

The Peasant and The Priest

A New Documentary by Esther Podemski

Always at Sea Productions

The Peasant and The Priest addresses two aspects of globalization as witnessed by two Italian men in their eighties: disturbances in the landscape and human trafficking.

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LOG LINE & SYNOPSIS

The Peasant and The Priest is a documentary about how globalization manifests in two aspects of Italian life today: the passing of traditional farming in Italy and the increase in enforced prostitution. The film is threaded with a metaphor from a medieval fresco in Siena, *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* by Ambrogio Lorenzetti.

SYNOPSIS

The Peasant and the Priest tells the story of two Italian men in their eighties whose ways of life have survived from medieval Italy to the present. Sergio, a sharecropper (*mezzadro*), uses ancient farming methods that have become overshadowed by corporate agriculture. Father Oreste fights the tide of sexual slavery, which grows each day as more and more women from Africa and Europe are forced into prostitution in Italy. Each man tries to make his contribution into a world that moves relentlessly and carelessly forward. Both represent ways of life that are rapidly fading as the modern world closes in. The point of departure for exploring the two parallel lives is a 14th century fresco, *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government*, by Ambrogio Lorenzetti. Uniquely secular for its time, it tells a cautionary story of necessary struggles if a city is to establish and maintain a republican form of government. At different points in the film, the painting is cinematically activated to emphasize its political messages, which are still relevant today.

PROJECT SUMMARY

In Tuscany, one of the most idealized areas of the world, evidence of the forces of globalization are becoming apparent. Human trafficking, olive groves giving way to housing developments, chemicals in the wine, and contaminated olive oil are among the global effects of governmental indifference. *The Peasant and the Priest* addresses two alarming aspects of these forces: disturbances in the landscape and human trafficking. The film offers a reinterpretation of this much-loved region, a landscape shaped and transformed by co-existing extremes of human labor, cultivation, and exploitation.

Connoisseurs of the good life go to Northern Italy in search of art, olive groves and good wine. But in the roads alongside the legendary fields and highways, it is becoming increasingly impossible to overlook the spectacle of young African women urgently attempting to sell themselves. Women from Eastern Europe have also entered this market, most of them from the destitute areas of the former Soviet bloc, primarily Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, and Romania.



As the medieval system of *Mezzadria*, or peasant/landowner system, fades from memory, agriculture is also undergoing a transition affected by global forces. Tuscany was traditionally short of water and never particularly green. It consisted of olive groves, vineyards, and shade trees. A system of “promiscuous” farming, typically carried out in small lots, made an arid region productive, diverse and beautiful. However, the new greener, better-irrigated Tuscany is now dedicated primarily to a single crop, grapes for wine, which is increasingly produced by large conglomerates.

Interviews with Sergio’s wife Rina, daughter Marta, and the town carpenter Dorian (who describes Sergio as a man who has “maintained the characteristics of the peasant culture”) reveal a man loved by his community. We capture on camera the emotional toll involved in the dissolution of the Ulivello estate and the termination of a 55-year relationship between landlord and sharecropper.

Father Oreste works the city streets at night. We see him in the fog calling out to young prostitutes in order to help them, “I am Father Oreste Benzi.” Young women emerge from hiding to surround and greet him. He attempts to intervene directly in the lives of these women, who have been forsaken by the same forces of global economics, tourism, and migration that are shaping the future of this region and the world.



The film also addresses deprivation and hunger: One life is concerned with the land that feeds the body; the other with the love and community that feeds the spirit. As we cut back and forth between the lives of the peasant and the priest, an animated version of Ambrogio Lorenzetti's medieval fresco (in Siena) appears intermittently and creates a link between the daylight of Sergio's world and the darkness of Father Oreste's. The fresco illuminates history and brings enlightenment to the politics of the contemporary moment.



