



off sides

TWO ICE HOCKEY TEAMS — TWO CULTURES — ONE GAME ON ICE



synopsis

In the summer of 2017, young ice hockey players from the town of Náchod in East Bohemia set off on a long distance trip to Morocco, to participate in what was surely the most entertaining training camp they had ever experienced. The thing was, they did not just go there to play ice hockey. Perhaps even more importantly, they went to Morocco to get in touch with the local people and get immersed in their way of life. A few months later, their visit was reciprocated by ice hockey players from the Moroccan town of Salé who went to the Czech Republic for the very same reason. This exchange trip fostered a lively dialogue between two different cultures, spiced up by many little surprises and doses of liberating humour. Did the Moroccan street markets teach the Czech youngsters how to haggle? Did they live up to the world-class reputation which the Czech Republic had earned in ice hockey? Did the Moroccans manage to find halal meat in the Czech Republic? Did they learn to recognize an offside position?





Director's statement

In autumn 2015, I was in bed recovering from a complex ankle fracture when I received an incoming call from a strange and unfamiliar number. It turned out to be Mr Czerny, a deputy of the Czech ambassador in Morocco and a person I had previously collaborated with on several audio-visual projects in Paris. "Hello, Ms Kohoutova," he said, "I would like to pitch you a story for a documentary. Hold your laughter, please. I know it will sound like a joke, but all the people here are perfectly serious about it." And he told me a story about Moroccans who had founded their own ice hockey team, an activity which had not gone unnoticed by the Czech embassy. One thing had led to

another and two exchange visits of the Czech and Moroccan teams were underway. I asked him to wait until February, as I would be happy to join them once my ankle had healed. As I was heading for my first scouting trip in Morocco, I assumed I would be shooting a comedy in the vein of *Cool Runnings*. However, when I got to the town of Salé in the North of the country, the cradle of Moroccan ice hockey association, I realised that some Moroccans did play ice hockey, and the town actually boasted a junior ice hockey squad. I also found that they had contacted the Czech ice hockey association but their overtures had so far been dismissed. In the midst of the raging immigration controversy, when most Czech people tended to view Muslims with suspicion and antagonism, while generally having scant knowledge of their culture, I began to cheer for the Moroccan ice hockey players. At that time, we were just finalizing FC Roma



film, my first collaborative effort with Tomáš Bojar. This documentary also addresses a socio-political theme within the context of a popular sport (the Roma people want to play football but Czechs do not want to play with or against them). Tomáš Bojar and I agreed to film the scheduled exchange trip which would enable the Czech ice hockey players to get an inside look at the Muslim world by staying with local families, with the Moroccans subsequently undergoing similar experience in Czech families. We agreed that we found the subject much more appealing than the original idea of a comedy about a pioneering ice hockey team in a predominantly desert country.

The filming proved to be very challenging for a number of reasons, and yet we managed to keep authorial detachment as impartial observers. We kept reminding

ourselves that we were shooting a film centred around ice hockey, a sport regulated by internationally recognized rules.

Using the prism of the main characters, namely the Czech and Moroccan teenagers, the film asks very poignant questions which are currently reverberating across Europe. In fact, even the members of our small film crew could not always come to an agreement on those issues. However, the film contemplates these issues through the unflinching eye of teenage ice hockey players who do not bother with political correctness, which is what I particularly appreciate about our film.

Rozálie Kohoutová



Director's statement

My interest in cinematography has always been piqued by inconspicuous things which are barely perceptible and may even seem banal, such as someone's unrehearsed joy triggered by sea waves striking a beach, a snow-covered slope or a ride on a tractor. We may even be intrigued by a dispute as to whether a pig can look at the sky, or as to which bread is "the proper bread", the Czech or Moroccan one. All these are seemingly banal issues which do not impart philosophical wisdom as we traditionally understand it. Nevertheless, I still feel that they constitute a relevant commentary on the world we live in, and impart some wisdom that transcends their literal meanings.

Those teenagers are largely unaware of their own cultural indoctrinations and it does not occur to them that they should put on an act. That is why I even think that their artless conversations will tell us more about the complex relationship between two different cultures than a scholarly treatise would. The resulting testimony is obviously very ambivalent, as it defies neat categorisations and cannot be used by way of confirming some particular ideological standpoint. Instead, it tends to provoke questions and raise doubts. These are then in turn temporarily dispelled with the help of liberating humour which may be often verging on the politically incorrect. By the end of the film, the audience may be wondering what exactly they have just seen and what moral is to be inferred from the spectacle. And indeed, such thought-provoking uncertainty is precisely what the film is meant to generate.



After all, I have never been particularly drawn to films with an obvious univocal message, a clear-cut emotional appeal and a discernible social function. I find it off-putting when the filmmaker is trying to steer me in a certain direction, to keep me hostage in his or her “unique world” or even to deliberately teach me some values which are best hammered home by a “powerful story”. That is why I am obviously unwilling to shoot this kind of films myself. And I hope *Off Sides* is not that kind of film. I do not want it to be a pamphlet but a sensitive observation of the world with all its ambiguities and contradictions. I hope the film does not embellish things or create a fake idyll by glossing over problems,

neither does it warn of an imminent apocalypse. I would very much like the film to trigger simple human wonder about the world that we have been born into. I wholeheartedly embrace what Ivan Passer said many years ago, namely that “films are a diagnosis that has ensued from probing the reality. They do not provide criticism, recipe or remedy. They just articulate the statement that our permanent condition is critical, encompassing the crisis of an individual and the crisis of the society at large.”

Tomáš Bojar

Rozálie Kohoutová (1985) studied Romany culture at Charles University and documentary filmmaking at FAMU; she also studied for a year at the Sorbonne. Her comprehensive knowledge of the Romany community came in handy during the shooting of **FC Roma** (2016), which she directed together with Tomáš Bojar. She also shot two feature-length documentaries — **Kytlice, Zimmer Frei** (2012) and **Jenica & Perla** (2015) — and contributed to the film project **Gottland** (2014).

Tomáš Bojar (1981) has a degree in politics, law and moral philosophy from the Charles University in Prague. He has been active in the film industry since 2003, first as a scriptwriter, later also as a producer and director. As a scriptwriter he worked on multiple film projects in a creative duo with Pavel Abrahám — most notably on two feature length documentaries, **Czech RAPublic** (2008) and **Two Nil** (2012). Together with Rozálie Kohoutová he directed a feature-length documentary **FC Roma** (2016). In 2018 he completed a feature length documentary **Breaking News** and together with Zuzana Kirchnerová a five-episode documentary TV series **The Magnificent Five**.



Crew and basic facts about the film

Written and directed by: Rozálie Kohoutová, Tomáš Bojar

Editor: Šimon Hájek

Cinematographer: Šimon Dvořáček

Second cinematographers: Rozálie Kohoutová, Tomáš Kotas

Sound recordist, sound designer: Adam Levý

Script editor: Jan Gogola, Jr.

Executive producer: Martina Knoblochová

Producer: Tomáš Bojar — Cinema Arsenal

Co-producer: Alena Müllerová — Czech Television

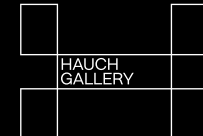
Footage: 75 min (24fps) / 72 min (25fps)

Languages: English/Arabic/Czech

Subtitles: English, Czech

Distribution format: DCP

The film was created with the support of The Czech Film Fund and Hauch Gallery, Prague.



Online screener:

<https://vimeo.com/297882968>

password: Hockey

Online trailer:

<https://vimeo.com/319911021>

password: Hockey



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