

Mongrel Media
Presents

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Tahar Rahim B er nice Bejo Ali Mosaffa

THE PAST

A film by Asghar Farhadi

130 min

Official Selection

Cannes Film Festival 2013

Toronto International Film Festival 2013

Best Actress

Cannes Film Festival 2013

Distribution



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THE PAST

Cast

Marie	BÉRÉNICE BEJO
Samir	TAHAR RAHIM
Ahmad	ALI MOSAFFA
Lucie	PAULINE BURLET
Fouad	ELYES AGUIS
Léa	JEANNE JESTIN
Naïma	SABRINA OUAZANI
Shahriyar	BABAK KARMI
Valeria	VALERIA CAVALLI

Crew

Written & Directed by	ASGHAR FARHADI
Produced by	ALEXANDRE MALLET-GUY
Cinematographer	MAHMOUD KALARI
Editor	JULIETTE WELFLING
Script Adaptation	MASSOUMEH LAHIDJI
1 st Assistant Director	MARYAM NARAGHI
Production Designer	CLAUDE LENOIR
Costume Designer	JEAN-DANIEL VUILLERMOZ
Sound	DANA FARZANEHPOUR THOMAS DESJONQUÈRES BRUNO TARRIÈRE
Original Music	EVGUENI & YOULI GALPERINE
Makeup Artist	LUCIA BRETONES MENDEZ
Key Hair Dresser	FULVIO POZZBON
Script Supervisor	SYLVIE KOEHLIN
Line Producer	ALEXA RIVERO
Production Manager	FRÉDÉRIC SAUVAGNAC
Unit Production Manager	MARIE-HÉNÈNE LABRET

Synopsis

Following a four year separation, Ahmad returns to Paris from Tehran, upon his French wife Marie's request, in order to finalize their divorce procedure. During his brief stay, Ahmad discovers the conflicting nature of Marie's relationship with her daughter Lucie. Ahmad's efforts to improve this relationship soon unveil a secret from their past.

About The Director

Asghar Farhadi was born in 1972 in Isfahan (Iran). From a young age, he discovered within himself an artistic sensibility that led him to study writing and to immerse himself in the world of theatre and cinema. After entering the Youth Cinema Society, he continued his studies at the University of Tehran, from which he graduated in 1998 with a Masters in Stage Direction. His output from his ten years of study was prodigious: he directed six short films and wrote and directed two series for television.

In 2001, the doors of cinema opened up thanks to Ebrahim Hatamikia, with whom Asghar Farhadi co-wrote the script of *LOW HEIGHTS (ERTEFAE PAST)* (2002), a chronicle of Southwest Iran that met with critical and commercial success. Soon afterwards, he wrote and directed his first feature film, *DANCING IN THE DUST (RAGHSS DAR GHOBAR)* (2003), about a man forced to divorce his wife and to hunt snakes in the desert to repay his debts to his in laws. The film won awards at the Fajr and Moscow International Film Festivals. A year later, *BEAUTIFUL CITY (SHAH-RE ZIBA)* (2004) had similar international success. The film, which examined the pitfalls of the Iranian judicial system through the story of a young man sentenced to death, won awards at the Fajr and Warsaw International Film Festivals.

In his third film, *FIREWORKS WEDNESDAY (CHAHAR SHANBE SOURI)* (2006), Asghar Farhadi followed the trials and tribulations of a couple through the eyes of their maid. The film demonstrated the singularity of Asghar Farhadi's vision. It was highly praised in Iran as well as internationally, where it won the awards for Best Film at the Chicago International Film Festival and Best Screenplay at the Festival des 3 Continents in Nantes. This was Asghar Farhadi's first film to be released theatrically in France, a country that would become increasingly receptive to his work.

A prolific director and scriptwriter, Asghar Farhadi began to surround himself with a family of actors. Taraneh Alidoosti played the title role in his next film, *ABOUT ELLY (DARBAREYE ELLY)* (2009), which marked the third time that they had worked together. With its psychological suspense, the film seduced the critics and audiences of Iran. The film represented Asghar Farhadi's greatest international success to date: he won the Silver Bear for Best Director at the Berlin Film Festival and the film won Best Film at the Tribeca Film Festival. In France, led by an enthusiastic press, the film had over 100,000 admissions. It was also Iran's official submission for Best Foreign Language Film for the Academy Awards in 2009.

With *A SEPARATION (JODAEIYE NADER AZ SIMIN)* (2011), Asghar Farhadi reunited with a number of the actors from *ABOUT ELLY*, including Peyman Moadi (in the role of Nader), Shahab Hosseini (in the role of Hodjat), and Merila Zarei, who plays Madam Ghahraei, the teacher of the young Termeh, who is played by none other than the director's daughter, Sarina Farhadi. After winning the most prestigious awards at the Fajr Festival, *A SEPARATION* swept the awards at the 2011 Berlin Film Festival, where it won the Golden Bear for Best Film, the Silver Bear for Best Actress for the ensemble of actresses, the Silver Bear for Best Actor for the ensemble of actors,

as well as the Ecumenical Jury Prize and the Morgen Post Reader's Award. This was only the beginning of a long list of prizes. The film took over 70 awards internationally, including the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film, the César for Best Foreign Film, and finally, the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. A SEPARATION sold worldwide and was an international smash success, unprecedented for any Iranian film.

In France, the film had one million admissions, a historic result. In the United States, where the film was released in December 2011, the film's box office was on par with the most successful foreign language films ever released in the US.

