



THE THREE OF US

By Suela Bako

ERÀ
FILM

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Logline

After her uncle's passing away, Soni has a few hours to find the money for his funeral, which her mother-in-law used to send her son, Soni's husband, to Germany to find a job, leaving her struggling to secure the cash and keep the family together, while finding more shocking truths about her husband's departure.

Soni (35), an unemployed woman, lives in Tirana with her daughter Ema (16) and her retired mother-in-law, Leta (67). Her husband, Altin (40), a former football star, has emigrated to Germany on a work visa. The three women, born and raised in three different political and social systems in Albania, live in harmony in their tiny apartment due to Soni's natural inclination to tend to everyone's needs and make them feel good. The small balcony in their apartment is home to flowers and plants that Soni grows with passion. Together with Leta's meager pension, they're the only livelihood

they have. When Agim, Soni's uncle, dies after a long illness, she takes it upon herself to organize the wake and the funeral. However, on this day, Tefta, his wife, informs Soni she doesn't have the money they had put aside for the funeral. Leta has borrowed it from her a few months ago, and has not yet given it back. Soni was kept in the dark. At home, Leta claims she needed it to help Altin settle in Germany. Furious, Soni embarks on a mission to organize the funeral and find the money Leta owes to Tefta, within a few hours of one single day. Altin, on the other hand, does not answer Soni's persistent calls. Soni turns to the bank for a quick loan, only to find out that the house deed, which the bank needs, is not on her name anymore. Behind her back, Leta and Altin have removed Soni from the deed by forging the document, since Altin needed it to marry a German citi-

zen for papers. Appalled, hurt and feeling excluded from her own life, Soni resorts to what the country is best at: improvisation. She sells her own blood on the black market, makes flower arrangements for the funeral from the pots of her own balcony, haggles with the funeral home for a cheaper coffin. But none of this can cover the funeral cost. As the hours pass, Soni realizes that in order to move forward, she must break away from her past. So she smashes the glass case where Leta keeps Altin's golden football trophy, takes it and sells it. It makes her the sum for the funeral and for paying off the debt. But unfortunately, that is not all that this long day had in store for Soni. Once the three women are home and past this impossible day, she yet again takes it upon her shoulders to deal with the legal consequences of Leta's document forgery. Because at the end of the day, all that matters to Soni is that the three of them have another chance at living together.





I have grown up in a big and traditional family, in a patriarchal society transitioning from one of the harshest communist systems in the world, to democracy. The economy crisis during the change of system brought along the identity and family crisis. I grew up in a family with a strong attitude to men as the most important family members. They would speak first and always the ones to bring decisions. Traditionally, men were chosen for work, inheritance and property. Despite the political change, this remained unchallenged.

I have been deeply influenced by three generations of women. In the beginning it was my mother, and my grandmother; then my mother-in-law and my daughter. Family stories, especially those featuring women caught in political and social turmoil, are what interest me the most.

My mother retired the year the system in Albania changed, same as my mother-in-law did. My older sister lost her job then, and she never returned to the work force. She self-retired at 30 years old. Through the years, a generation of unemployed women was formed. They ended up making lunches at home and accompanying the children to school. So is Soni (35) that is at the center of the story in THE THREE OF US. She's also transitioning from a family tradition of patriarchal values, to one which she must create herself, and in which she and her daughter will have more favorable opportunities in life. Soni is unemployed. She lives with Ema (16), her daughter, born in the 'new era' of democracy and hope, and Leta (67), her mother-in-law, born and firmly grown up in the past system. They live in today's

chaotic Tirana, which resembles more a massive construction site than a city, where the past and projections about a modern future cohabit in some strange dynamics, creating deep class divisions, and where ordinary people - especially women - have it hard to find their place.





Character description

SONII

She is a 35-year-old woman, unemployed, without a university degree. At 17 she fell in love with her husband-to-be, Altin. At 19, an unplanned pregnancy forces her to set her dreams aside and devote herself to family, flowers, and raising their daughter, Ema. Today, Soni lives with her mother in law, Leta, and Ema, in Leta's apartment. Altin is in Germany with a work visa, and with the promise of making money so he can help at home.

