

From Oscar® Nominated Director
MARKUS IMHOOF

ELDORADO



68 Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Out of Competition



Films Boutique presents a ZERO ONE FILM / THELMA FILM / ORMEUS FILM production in co-production with SRF SCHWEIZER RADIO UND FERNSEHEN, SRG SSR, BAYERISCHER RUNDFUNK
written by MARKUS IMHOOF Director of photography PETER UNGERDAND (GCS) Editor BEATRICE BABINI (BFC) Music PETER SCHERER Sound Design SEBASTIAN TESCH
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FILMS *Boutique*

presents

a zero one / Thelma Film production

ELDORADO

Directed by

MARKUS IMHOOF

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Cinéma

Switzerland, Germany 2018

TRT: 91 minutes



SYNOPSIS

Throughout history, there have always been refugees. They used to come from places closer to home: In the lean years of WW II and its direct aftermath, the family of Swiss director Markus Imhoof, a small boy of four years at the time, took in Giovanna, an undernourished eight-year-old Italian girl as part of a limited-term program for children. After the end of her stay, she had to go back to Italy. The Imhoof family privately arranged for Giovanna to come back to visit for a second time. In the end, the Swiss government insisted on sending Giovanna back to Italy. She died of illness at the age of thirteen, soon after being forced to return.

Imhoof takes this early experience of personal loss as a point of entry to the ongoing refugee crisis, the biggest mass displacement of people since WW II. With extraordinary access, Imhoof takes us on a journey with deep personal roots through the Italian warships of Operation Mare Nostrum, refugee camps in Southern Italy, asylum hearings with Swiss authorities, all designed to turn back refugees at all levels.

What emerges is a stark picture of an absurd and inhuman process that fails to address a human tragedy: a crisis caused by economic imbalances turning the rich countries of the North into the Eldorado that so many of the less fortunate try to reach at all cost. The “Promised Land” is based on a broken promise.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Foreign countries played a significant role in our family: My father wrote his Ph.D. thesis on European emigrants, my mother was born in India, one of my aunts came from Odessa, the other lived in Egypt, my uncle lived in Columbia, another one in the US. Throughout my childhood, I hung a map of Africa over my bed, with a real spear pointing to the “Heart of Darkness”.

In 1945, Giovanna arrived from Italy in a Switzerland spared by the war. It was right around this time that I discovered, that everybody else, too, used “I” to refer to themselves. I fell in love with the foreign “I”. This shaped my life decisively.

During this time, Switzerland resorted to the formulation: “Refugees for purely racial reasons do not count as refugees”, because most fell under this category. 24.000 people who had saved themselves were sent back – because presumably we would have drowned under the weight of these additional passengers. In 1980, I shot the fiction feature THE BOAT IS FULL about these events, the story of a randomly put together group of refugees who were sent back to their deaths. For the role of the refugee girl Kitty I looked for a girl that resembled Giovanna. As a direct result of WW II, racial discrimination today is recognized as grounds for asylum in the first paragraph of the Geneva Convention.

One of today's principles is: "Refugees for reasons of economic plight do not count as refugees," because most fall under this category. I would not have thought 35 years ago that the title of my film would be concrete and urgent enough once again to force me to shoot another film on the subject. Following my last documentary MORE THAN HONEY I began to work on two film projects: one about migration and one about money.

While doing research, I soon discovered how tightly related these two themes are, and that the theme of migration cannot be told independently from the topic of money.

Each one of us carries a piece of Congo in our pockets: Rare earths in cell phones. 80% of coltan and cobalt is unearthed in primitive mines in Congo, but the profits of the commodity traders remain in Switzerland. And the European trade agreements with Africa for the toll-free import of our agricultural products distort the rules: African farmers cannot compete with our subsidized success.

Globalization has «exported» the proletariat and becomes economic colonialization: Money, rich people and goods travel globally; the poor must stay where they are. The economic high and low-pressure areas distributed around the world are the precondition for the cheapest possible production of the flood of goods. Do we need the poorer parts of the world for our economic dynamism? The wheel of our mill needs different levels to turn.