With THE PAST (2013), Asghar Farhadi shot the film in France and in the French language. The film stars amongst others Bérénice Bejo, Tahar Rahim and Ali Mosaffa. The film's screenplay won the EU Media Prize. THE PAST will premiere in competition at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival.

Interview With Director Asghar Faradi

Between A SEPARATION and THE PAST, you worked on another film project. What happened?

I did write another script after ABOUT ELLY, while I was staying in Berlin. Then I shot A SEPARATION and my French distributor, Alexandre Mallet-Guy, asked if he could read that script. He liked it and said he wanted to produce the film, either in Germany or in France. After a few trips, I chose Paris and started working on the project. One day, we were in a café, talking about it and all of a sudden, I said I had another story in mind. It was only a synopsis but as I started telling the story, I realized something was taking shape and developing. Another narrative was coming to me. So we gradually shifted to this story, I developed it and quickly had a treatment ready. That's how THE PAST was born. Being in Paris meant a lot. When you want to tell a story dealing with the past, you need to set it in a city like Paris that exudes the past. This story couldn't have taken place just anywhere.

But historic Paris is not shown in the film...

I was very careful not to abuse the historic aspect of the architecture of Paris and not to have a touristic approach to it. I decided at a very early stage that the main character's home, in which a great part of the film takes place, would be in the suburbs and Paris would appear in the background, taken for granted. The pitfall for filmmakers working in an unknown setting is to highlight in the film the first things that catch their eye. I tried to do the opposite. Since I was fascinated by the architecture of the city, I decided to look beyond that and reach something else.

What's the writing process like? How do you build the story?

All my stories are written in a non-linear way. They don't go from point A to point B. I always have several stories developing simultaneously and they come together during a shared situation. Here, I had the story of this man who's been living away from his wife for a few years and now is traveling back to her to finalize their divorce. Then, I had the story of a man with a wife in a coma who has to take care of his child. These are elements that expand separately then converge to a single situation. I write intuitively. I start with a synopsis and immediately question it, trying to find out more about the little information that I have. Since I know that this man has come to get a divorce, I ask myself why he left four years ago? And now that he has returned to his wife's house, what is going to happen there? So many questions emerge from these few lines that by answering them the whole story is constructed.

In what way did the observation of the French way of life influence the script?

I did a lot of thinking about the differences. What would have been different if the story took place in Iran? In my films, the characters express themselves indirectly. It's part of my culture but I also use it as a dramatic resource. That is less of a custom in France. Of course, it depends on the context, but generally speaking, the French are more straightforward. So I had to adapt the development of my French characters to that new parameter, which wasn't easy and took time in my writing process.

Curiously, the Iranian character is the one that pushes the others to speak...

He's a kind of a catalyst. He puts the others in a condition for speaking, for saying things that had remained unsaid for a long time. But he's not even aware of it. One of my guidelines was not to define my characters by their nationality or their flag. Their behavior is determined by the situation they are experiencing. In a crisis situation, differences tend to disappear.

One of your actors says the idea of the film was triggered by your visit to a person in a coma...

That's not how things happened. I went to visit patients in a coma to prepare the film. I've never had any personal experience with a coma, but I've always associated this state with a sense of uncertainty, a space between life and death, wondering if the person should be considered dead or alive. Here the film is entirely built on this notion of doubt. The characters constantly have to face dilemmas, having to choose between two options. In A SEPARATION too, the character had to face the common but difficult dilemma between his father's well-being and his daughter's. In THE PAST, the question is slightly different: should one be faithful to the past or give it up and move on to the future?

Does the complexity of today's life increase these dilemmas?

Probably. One tends to consider the future blurred because it's unknown. But I think the past is even more unclear and opaque. It should feel clearer and closer to us now, as we keep traces from it. But photos and emails don't help our past get any clearer. Nowadays, life may tend to move on, neglecting the past. But its shadow weighs on us and holds us back. It seems to be as true in Europe as it is in the rest of the world, that no matter how determined you are to embrace the future, the weight of the past is still heavy on our minds.

How did you choose Bérénice Béjo ?

I first met her during a trip to the US, where she was promoting THE ARTIST. I immediately found her warm and genuine. One of those people you feel you can connect to. Her performance in THE ARTIST confirmed for me that she was also an intelligent actress. These two personality traits must be present in an actor for me to choose them: being smart and exuding a positive energy on the screen, someone appealing with whom the viewers enjoy spending time.

She said that you were looking for something in her face on the first day of the rehearsals. What was that?

Doubt, which is central to Marie's character. Bérénice herself doesn't doubt very much. But at an early stage of the rehearsals, she proved that she was able to perform doubt.

Marie's character is the one that provokes situations, that makes things move forward...

She is the one who is the most determined to move on and not to be stuck in the past. But who knows if she'll be able to do it? Men are more burdened by the past. In the last scene with Marie, she walks towards us, towards the camera. Ahmad is behind her and she says: "I don't want to look back anymore." And then she turns her back to the camera, and to us the viewers. She also leaves us behind. To that extent, she can be considered as the most progressive character. Who knows why in all my films, women have these kind of roles. Like in A SEPARATION.

What are Tahar Rahim's qualities?

I saw A PROPHET in Iran and I immediately knew that he was an exceptional actor with a wide range of performing skills that allowed him to take on very complex roles. I decided to work with him. One of his particular traits that I really appreciated during our collaboration was how connected he is with his childhood. The emotions and the reactions related to childhood are still vivid in him.