Soni has a natural propensity for being of service to others. She looked after her father and her father-in-law, who have both suffered from chronic disease. Recently her uncle, with whom she has been very close, has also fallen sick and she had nursed him day and night. r. Soni is a hard-working woman, honest, humble, and ready to make sacrifices. She is good looking and] speaks calmly. her face is always

smiling, but her eyes are sad. She was born and raised in the capital, Tirana. Her mother has raised her with the idea that a girl should not pretend to own anything at her father's house, because a woman's place is at her husband's. Soni is unaware of the energy she harbors inside, until she has to find the money she owes to her late uncle's family. The dead man's right to a proper burial becomes her sublime obligation, for which she is ready to sacrifice everything. As she starts to realize that her life is built on lies and hypocrisy, she becomes a different woman. All alone, she has to take charge of her life, as there is no turning back. Her relationship with her husband Altin is empty, silent, distant, like a non-answered phone call. Altin and his mother Leta have not only borrowed money from the uncle's family but also reassigned the house ownership under Altin's name without feeling the need

to ask for Soni's opinion on the matter or to even to let her know. These actions clearly show that her place is not even at her husband's house. Soni views Leta as the embodiment of the family institution, so she respects her. She does not challenge her mother-in-law at first. However, the more she sees the bitter truth, the faster their relationship transforms. Her relationship with Ema reminds Soni of hers and her mother's. However, Ema is going through adolescence and has many questions which Soni has no time or space to answer. Their closeness is challenged, lost and refound in a chaos that none of them can control. The confrontation with Arian is a second turning point for Soni. Arian's arrogance aimed at Soni's existential need for a share in a property they both have inherited from their parents will shake her hard and push her closer to truth and her own self.

The three of us

LETA

She is a 68-year-old woman who does not feel ready to accept the changes of the times in which she has grown old.. She pays attention to her looks.Unlike Soni who dresses simply, Leta wears, at home, the same clothes that she would also wear at an evening in the city. Even when she sleeps, her hair is arranged into a bun and she sports a lady-like nightgown. Her former job in quality control in a factory has given her airs of stern authority, which she still projects upon others, even though she retired early, many years ago. She is aware that her pension is the only income for the family and, as widow of the head of the household, she has taken over his duties. This is how she considers it's her right to take decisions concerning the house in which she lives with Soni and Ema, without consulting or notifying Soni.

EMA

A 16-year-old girl in full bloom, Ema may well look brittle and soft spoken, but she has a strong character and a fiery temper. She is too close to Soni, to the point of sleeping in her bed. Ema is a good student and Soni sees, in her daughter, the girl she failed to become. Her talent and artistic vocation is obvious, and it serves like a door to leave the overwhelming world of teenagers and explore her inner world through art. Ema misses her father a lot and she marks the days to his return. Her relationship with Leta is close - they love each other very much - but dynamic as well. Ema is aware of the disproportionate power that her grandmother has in their household and tries to undermine it whenever she can by justifying the grandmother as someone who belongs to a different time. .

ARIAN

Soni's brother represents the patriarchy and the hypocrisy the Albanian family institution is built on. He is well aware that Soni is allowed to have a share of the property by law, but he throws the customary family code at her which discourages women from property share by prioritizing the economic wellbeing of their brothers, so she steps back. Arian thinks denying his sister a share of the house is the right thing to do for him,, even though she has grown up in it just like him, and has the right to a property share, just like him.





VISUAL APPROACH

In THE THREE OF US, the film narrative unfolds chronologically, almost in real time. The main character's confrontation with the paradoxes and the absurdities that surround her and the events she has to face enrich the film with **unique notes of the Albanian grotesque**. The film is full of situations with a bitter black humor. The death motif that accompanies the film throughout will expose the relations between characters and their sensibilities, on a narrative layer in which we are led to discover a **society that cares more for the dead than it does for the living**. This is oxygen deprivation within and without; the absurd of a cyclical project that never ends. A process that forces the main character to return to point zero, a Sisyphean extraordinary effort leading nowhere. Just as every woman's efforts in my country who, like Sisyphus, brings her face so close to the rock being pushed that she becomes that stone...

The visual and sound approach of the film is just **loud and chaotic**, apart Soni's home or uncle's room where is **low and smooth**. The leading character of the film, Soni, lives in a city in a constant transformation, that in the name of development ruins the houses and build skyscrapers.

The documentary style, hand-held camera, in a soft and slow movement, will allow the audience to breathe in at the same time with the main character. Starting in a slow naturalistic rhythm of an early morning we will look at the finer shades of the protagonist's eye to convey during the narrative their anxiety, fear, despair little joys, but at the other hand we'll see the characters in a wide screen depicting the tough everchanging urban chaos where they belong.

Audience in the film will be led to act as a witness to an apparently objective rendering of reality, like in documentaries.

