

The Scar Audio Commentary Transcript

Film 1 – The State of the State

00:00

Brad Butler: So, my name's Brad Butler.

00:04

Noor Afshan Mirza: My name is Noor Afshan.

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Brad Butler: And we're here watching The Scar with you, we're on film one, and we're just about to head into the title sequence with a soundtrack that was done by a group called Ha Za Vu Zu based in Istanbul. And then from there we head straight into the car.

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It was always our intention to start off the first image on the female protagonist, Yenge, and for her to be listening in on these conversations, these male fumes erupting around her.

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Noor Afshan Mirza: We initially planned to shoot in both the UK and Turkey, but we settled on working with Turkish actors that were based or moving between the UK and Turkey. Whenever you put a casting call out you always meet loads of talent, and I love casting for that reason...

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...because you have a idea in your head, and then someone walks into the room. Like, the minute Kaptan, who's the policeman, walked into the room, you just knew he was Kaptan. But then the other side of that is

that you also meet lots of other people and it shifts your ideas as well. Maybe that person could be Kaptan, you know?

01:45

Brad Butler: So, this point in the film, we were trying to set up where you are, and already one of the things that was really exciting for us, since people are quite familiar with road movies, you can start people there, and then it starts to get quite interesting. If you feel like an audience knows where they are, how can you start to shift and move your characters around? So we started to work on things that are slightly unclear as to where they come from. Are they inside the character's mind? Are they ideas? Are they fictions? Did they happen?

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The car is moving, then it's stationary, so you start to break up time and create a series of smaller loops, then larger loops. In a way for us, the car is a sort of psychological space, so we also knew in the beginning, we were creating a vocabulary we could use into film two.

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So for example, the chicken story in film one, which I'm watching at the moment, is picked up in a very different way in film two.

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Noor Afshan Mirza: There's a really well-known Turkish film, *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*...

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...which is an amazing film. In that film, there's this incredible scene. There's the guy who you think is the militant, is the subversive, who is in

the car with these guys who you think are the state, but they could also just be hired thugs. He's really squashed between all...

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All the threatening violence and power is being told through this really banal conversation about yogurt, and each of the four men – except the guy who's the one who's being subjected to the conversation and subjected to whatever awful things are going to happen to him, he's not speaking - but all the other men are speaking about yogurt.

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And it was a reference when we were writing the script, that we all knew that scene and we all knew that film, and then it came out of an anecdote, someone was saying they know this recipe. So we started to construct this chicken story from there.

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Brad Butler: And also it was to tell a story about torture, because we didn't want the characters in the car talking about torture or these things, or in talking business so much. You've got to imagine, it's like a long car journey, so we started to lay something in here which allowed a power dynamic. You can see in it that Yenge, the female protagonist, is not on her front foot, able to partake yet in this conversation. Ağa, the politician, doesn't quite catch what they're really speaking about, so there are different layers that work through.

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Noor Afshan Mirza: Yeah, it is introducing the characters. With Yenge, I think Brad talked about the fact that the film opens with a camera on her. She's never a victim of male violence, she's not a victim, she's a survivor, but in this whole film she hardly says a word.

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So it's a very challenging role for her, she played it brilliantly, but her role was silent, it was mute. In the first film, that's what we're talking about. But she gets a couple of good lines. She gets that great line about the cigarettes.

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Brad Butler: She's an interesting person though, because in a way her presence changes the others, even though she says nothing. How can you shoot the film where it all seems to revolve around her? Even though the others are given this charisma, how can you have it where the female character, who we're denying speech because we're constructing a situation where that's become her reality, how can it still feel like it's going to revolve around her?

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So you're undoing some characters, and in the undoing you're building her strength at the same time.

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Noor Afshan Mirza: Like the Reis and the Yenge story. There are lots of stories, so there's a story and a dynamic between Reis and Yenge, but then there's also a story between Kaptan and Yenge. And then there's a story between Kaptan and Reis, and then there's a story between Ağa, Kaptan and Reis. It's what's said, what's not said, and what's felt.

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It's trying to build that space, the ecology, the tensions.