How did you choose Ali Mosaffa?

He has something specific as an actor and no doubt also as a man: something self-retained appears on his face, in his way of being. He gives the impression of being a man who has a rich inner life that he exposes very little. He is the kind of person who draws others to him. We want to know more about him. This trait was woven into the character because Ali was chosen. In reality, we had to find a professional Iranian actor who could speak French, which limited our options. Once we chose him, I wasn't quite sure if a few weeks of preparation would be enough for him to actually master the language. But everyone who witnessed his progress in French between his arrival in Paris and the first day of shooting was very impressed.

In one of the versions of the script, Ahmad had something to do with cinema, as if he was also the one who'd write the other characters' lines...

In one of the earlier versions of the script, I imagined his job may be related to cinema but then I realized I didn't want him to have a specific job. I wanted nothing specific to be known about him. We had to feel curious about him, wishing to find out more. But he's not given the opportunity to deliver more information about himself. Even when he attempts to justify his return to Iran, his partner in the scene doesn't let him do so. He may be a filmmaker, a documentary maker, a photographer... not knowing leaves all these options open. I think he has a job which you cannot do well away from home. This is one of the reasons why he left France.

Is he more intellectual than Samir?

He's a man who needs to be active. One of those people who arrive in a place and cannot help fixing things: either the bike or the sink, or a dinner... They feel uncomfortable when out of their habitual context because being elsewhere means being inactive. For Ahmad, standing still is painful. We then understand why he suffered from depression when he was forced to undergo this period of passivity.

How did you direct Pauline, whose role is one of the pivots of the narrative?

I met many girls of her age before choosing Pauline. I saw a test that had been shot with her. I immediately knew that she would bring the right strength to the role. The key of her performance was her motivation. Lucie is secretive and reserved, like Ahmad. Being both introverted gives them a certain closeness. Pauline herself has something mysterious in the eyes. In the script, Lucie is not Ahmad's daughter but I did want them to give an impression of being related, as a child with her father. Some kind of complicity. She's the one who's been missing Ahmad the most since he left. She has not only lost her mother's husband, she's also lost a father.

Truffaut said children can't lie in film and they give a different truth from adult actors. Do you share this feeling?

I have come to the conclusion that I'm not able to make a film without a child in it. It is difficult to work with children, though. But I find their presence opens the atmosphere of the film to affects and emotions which bring a level of sincerity to it. In my films, children do not lie, unless they are under the pressure of adults.

Are children both witnesses and victims of the adults in the film?

One child that nobody sees is the one Marie is carrying. Even before being born, his or her destiny is already decided by the others. I wonder what this child will be told later about his or her past and about what happened before the birth.

What are the differences between shooting in Iran and in France?

It wasn't really different for me. I worked in the same fashion in both countries. Here there are more means and cinema is more of an industry. In Iran, cinema is a convergence of individual creativity, whereas here creativity is more collective.

The camera was handheld in A SEPARATION and in this film it is more often still. Why this style change?

Once the story took shape and I went to see the locations, I realized this story had to be steadier, with a camera that would move less, that wouldn't communicate a feeling of restlessness. In A SEPARATION, all the important events took place in the here and now, in front of the viewer's eyes. Here the key events have taken place in the past and we can only witness their inner consequences on the characters. The film is more interiorized and therefore more still.

Are you a moralist?

I don't see myself as a moralist. But I can't deny that moral is at stake in this film. You can also choose a sociological or psychological approach of the film. But it's obvious that many situations can be seen under the moral angle.

Interview With Bérénice Bejo

What was your first impression when you read the script of THE PAST?

I had to wait a month before I received it. I'd met Asghar, then I went abroad on vacation and I waited to find out if he was going to give me the script, and if he was going to offer me the role or not. When I finally got hold of it, I picked it up like a jewel, a rare object that I was lucky to have in my hands. I found everything in it that I liked in his previous films. A mood, characters who aren't just monochrome, and who always retain a degree of mystery, and a complex story which continually makes the spectator change his or her mind. I finished reading it enchanted.

How did your first meeting go?

We met two hours before I took a flight, and I've never done a test like that! Asghar was looking for something in my face, I didn't know what. Then he put some cotton wool in my mouth, he darkened my forehead, he worked on the corners of my mouth. To the point where I said to the make-up artist: "If he wants to change my face that much, he might as well find someone else." We hardly spoke on the day of the tests. Just a little about the character. And when I left, I knew next to nothing.

When he spoke about the character, what did he say?

"She's a woman with two children, who is in love with a man who has a child, and who has to get divorced from another man." He asked me if I had any children. I told him I have two, and that my partner also has two. So I'm mother to four children, every other week. It was a way of telling him: "I can relate to what you are telling me, and perhaps I can find an echo of it in my life so that it works on screen."

Asghar Farhadi is very keen on organizing rehearsals before his shoots. How long did they last?

Two months. We met up three or four times a week, sometimes also on a Saturday, and we rehearsed for four to five hours. It's something I'd never done before, and must be close to the preparation for a stage actor, working as a troupe. Asghar had us do exercises for half an hour; we walked round the room, we ran, we relaxed, we did sit-ups. And he always demonstrated the exercises to us, clearly taking the role of troupe leader. After that, we read the script, and sometimes we improvised a little around it. And we always all did the same, even when the scene didn't involve us. By the end, I was growing more and more impatient. I wanted to get on with filming, especially since Asghar's demands were becoming increasingly precise.