PROJECT TEAM



Esther Podemski, Project Director for *The Peasant and The Priest*, also produced and directed *House of the World*, a documentary about the aftermath of the Holocaust. Shot in Poland, it was screened in Europe and traveled throughout the United States with the Human Rights Watch International Film Festival. Discovery Communications purchased the film for national broadcast, and it was later purchased by the Jewish Broadcast Network. The film was also screened at Lincoln Center and in the Los Angeles International Jewish Film Festival, as well

as at numerous colleges. As a painter, Podemski has exhibited in the Pacific Northwest and in New York City. She has won a painting fellowship and awards. Recent exhibitions include *5 Days in July*, a dual-screen projection that revisits the Newark riots of 1967. The installation was first exhibited at Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art in Newark. It has traveled to the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in Alabama, and was also included in an exhibition entitled *1968: Then & Now* at the NYU Tisch School of the Arts. Holland Cotter reviewed the installation in the New York Times Arts section. In 2010, it was included as part of the Urban Research screenings at the Directors Lounge exhibition in Berlin, Germany. *5 Days in July* won the director's choice in the Black Maria Film Festival and the Jury Award for the best short in the Langston Hughes African American Film Festival. Podemski co-produced a one-hour radio program also titled *5 Days in July*. The award-winning program was broadcast across the country on NPR.

Kate Barkume, Associate Producer and Associate Editor, has been a technical, administrative and creative collaborator on this project since its inception. As a post-production assistant, she has worked with New York-based clients including BBDO, Grey Worldwide, Kaplan Thaler Group agencies, USA Network, designer Donna Karan in collaboration with Gaiam, and the Foreign Policy Association.

Miriam Hess, Assistant Producer, assisted with coordinating many aspects of production, including fundraising, research and additional writing. She remains actively involved with the distribution of the film.

For almost a decade, Miriam has worked with film in several different capacities: as an assistant to documentary filmmakers and projects, as a feature film crew member, and as an academic. She has collaborated extensively on projects with major documentary filmmakers and artists, including Eleanor Coppola, Barbara Kopple (with whom she traveled to the 2005 Munich Film Festival), Alexander Kluge, and Rosemarie Troeckl. She received a BA with honors in Cinema and Media Studies and Germanic Studies from the University of Chicago, and continued her academic studies as a graduate fellow at Princeton University, where she participated in the Program for Media and Modernity and presented papers on early cinema at university seminars, conferences and colloquia in the US and internationally. Prior to this, she worked in various capacities both in the production office and on set during the filming and pre-production of Sofia Coppola's

Marie-Antoinette and *The Making of Marie-Antoinette in Paris*, and as a member of the art department on Mike Mills' debut feature *Thumbsucker*. She currently lives in Portland, Oregon with her gigantic dog, Ira.

Federico Marsicano, Cinematographer, lives in Rome and has been an important collaborator on this project. Mr. Marsicano has worked for Italian television (REI) and Arabian Television, and has served as director of photography on numerous feature films and documentaries in America. His credits include *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, directed by Alec Baldwin, *L'aria salata (The Salty Air)*, directed by A. Angelini, and *Edo e Sam*, an E & S Production.



Gregory Loser, Supervising Editor and Motion Graphics Designer, was also the co-editor for the documentary film *Moving Midway*, which screened in competition at the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival in Durham, North Carolina, the New Director's Festival in New York, and at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The film was also released theatrically in New York. Greg Loser also wrote, directed, edited and co-produced *End of the Season*, which screened in festivals, including the Woods Hole Film Festival. He also produced and directed *Worth It*, a documentary about the creative process.

Daniel Lawren, Co-Editor, was also the Co-Editor for *Buried Above Ground*, a documentary which explores the stories of four Americans living with the burdens of PTSD. He edited a feature-length documentary on the epidemic of HIV among minority youth titled *America's Shadows*. Daniel's post-production assistant editorial work includes *The Lost Son of Havana* and *Cropsey*. Both were official selections at the 2009 Tribeca Film Festival.