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Brad Butler: We're watching Kaptan now, he's with the car looking out the side window at this scarred body. And you know, you get scar - scar, car - this intrusion of reality which is this political speech by Ağa, the politician, which we called 'the hollow speech'. It was a speech that loops but doesn't quite say anything, and that's the beauty of the speech. Kaptan is an interesting character, who's on one side trying to handle hallucinations, but at the same time I always sense from the way he played it that he could call things out.

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He had an intelligence about him, an intelligence to know where he was and what his situation was, but not enough capacity to remove himself from the situation. I think we were very pleased with how this hollow speech was pitched by the actor, and this quiet observation between the mirror and Kaptan, trying to make a connection with Yenge.

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Noor Afshan Mirza: We imagined that they both came from similar backgrounds, so even though they would have existed through a different set of privileges or oppressions, somehow there would have been some sort of - like a kindred spirit. 'I know where you come from, you come from that kind of family and I come from this kind of family. We might have grown up in similar villages' - so there was play there, but at the same time this dynamic that Kaptan wouldn't really be able to pull a woman like Yenge.

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So there's a flirtation there, but also it's a boundary he'd never be able to cross, because he can't, because she's Reis' girlfriend.

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Brad Butler: We've only got a couple of bits of text without voiceover on them. We thought about working with text on the screen and subtitles from earlier works we made. In fact, one of the first works we ever did, called *Non Places*, had subtitles without voices, and it's something to do with how you internalise text on a screen, into your own words.

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Noor Afshan Mirza: And your own voice.

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Brad Butler: Yeah, and where do you place that, and do you ascribe it to him, to something outside of him, to yourself? And that's why that scene exists in the way it does, and the text itself is slightly more literary in the way it's delivered. It's less of a spoken text and that interested us.

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This scene is so difficult. This is a complex scene with Reis at the back of the boot. Yenge's at the front, and she's about to see a car driven by herself going past, in a parallel universe, but at the same time we're with Reis' story about the different generations that exist, and what they feel they can and can't do, and who that belongs to.

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Noor Afshan Mirza: It's also about the boys jostling at the back of the boot, because in this scene Reis is also saying to Kaptan: 'at the end of the day, I'm the man'. There's a power play between those two, and he's reasserting that he's top dog, and he does it in this chilling way.

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It's complex because you've got so many things going on, but I love it, because of how it moves between being in Yenge's space, and the

freedom of this glimpse into this parallel universe. Meanwhile, they're still bound by these two rams jostling about as to who's going to be top dog.

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It's the simplicity and the complexity that I've enjoyed working on with this film, because if you take it simply at what is being said, it's actually a very simple story. But it's what lies under the surface of what's being said. So with this scene we wanted to put in some of the facts that we've researched.

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So this thing about the grey wolves, this is a nationalist youth movement, that is not just bound by, it transgresses the borders of Turkey. I think there's an intergenerational relationship to how brotherhood and patriarchy work. How older violent men groom younger men into their job of violence, but you could also say that's how the state grooms young men into its violence of perpetrating wars.

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There's a story being told here about father and son, about two men that are jostling it out about who's going to be the man. At the same time, there's this thing about what it means to recruit young men into the work of violence.

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Brad Butler: This memento mori scene, memento mori could be defined as things that belong to the dead, and here Yenge is at the beginning of the scene. It's a little bit harder for a Western audience to pick up that she's holding a pregnancy test, it links through to an image much earlier on in the film, and his memento mori, from the pregnancy test to the photographs, which become a big deal in the second film.

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I've always been fond of that line - 'Who's going to arrest me? You? Him? Do you realise how many streets on the way to the court you'd have to pass that are named after me?' Before we go into this idea again that Kaptan drives the car, sees himself on the road, and that's what causes the crash. It's part of this hallucination set up from the first few scenes that comes back round.

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Noor Afshan Mirza: Which we haven't spoken about, but we've run out of time for this session, but there's a whole narrative around The Resistant Dead and there's more work to be done, but we've started to open up the space. I would like to open up the space around the difference between talking about structural state enforced violence, or state violence or structural violence, and disappeared people.

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And then on the other side, open up a space to try and find a way to talk about the agency of the resistance, which is beyond your own lifetime.

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