Did this precision scare you ahead of the shoot?

I was mainly afraid of growing tired of the text and the story. And once we started shooting, I felt I'd already done the film! In movies, the first montage that the editor puts together right after the shoot is called the "rough cut". I felt as if I had done this rough cut myself! When you're an actor, you sometimes worry about lacking in spontaneity, but I discovered that it is through

working that one becomes more spontaneous. You know the character so well that things escape from you.

So in the end, how did the shoot go?

Asghar made it easy. I was never struggling, I always played Marie quite naturally because I knew her by heart. I'm not saying there were no moments of doubt, times when we redid takes, when we were all groping around for something, but I experienced all the incidents in her life from the inside. Sometimes in the evening, I'd say: "I don't understand. I feel as if it all came so naturally." That was exactly what Asghar was after: for me never to intellectualize the character, for me to always live it from the inside.

Are you at all like Marie?

Not at all. That's an interesting point: I was shooting scenes in which Asghar asked one thing or another from me, and I would think: "That's so not me!" At no time would I have reacted the way Marie reacts. What a delight for an actor to play a character so easily who is the complete opposite of themselves.

What did you know about Marie at the start of rehearsals? Had you constructed a back-story for her character?

I knew she was a pharmacist in Paris, whilst living on the outskirts. It's not really very clear, but I imagined she was a simple employee at the pharmacy. During rehearsals, we thought about her relationship with Ahmad, how they had met, and also who was her first husband with whom she had two children. And also why Ahmad and Marie split up. We even acted out some break-up scenes. We imagined that they separated via Skype. Ahmad left, saying he'd be back, but he never did come back. It was important for me to act out those scenes: it forged something between Ali, who plays Ahmad, and me. I could look him in the eyes, laugh with him, cry – he was part of my everyday life. We also constructed the past of the character played by Tahar. For example, we did quite an interesting exercise in which Asghar asked us, facing the camera, to say who Samir's wife was. I described her physically. Then Tahar did the same thing. And gradually a picture of this woman emerged...

The script stipulates that there was a complicated episode, that Ahmad was depressive for a long time. Did you discuss this period and imagine these moments?

No. Asghar often talks about immigrants. He often says that Iranian culture is very different to ours, and that often those Iranians who come to France cannot adapt to our lifestyle. They get depressed and return home. I think Ahmad's character is a little like that. He's someone who tries to integrate into a new society, into a new life, and who genuinely falls in love. But at some point, it's too much for him and he'd rather go home. Marie has understood what happened to Ahmad. If she's angry with him, it's because he didn't have the courage to tell her to her face. You can tell in his films that Asghar believes in women more than in men; that he finds women stronger and more expressive.

The story is universal, but does it say anything about today's France?

No, not particularly. It has something to say about today's world. About the complicated relationships between human beings, about the situations in which they may find themselves, which are sometimes completely absurd. In fact, Asghar likes posing questions, putting people in certain situations, but don't count on him to supply any answers or solutions. That's what works in his filmmaking.

Your character in some ways serves the role of provoking emotions, while the masculine characters are more evasive, or cowardly.

It's true, Marie is always at the heart of the action. She's the one who asks the difficult questions, and who is waiting for the answers. But as an actress, I didn't really feel that, because Asghar's way of shooting is very particular, very meticulous. The shoot was very long. Sometimes we did five shots a day, when on another film, you might do 15. Everything is at once diluted and very precise.

How do you grasp the character when you work fragment by fragment?

That's what the rehearsals were for. Then there's the total confidence I have in Asghar. He can be really very, very precise. Certain scenes are put together like a ballet. For example, he would say: "Now Bérénice, you do this, you go there, at this point you speak, you move in that direction. And you, Tahar, once she speaks, you move this way." And he would perform all my movements, then those of Tahar, then say our dialogue but without acting. To begin with, this can be quite unsettling. You wonder how you can put your own stamp on it. But in fact, it doesn't always happen as he demonstrated it; he just indicates a path. It's his way of helping us, of saying: "Here, I'll give you a pathway so that you feel loved, aided, watched over, but from then on, do what you like." And I love that. He's a manipulator, but with no perversity.

Asghar Farhadi doesn't speak French. What did that change on set?

During the two months of preparation, we really had time to get used to the person who was translating, Arash. He did an extraordinary job, translating everything. When Asghar said to us: "I'd like you to go to the left, er no, sorry, I'd like you to go the right," Arash repeated all that word for word. He became Asghar's voice. To begin with it was quite disconcerting, but as things went along, I didn't even think about Asghar not speaking French. Anyway, Asghar is so expressive, he makes so many gestures, I don't even need Arash to translate. I already know where he's going.

Interview With Tahar Rahim

Initially, you were due to make another film with Asghar Farhadi. What was that, and what happened?

Asghar had seen A PROPHEET, and he told me that was why he wanted to work with me. We met up and he told me about this project. It seems quite a while ago now, but I remember there was a man and a woman who fell in love over the internet. The writing came up against a specific problem: the use of a webcam. Anyway, we were supposed to see each other three weeks later, and during this meeting he told me the plot of THE PAST. I asked about the other film. He replied that he'd rather make this one, because it was more personal for him. It came as a surprise, but since we hadn't yet started working ...

Why did he choose you?