Issar Shulman, Composer, is a graduate of the Royal Conservatory in The Hague. Shulman has been a member of the Israeli opera orchestra for five years. In 2008 he was nominated for an Emmy Award in the category of music composition for the HBO documentary film *To Die in Jerusalem*, directed by Hilla Medalia. Issar Shulman is a principal bass player in the Herzelia chamber orchestra and has scored many major TV programs, movies, plays and dance shows.

Esther Regelson, Sound Designer and Recordist, has directed and edited sound for film and radio for over twenty years. Her audio-documentary *109 on 9/11*, about her

neighbors' experiences in Lower Manhattan during the Twin Towers attack on 9/11, has aired on numerous radio stations across the country. She has edited documentary and

feature films for television and theatrical release. Recently, she edited dialogue for *Kings* on NBC and ADR for *Night Catches Us*, a narrative feature. This year she recorded sound for the Vancouver Winter Olympics and video for the *All Eyes on the Gulf Expedition*, documenting the effects of the BP oil spill on wildlife.

Simona Rodano, Narrator, completed her voice training at the International Music Academy of Milan and has a diploma in acting from the Conservatory Centro Teatro Attivo (Milan). She began her performing career on RAI television in Italy where she worked as an actress and singer in one of the most popular Italian TV shows: *Ci vediamo in TV*.” Between 2002 and 2005, Ms. Rodano worked with one of the best-known theater companies in Italy, *Compagnia della Rancia*.

Andrea Carlisle, Writer, has published a book of fiction, *The Riverhouse Stories*, as well as stories, poems, and essays that have appeared in Northwest Review, Calyx, Texas Observer, Willow Springs, Seattle Weekly, Funny Times, The Ledge, Melusine, and various other publications. She co-authored and co-directed a video program on disability called *Looking Up*, which won a first place award at the John Muir Medical Film.

John Campbell, Cinematographer, has worked as the Director of Photography on numerous features, documentaries and commercial films. Campbell’s work is impressive. In 1987 he received the Los Angeles Film Critics Award in part for his original use of black and white reversal in *Mala Noche*. After years of languishing in search of music clearance, *Mala Noche* finally became distributable and opened in a general release in France in 2009. It showed at Cannes at the Director's Fortnight and is hailed as one of the premiere films in the international independent film movement. In 1991, Campbell was Director of Photography for the feature film *My Own Private Idaho* (Criterion Collection), which has become a classic of independent cinema. He has served as Director of Photography on many feature films including: *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* by Gus Van Sant, *The New Age* by Michael Tolkin (Telluride), and two films nominated for Academy Awards: *The Duke of Groove* by Griffin Dunne, and *Partners* by Peter Weller.

In 1987 he received the Los Angeles Film Critics Award for *Mala Noche*. The film was finally cleared for distribution and opened in a general release in France in 2009, where it showed at Cannes at the Director's Fortnight.

FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT

Esther Podemski

I met Sergio Ermini during my first trip to Italy. Sergio was a peasant sharecropper still living under the Mezzadria (the peasant/sharecropper system), a culture which has formed both the social and physical landscape of Italy since the Middle Ages and which now is virtually extinct. Upon returning to New York, I researched the Mezzadria culture and returned to Italy with cinematographer John Campbell to document Sergio's farming practices and a vanishing way of life. At that time Sergio was in his late seventies.

In 2004, I returned to Italy again to work with the Italian cinematographer, Federico Marsicano. Federico and I conducted follow-up interviews with Sergio. While working on these interviews, I had a chance meeting with a priest, Father Oreste Benzi. I met him on a highway off-ramp on New Year's Eve. That night, I accompanied Oreste as he spoke to many young women who worked as prostitutes and were lined up along the highways and the truck stops. I saw a side of Italy not represented in any tourist brochure. I learned firsthand that human trafficking has become a notorious form of extortion and slavery. This system resembles the international currency exchange in that the poorest young women and girls (the Nigerians) are charged somewhat less for their transport to Italy than those from Eastern Europe.