THE THREE OF US, is an **urban poetry** with a naturalistic mise-en-scene. Every element of the film will be as close to reality as possible. The light will be almost natural light.

As in Darden Brothers, Ken Loach, Rumanian new wave, I am interested in realism. But more than in the tough realism, that will be wherever the main character is confronting family, traditional and urban obstacles, I am interested in what is called **'sensuous realism'**. The uncle scene it's the top of that sensation where camera movement, framing and camera distance will combine together to create a heightened perception of white color and

textures resulting in a sensuous experience that pulls the audience closer to the image of death that lies in the room, the curtains, sheets, towels and two human bodies the dead one and Soni. Acting in the minimalist style will be one of the strongest component, of the film, as we have no longer a film with extraordinary visual grades or an art film; extraordinary will be exactly within the common things, my point is to turn the ordinary into the art, into aesthetics. I am interested in conveying a real – time story, mostly in **single-shot technique**, to follow the main character without disturbing it, from a fly on the wall observing in the beginning of the movie to mid-shots and close up through the end of the film.

The variety of characters, their sense of honesty and realism will give the film a solid tone of truth, even though in claustrophobic areas. Soni's garden is her leitmotiv, her oasis, her poetry the color, the light and the chemistry that misses in her life. The music is the sound of the city, the sound of the silence, like pizzicato in a distant sound that is missing.



Location

A city caught in the cycle of demolition–construction, in between paradoxes, chaos and dust



an urban poetry with a naturalistic mise-en-scene"



Producer's Notes

When Suela and I both graduated from the Art Academy at the same time in 1999 – she in acting and I in stage direction – Albania was an artistic desert, which provided artists with no opportunity to work and create in.

Nobody believed that one would be able to make a living, create a family and raise children, while working in Theater or Cinema. The road we had to take, in order to follow our dreams in our professions, during these 20 years, has been quite unforgiving and harsh. Nowadays Erafilm, the company I manage and founded in 2001, has a track record of over eight productions, two co-productions, including documentaries, long feature films, and short films and a miniseries.

The *Three of Us* film project is the logical continuation of a many-year collaboration with director and screenplay writer Suela Bako on two short films already produced, *Shirt Sleeves* (2015) and *My Name is Sonila* (2019), the

latter being an Albanian-French co-production that will premiere in Krakow IFF in May 2020.

What attracted me to the project was the director's artistic approach to the bitter-life reality of Albanian women and young girls who, in spite of the hardships they have to deal with, never lose their hope and faith – a reality shown through humorous notes that depict an absurd paradox. Through their sacrifices women carry the burden of their families and raise their children, often silently, as if following a fate that has been written for them in stone, for countless generations. A woman's place is to serve.

Subtle humorous notes make this film project appealing to a larger audience, while endowing it with the strength of an authentic, sincere work, which should be able to speak to any society and culture, regardless of its degree of emancipation. All around the world, women face the same problems, which manifest themselves in

different forms. Child raising, Work and career, Care for their families, The creation of a personal identity, vis-a-vis society's expectations, The freedom to choose what to do with one's life

In the development of the project, we have included the best part of the Albanian-speaking cinema, the talented screenwriter Doruntina Basha, who has a strong voice in connection with the stories of women in the Balkans, she was included in the project with a tune and added value, as well as DOP Sefdiqe Kastrati, a woman who in her cinematographic narration has marked the characters of women and girls in a poetic and realistic manner, the main actress Yllka Mujo, one of the legends of Albanian cinema and theater in the part of Leta.

We are now in the financing phase, after winning as the best project in *Dot on the map* industry days, we received the support of Creative Europe for the development of the project. This film is a co-produc-

tion between Albania and Kosovo and we are looking for a third co-producer. The total budget of the film is 650 000 Euro.

The tone of the film is a black comedy with strong female narrative

- Women-lead story. Whether at the teaser and trailers, it is important to underline who is the main character lead; women. It will help the audiences to get connected with the storyline and encouraged to know more about the plot.

- Family and relationship. In addition, emphasis will be given to the relationships of the family portrayed in the film. Conflicts between generations mother and daughter/son are element of the films that audiences can relate to.

This film is an invitation for reflection and is meant to impact a vast audience of all ages, from 16 to 90 years old, including the young, boys and girls, women and men, mothers and fathers, grandmothers, and grandfathers. By choosing to treat a family-re-

lated narrative as black comedy we hope to be able to add originality to our film and make it more attractive to important film festivals that aim at reaching the wider audience. I am, therefore, convinced that our film, *Three of Us*, will have a long, successful life through A-category festivals and reach a large audience around the world.

