

el río

MEETING M. DURÁN



FEATURE FILMS DOCUMENTARY

Script: Alejandro Parisi

Director: TBD

Executive Producer: Cristian Marini

Executive Producer: Tif

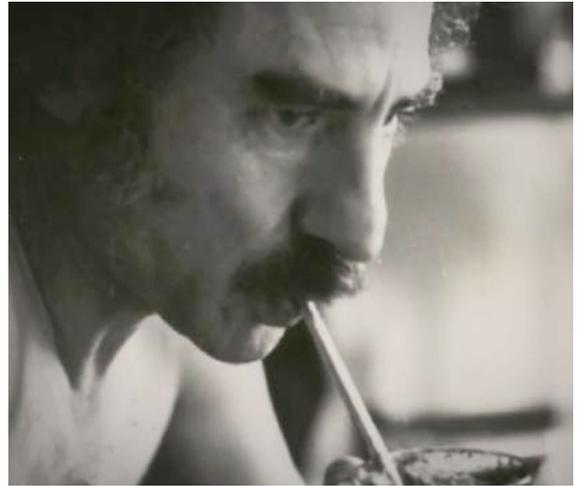
ETA: 80 minutes.

Format: Digital B&W and Color

Who was Mario Durán?

Clara, a woman who even now visits Durán's resting place, insists she convinced him to study medicine. Duran wanted to improve his lot, to earn money, to help his parents. According to her testimony, Clara advised him to study medicine because doctors earn good money and always find work.

Some say it was his mother, a washerwoman, who urged him to study medicine because she thought having a doctor for a son would guarantee the social standing the family hoped for.

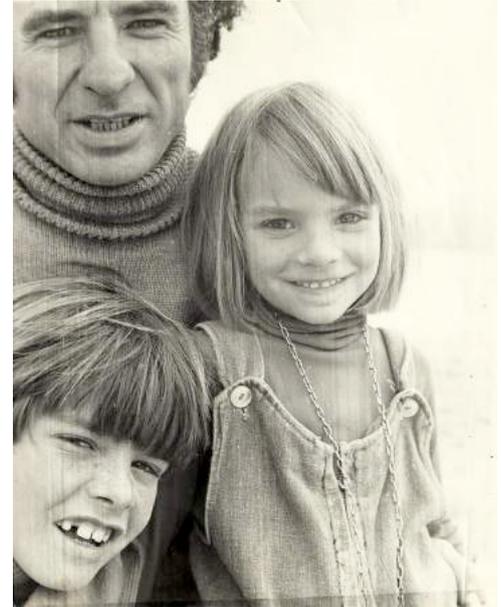


Duran used to say he had cofounded Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) but there are thirteen names in the organization's statutes and Duran's isn't among them. Back then Paris was a party and Duran enjoyed it to the full. He lived as a squatter in a building that had been declared a World Heritage site. He used to ask his neighbours for firewood to heat the place and became angry with them when they asked him to replace it. He loved drinking and women. He wasn't good at saving money. What little he made selling his paintings to tourists he squandered at the casino.



We do know that Mario Durán arrived in the city of Córdoba in 19XX and enrolled at medical school. Penniless, he managed to live rent-free at the Hospital de Clínicas. His friends remember him as a top student. He had natural talent. He was also generous. He would offer to help peers with their studies under one condition: that for each hour of studying, they agreed to gamble at the casino for an hour.

Before graduating, Durán started work as an anaesthetist and surgical technician at several clinics in Córdoba. There, he met María Mercedes, a surgical technician. He married her and they went on to have four children.



Sometimes, he would phone his children and tell them he was earning a lot of money as a doctor on a French oil rig in the Arctic, and then would fall silent for a few months. He would then call to say he was operating on mutilated children in Asia. They would not hear from him for months, and then he would suddenly reappear, dressed in an African kaftan, carrying small ivory statues and telling stories about his work as a doctor in the Lebanese war, Afghanistan's mountains, Vietnamese rivers or in the Angolan civil war.



