ros. It became a kind of curse, in the best way. I find myself returning to it four or five times a year, and each time I uncover a new layer. There's a passage in it that struck me deeply:

"I don't mind the camera looking at me. I get the impression that its gaze is more attentive than that of other people, and I know from experience that true attentiveness eventually leads to a kind of enchantment... The camera doesn't compare, it isn't relative. It is only slightly influenced by the one operating it, and that lightness is creative. We cannot hate something we look at long enough. We cannot belittle it. Today, all violence and political disgrace stems from no one really looking at anyone." That idea became a central compass for the film's visual language. With my cinematographer, **Adib Sobhani**, we tried to build a gaze that genuinely looks at its characters without judgment, without agenda, simply to see them.

The subject matter is heavy and brutal. But if we had matched that brutality with an equally harsh narrative tone, the film might have lost its emotional resonance. Some emotions are too huge to be felt; they can only be suggested, hinted at. That's why I leaned into a tone that sits just outside of conventional drama, a space where the audience can feel deeply without being told exactly how to feel. A form that observes rather than declares.

There are two observers in the film: the mother and the child. But as viewers, we are drawn into the layered inner world of a third character, Zabur. How did Zabur come to life, and how would you describe his unique role in the narrative?

Zabur is, for me, the embodiment of the grey area. In a world where the lines are drawn so sharply, he's simply trying to survive. Taken into that hidden world at a very young "boy" age, he has learned how to be a "woman," how to be a "mother," through trial and error. He's built a delicate world with his own hands one that makes sense only within the narrow rules he's been given.

He doesn't even realize he's being abused, because he has no alternative. The outside world is unknown, terrifying. And yet, as his facial hair begins to appear, he knows his time is running out. He's walking a tightrope between who he was told to become and what he is being forced to turn into.

What's striking is the contradiction he lives through: the same masculine world that demands he perform femininity to entertain men is the one that later demands he "become" a man, marry a woman, and disappear into society's mold. That paradox alone carries immense emotional weight—his story is one of confusion, resistance, tenderness, jealousy, hope, and heartbreak all at once.

And while we follow Zabur's story, we're also witnessing what those young boys are being shaped into what they are being coerced to become. Zabur is the visible future of the invisible children.

There's a deeply symbolic parallel between him and Leyla. While Leyla tries to protect her beard to survive, Zabur carries a pair of tweezers around his neck to preserve his smooth skin plucking out each hair as it appears. One hides masculinity to move freely, the other hides it to remain desirable. Both are victims of the same system one as a woman, the other as a man.

The performances in the film feel deeply aligned with its emotional and thematic layers. Can you tell us about your work with the cast?

Starting with Fereshte Hosseini as Leyla, all of the actors delivered performances that were incredibly close to how I had envisioned the characters.

Our child actor, Ali, taught me a great deal as a director. His performance was beautifully neutral, he acted with his eyes in a way that surprised all of us. The fact that a 7-8 year old child could grasp and reflect such emotional nuance was incredibly moving.

The only actor from Turkey in the film is Mazlum Sümer, who portrays Zabur. He didn't speak the language used in the film, but through dedication and preparation, he fully inhabited the character. We spent almost a year and a half discussing and developing Zabur together. Even after all that time, he managed to surprise me, his performance was both emotionally resonant and technically impressive.

What do you hope audiences take away from Cinema Jazireh?

I hope they leave the cinema with a sense of unease but a meaningful one. Cinema Jazireh isn't just about Afghanistan. It's about what happens when systems become more powerful than people, when fear becomes a method of governance, and when survival requires erasure of identity.

I want audiences to sit with the discomfort, to reflect not only on what they've seen, but on the conditions that make such a world possible. And I want them to ask: where do we see traces of this in our own societies?

But above all, I hope they carry a sense of empathy. That's the core of it. If you can look into the eyes of someone like Zabur or Leyla and really see them beyond gender, beyond politics, beyond borders then maybe that's a small step against the kind of dehumanization that allows these systems to thrive.





DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Gözde Kural was born in 1987, Ankara, Turkey. She studied Advertising and Film-TV Production at Istanbul Bilgi University. After graduating, she began her career as an assistant director and went on to direct numerous music videos and commercials. She has written, directed, and produced three short films: *Awake*, *The Braid*, and *The Laceration*.

In 2015, she wrote and directed her debut feature film *DUST*, which was shot in Afghanistan. *Dust* premiered at several international film festivals, including the Montreal Film Festival (First Films Competition), Shanghai International Film Festival, and Mumbai International Film Festival. The film received multiple awards, including Best Actress and Best Supporting Actor at the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival (2016), and Best Film and Best Screenplay at the Sweden Afghan International Film Festival (2017). In 2022, she directed a 13-episode docu-drama series titled '*Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*', which aired on BeinConnect, exploring Anatolia's layered cultural heritage through dramatized real stories.

Her second feature film, *Cinema Jazireh*, has recently been completed and will be its World Premier at 59.Karlovy Vary Film Festival.

Awake/Ayık-2009, Dijital (Short)

Writer : Gözde Kural

Director : Gözde Kural

Producer : Gözde Kural

Braid - 2011, Digital (Short)

Writer : Gözde Kural

Director : Gözde Kural

Producer : Gözde Kural, Ezgi Altan

The Laceration-2011, 16 mm (Short)

Original story : Dostoyevski, Karamazov Brothers

Director : Gözde Kural

Producer : Gözde Kural, Ferdi Alaboğa

Dust, 2017, (Feature)

Writer : Gözde KURAL

Director : Gözde KURAL

Producer : Gözde Kural, Taha Altaylı

Company : Toz Film Production - Galata film

DISTRIBUTOR : TME (The Moments Entertainment)

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD, 2017, Documentary

Director : Filippo CARIGLIA

Producer : Gözde Kural, Filippo Cariglia

Company : Toz Film Production (TR),

Once Upon A Time, BEIN ORIGINALS TV Documentary Series, 2022

12 Episodes

Writer : Arbil Çelen Yuca, Gözde Kural, Esra Jones

Director : Gözde Kural

Producer : Esra Jones

Company : Rubicoms

CINEMA JAZIREH, (Fiction, Feature) 2025

Writer : Gözde Kural

Director : Gözde Kural

Producer(s) : Gözde Kural, Bulut Reyhanoğlu, Milad Khosravi, Svetla Tsotsorkova, Adreea Dumitrescu

Company : TFP, Koskos Film, Seven Springs Pictures, Avva Films, Front Film

Festivals&Awards :Sofia Meetings ,Thessaloniki Film Festival (Agora WIP), Apulia Film Forum (ITA), TGFM

PRODUCER'S BIOGRAPHY

Bulut Reyhanoğlu was born in Istanbul in 1962. After his business administration graduate, he worked in textile export industry before transiting to his true passion. He started his film career as Producer with awarded film The Zenne Dancer in 2011. He also produced two more awarded film, Drawers and The Announcement by Mahmut Fazıl Coşkun. The Announcement premiered at Venice Film Festival and awarded with best Mediterian Film. He is also founder of online short film watching platform, shortbyshort.com. In 2019, he started Producers&Directors Meeting to support short movie production by creating collective approach with Producer's Academy in Turkey. In 2024, he became member of the European Film Academy.

Dancer (Zenne) 2011 - Feature

Director(s) : M.Caner Alper, Mehmet Binay

Writers : Caner Alper, Mehmet Binay

Producer : M. Caner Alper, Mehmet Binay

Associate Producer : Bulut Reyhanoğlu

Drawers (Çekmeceler) 2015 - Feature

Director(s) : M.Caner Alper, Mehmet Binay

Writers : Caner Alper, Mehmet Binay, İsmail Onu Coşkun, Tilbe Saran

Producer : M. Caner Alper, Mehmet Binay, Bulut Reyhanoğlu, Güldenay Somut, Nurhan Özenen

The Announcement (Anons) 2018 - Feature

Director : Mahmut Fazıl Coşkun

Writers : Mahmut Fazıl Coşkun, Ercan Kesal

Producer : George Abrashev, Chouchkov Brothers, Kristina Despotova, Halil Kardaş, Tarık Tufan