I felt moved to create a single narrative device within the film that could accommodate both men, and to do this I chose to incorporate a secular medieval fresco, *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government*, as a way of symbolizing their relationship to one another and to the land. This medieval fresco speaks to the ideals of good government as exemplified by the lives of Sergio and Father Oreste, two modern-day men who persistently bear witness to the ongoing forces of social chaos that arise when habits of civic responsibility are no longer practiced by denizens of a particular society. The painting, commissioned in the Late Middle Ages by the government of Siena serves as the structural core of the film, and also recurs throughout as a motif. At certain transition points in the film, sections of the painting are shown to signal that we are about to shift from one protagonist to the other. I was also drawn to the fresco because it is a work of great visual power and complexity that speaks to the very origins of the lives and the themes of the region I am documenting.

This three-part fresco cannot be seen from one point of view, so the work had to be reinterpreted to create a cinematic experience. I wanted to create a visually engaging representation of the fresco and to infuse the work with drama and connect it to today's political reality in Italy. This film attempts to make visible the power that may still reside in old habits of work, care, and service, even in a world that seems to have thoughtlessly abandoned them. And, like the mural in the old town hall of Siena, the film warns us of the disastrous consequences that may arise without the virtues that sustain these everyday habits.

REVIEWS

By **Bev Questad**

<http://itsjustmovies.com/>

Ambitious, intellectual, and well-researched, this insightful documentary explains effects of globalization through the lives of two wonderful old men and a famous work of art.

This film opens silently with a view of a relaxed, wholesome 14th century landscape of peasant life in the Tuscany region of Italy. Then it turns to a woman calling from an old, decaying brick window. This scene transitions to Sergio Ermini, who says, "I was born among the olive trees. I am a sharecropper. Passion itself has driven me."

Filmmaker Esther Podemski set herself up with the ambitious task of responding to the effects of globalization, intertwining the lives of an Italian sharecropper and a priest, with the 14th century fresco, "The Allegory of Good and Bad Government" by Ambrogio Lorenzetti.

The art mirrors the issues of the film. What has happened in Italy and what is happening in the world that causes governments to lose sight of the health and welfare of both our land and our people?

Podemski sees the answers in both the ancient mural and the lives of these two eight-two year old men.

The three values in the panel on "Bad Government" are avarice, pride and vain glory. The people do not fare well in this picture of corruption and self-centeredness. The land is withered, crime is rampant and there is violence against women, a symbol of social justice that is at the center of the fresco.

The values represented in the "Good Government" section are faith, hope and charity. In this panel, the land is lush and the people are eating well, trading, laughing and dancing.

In the film the sharecropper, Sergio, takes care of the land, the machinery and the people who help him with the harvest. His life is based on a peasant culture that prides itself on helping each other out without charge. During the harvest they gather together for evening feasts in a great dining room, drinking their own wine and listening to someone play an accordion. They are jovial, and connected to each other through a common goal and camaraderie.

Sergio's farm is the last in the region where the grapes are harvested by hand and then pressed and stored in old wooden casks. The surrounding mega-farms have been industrialized in order to substantially widen product distribution throughout the world.

Juxtaposed to Sergio's simple, fulfilling lifestyle is Father Oreste Benzi's more frustrating vocation. He walks the Tuscany urban streets in the shadowy nights with his bodyguard. Out from both the lush overgrowth of the roadside and seedy town sidestreets, young prostitutes shyly emerge from the dark for communion. They are primarily from Nigeria and Romania where they grew up in extreme poverty and hunger. They had been

promised jobs in Italy and they arrived gratefully with few questions –not understanding the new kind of suffering they would soon be entering.

Father Benzi says he can't be called a Father if he's not willing to take care of them. So he works to send these victimized girls to safe houses with suitable employment. However, he knows the prostitution system is powerful and sometimes he gets discouraged. As soon as one girl is taken off the streets more arrive.