I don't know exactly. But I think Asghar chooses actors for their "modeling clay" potential. I think he likes to transform people. He's not interested in taking an actor and just asking him to do what he's done before, and he's right. What's more, he wanted to wash me clean of all my previous roles. He had seen all my films and it was obsessive. It went right down to the detail of the costumes. Sometimes I would wear a jacket a bit like one I'd worn in another film, and he'd say, "No, I've seen that before, I don't want that."

Did Asghar talk to you about your origins?

We touched on the subject, and we agreed: the film shouldn't be about that. The film is like what society is like today in France – how we go through it with our highs and our lows, but with no question of cultural heritage, of being a couple from an immigrant background, and so on. Asghar understood that the country has moved beyond that.

How would you describe the character of Samir?

As a man who's tired of life. He is hung-up on his guilt, caught between a love which still lasts and a new love – between a past life and the desire to move on to a future life. And I think he's a guy who really is constantly depressed, but who keeps it all inside. He hangs on, and that's a sign of his maturity. He's a bit older than me – in his thirties – and he's taken a few knocks in life. No doubt this has aged him more quickly. Asghar transformed me, making my hair a little gray. I adopted a slightly heavy gait, and slower movements, whereas normally I'm much fleet of foot.

Did you see the character like that right away?

To begin with, I imagined him more smiley, more into the spontaneity of the good things in life. But Asghar saw him differently. We talked about it a lot. For him, it was a character very like the father in BICYCLE THIEF. Asghar asked me to watch De Sica's film. He wanted me to understand the almost adult relationship that a father can have with a child. My nature and my

own upbringing made me gravitate towards someone more upbeat, but in the end, Asghar was right.

Was the long rehearsal process something new for you?

I rehearsed a lot for the Jacques Audiard film. But it was a different kind of rehearsal; it was about finding the character, constructing him. With Asghar, it was about doing it his way. He wanted to make his actors malleable so they could fit with the directions he gives.

What did the rehearsals bring to you?

They helped me understand my character better, and helped me adapt to how the shoot was going to be using Asghar's method. They also allowed me to probe a bit more around the important issues in the script and the relationships between the characters. Perhaps most important was discovering how the script, and the story itself, would be enhanced by the directing. Things emerged during rehearsals that didn't exist in the script, notably the emotional relationships between the characters. Everything became more complex than what I had come to expect from the readings.

With Asghar, did you think about what Samir's past might have been?

Yes, we did a lot of work on that subject. I remember one exercise: Asghar asked me how I met my wife, what she was like physically, and the exercise was all the more interesting given that I hadn't prepared for it. It was really improvised. We also did some memory exercises to learn how to look at each other carefully. I had to look at the young actor who plays my son for 30 seconds, then we had to stand back-to-back and describe exactly which clothes we were wearing, the feature of each other's face, and so on. These are exercises from Asghar's previous work as a theater director, and it's very important to know the characters biographical elements and to integrate them, so you don't think about them during the shoot. That allowed me to be immersed in another life.

During rehearsals, did you also invent how Samir and Marie had met?

Yes, it was quite simply when he went to fetch his wife's medication from that pharmacist. In moments of distress like these, welcoming arms can be either dangerous or life-saving, it all depends. Marie also came to bring her laundry to the dry cleaners and Samir found someone to talk to in those moments. That's how life goes.

On the set, how did you adapt to Asghar Farhadi's very meticulous way of working?

I just adapted! With me, the energy always dissipates at a given moment – I can't remain in a constant state all the time, that's impossible. My way of decompressing is to relax between takes. And when I have to do a difficult scene and I have to stay concentrated, you really have to catch it quick because it's hard to remain sincere and honest in an emotion. I remember a detail which illustrates Asghar's precision. It was one of the final scenes in the film: Samir is seen through a little window in a door. I had been raised up a bit to achieve the composition that Asghar wanted.

Then they did the reverse shot, which was quite a wide shot in which I'm seen from behind, and then, obviously, they had to remove the little plates on which I'd been standing. Asghar asked me to take two steps back so that the perspective gave the right impression, making it seem as though I was in the same place. No one else would have noticed, but for him it was important.

What are the main sentiments that motivate Samir? Sadness? Guilt?

Both, and I think also indecision. And beyond these three sentiments, there's love too, of course, because if there were no love involved, his case would be quickly resolved. Love sometimes leads to complex situations like this one.

What is the role of Ahmad's character, in your view?

He's a catalyst, and in the end, he makes Samir and Marie bond. Sometimes, you can be in a fog, and until you get a jolt, you can't move forward. It can be necessary for an outside element to restore dialog when it has become impossible.

Samir doesn't show any open animosity towards Ahmad, nor show any real signs of affection towards Marie: is that what Asghar Farhadi asked of you?

Yes, it was a precise request. I tended to show a bit more, to try and be more amiable. But Asghar didn't want that. He was right, given Samir's situation: he lives with a sick person, with whom he can no longer really communicate. He's in limbo, and that prevents him from attaining happiness. Once again, Asghar is the most meticulous filmmaker with whom I've worked. Thanks to him, it's the first time I have brought together the internal work with the external. When I say external, I mean the scenography of the theater; for example very precise movements, almost choreographed. Sometimes, Asghar is a bit like a puppeteer who'd like to give life to his puppets. And I like that, when I feel confident.

Interview With Ali Mosaffa

When did you meet Asghar Farhadi for the first time?

The first time that I saw Mr. Farhadi, he'd come to talk about a script to Leila Hatami, my wife. But I had followed his career and seen his films. I knew his work. We knew each other as two Iranian film professionals.

What's your background?

