

A BLACK JESUS

a film by Luca Lucchesi

August, 2020

Trailer Link

<https://vimeo.com/466663519>

For many centuries, in a small town on the southern border of Europe, people have been worshipping a statue of a black Jesus. 19-year-old Edward from Ghana, a resident of the refugee centre which is the subject of great controversy in the village, asks to carry the statue in the annual procession and to stand next to the locals that bear its cart. The community is divided over the response.

On a journey exploring the source of fear and prejudice against “the others”, the inhabitants of this small European village are called upon to question their own identity, starting with the very icon of their faith: a black Jesus.



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A BLACK JESUS

Documentary

Length: 92 minutes

Format: DCP, 2K – Cinemascope

Synopsis

In Siculiana, a small Sicilian town in the province of Agrigento, the statue of a black Jesus has been venerated for centuries. On May 3rd, the crucifix is carried on the shoulders of chosen devotees in procession through the crowded streets of the town. On this occasion, hundreds of *Siculianesi* emigrants return from every part of Italy and abroad to pay homage to their patron saint.

In 2014, Villa Sikania, a hotel on the verge of bankruptcy, was converted by the owners into a reception centre for asylum seekers. At the height of the migrant crisis the centre hosted up to 1000 guests – a third of the local population. However, few *Siculianesi* have ever exchanged a single word with them.

The *Siculianesi*, who have always been a population of emigrants, have to deal with an exodus of young people and therefore with the lack of a workforce. One possible answer to the town's problems could be the young migrants present at Villa Sikania: their willingness to undertake any honest work could revive the fate of Siculiana. But their status as asylum seekers makes it impossible for them to make short or long-term plans or to obtain employment contracts. *Siculianesi* and migrants remain divided, not speaking with each other out of fear, but also because the Italian government has not attempted to create a fruitful dialogue between these two different faces of poverty.

The drowsy stagnancy of Siculiana is stirred up by the arrival of Edward, a 19-year old migrant from Ghana. He is immediately fascinated by the figure of the black Jesus, who he discovers for the first time during the 2018 procession. Edward decides to challenge the indifference of the *Siculianesi*. He asks them for the greatest honour: to participate, together with his friends Peter and Samuel, as bearers of the black Jesus statue during the celebrations of May 3rd.

Dialogue and understanding finally seem possible. But how much power do individuals and communities really have, within a system designed to divide rather than unite?

The result of two years of immersive research within the community of Siculiana, A BLACK JESUS is a modern parable about the fragile path towards equality and brotherhood among all human beings.

Note from the filmmakers

Luca Lucchesi's late father was a *Siculianese* and profoundly devout to the black Jesus. Visiting Siculiana's church shortly after his death, Luca was struck by the image of a group of African migrants kneeling in front of the statue of the black Christ. At the same moment, in the streets outside of the church, hundreds of *Siculianesi* were protesting to demand the closure of the reception centre that hosted them. Since then, Luca's camera has been following both locals and migrants in town.

Like many other communities already badly hit by the economic crisis, Siculiana feels abandoned by national decision-makers in the face of the complex challenges of migration and integration. This growing frustration constitutes a fertile terrain for rising nationalist parties who use poverty and uncertainty to gain votes in the most fragile regions.

We wanted to look beyond the socio-economic analysis at the real actors of this tragic play: people with desires, values and contradictions. Luca's empathic inquiry manages to reveal the *humans* behind the system, and delivers a touching, nuanced and non-judgmental point of view on a subject usually dealt with in a divisive way.

Empathy is the core theme throughout our film: their Christian faith – embodied by an unquestioned adoration for the black Jesus – should lead our protagonists to care for their neighbours, but why has it become so hard for them to *empathise* with migrants knocking at their doors? With A BLACK JESUS, we would love to keep a dialogue alive about solidarity and inclusion in our society: each one of us being somebody's stranger at a certain point of our journey through life.

A BLACK JESUS is not only a portrait of Luca's father's hometown Siculiana, it is also a powerful metaphor of a certain state of the world today. In these conflicted times, when political divisions are deepening and nationalism is rising dramatically world-wide, it seems more urgent than ever to look at ourselves and assert what kind of society we strive for. We as filmmakers see it as our duty to shape a vision of the world not only as it is, but as we believe it should be.

We consider A BLACK JESUS to be an intimate, political film: a personal testimony of faith, hope and love for humanity.

Filmmakers

LUCA LUCCHESI, writer, director and cinematographer

After graduating from Law school in Palermo, Luca decided to combine his passion for justice and stories into filmmaking. Since 2009 he has been assisting German director Wim Wenders on several projects as 1st AD, editor, and cinematographer. He has also collaborated with Hella Wenders on the documentaries *BERG FIDEL* and *SCHOOL, SCHOOL – THE TIME AFTER BERG FIDEL*. *BACHELOR PARTY*, a short on the road documentary about love, was presented at Cannes Critics' Week 2011 as part of the collective documentary project *Istanbul Express*. Luca lives in Berlin where he works as freelance director, editor and cinematographer. *A BLACK JESUS* is Luca's first feature film as director.



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Filmography as director

2020 *A BLACK JESUS*, documentary form, 92 min.

2010 *BACHELOR PARTY*, documentary form, 15 min.

2007 *ULTIMO MODELLO*, fiction, 13 min.

HELLA WENDERS, writer

Hella studied at the German Film and Television Academy dffb. Her graduation film *BERG FIDEL* (2012) was selected and awarded at several international film festivals and released in theatres throughout Germany. The sequel *SCHOOL, SCHOOL – THE TIME AFTER BERG FIDEL* premiered at Max Ophüls Festival in Saarbrücken and was released in Germany in 2017.



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WIM WENDERS, producer

Wim Wenders is considered one of the pioneers of the New German Cinema of the 1970s and one of the most important representatives of contemporary cinema.

In addition to multi-award-winning feature films, such as ALICE IN THE CITIES (1973), PARIS, TEXAS (1984) and WINGS OF DESIRE (1987), he has also created several innovative documentaries such as PINA, and most recently POPE FRANCIS - A MAN OF HIS WORD.



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LÉA GERMAIN, producer

Léa began working in film production in 2014. She gained a wide range of experience as a secretary and coordinator for German and international film productions. She then went on to work as a junior producer and production manager for independent short and feature length films. In November 2018, Léa joined Wim Wenders' production company as a producer. Since 2020, Léa has been the Head of Development at Road Movies.



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A BLACK JESUS

Director: Luca Lucchesi

Writers: Luca Lucchesi, Hella Wenders

Cinematographer: Luca Lucchesi

Sound: Francesco Vitaliti

Editor: Edoardo Morabito, Luca Lucchesi

Dramaturgical Consultant: Verena Neumann

Original Soundtrack: Roy Paci

Production: Road Movies GmbH

Producers: Wim Wenders, Léa Germain

Co-Producer: Eric Friedler, Silke Schütze, NDR Fernsehen

German Distribution: Filmwelt Verleihagentur

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