



**\*\*WORLD PREMIERE - WORLD DOCUMENTARY COMPETITION\*\***

# HONEYLAND

Directed By **Ljubomir Stefanov and Tamara Kotevska**



2019 / Macedonia / Turkish with English Subtitles / 85 mins

## **FESTIVAL SCREENINGS**

**Mon. 1/28, 6:00 p.m., Park Avenue, PC - World Premiere**

*Tue. 1/29, 3:30 p.m., Holiday Village 3, PC - P&I*

Tue. 1/29, 9:00 p.m., Broadway Centre 6, SLC

Wed. 1/30, 9:00 a.m., Temple, PC

Fri. 2/1, 6:00 p.m., Holiday Village 2, PC

Sat. 2/2, 11:30 a.m., Holiday Village 1, PC

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## **LOGLINE**

When a nomadic family move in and break Honeyland's basic rule, the last female wild beekeeper in Europe must save the bees and restore natural balance.

## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

Nestled in an isolated mountain region deep within the Balkans, Hatidze Muratova lives with her ailing mother in a village without roads, electricity or running water. She's the last in a long line of wild beekeepers, eking out a living farming honey in small batches to be sold in the closest city – a mere four hours' walk away. Hatidze's peaceful existence is thrown into upheaval by the arrival of an itinerant family, with their roaring engines, seven rambunctious children and herd of cattle. Hatidze optimistically meets the promise of change with an open heart, it doesn't take long however, before a conflict evolves that exposes the fundamental tension between nature and humanity, harmony and discord, exploitation and sustainability.

The debut feature from documentarians Ljubomir Stefanov and Tamara Kotevska, HONEYLAND is made with the widescreen sweep of an epic, yet clearly built from an intimate collaboration between filmmakers and subject. With a surprising sense of humor, it's a tough and tender portrait of the delicate balance between humankind and nature, a glimpse at a fast disappearing way of life, and an unforgettable testament to one extraordinary woman's resilience.

## **LONGER SYNOPSIS**

Nestled in an isolated mountain region deep within the Balkans, Hatidze Muratova lives with her ailing mother in a village without roads, electricity or running water. She's the last in a long line of Macedonian wild beekeepers, eking out a living farming honey in small batches to be sold in the closest city – a mere four hours' walk away. Hatidze's peaceful existence is thrown into upheaval by the arrival of an itinerant family, with their roaring engines, seven rambunctious children and herd of cattle. Hatidze optimistically meets the promise of change with an open heart, offering up her affections, her brandy and her tried-and-true beekeeping advice.

It doesn't take long however, before Hussein, the itinerant family's patriarch, senses opportunity and develops an interest in selling his own honey. Hussein has seven young mouths to feed and nowhere to graze his cattle, and he soon casts Hatidze's advice aside in his hunt for profit. This causes a breach in the natural order that provokes a conflict with Hatidze that exposes the fundamental tension between nature and humanity, harmony and discord, exploitation and sustainability. Even as the family provides a much-needed respite from Hatidze's isolation and loneliness, her very means of survival are threatened.

The debut feature from documentarians Ljubo Stefanov and Tamara Kotevska HONEYLAND was shot over three years by a skeleton crew committed to an intimate collaboration between filmmakers and subject. HONEYLAND is made with the widescreen sweep of an epic, visually ambitious and driven by an unexpectedly dramatic narrative and a surprising sense of humor. It's a tough and tender portrait of the delicate balance between humankind and nature, a glimpse at a fast disappearing way of life, and an unforgettable testament to one extraordinary woman's resilience.

## **DIRECTORS' STATEMENT**

The HONEYLAND story began long before humans ever lived in the region, but our narrative starts with its last two remaining inhabitants: Hatidze and her mother Nazife. Just as worker bees spend their entire lives taking care of the queen bee which never leaves the hive, Hatidze has committed her own life to the care of her blind and paralyzed mother, unable to leave their ramshackle hut. The film is set in an unearthly land, unattached to a specific time and geography, unreachable by regular roads, and yet, only 20 km away from the nearest modern city.

The families here use an ancient Turkish vernacular, so the film is driven by visual narration rather than dialogue, the characters are understood through their body language and their relationships, and their emotions. This visual and visceral communication draws the audience closer to the protagonists, and more importantly - closer to nature. Engendering the feeling that we as humans are but one species among many, equally affected by the circumstances around us.