I've been acting in Iranian films for 24 years. I started randomly. I was getting bored at the university and I was offered to act in a film. I went there just to clear my head. My first film was a 3rd zone commercial type of film. But then came my third film, PARI, directed by Dariush Mehrjui and being an actor took on a new meaning for me. I'd just been having fun until then. Meeting Mehrjui made me take cinema seriously.

How did Asghar Farhadi talk you into the project?

I went through several auditions. A month before the shooting started, I wasn't sure I had the role. Being able to speak French was obligatory. Funnily enough, I still don't consider myself to be a French speaker. But I've always heard the language. I even started learning it a few years ago, then stopped, then started again and so on. French had become like a chronic disease I couldn't get rid of! A constant problem... My wife happens to speak French to our children at home. So for the past few years, French has played an increasing role in my life.

How did acting in French affect your performance?

I've thought a lot about that. I heard something Mr Kiarostami said about his experience in Japan, shooting a film with actors whose language he doesn't understand. He said that in spite of the loss of a tool as a director, he'd gained a unique way of evaluating the acting. He was no longer duped by the language. He was able to perceive more accurately and more deeply the quality of acting. This can be applied to the actor too. When acting in a different language, you lose the weapon of your mother tongue which you can usually employ to cover some weaknesses in your acting, by the inflexion of your voice, by a mastery gained throughout your life. Without this weapon, you have no choice but to base your acting on primitive elements like your eyes, for instance.

How would you define Ahmad?

He's an outsider in France. Although he's familiar with the culture and has lived here for 4, 15 or 20 years, it makes no difference, I think, he still remains a foreigner. Like many people from the East, he doesn't express his feelings directly. That's how his reactions must be understood and interpreted. This difference existing between the Iranians and the French can cause many misunderstandings. As for the rest of his personality, I'm not the kind of actor who tries to understand all the complexity of the character before performing the role.

Did you and Asghar Farhadi imagine a past for Ahmad? Why he came to France the first time, how he met Marie...

That is part of Mr. Farhadi's method. He talks about his characters' past. It's probably necessary to the writing process. I don't wish to know everything about the character and never ask anything about him to the writer or the director. I think trying to explain the character's behavior through his past is only a way of justifying his present contradictions. But I feel that the contradictions should be accepted in order to make the character real. Trying to erase them is useless. Trying at all costs to understand a character doesn't help the actor perform the role.

Is Ahmad's function to help the others speak and reveal certain things?

What's true about Ahmad is that he cares so much about these people, he can't help trying to help them sort out their problems. But this is not his natural tendency, he's not that involved in other people's lives and he doesn't feel he's able to help them solve their problems. He's involved only because of the affection he feels towards them. That is one of contradictions. If he cares so much about Marie's life, how could he leave her? That's his personality. He may be representative of a generation in Iran. Truthful people who care about others and wish they could help them. But the times don't encourage them in this way. They feel torn apart. Help the others, but to what extent? They try to preserve their own lives but they've been taught selflessness.

Ahmad's expression is very soft...

I may speak slowly because it's in French. But in real life, even in Farsi, I do speak slowly and I'm a slow person. It's my way of being. But it's also a reaction. I feel the French speak very fast. I can't help behaving differently between actors who have something in common. So, the faster they speak, the slower I feel like speaking, even if I know my lines and I'm able to say them fast.

Is your character Asghar Farhadi's spokesperson? Does he for instance represent the gaze of an Iranian man on a French couple?

I don't think Asghar Farhadi wishes to have a spokesperson in the film. Based on what I know of his work and his approach, he would specifically avoid having anyone represent him, or making a film that would be a kind of a manifesto. Nevertheless, because this character is Iranian, he must have transferred more of himself on him than on the others.

What was working with French actors like?

It was a very friendly atmosphere. I never felt like I was working with foreigners. I don't know if it's always the case, but with Bérénice, Tahar, Pauline, I really felt supported. Quite often, when I would make a mistake in French or say a wrong line and someone would come and correct me, Bérénice would try to minimize my mistake, saying I had a cute accent! I really felt they were looking after me as fellow actors. I really appreciated this professional solidarity that I felt in French cinema.

Is a French shoot different from an Iranian shoot?

The principles are very similar. We must have borrowed a lot from French cinema. Although here, things are more formal, more substantial.

Is THE PAST a French or an Iranian story?

I think the strength of this script is that it's neither French nor Iranian. It's a human story.

Interview With Cinematographer Mahmoud Kalari

As a cinematographer, what is special about working with Asghar Farhadi?

Working with Asghar Farhadi is always a thrill because there are many unknown factors. It's a very spontaneous method of filming with a lot of last minute decisions, which are by nature hard to predict. I find that to be really exciting. Difficult, but exciting. Asghar Farhadi has one very distinct characteristic: I think he doesn't know how to make a bad film. I believe there is an important reason for that. He immerses himself in the project and lets emotion drive his decision-making. For people who are unfamiliar with his process, it can be difficult, that's for certain. But if you accept it, you find yourself constantly discovering, moving from one surprise to another.

How did you define with Asghar Farhadi what the look of this film would be?

In *A SEPARATION*, the camera was entirely handheld except for three still shots. But you should be aware that Mr Farhadi is capable of going back on a large part of what you had previously defined at the last minute. He does it every time. You may have discussed the style and the visual nature of the film, but you always have to be ready for him to change his mind. He does the same thing with the actors. In the last take, he may say to them to forget all of the direction and to play the part in an entirely different way. He does this often. In the beginning, this film was also meant to be all shot with a handheld camera. But very quickly, by the end of the second day, the decision was made to do still shots. The story itself and the structure of the narrative persuaded to change our method and find a new form which we then adopted.