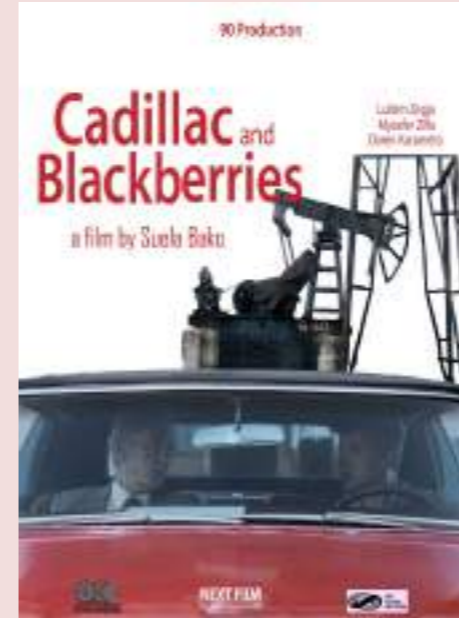
We are very excited and we can't wait to make the film *THE THREE OF US*



Director's bio

Suela Bako, lives in Tirana, Albania. She completed her acting studies at the Academy of Arts in 1999. She has been part of many theatre and film productions, as an actress and now she's a resident actress at Aleksander Moisiu theatre. Suela Bako debuted as a theatre director in 2018, with the play Three women and Misugj based on the novel The hunting gun by Yasushi Inoue; After working for more than 10 years as a TV director she realised her passion for the big screen. She graduated MA in Film & Tv Directing in 2014. After that she directed several short films and documentaries as a

writer/director and her works have been shown and awarded in festivals such as Thessaloniki, Brussels and Krakow Film Festival.. THE THREE OF US, her first feature film project, as writer/director, a work in progress, won the top prize, at DotOnTheMap, Cyprus Industry days, 2020. The same project in 2021 won the grant for script development in Creative Europe. Suela Bako has been awarded several times for her work as film director and she won the prize Best actress at Nashville International Film Festival USA 2017, as Shpresa in Bloodlands, an Australian production, directed by Steven Kastrisioss. Since 3 years she is ass/lecturer in MA Film and TV directing, and cofounder of Z-Studio, Albanian Casting Agency.



CADILLAC AND BLACKBERRIES

2021 ; 14' ; Albania
Supported by: ANCC, SEE CINEMA NETWORK

- FESTIVALS & AWARDS**
- 19th Tirana International Film Festival, Albania, September 2021
 - 4th Moscow Shorts International Film Festival, Russia, October 2021
 - 6th Europa Film Festival, Spain, 31 March 2022
 - 25th Brussels Short Film Festival, Belgium, April 2022
 - 11th Short Of The Year Festival, Spain, June 2022, Special Mention Award
 - 12th Balkan Film Food Festival, Albania, June 2022, Special Mention Award
 - 16th San Francisco Frozen Film Festival, USA, 13-17 July 2022
 - 5th Beach Film Festival, North Macedonia, 20-24 July 2022
 - 3rd Galichnik Film Festival, North Macedonia, 3-7 August 2022
 - 13th International Salon of Light Film Festival, Colombia, 9-14 August 2022
 - 46th Open Air Filmfest Weiterstadt, Germany, 11-15 August 2022
 - 33rd São Paulo International Short Film Festival, Brazil, 18-28 August 2022
 - 11th Tetova International Film Festival Oda, North Macedonia, 26-31 August 2022
 - 28th Nancy International Film Festival, France, 26 August - 4 September 2022
 - 8th Minikino Bali International Short Film Festival, Indonesia, 2-10 September 2022
 - 13th Macau International Short Film Festival, 1-8 December 2022

<https://vimeo.com/503192309>
password: kadillak21



MY NAME IS SONILA

2019 ; 20' ; Albania
Supported by ANCC

- FESTIVALS & AWARDS**
- Umana Solidarieta International Film Festival, Italy (2019)
 - 19th Courtivore Festival of the Short Film of Rouen, France (2019)
 - 31st Travelling Rennes Film Festival, France (2020)
 - 60th Krakow Film Festival, Poland;
 - 15th Films Femmes Méditerranée Festival, France;
 - 42nd Montpellier International Festival of Mediterranean Film, France;
 - Dardan Film Festival, Albania;
 - 34th International Francophone Film Festival in Acadie, Canada;
 - Bosnia Herzegovina Looks Around International Film Festival, France
 - 68th Belgrade Documentary and Short Film Festival, Serbia
 - 20th Courtivore Short Film Festival, France