Executive Producer : Bulut Reyhanoğlu, Yusuf Aslanyurek, Jim Stark, Sinan Yusifoğlu

Weasel (Gelincik) 2020 - Feature

Director : Orçun Benli

Writers : Şükrü Üçpınar, Orçun Benli

Producer : Yusuf Ziya Benli, Orçun Benli, Şükrü Üçpınar

Executive Producer : Bulut Reyhanoğlu, Kaan Yıldırım

Tell me about your darkness (Bana karanlığını anlat) 2022 - Feature

Director : Gizem Kızıl

Writer : Gizem Kızıl

Producer : Ayşe Barım

Co-producer(s) : Gizem Kızıl, Emre Oskay, Bulut Reyhanoğlu

Crossroads 2022 - Documentary

Director : Mahmut Fazıl Coşkun

Writer : Mahmut Fazıl Coşkun

Producer : Bulut Reyhanoğlu

Cinema Jazireh, (Fiction, Feature) 2025

Writer : Gözde Kural

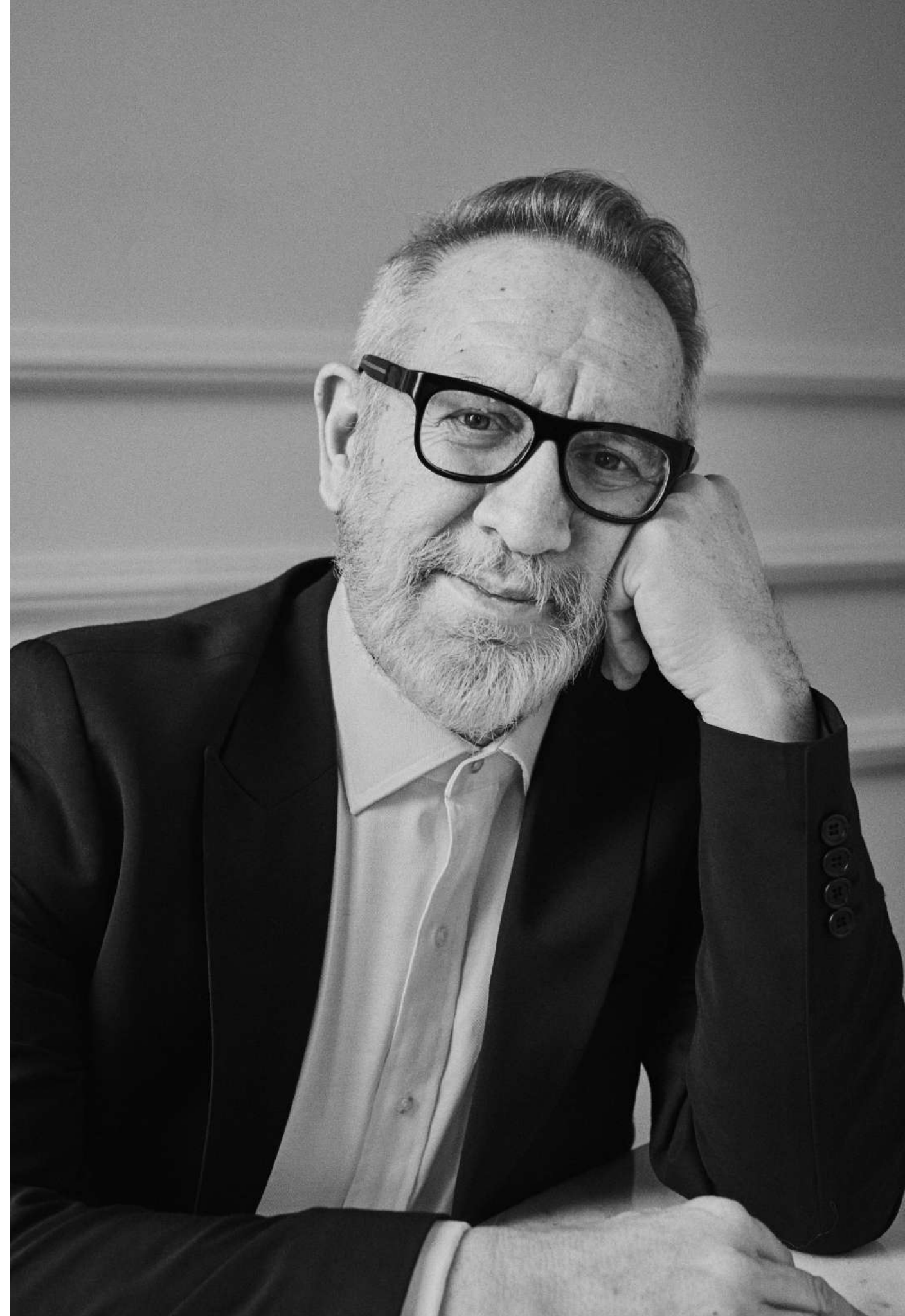
Director : Gözde Kural

Producer(s) : Gözde Kural, Bulut Reyhanoğlu, Milad Khosravi, Svetla Tsotsorkova, Adreea

Dumitrescu

Company : TFP, Koskos Film, Seven Springs Pictures, Avva Films, Front Film

Festivals&Awards :Sofia Meetings ,Thessaloniki Film Festival (Agora WIP), Apulia Film Forum (ITA), TGFM





PRODUCER'S BIOGRAPHY

Milad Khosravi is a producer and distributor from Iran, with a strong commitment to social issues such as children's rights, family matters, and current affairs. After years of experience in cinema production and individual film producing, he founded Seven Springs Pictures in 2021, a Tehran-based production and distribution company. The company has produced numerous short films and documentaries, including Mrs. Iran's Husband, THE DREAM OF A HORSE, AUTUMN, and THE SNOW CALLS. These films have been showcased at many festivals, such as IDFA, Hot Docs, Big Sky, Krakow, and DMZ IDFF.