In 2003, penniless, sick and on the verge of death, Durán decided to return to Córdoba in order to die near the children he had hardly seen for 30 years. Legend has it that he used to swear he had seen all but two countries in the world. His luggage consisted of a few clothes and a trunk where he carried the only documents of his life: photos, videos, interviews and press clippings from all around the world.

Durán died at home in 2007.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

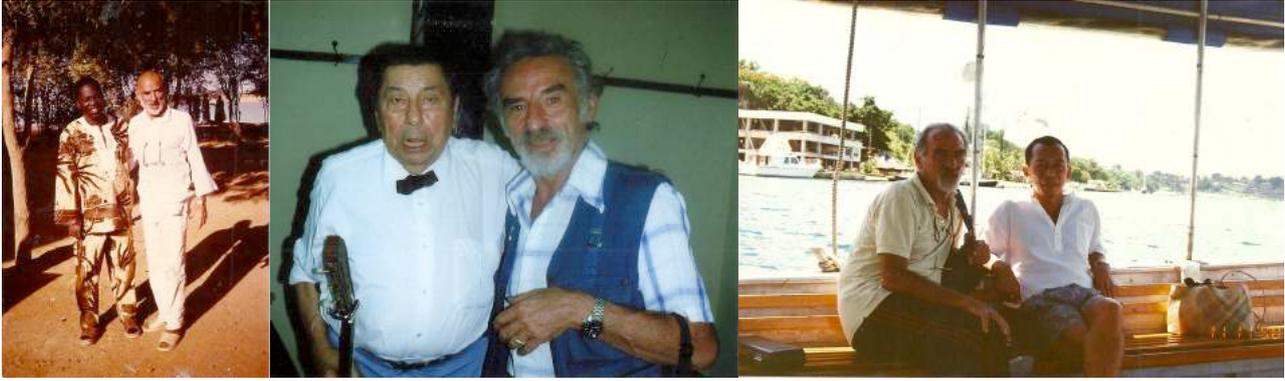
A man in his 70s walks with a woman in her 40s through a small town cemetery in Córdoba, Argentina. They arrive at Mario Durán's grave. They stop. They pay homage.

Then they walk around the town. She is clearly a local and will be a sort of guide: they will visit the house where Mario Durán spent his last years, they will meet the people who knew him. For some he was Mario, for others "the Doctor", for most, a bearded, slightly mad old man who had difficulty walking and was quite moody. These testimonies will help us discover the bizarre character Durán became: an old man who sunbathed in the nude, who flirted with much younger pharmacists and who sometimes told stories of doubtful provenance.



A beautiful sunset in Traslasierra. The two characters are looking at old photographs. We can see a bearded man in different scenarios: in Afghanistan dressed in Arab garb; surrounded by armed men; wearing a sarong on the beach; in an operating room; on a ship; in the desert; in the jungle. He is always smiling. In one photograph we can see him talking with Atahualpa Yupanqui in a clearly festive mood.





In another one, he is operating with a flashlight between his teeth. The man stops on a particular photograph. We see it: it is a wide shot, but we can see two people dressed in Arab garb, covered from head to toe, in the desert. *C'est moi*, says the man.



The man's name is Bernard Kouchner, a doctor from Avignon, France. He first belonged to the French Communist Party and then switched to the Socialist Party. He cofounded Médecins sans Frontières. Monsieur Kouchner then became Foreign Affairs Minister under Francois Fillon's right-wing government and the Jerusalem Post called him one of the 15 most influential Jews in the world.



According to Durán's own letters and written testimonies, it was Kouchner who encouraged him to travel to war zones to practise medicine. Kouchner himself describes Durán as a very close friend. They travelled together to places no other doctor would set foot on. They operated for hours whilst listening to bullets whizzing by and bombs exploding in the distance. Together, they had to choose who to operate since time was scarce and some patients had better chances of survival than others.



At some point, still undefined for us, their lives took different courses. Durán continued to do fieldwork. He also travelled extensively, and visited casinos. He brawled with neighbours at his Parisian apartment block. He had new girlfriends. Kouchner began a successful political path that would eventually lead him to become France's Chancellor.