People claiming asylum are a consequence of this dynamic. Our fortune attracts them. But they disturb the increase of wealth and economic growth. Hence the laws against immigration to Europe. Defence is left to the natural force of the sea. Since 2000, more than 30.000 people have drowned during their flight: a small town of corpses. Human lives as the collateral damage of our wealth and our "pursuit of happiness".

This crisis is not over, it is merely beginning. Soon, refugees from climate change will arrive, too.

The memory of Giovanna gives me the radicalism of a child's point of view, a fruitful contrast to the international machinery that administers strangers. It was never this difficult to obtain shooting permits. Any project that is kept so closely under wraps must have legitimacy. But hidden as it is in some ways, it tops agendas in election and coalition negotiations.

Our challenge was to make the invisible visible. Matters of principle are often betrayed by a detail, a glance, laughter. The sum of the inconsequential sometimes reveals the essential.



At its core, this story is about the conflict between «I» and «Us», about the contrast or the interplay between many different things in one whole. Just like in an orchestra, where it is not the trumpet that dominates everything but where we also hear the viola and flute. It is about hoping for an equilibrium, for North and South living together as one organism that does not permanently exploit and thus destroy itself.

Everybody else call themselves «I», too. This can lead to war or be the beginning of a love story.

On the door of a tailor's workshop run by women refugees, there hangs a quote from «Alice in Wonderland»: "There's no use trying," Alice said: "one can't believe impossible things." "I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

Markus Imhoof, January 2018



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CHILDREN'S TRANSPORTS

The **Children's Aid of the Swiss Red Cross** was an aid program between January 1942 to 1955 for the benefit of children from several European countries who suffered from the consequences of war.

Children in poor health or those who had lost family members and whose conditions allowed for them to be brought to Switzerland for a three to six-month stay were sent to Swiss families or sanatoriums.

The Swiss Children's Aid's origins were not on the federal level. Moved by the events of WW II, 17 aid programs and NGOs came together to form the Swiss Association for War-damaged Children (*Schweizerische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für kriegsgeschädigte Kinder*, SAK). Because SAK both lacked the necessary personnel and financial resources and was seen as too "political", this humanitarian aid was reorganized in 1942 within a larger organization under the tutelage of the Swiss Red Cross (*Schweizerisches Rotes Kreuz*, SRK).

The organization of children's transports by train to Switzerland was the biggest children's aid mission during and after WW II. Between 1940 and 1945, about 62.000 undernourished and sick children were beneficiaries of the program. After the war, the

program was enlarged further to cover children from all of Europe. Until the end of the program in 1956, about 181.000 children were cared for by roughly 100.000 Swiss host families.

Jewish children, however, were explicitly excluded early on from the children's trains. The SRK, like all national organizations of the Red Cross, had a privileged relationship with the Federal Government and, especially in times of war, depended on official policies. The Swiss government was under intense national and international pressure. Humanitarian aid was one way to ease the strain. Accordingly, from an early date, children from German-occupied territories were integrated into children's transports, providing a bargaining chip in Switzerland's negotiations for the preservation of its neutral status. This was the origin of the trade between the Vichy and Swiss governments and the SRK described in the film: In exchange for every Jewish refugee in Switzerland with a visa for the US and a ticket on an ocean liner, a transit visa for the port of Marseille was issued if Switzerland agreed to take in three malnourished French children suffering from the effects of the war.

To better manage immigration and because the Swiss federal government didn't want to close its borders because of the importance of tourism, a new distinction was introduced in 1938 between recognized "political refugees" and „emigrants“ whose application was at the discretion of the immigration police. Refugees for "reasons of race exclusively" were explicitly not counted as political refugees. For "non-Aryans" crossing the border from Germany, visa were strictly enforced, and they could only be issued with a guarantee that the foreigner in question would leave Switzerland again. The passports of German Jews were additionally marked with a stamped "J" and thus rendered invalid for immigration into Switzerland.

Overall, according to different sources up to 20.000 people were turned away at the border or handed over to the Nazis, although it had become apparent that this would very likely lead to their deaths. In 2002, a parliamentary commission came to the result that the Swiss refugee laws of the time were not compatible with the principle of the rule of law.