He also produced TERRESTRIAL VERSES (written and directed by Ali Asgari and Alireza Khatami), which was selected for the Un Certain Regard section of the 76th Cannes Film Festival. Terrestrial Verses was named one of the 10 Best Films of 2024 by The Hollywood Reporter. The film has been released in over 20 countries, receiving 100K admissions in France and 26K in Italy. In 2024, Milad completed his first international co-production, the feature film REQUIEM FOR A TRIBE, which premiered in the competition section of the Shanghai IFF. Most recently, he produced Ali Asgari's fourth feature film, HIGHER THAN ACID CLOUDS, which had its world premiere at IDFA and also will be screened at Hot Docs and Visions du Réel.

Milad is currently producing three high-quality feature-length films: Cinema Jazireh, a coproduction between Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania, a feature fiction film written and directed by Gözde Kural; Marjan Khosravi's second feature film, Dreams of the Wild Oaks, which received support from the Catapult Film Fund, IDFA Bertha Fund, and AlterCineDocumentary Fund, and won awards at Sunny Side of the Doc and Vision du Réel Pitching Forum; Sajad Imani's first feature film, The Highness and Excellency, which won the TokyoDocs Pitch, the EBS Commissioning Pitch, and was a finalist for the Wickers Award. Milad has participated in several pitching forums, labs, and workshops over the past five years, including the Hot Docs CrossCurrents Lab, DMZ IDFF Lab/Industry, IDFA Forum, DFI Producer's Workshop, Vision du Réel Forum, European Film Market, and Berlinale TalentsLab. He aims to make a positive impact on Iranian cinema and support the Iranianindependent cinema community. In 2024, Milad relocated the headquarters of Seven Springs Pictures to Doha, Qatar, and will be participating in the EAVE Producers Workshop to develop Marjan Khosravi's first feature length fiction film.

TECHNICAL SPECS

Running Time : 128'

Format : DCP, 4K

Aspect Ratio : 4:3

Sound : 5.1

Shooting Format : 4K, Color

Original Language : Dari

(English, French , Turkish subtitles available)

Year of Production : 2025

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