How does Asghar Farhadi behave on set?

He rejects everything that seems artificial or conventional to him, in terms of composition, lighting, acting, everything... you can hear him saying to the actors, "Now you are acting", "That was too cinematic". He does the same thing when setting up the shot. He'd say : "It's overly composed", "the frame looks too neat", "the lighting is too perfect", "It's too beautiful, I don't want that!" Asghar Farhadi considers that a shot is just right, according to his ideas, specifically when it doesn't respect the established norms. It's sometimes difficult for his collaborators to understand this and to trust him. I believe that the more important thing for him is coherence between the global conception and, at the same time, the conception of each sequence. There are certain chapters in the story that he wanted to be static, immobile, even heavy. For others, he wanted lots of movement. Certain sequences are composed of very short shots, like the last two chapters we filmed. And there are also long shots mixed in. This can disturb the homogeneity of the global structure of the film. But I have to say that he's a master who has the artistry to control everything while assuring that the coherence and the continuity of the film remain in place.

In *A SEPARATION*, the characters are fleeing from one another, in *The Past*, they are often filmed together...

Indeed, in *A Separation*, the camera was a sort of narrator, a third eye who was telling a story. While here, the camera takes on the point of view of each character. In this film, the characters get close to each other, while still maintaining a certain distance from one another. But they are

gathered together in sorts of choral sequences. And so, Asghar Farhadi has taken on the way each character views the others and the situation. And then, there was also something that my team was constantly talking about here, something they found both disconcerting and interesting : Mr Farhadi placed the actors in the most uncomfortable situations and the most complicated in terms of lighting and setting up the shot. He would place them in doorframes, which is something we avoid at all costs in the cinema. There were two light sources which we were stuck between. These sort of challenges are what I find so interesting about this film. Asghar Farhadi seemed to intentionally place actors in settings that hindered a classically esthetic process and a traditional way of approaching them.

Cast Bios

Born in Argentina, **BÉRÉNICE BEJO (Marie)** arrived in France at the age of 3. Immersed rapidly in the cinema world by her father, the director Miguel Bejo, she started her career in 1998 in LES SOEURS HAMLET by Abdelkrim Bahlo. Gérard Jugnot offered her her first lead role in MOST PROMISING YOUNG ACTRESS in 2000. She then shot briefly in the US in A KNIGHT'S TALE with Heath Ledger, and then back in France with directors like Laurent Bouhnik, Steve Suissa and Marie-France Pisier. In 2006, she co-starred with Jean Dujardin in OSS 117:CAIRO, NEST OF SPIES, directed by Michel Hazanavicius.

With Peppy Miller's part in THE ARTIST, written and directed by Michel Hazanavicius, she reached international recognition. For this role she received a Cesar Award for Best Actress and nominations all around the world, including Best Actress at the BAFTAs and Best Actress in a supporting role at the Golden Globes and at the Academy Awards.

She has just finished shooting Eric Barbier's new film LE DERNIER DIAMANT, in which she co-stars with Yvan Attal.

TAHAR RAHIM (Samir) got his first lead role in 2009 in APROPHET by Jacques Audiard (Grand Prix – Cannes Film Festival 2009). The film won both critical and audience recognition and he received the Cesar awards for Most Promising Actor and for Best Actor in 2010 as well as the Patrick Deweare Prize. In 2011, he starred in his first English language film THE EAGLE by Kevin MacDonald and in two other films selected in Cannes (FREE MEN by Ismael Ferroukhi with Michael Lonsdale) and in Venice (LOVE AND BRUISES by Lou Ye). He then played the part of Auda in BLACK GOLD by Jean-Jacques Annaud.

He is now continuing his international career and will appear in Fath Akin's new film THE CUT.

ALI MOSAFFA (Ahmad) was born in Tehran (Iran). He graduated from the University of Tehran in Civil Engineering and began his career as an actor in 1991 in Habib Kavosh's film OMID.

The same year, he received the prize for Best Actor at the Fajr Film Festival for his role in PARI, a film by Darius Mehrjui. In 1996 he met his future wife, the Iranian actress Leila Hatami, during the shooting of LEILA, also directed by Darius Mehrjui.

Ali Mosaffa then went on to direct his first short features INCUBUS, THE NEIGHBOR as well as the documentary THE DECEIT OF POESY. He then went on to direct his first feature film in 2005 with PORTRAIT OF A LADY FAR AWAY, starring Leila Hatami and Homayoun Ershadi. It was awarded with the Sutherland Trophy at the BFI London Film Festival. His second film, THE LAST STEP starring Leila Hatami won the FIPRESCI prize and the Crystal Globe for Best Actress at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival.

Born in 1996 in Mons (Belgium), **PAULINE BURLET (Lucie)** started taking drama lessons at the age of five.

She was discovered by Olivier Dahan at the age of nine, who chose her to be the young Edith Piaf in his film LA MÔME (LA VIE EN ROSE). With her role in DEAD MAN TALKING by Patrick Ridremont, she was nominated at 2013 Magritte of Cinema in Brussels for most promising actress.

Crew Bios

MAHMOUD KALARI (Cinematographer) was born in Tehran. After having studied photography in the United States, he entered the SIGMA agency in Paris with whom he worked for four years before going back to Iran where he began his carrier as Director of Photography at the beginning of the 1980's.