GIOVANNA'S STORY

In 1945, eight-year-old Giovanna Viganò came to Switzerland and the Imhoof family on one of these children's transports. Giovanna is a malnourished street kid. Her father is M.I.A. in Stalingrad and presumed dead, her mother is too ill to care for her daughter.

In 1946, Giovanna has to return to Milan. The Imhoof's want to keep her for longer, but the Red Cross advises that it wouldn't do to let emotional ties become too strong.

Back home in Italy, her mother is still sick, their poverty is great, there is not enough to eat, the windows have been broken since a bomb raid and are only provisionally covered with oiled paper.

They lack for everything, and it is cold because they have no money for heating materials. The mother solders radio antennas in her kitchen for a small workshop. She later works in a cigarette factory. Giovanna is often sick, suffers from rheumatic fevers and is underfed. The parcels with gifts and money transfers are not enough.

In 1949 the Imhoof family wants to take Giovanna, now 13, back privately (Markus is 8 years old). But to get into Switzerland as a foreign child is difficult due to regulations about seasonal workers. They live in shanty towns in Switzerland, work mostly in construction and have to go back to their countries for three months every year. They have no right to bring children. The intention is, just like it is today, to prevent „chain migration“. There are more than half a million Italians, often victims of racist discrimination.

Markus's father has to vouch for all costs and guarantee her return. Giovanna is finally allowed to come. But already in 1950, she has to go back to Milan – and soon is sick again. Giovanna dies that same year (Markus now is 9 years old). The Imhoof parents blame themselves until the day they die.

1978: Markus lives in Milan, but with another Italian-speaking woman. Giovanna's mother often looks after their children. He writes the script to the refugee drama DAS BOOT IST VOLL about the deportation of Jewish refugees from safe Switzerland back into the German Reich and certain death during WW II.

In 1981, the film is shown at Berlinale and awarded a Silver Bear. A year later, it is nominated for an Oscar®.



BEHIND THE CAMERA

MARKUS IMHOOF

Director, scriptwriter, producer

Markus Imhoof was born in Winterthur in 1941. He studied German Studies, Art History and History in Zurich and graduated with a thesis on „Brecht’s plays in relation to his theoretical works.” After a turn as assistant to Leopold Lindtberg at Zürcher Schauspielhaus he enrolled in the Zurich School of Design’s film school. His first film from 1961 had already long been finished by that time. His films FLUCHTGEFAHR (1974) and TAUWETTER (1977) are part of the works that assured international recognition to the New Swiss Film of the 1970s. His 1980 film DAS BOOT IST VOLL was awarded a Silver Bear at Berlinale and shortlisted for an Oscar® as Best Film in a Foreign Language.

DIE REISE (The Journey) from 1986 was based on Bernward Vesper’s posthumous roman a clef about the early days of the German terrorist group Red Army Faction (RAF). His films were shown in the festivals in Berlin, Venice, Cannes, Locarno and many others. His most recent film MORE THAN HONEY was honoured with both the Swiss and the German Film Awards, was the most internationally successful Swiss film of all times and finds great acclaim all over the world to this day.

Markus Imhoof was Guest Lecturer at the Deutschen Film- und Fernsehakademie, Berlin and at the Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst, Zurich. He is a member of the Akademie der Künste Berlin, the European and German Film Academies as well as of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) in Los Angeles.

Apart from his cinematographic work, Imhoof is also well-known for his stagings of operas and plays in Germany, Austria, Italy and Switzerland.

Selected Filmography

2018	ELDORADO	Director, scriptwriter, producer
2012	MORE THAN HONEY	Director, scriptwriter, producer
2005	STEINSCHLAG	Scriptwriter
2000	ZORNIGE KÜSSE	Scriptwriter
1996	FLAMMEN IM PARADIES	Director, scriptwriter
1991	LES PETITES ILLUSIONS	Director, scriptwriter
1990	DER BERG	Director, scriptwriter
1986	DIE REISE	Director, scriptwriter
1980	DAS BOOT IST VOLL	Director, scriptwriter
1979	ISEWIXER	Director
1977	TAUWETTER	Director, scriptwriter
1974	FLUCHTGEFAHR	Director, scriptwriter

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