One girl, Sophia, explained that she couldn't join his program because her pimp swore that if she left him he would take it out on her parents. Father Benzi later found her body burned to death.

Benzi explains that there are over 800,000 prostitutes in Europe , mostly from the poorest countries in the world. All report that they hate it, but he remarks that "their incentive is poverty."

This important film is playing on Thursday, Oct. 21, at the Northwest Film Center in Portland, Ore., as part of a series called "Voices in Action: Human Rights on Film."

<http://itsjustmovies.com/12824>

By **Elise Nakhnikian**
Slant Magazine

I heard about *The Peasant and the Priest* from my sister, Judith, who went to art school with the film's director, Esther Podemski. Podemski is a New York City filmmaker who has taught at the New School, but my sister knows her as "a fabulous painter." Having seen her latest documentary, I'm not surprised to hear that. *The Peasant and the Priest*, a protest against the price we pay for globalization, captures the texture of a vanishing way of life with delicate precision.

Read the full review:

<http://www.slantmagazine.com/house/2010/07/a-movie-a-day-day-54-the-peasant-and-the-priest/>

INTERVIEW

Interview with Esther Podemski by Vanessa McMahon, March 22, 2011

VANESSA: Hello Esther, so your film is called THE PEASANT AND THE PRIEST. Can you speak a little bit about what inspired you to make the film?

ESTHER: Well, initially I met Sergio the peasant, Sergio Ermini, on my first trip to Italy. I went with my family. And at this villa which was not in the best of shape but beautiful and unchanged was Sergio who is a Tuscan peasant. He is a Mezzadro, and a Mezzadro is a Tuscan sharecropper and he had been there for over fifty years. There was nobody else there and I knew the person who was his landowner. She wasn't there but he was there with his family. He was the living embodiment of the social structure that had formed Tuscany. This land is very idealized. Everybody loves Tuscany right?

VANESSA: Yeah, of course!

ESTHER: So, I thought I would make a film about his farming methods, but that didn't work out for various reasons. I mean, I brought it back to America and it looked kind of like an old guy on a 45 year old tractor, which is his most sophisticated piece of equipment. And anyway, I expanded this film to include this priest. And the priest works with women who are trafficked and it's a story about parallel lives, two men who represent ancient vocations and their confrontation with modernity. They were born and they died in the same year which I didn't know until I was well into the story.

VANESSA: So, how long did it take you to make this film?

ESTHER: Should I tell you the truth?

[we both laugh]

VANESSA: Yes! This is a documentary. We only want the truth here!

ESTHER: It took me eight years, which sounds ridiculous because, you know, it's only 47 minutes. It took me that long because I quit for a couple of years out of frustration. I was very discouraged because I wasn't getting any response. But my background is as a visual artist. So, what I learned in art school was you have to finish the painting [laughs]. You have to finish it! And I guess that once I start something I have to finish it. It's a compulsion. It's good.

VANESSA: It's a good compulsion!

ESTHER: It sounds sort of ridiculous that the film took me eight years.

VANESSA: Not at all! You finished a film. That is a great feat! And for some people it can take longer. It depends greatly on how much help there is. I'm so glad you did. It's a beautiful work. I believe you should make it a feature length even. I just believe the parallel in your film is very important to modern day issues in Italy. I lived in Italy for two years so I've seen the issue at hand up close and it has not really been brought to light in film so much, not yet anyway, which is one of Italy's darker sides and certainly not what people want to imagine when they think of glorious romantic Tuscany.

ESTHER: Well, I think that what struck me is when I landed in Rome and as we were driving to Tuscany on the country roads, I was seeing these black women, some of who were wearing the traditional clothing. I assume they were Nigerian because that's the largest group of enslaved prostitutes in Italy and I thought, 'oh, how picturesque! Look at this beautiful black woman underneath a parasol on the side of the road!' And then I thought, 'Wait a minute, who is she and why is she here?' You know, and then, the more I saw of them, it became clear to me that these were prostitutes and then progressively I learned that there were many of them...It just struck me as so strange, because there are so many of them, especially in Florence walking the streets at night. It's just the juxtaposition of our idealization of the region, our myth about Italy and particularly this well-loved region of Tuscany. The juxtaposition of this form of exploitation and reality just was really kind of shattering and that kind of observation led me to Father Oreste Benzi.