He worked amongst others with Moshen Makhmalbaf, Darius Mehrjui, and Jafar Panahi, before starting his collaboration with Asghar Farhadi on A SEPARATION. As of today he has been Director of Photography for more than sixty feature films.

ALEXANDRE MALLET-GUY (Producer)

THE PAST is a new step in the collaboration between Asghar Farhadi and Memento Films. "I met Asghar in Berlin in 2009," recalls Alexandre Mallet-Guy. "I had just discovered ABOUT ELLY and was about to acquire the French rights for it. A couple of days later, the film was rewarded by the Jury and Asghar went back home with the Silver Bear for Best Director." ABOUT ELLY was released in France in September of the same year. The film took 100 000 admissions, a number that had not been seen in a long time for an Iranian film. "The audience's response to the film was fantastic, but it didn't come as a surprise to me, as I was already convinced by the universality of Asghar's cinema," explains Alexandre Mallet-Guy.

The deal on A SEPARATION was therefore very rapidly sealed, well before the announcement of its selection at the Berlin Film Festival in 2011. "We were no longer just the French distributor of the film but also the international sales agent, with my partner Emilie Georges", continues Alexandre Mallet-Guy. The Berlinale kicked off and A SEPARATION soon imposed itself as the phenomenon of the year. Crowned with its Golden Bear and two Silver Bears, the film was released in France in June. It went on to do in one week what ABOUT ELLY did over the length of its release. The film soon became the most viewed Iranian film in France, as well as the most widely exposed one as it was screened in 250 theaters. By the end of its career, which spread over almost a year, the film had made one million admissions in France and won a Golden Globe, a César and an Academy Award. In the meantime, Memento Films acquired the rights for FIREWORKS WEDNESDAY, which was re-released in July 2011, as well as BEAUTIFUL CITY, released for the first time in France in the summer of 2012.

The collaboration continued with THE PAST. "Asghar had mentioned a story that he would have liked to shoot in Berlin," recalls Alexandre Mallet-Guy. "I listened to him and then took the liberty to suggest transposing the action to Paris. This was in the beginning of 2011, and de facto, I was committing to accompanying him as a producer. Asghar therefore came and settled down in Paris, and this is where he decided to write an entirely different film. I believe it was important for him to use his own experience in France in the story. This is the project that became THE PAST."

The film, which at that time still did not have a name, was officially announced at the Cannes Film Festival in 2012. There, Asghar Farhadi and Alexandre Mallet-Guy received the EU MEDIA Prize, granted to projects in development. The presales started there as well. Bérénice Bejo joined Tahar Rahim by the end of July and the rehearsals started beginning of August for a two-month period. "Asghar worked in the same way as he always did," notes Alexandre Mallet-Guy. "It was important for him, as it was the first time he was shooting outside of Iran, in a language that wasn't his. It was extremely important to me that he feel able to keep the same work habits, because they had modeled his style and brought him so much success." THE PAST was budgeted at 8 M €. Filming lasted for 15 weeks and was both in a studio in Brysur-Marne, where the interiors of Marie's house were constructed, as well as in Sevrans and Paris. "THE PAST is truly a French film, orchestrated by an Iranian director that has already been able to move the entire world", summarizes Alexandre Mallet-Guy.

To finance the film, Memento Films built a coproduction with France 3 Cinema and BIM Distribuzione in Italy. Also partners on the film were: Canal+, Ciné +, France Télévisions, France Télévisions Distribution, the CNC, the Ile-de France region, Eurimages, the EU MEDIA Program and a couple of tax funds.

THE PAST will premiere in competition at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival. Memento Films has already had the privilege of appearing on the Croisette with KILOMETER ZERO, by Hiner Saleem, which premiered in Competition in 2005. This was Alexandre Mallet-Guy's first production. Mallet-Guy founded Memento in March 2003 with Emilie Georges who heads the sales and produces her own projects as well. In 2006, Alexandre Mallet-Guy produced TAXIDERMIA by Györgi Pálfi, whose first feature, HIC, had marked the company's first incursion into distribution three years earlier, as well as GOLDEN DOOR by the Italian filmmaker Emanuele Crialese, starring Charlotte Gainsbourg, which was awarded with a Silver Lion and was released in France in the spring of 2007. GOLDEN DOOR was an ambitious project shot between Argentina and Italy, with a budget of 11 M€, and at that time Memento's first large success in theaters with almost 300 000 admissions. Alexandre Mallet-Guy was also a co producer in 2007 on Bent Hammer's O' HORTEN, in 2012 on Rodrigo Pla's LA DEMORA (Memento Films had distributed the Mexican director's first feature LA ZONA, which had won the Lion of the Future Award in 2007 at the Venice Film Festival) and finally in 2013, on UNDER THE RAINBOW, by Agnès Jaoui which already made almost one million admissions only two months after its release.

He has also distributed over fifty films, including SALVADORE ALLENDE by Patricio Guzmán, TETRO by Francis Ford Coppola, AMREEKA by Cherien Dabis and POST MORTEM by Pablo Larrain.

Alexandre Mallet-Guy will also be the co-producer on the next films by Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Joachim Trier, both of whose films he has already released in France: ONCE UPON A TIME IN ANATOLIA (Grand Jury Prize in Cannes Film Festival in 2011) and OSLO, 31. AUGUST (Un Certain Regard 2011 and nominated for Best Foreign Film at the 2013 César).