



## Nikdy nejsme sami

### We Are Never Alone

Petr Vaclav

**Producer** Jan Macola, Tom Dercourt, Sophie Erbs, Čestmír Kopecký. **Production companies** Mimesis Film (Prague, Czech Republic), Cinéma Defacto (Paris, France), Czech Television (Prague, Czech Republic). **Written and directed by** Petr Vaclav. **Director of photography** Štěpán Kučera. **Editor** Florent Mangeot. **Sound design** Daniel Němec. **Sound** Daniel Němec. **Production design** Milan Plešinger. **Costumes** Tereza Kučerová. **With** Karel Roden, Lenka Vlasáková, Miroslav Hanuš, Zdeněk Godla, Klaudia Dudova, Daniel Doubrava, Rudolf Tříška, David Stropěk.

DCP, colour & black/white. 104 min. Czech.

**Premiere** 14 February 2016, Berlinale Forum

**World sales** WIDE Management

Somewhere in the middle of nowhere in the Czech provinces, a handful of people come together: a paranoid prison guard, his hypochondriac neighbour and the latter's silent, despairing wife, a lovesick nightclub manager and a stripper who is a single mum. Here, peace, joy and hope are just slogans on a T-shirt. Although they live on a connecting road, life offers them nothing but dead ends. Yet brighter colours are soon mixed in to their black and white everyday existence. The encounters between the characters bear witness to rebellion and irrational hopes, as well as cruelty. The depiction of this milieu shifts between the realistic and the bizarre. The forest setting, the many tracking shots and streets, lend the action an almost metaphorical note. Where are we really, and where are we heading? In this film, the provinces are more than just a stronghold of quirky, yet sympathetic individuals; they are a frame of mind, a self-righteous need to set oneself apart from anything different. Your father is afraid of diseases, mine is afraid of people, says the prison guard's son to the hypochondriac's son.

*Anna Hoffmann*

## Who determines the spirit of the time?

No man is ever truly himself. He does not have a single, fixed character or unchanging opinions and preferences. He lives through the others. He lives for them and against them; in adoration, love, or hatred, but always connected. No one is ever alone, no matter how lonely he feels. We all live with others: some we dominate, some dominate us. The weaker submit to the stronger, the imitators to the originators, lovers to their beloved. Everything is constantly flowing, blending and changing: people's characters, opinions and paths. And all of this forms a single grand story reflecting our lack of independence.

People are products of their times. But who determines the spirit of the time? All those little people who are at once its passive victims and its co-conspirators, its co-creators.

Nikdy nejsme sami is a film about our time; about the darkness that is once again starting to embrace Europe. It is embodied by adults. But Nikdy nejsme sami is also about the desire for freedom carried within their children.

Petr Vaclav

## "We are never totally ourselves"

*What inspired you to write this screenplay?*

**Petr Vaclav:** I had the desire to make a film without a main character; a slow, oily, strong current that would carry away the whole set of characters; a film describing the current society through the fates of several people.

*Is it possible (or simple) to give up the principle of one main character leading the story?*

That is exactly what I wanted to try: to describe a world where the freedom of people is cruelly relative, where the story is not created by free characters. On the contrary, the fatal story is happening to the characters, forming and creating them. Not in the sense that the characters would be passive. On the contrary, they make decisions and they act. However, all their actions are crushed by the far stronger flow of fate, determination and inner limitations. That is why the character who succeeds in reaching the wider and more open horizon finally wins in the film; because this character doesn't let his source of freedom escape.

*The characters do not even have names. What is the reason for that?*

I wanted to conceive the characters as phenomena, as generalised characters, and that's why they are nameless. The story doesn't analyse the nature of the protagonist who is reflected in the supporting, less important characters. We are following the story of eight relatively equal protagonists. The theme becomes the main character: the set of characters and their interaction.

*What is the main subject of the film?*

That we are never alone. We are never totally ourselves, as we are constantly under the gaze of others, continually in interaction with the people whom we are lucky or unlucky enough to encounter. As for our emotions and opinions, we are very dependent creatures; and this dependence leads to feelings of loneliness, deprivation, grief and frustration... it brings anxiety or even anger. The story takes place in our contemporary

post-industrial Europe, perplexed by unemployment and terrorism. The consequence of this is often an irrational fear of the future, of the loss of one's identity and general dissatisfaction... and the desire to get revenge. That's why my characters often escape into their own passions and vicious circles, or vice versa; they see a way out in the radical search for a new leader.

*On one hand, you have a very rough character with a tendency to be politically engaged. On the other hand, the majority of your characters try to escape reality. They are apolitical, lost.*

Yes. Today, people begin to long for a leader as they lose their trust in democracy, politics and its representatives, often having a legitimate reason to do so. Or they are at least trying to escape from reality, through shopping, soft and hard drugs, pills, TV, alcohol... and when that doesn't work, radical religions become fashionable. Although these are not directly the focus of Nikdy nejsme sami, they are present in the film. One of the characters, who is scared of – among many other things – Islam, goes through a peculiar conversion: towards a personal faith in justice, in the nation. And he wants to enforce these values with armed violence if necessary.

*The only ones who really find escape are the children. It is not really a harmonious and hopeful ending. But still, there is magic on the horizon, hope, relief, sympathy...*

Children have – despite all the faults in their upbringing, the thrashing by grown-ups or the devastating influence of poor schooling – a natural inclination towards freedom. A kid who doesn't get destroyed by the teen years and the following normalisation of the soul, forced upon him by grown-ups and the society, can realise his own self and the freedom of the soul. Children can be better than their parents. Just like the slightly mentally challenged Julek or his neighbour, a mistreated child, would perhaps be better than their burly fathers. In this sense I consider Nikdy nejsme sami to be pretty optimistic.

*How about the black-and-white versus colour parts of the film? What is behind this visual concept?*

Black-and-white comes in the moments of depression and the monotonous drowning of the characters in their hopeless present. The colour comes with the birth of emotion, passion, excitement. That was my concept from the very beginning. Black-and-white plays its role also in the parts where there is blood in the film. The characters are thus not primitively realistic. Their story is not ordinary. Everybody is in conflict with everybody. That's why there is a clash of the black-and-white and colour worlds, too, in the immense differences between the characters and their perception of the world.

My cinematographer's father, Jaroslav Kučera [photographer and cinematographer on films such as Sedmikrásky/Daisies by Vera Chytilová, -ed.], used to say to us: The black-and-white image is an extreme stylisation of a colour image. I wanted to have exactly this kind of extremism in my film. And not only in the images.

*Interview: Marketa Santrochova, January 2016*



**Petr Vaclav** was born in 1967 Prague (Czechoslovakia at the time; now Czech Republic). He graduated from the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU) in Prague. Vaclav has lived in France since 2001.

#### Films

1991: *Paní Le Murie/Madame Le Murie* (35 min.). 1996: *Marian* (109 min.). 2002: *Paralelní světy/Parallel Worlds* (100 min.). 2014: *Cesta ven/The Way Out* (103 min.). 2015: *Zpověď zapomenutého/Confession of the Vanished* (78 min.). 2016: *Nikdy nejsme sami / We Are Never Alone*.