VANESSA: Well, you've really hit on something though about modern Italian culture. We've seen so much about mafia but not about the trafficking issue that is becoming more and more of a problem. Anyone who has traveled there can see this problem. It is clear these women are in a desperate situation.

ESTHER: They're exploited. They come from Nigeria predominantly and they come from the former Soviet Block of the poorest countries in Europe. Moldova has the distinction of being the poorest country in Europe. And when you read the literature and you talk about the subject with activists you realize how terribly exploited they are and what motivates them to leave and you know it's really heartbreaking. And I guess what I like about Oreste Benzi in terms of that aspect of the film is that he had a larger philosophical faith about what causes these circumstances and he realizes that it's poverty and it's poverty that drives people to these mass migrations, that allows them to leave their families or where their parents permit this for their young daughters because he himself was poor. And he gives this poverty speech early on and I was touched by that. It wasn't simplistic. It had a real philosophical base but he had a deep understanding because he understood poverty himself and what drives people and how it destroys their self-image as individuals.

VANESSA: And I think that goes for all forms of poverty. Not just monetary, but spiritual poverty, family and love poverty because I think that's what is universal. That's what I loved about this film. How you start with that speech from Benzi about the explanation of

how these people almost apologize for being alive. And that's insecurity. Everyone is insecure from some form of poverty or lack of something in their lives or feeling of self-worth. Even around rich or successful people, there is a gaping hunger and form of another poverty present and that is what, for me, makes this story universal. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, people all over struggle with that feeling of worthlessness so it makes one connect even more to the women portrayed in your film.

ESTHER: Oh thank you! I haven't heard that before.

VANESSA: Can you talk about the classic Renaissance painting/fresco used which you inter-weave throughout the film? That was very cleverly done, mixing past with present, art with hard reality. The fresco painting of THE ALLEGORY OF GOOD AND BAD GOVERNMENT (by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 14th century).

ESTHER: Yes, thank you. Well, the painting is, in part, about the romanticism we have of certain areas. Just using Italy as an example, there's Venice. The reality in Venice is that the Venetians can hardly afford to live. It's a prop. And then there's Tuscany with its expatriates... You know, there's Germans, Americans, Brits. Tuscany has always had this allure. It's always had this idealization in the popular imagination. There's a long history of that. But I decided to use the painting, because I had two characters and they never converge in the film. I always knew about the painting and it's very famous. I thought that would be a way of unifying the characters because the painting is very complex and we could actually find these people in the painting among many other classes of people. The painting has three panels- good and bad government, good government with the good city and republic and the good countryside. And in terms of the good panel the city and the country reflect each other so when you look out onto the countryside it reflects the city so it's kind of an ecological statement.

VANESSA: Oh yeah! For sure!

ESTHER: and then you have the bad government, which does the same thing, it's a reflection but everything in the countryside and city is burning, and you have all these classes operating together. In the good government panels we see harmony and then in the middle panel you have the power structure or the court of justice and it looks over and it's about the virtues of a republic that creates responsible government in the city.

VANESSA: Well, it works very well in the film. I mean, most of the time we are looking at these paintings with these archetypes and symbols and wondering 'what does it mean?' so it's very useful and important to attribute meaning from such an old painting and apply it to modern life in the same region represented in the painting. The painting is drawing on timeless human issues no?

ESTHER: It is timeless. That's why it's great and what I noticed is more and more I have been reading stuff in which people look to the painting in modern literature. For instance, Adam Gopnik had this article in the New Yorker about Adam Smith and he referenced the

painting as a kind of counter argument to the Adam Smith concept, that maybe it isn't good to have more and more profit. Maybe what's better, and what the painting suggests, is to try to strike balance a harmony.

