

In 2015, prompted by a news report, Czech-based Italian director Francesco Montagner decided to visit central Bosnia with the hopes of making a documentary about a radical Salafi preacher. Ibrahim Delic had been accused of delivering sermons in Syria, presumably in support of ISIS, and received a 23-month prison sentence. Not long after, Montagner realised that his reason to stay in Gornja Bočinja – population: 24 – was not the Imam but his three sons, living in the absence of the father. Shot over five years, *Brotherhood* watches attentively as they grow up and grow apart, while an observational aesthetic intertwines displacement with intimacy.

Despite the age gap between them, Jabir, Usama and Useir form an ecosystem of filial bearing. And like their father's herds of sheep, they roam in need of care while also rejecting it. In their idyllic Bosnian setting, the boys sustain a whole universe in both harmony and entropy as if the world conforms to their heterogeneous unity. In the closely entangled chronotope, village life expands and compresses in meditative long takes that couple humans with animals or nature. Just as the tree branches never obscure the picturesque landscapes they enclose, framing the brothers together reflects and refracts their individualities as experienced by association. However, life is not without tensions. The film cuts open scenes of vulnerability: we see Jabir hacking off trees in the middle of the forest, letting violence and susceptibility collide.

Following a laid-out path and diverging from it are both forms of engagement with destiny – and in *Brotherhood*, free will functions as a springboard for self-reflection. Between fate and choice, the film plants hints in the most delicate of places, such as Useir's primary school lessons. In a full classroom, the teacher weaves out the epistemic value of sentences by asking questions and follow-ups: 'What is a sentence? Why do we need it? To understand each other.' And yet emotional articulation is frowned upon in a hypermasculine setting, which is why the subtle presence of other spaces – such as phone screens, with their selfie cameras, games and social media feeds – acts as a surrogate for a life beyond one's known boundaries.

But *Brotherhood* doesn't trap its characters. On the contrary: the recurrent use of wide shots opens up the possibility of togetherness. As much as the camera observes and records, it also allows the brothers to establish a newfound connection as a collective protagonist.