The woman is Mario's daughter, Marina Durán. As a child, she lived with her mother and her second husband (an American diplomat) when, soon after the 1968 events in France, a young and idealistic Dr. Mario Durán moved to Paris. By the time Mario finally returned, dogged by health issues, to live in an unheated house in a town in Córdoba, Marina already had two children.

We will follow Marina, a woman who never really lived with her father, as she gets to know him better. She will do this accompanied by Bernard Kouchner, Mario's travelling buddy from way back, when they used to operate in field hospitals without electricity in Chad, Vietnam or Algeria.

Marina admires and adores her father and has dedicated the last few years to collecting whatever information she can find about him. Her three brothers are very angry at their father and don't want to participate in the film. She treasures the photos in the trunk. She proudly tells her father's stories without minding his 30 years of absence, even when those stories talk about the alleged sale of a girlfriend to an African tribal chief. Or the debts with the French state that he left as only inheritance. Or the possible existence of other siblings who we might not know about. Marina has organised events and exhibitions, she is proud that her children were able to spend time with their grandfather ("they enjoyed him more than I did"), she has recorded video of him. And she calls her mother's husband "Daddy", in English.



The movie begins in Córdoba, the place where Mario Durán was born and where he died.

Then we will go to Paris and Kouchner will be our guide (and Marina's). We will see Marina visit the places her father lived in over the 30 years he wasn't with her: the apartment that was declared a World Heritage site, where Durán lived for over 30 years without ever paying a single Franc for the privilege, the stands where he sold his paintings, the streets where he lived among girlfriends, Lido prostitutes, exiled Latin Americans and the doctors who called on him to carry out risky missions in war zones.

We will also meet Raymond Depardon, a photographer with the Magnum agency who photographed Durán and Kouchner when they were operating in Sub-Saharan Africa.



Marina will also visit her sisters, the daughters Durán had in France with different women and who, after his death, decided to renounce anything that had anything to do with their father. And MSF, to understand why her father's name is not in the founders' statutes.

Finally, we will travel to the different places where Mario Durán practised medicine. We will visit villages and towns where they worked, and will try to compare old photographs with present images. We will look for patients and ask them to show us where the field hospitals were, to tell us about their experiences with Durán in war zones. We will travel down the same rivers, tread the same roads accompanied by his friends, colleagues and patients.

Our journey will end in Lebanon, where we will try to find the location where the mythical photograph that went around the world on the cover of newspapers and magazines was taken:



Thus, we will have different storylines. The lines will be interlinked and move flawlessly one to the next, searching for a polyphony of sorts in the story-telling that will help generate new meaning. Each person will have something different and perhaps even contradictory to say about Durán. The polyphony we propose will build the character bit by bit, with an "Eisenstein-style" editing that will generate meaning in its juxtaposition and which will only reveal itself at the end of the film.

We will also use archive material: home movies in 8mm, press clippings from around the world, amateur and professional photos. These images will set up a permanent 'dialogue' with what is being shot, as we try to echo the same composition and framing, trying to point out coincidences and differences between images taken 40 years ago and today.

The film will be a journey. We will try to discover an unknown character through information provided by an stream of people who shared their lives with Dr. Durán. We will go on this journey guided by two characters as fascinating as Mario himself: Bernard Kouchner and especially Marina Durán.

CONCLUSION

The synopsis is obviously incomplete. It lacks the essence, the tangible facts, the scenes that will lend life to the film beyond testimonies. That essence today is a fantasy for us, an imagery that we have been building based on stories told by Marina Durán, a few letters and some photos. In order to complete this synopsis, to be able to write a screenplay, we need to carry out extensive field work that we will undertake using the same methodology we propose for the film itself. Mario Durán is today an enigma that we must decipher. We want to decipher it. And we want to turn that process into a great film.

References:

- . L'avocat de la terreur, Barbet Schroeder
- . Capturing the Friedmans, Andrew Jarecki
- . Los Rubios, Albertina Carri.