The Nagoya Protocol - a United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) - came into force at the end of 1993 and established global guidelines on access to natural resources. Its objective was the promotion of fair and equitable sharing of benefits for both providers - i.e. land, plants, animals - and users - i.e. humans - of resources. Genetic diversity, or biodiversity, enables populations to adapt to changing environments and a changing climate, contributing to the conservation and sustainability of resources. The "honey crisis" in this film illustrates the risk of ignoring these protocols and upsetting the respect for biodiversity.

Hatidze's story is a microcosm for the wider idea of how closely intertwined nature and humanity are, and how much we stand to lose if we ignore this fundamental connection.

## **A CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTORS TAMARA KOTEVSKA AND LJUBOMIR STEFANOV, AND CINEMATOGRAPHER SAMIR LJUMA**

### **HOW DID HONEYLAND COME INTO BEING?**

SAMIR LJUMA: We were commissioned to create an environmental video for The Nature Conservation Project (NCP) in Macedonia, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Ljubo went to research the region and we found out that there were some old, traditional beekeepers, wild beekeepers – still there. We discovered Hatidze and found her methods interesting: why is she only taking half the honey? She never feeds the wild bees with sugar, like contemporary beekeepers are doing during the winters. In the winter, when there is no pollen, the bees need to be fed with their own honey or the quality of the honey drops.

TAMARA KOTEVSKA: Hatidze's whole family always did it this way - her father, grandfather, great grandfather... We don't know how far back it goes. But it's far.

### **HOW MANY HOURS OF MATERIAL DID YOU COLLECT, WHAT WAS THE EDITING PROCESS?**

TAMARA: We collected over 400 hours of footage, over the course of three years. For us the dramaturgy was always very clear. From the beginning we wanted to tell a story about this woman and then when Hussein's family showed up, it became more about the conflict between them and Hatidze, and how that affects the balance of the land.

We started editing while we were still shooting - we realized that was the best way for us. We were able to say: "Alright, what are we missing here? We're missing scenes of the relationship with the

children.” So we would go, find more times, focus on the relationship with them, or their conflicts at home. Different aspects.

### **CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE AREA WHERE YOU WERE FILMING?**

LJUBO STEFANOV: There was an agreement after World War II between Yugoslavia and Turkey to change the population of the area and it was settled with a Turkic, Ottoman population – most of that population moved in over the course of just one year but it never really worked out. The state lost interest in that area, it’s a very dry area - no vegetation, no water, no agriculture nothing and They were basically forgotten. No roads, no electricity, no *nothing*. It has been virtually abandoned since the 1950s.

TAMARA: They just left the place to die out.

### **HOW DID YOU FIND HATIDZE?**

LJUBO: Working in the project we mentioned we spent a lot of time filming the wilderness, we spotted the beeholes first, and then Hatidze.

TAMARA: First we found the bee holes in the rocks, the natural habitat of the bees, and became intrigued - Who makes these holes in the stones? Who marks them? This is how the Hatidze was found, so we started exploring her story, we met her mother - after three months of research, we decided to keep following this story, and stayed for another three years.

### **HOW LONG WERE YOU IN BEKIRLIJA?**

TAMARA: The place is completely uninhabitable to most people, so the longest we could stay at a time was five days - we’d have to bring food with us, water with us, there’s no place to sleep or shower or anything.

SAMIR: The fleas out there really liked Tamara... and we never wore any protection from the bees either, because we didn’t really know how dangerous it could be.

### **TELL ME ABOUT THE GOLDEN RULE - LEAVE HALF THE HONEY FOR THE BEES. DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS BEFORE YOU BEGAN FILMING?**

TAMARA: What’s interesting is that Hatidze never told us this explicitly - we observed her way of working and came to realize the rule.

LJUBO: Hatidze knows if she took all the honey the bees would die out. She is the only person respecting this rule - for us this is very, very important. I have a 20-year background working for institutions like United Nations and one of the targets of the UN’s “Millennium Goals” is equal share of benefits - that is, equal share between user (humans, in most cases, man) and provider (nature, or area). Under equal share, if you are using a resource provided by some species or by some ecosystem, or some area, you will have to care for the future of that ecosystem. A lot of what we saw with Hatidze overlapped with this principle.