<https://vimeo.com/146694652>
password: MNIS2019



LIGHT

2017 ; 53' ; Albania
Supported by: ANCC, RTSH

- FESTIVALS & AWARDS**
- TGhe 9th NYC INDEPENDENT FF, USA
 - 10th CENTRAL&EASTERN EUROPEAN FF, Luxembourg
 - 12th LUMS INTERNATIONAL FF, Pakistan
 - 11th SEBASTOPOL DOCUMENTARY FF, USA
 - 8th QUEENS WORLD FF, USA; Leo Ljarja-Best Cinematography Award.
 - 20th THESSALONIKI DOCUMENTARY FF, Greece
 - 10th SENE FILM, MUSIC&ART FESTIVAL, USA
 - KQ,SH FF, Albania
 - 4th HOOSIERDANCE INTERNATIONAL FF, USA
 - 16th TIRANA INTERNATIONAL FF, Albania
 - 6th DEA FF, Albania; Best Documentary Award
 - 9th MANHATTAN INTERNATIONAL FF, USA

<https://vimeo.com/220466516>



SHIRT SLEEVES

2015 ; 14' ; Albania
Supported by ANCC, RTSH

- FESTIVALS & AWARDS**
- Festivals and Awards
 - 13th TIRANA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, Tirana – Albania, November 2015
 - NEW YORK CITY INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, USA, April
 - 11th VIDEO FESTIVAL IMPERIA, Italy, April
 - 69th FESTIVAL DE CANNES, SHORT FILM CORNER, France, May
 - 3rd DEA FILM FESTIVAL, Sarande – Albania, June
 - VERE NE EPIDAMN, Durres - Albania, August 2016
 - 5th ALBANIAN FILM WEEK, New York – USA, September
 - 29th HELSINKI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, Finland, September
 - 5th TETOVA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, Macedonia, October 2016
 - 5th FEMART FESTIVAL, Kosova, May
 - 7th BALKAN FILM FOOD FESTIVAL, Pogradec, Albania
 - 64th PULA FILM FESTIVAL, Croatia, July 2017



Producer's Bio

Sabina Kodra graduated from the Academy of Arts in Tirana in 1999 with a degree in theatre direction. In 2001, she founded the Albanian film company ERAFILM and

co-produced her first feature film LETTERS IN THE WIND, directed by Edmond Budina, who was awarded in Italy 2003. She has produced in 2011 the

feature comedy, BALKAN BAZAAR by Edmond Budina, AGON feature film (2012) by Robert Budina (Albania's selection for the US Academy Award's Best Foreign Language Feature 2013), BOTA feature film by Iris Elezi and Thomas Logoreci (Albanian entry for the US Academy Award's Best Foreign Language Feature 2015), Fedeora Award in Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, co-produced SWORN VIRGIN by Laura Bispuri (Berlinale Competition 2015), Best Film in First Youth Film Festival, Golden Firebird Award in Hong Kong Film Festival, Golden Gate Award in San Francisco International Film Festival, Nora Ephron Prize in Tribeca Film Festival.

In 2018, A SHELTER AMONG THE CLOUDS, has the world premiere in Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival in Estonia, in the Official Competition in November 2018. The film participated in more than 20 other festivals worldwide collecting awards such as - Global Visual Award in Cinequest Film, Creativity Film Festival in San

Jose Usa - Best Film in La Valletta International Film Festival, Malta - Best Film, Best Actor, Best Actress in PriFilm Fest, Kosovo - Best Music and Sound Mix in Mediterranean Film Festival Valencia, Spain. The short film MY NAME IS SONILA by Suela Bako had the premiere in Cracow International film festival and was released by Canal +.

in 2022 she produced the mini-series - THE SQUARE OF POWER in 2022 by Robert Budin and first feature film ONE OF US by Ergys Meta Sabina is in postproduction of the third feature film by Robert Budina - title WATERDROP.

The first feature film THE THREE OF US by Suela Bako supported by Creative Europe is currently in an advanced stage of development. Also she is working with Ajola Daja in her second feature film MADE OF DUST early development (supported by Creative Europe). Sabina was part of the jury in European Work in Progress 2019 in Cologne, Germany, from 2015 she is an ACE producer.



Teaser, The Three Of Us : <https://vimeo.com/766115366>
password : the3ofus

DP visual approach:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wvQRBmTbZpOlhgdG2U2E00mQnlhJgMu2/view>