VANESSA: Right. I mean, that's what it's all about. Great art is timeless for a reason. The archetypes and symbols of being human that never die.

ESTHER: Right. And in a way, I don't want it to be a film about nostalgia or the idealization of the past but on the other hand what interests me in filmmaking is this glimpse of the world, of certain aspects of the world and a point of distinction, just as something is vanishing, just as its vanishing forever. And that is one of the magic aspects of film for me.

VANESSA: Oh, for sure, yeah. And then both then men in your film died! That's really powerful because if you captured something that if you tried to do it now, you wouldn't be able to, not with those people and not in that time or space. It's not something you could ever do again. The documentary in that sense is a living thing.

ESTHER: Yeah, it's an aspect, a monument, a remembrance that is so powerful. Like when you see a section of the Curtis film which lasts only 45 seconds in the museum in British Columbia of war canoes, and when you see these North Coast Indians, even though it's staged, that's magic. That's going back to a point of time that's completely gone and one of the most powerful aspects of filmmaking.

VANESSA: Exactly. You're making a timeline. You're capturing something that is not going to be there tomorrow and someone in the future will be able to look back. I mean, you look at paintings and someday people will look at these films. It's essential to document for our education and posterity.

ESTHER: I totally agree.

VANESSA: So, what's next for you after this long journey?

ESTHER: Well, this is the first festival and I want the film to be seen so before I start a new project I want to see it through that process. I mean, I had an editor and everything but it's really been just me doing everything, creating financing etc.

VANESSA: Actually, I did want to ask you how you produced this. Was it difficult?

ESTHER: Well, it was an extremely difficult production and I really had to self-finance it for a long time. And it wasn't till it was at a very developed state that I could go about and start begging, and this is my favorite thing. [I laugh hysterically now because I know she is being facetious because it is not a fun task if you are an artist] and so it was a bit of a strain. But apart from travel and airfares, etc., it was pretty low budget.

VANESSA: So, you're just at the beginning of your festival run then. It's a 2010 film so you can still enter it into festivals all this year.

ESTHER: This is my third film. My previous films I had more help with grants but funding has changed a lot in documentary filmmaking.

VANESSA: And distribution! And all filmmaking for that matter. Everyone's in limbo right now. And yet there's a greater demand than ever for good films. It's just how to make it so the industry can support itself. Well, I think one way that you can sell this film to buyers.

ESTHER: And what is that?

VANESSA: Well, this is tasteless, but so are many buyers- LOL- you could rename it as: 'Prostitutes and Olive Oil'. [Esther laughs aloud] just if you want to make some real attention. LOL. Can you tell us more about the peasant culture of Italy?

ESTHER: So the relationship to the olive tree and the vine growing on the tree and in between them were all of this cultivation in small plots. Well, this is coming back. Sustainable agriculture is bringing this intensive cultivation in small plots back and that's what made this land so beautiful. The recreation of an arid region into this intensive cultivation that was done by this peasant culture and that peasant culture formed the cultural landscape of Tuscany. So, when the peasantry was abolished all of these farmhouses where then vacated, in the early 70s, they were all emptied. And then all of these people, these Americans would come back and renovate. Meanwhile, the peasants lived in housing developments. And the cuisine of the area which has now become so expensive and so turn your nose up kind of deal, that was the peasant cuisine. They used all the leftovers. The peasantry would go out into the fields and pick herbs and grasses. It was a culture of no waste. Nothing was ever thrown away. So, they were inherently so forward looking.

VANESSA: It's always that way. The elites always take what is popular (arts, cuisine, culture, etc.) and appropriate it making it theirs and the original thing loses its former simplicity.

ESTHER: Exactly. A lot of people look at this as sort of nostalgia, but it isn't about nostalgia, it's about history.

http://www.fest21.com/en/blog/thessaloniki/the_peasant_and_the_priest_an_interview_with_esther_podemski

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