TAMARA: This all becomes symbolic of capitalism - and Hussein’s family represents the capitalist world, of wanting to take as many resources as you can so you, personally, will thrive - not thinking about how this will impact the next generation.

LJUBO: It's beyond political in my opinion - it touches on very basic things which are so basic as to be fundamental: a way of thinking, a way of being.

**YOU CLEARLY OPERATED WITH A VERY SMALL, TRUSTING CREW, TELL ME HOW YOU SIGN SOMEONE UP TO GO HANG OFF THE SIDE OF A MOUNTAIN WITH SWARMS OF BEES FLYING INTO THE CAMERA.**

TAMARA: We were a very small crew, a maximum of four people was on site at any time - sometimes less two, sometimes three - depending on the shooting day.

SAMIR: The working conditions were *very* challenging, exploring how Hatidze lived in this abandoned village for her entire life, taking care of her mother, refusing to live in proper modern conditions.

TAMARA: This was all new for all of us, but it just grew - we just went with the flow and decided to go as far as we could with these people.

LJUBO: By the end the shooting of this film was done in a very very *very* enthusiastic way!

**WAS IT HARD TO WIN HATIDZE'S TRUST?**

TAMARA: We didn't expect her to be so open to us filming, but she said her biggest wish was that one day some journalist would come from some TV station and shoot her story - walking on the mountainside, working with the honey. For her, we were fulfilling this dream and she was totally open to us. She wanted to tell her story because she realized she was the last generation to live this way.

By the end of the shoot we had become very close. We have footage of her laughing, dancing, singing to us. We really became like a family.

**HOW DID HATIDZE REACT WHEN SHE SAW THE FILM FOR THE FIRST TIME?**

TAMARA: I think she was happy, but also shocked to see herself on screen.

SAMIR: Remember: out there there's no TV, no electricity, nothing...

**DID HATIDZE OR HUSSAIN EXPECT YOU TO TAKE A SIDE DURING THE CONFLICT?**

SAMIR: I don't think they expected anything from us - when the new family arrived, we didn't know what was going to happen. It took three months to get close to Hussain's family, but we did, slowly. When the conflict with the bees began - when Hatidze called him to tell him "You shouldn't do that" ...

TAMARA: ...to tell him he killed her bees, basically. We realized we had to get close with his family and work with them so we could get the whole picture.

TAMARA: We managed to catch the conflict between them as it developed but it started when we were not actually there. They started arguing slowly, then the conflict got bigger and bigger - at that time we didn't exist to Hussain's family because we had only been shooting Hatidze. They were focused on the problem in front of them. She would call Hussein over and show him, "Look what you did to these bees." And she was too obsessed with this problem to focus on us, in a way.

SAMIR: in the end Hussein and his family were even more open than Hatidze, they're very lonely - they will accept a newcomer like family after a very short time.

LJUBO: There is nobody else out there, caring about these people. We still visit - Hussein's wife is expecting her eighth child. So we were there last week to visit them.

## **WHAT WERE THE HARDEST SCENES TO SHOOT?**

LJUBO: The relationship between Hatidze and her mother was extremely difficult.

SAMIR: I would have to just point my camera at the wall sometimes.

TAMARA: As an outsider, I felt like I was intruding on them. You feel ashamed in some situations, you don't know if you have a right to be there for their family argument. But you keep shooting.

SAMIR: The language barrier probably made it easier though. Our other cinematographer spoke Turkish but what they're speaking is an older, completely different version of Turkish, an old Ottoman dialect. It is not in use anymore. The modern Turkish language does not exist for them.

LJUBO: This is very important to emphasize: we were shooting situations in a language that *we* did not always understand.

TAMARA: We saw and filmed their fighting without understanding it. But Hatidze speaks Macedonian so later we could ask her what was happening in those scenarios.

## **TELL ME MORE ABOUT THE LANGUAGE BARRIER HELPING WITH THE SHOOT?**

TAMARA: It helped in one way - we knew they are fighting about the bees but we don't know what they are saying. It made us more objective with what we were seeing and we found some very interesting, more powerful parts as a result.

LJUBO: Like when Hatidze tells her mother "We are waiting for the summer", the mother says, "Too many winters have passed."

TAMARA: This was priceless for us, these people are illiterate, living in the middle of nowhere, yet they say such powerful things.

## **WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM YOUR TIME WITH HATIDZE?**

SAMIR: For me, it was very interesting - I'm a cinematographer, not a biologist. We were shooting Hatidze while she was opening these beehives, and everything was new for me. On one occasion I saw that one of the beehives we had shot a week before, it was more rich, there was more honey. But another hive, in the same region, had *less* honey. So, I asked Hatidze: Why more here, less there? She said, "Well, it's like how you have rich families and poor families." Then I realized that actually, the bees in a hive are functioning like one family - like humans! The workers, the protectors of the house, the mother, the queen bee who they are all taking care of...

TAMARA: This is not something new - the symbolic link between animals and humans - what's fascinating is that Hatidze is completely aware of it. People of our generation need to read about something or see it on TV and say "Wow, the bees really function like humans!" But when you see the awareness this woman has and her respect another species you feel very humbled and come to understand that you also have this knowledge, you just have to remind yourself.

We hope that the story of Hatidze can trigger a change in perspective on life for people, to remind them how much they already know about the relationship between nature and humanity, and to motivate them to find their inner strength as they reflect on this extraordinary heroine.

## **KEY CREW BIOS**

### **Ljubo Stefanov / Co-Director**

Born 1975 in Skopje. Over 20 years of experience in development and production of communication concepts and documentaries related to environmental issues and human development. Working for clients such UN agencies, Euronatur, Swisscontact etc. Previous films include "The Noisy Neighbors" (2005) and "Lake of Apples" (2017)

### **Tamara Kotevska / Co-Director**

Born on 9th of August, 1993, in Prilep, Macedonia. Tamara won the Best Balkan Film award at the Tirana International Documentary Film Festival with her graduation documentary *Students (49')*, supported by Trice Films and the Faculty of Dramatic Arts- Skopje.

Her first professional environmental documentary *Lake of Apples (27')*, supported by UNDP (as writer and co-director) played at the International Nature Namur Festival, the Prix de l'environnement (2017) award in France, an Honorable mention at the Innsbruck Film Festival in Austria (2017), and the Perseus award at T-Festival in Brno, Czech Republic (2017).

### **Atanas Georgiev / Producer / Editor**

Atanas Georgiev was born in 1977 in Skopje, Macedonia, in what was at that time Yugoslavia. He is owner of Trice Films and Film Trick production companies from Macedonia, a subsidiary and association of fx3x.com

He makes his living by editing feature films, but then he spends his money on documentaries he believes in. His debut *Cash & Marry*, which cost him many years of hard work and pulmonary embolism, has won many international awards and recognition.

### **Foltin / Music**

**FULL CREDITS**

FEATURING

HATIDZE MURATOVA  
NAZIFE MURATOVA  
HUSSEIN SAM  
LJUTVIE SAM  
MUSTAFA SAM  
MUZAFER SAM  
VELI SAM  
ALI SAM  
ALIT SAM  
GAMZE SAM  
LJUTVISH SAM  
SAFET JAVOROVAC

DIRECTED BY

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CINEMATOGRAPHERS

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SAMIR LJUMA

PRODUCER AND EDITOR

ATANAS GEORGIEV

SOUND DESIGNER

RANA EID

MUSIC

FOLTIN

PRODUCER

LJUBO STEFANOV

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS

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KORNELIJA RISTOVSKA

ADDITIONAL CINEMATOGRAPHER

KRISTIJAN KARADZOVSKI

ADDITIONAL EDITOR

BLAGOJA NEDELKOVSKI

DIALOGUE EDITOR

VANESSA KANAAN

FOLEY ARTIST

LAMA SAWAYA

FOLEY RECORDING

FRANÇOIS YAZBECK

RE-RECORDING MIXER  
FLORENT LAVALLÉE

AUDIO POST-PRODUCTION  
DB-HAL STUDIOS - BEIRUT

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DEJAN SMILESKI

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ANDREJ MARJANOVIC

MUSIC PRODUCER  
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