

OFFICIAL SELECTION **FESTIVAL DE L'ALPE D'HUEZ 2016**







One man and his cow

(vache)

A FILM BY MOHAMED HAMIDI

FATSAH BOUYAHMED, LAMBERT WILSON, JAMEL DEBBOUZE

Distribution

Pathé Distribution Tel: 0033 171 723 305 2, rue Lamennais 75008 PARIS, FRANCE



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THE STORY

Fatah, a humble Algerian farmer, only has eyes for his cow Jacqueline that he dreams of taking to Paris to the Agricultural Show. When he receives the precious invitation - to the amazement of the whole village - he leaves his land for the first time, takes a ferry to Marseille, and crosses the whole of France on foot, heading for the Porte de Versailles Show Ground. Between encounters and surprises, Fatah and Jacqueline experience a human adventure made up of great moments of mutual aid and helpless laughter. An unexpected and very tender journey across today's France.



MOHAMED HAMIDI, THE DIRECTOR

Born in Bondy on November 14th, 1972, Mohamed Hamidi followed a rather atypical path before embarking on his film career. First a teacher in Economics and Management in Bobigny, he devoted his time to the education of youth in the Paris suburbs. From 2005 to 2006, he worked as a political commentator for Canal Plus and founded the Bondy Blog. Also a musician, he first worked with Jamel Debbouze in 2006 by composing the music for the Jamel Comedy Club. That was where his collaboration with Jamel developed and he would subsequently become artistic director at Kissman Productions, the company founded by the comedian. From there, he would go on to stage the Marrakech Comedy Festival for which he is still the artistic director, as well as write Jamel Debbouze's one-man show, «Tout sur Jamel», or the first show by Malik Bentalha «Malik se la raconte».

After working several times as a director for the stage and television, Mohamed Hamidi finally directed his first feature, NÉ QUELQUE PART in 2013. A personal film on the theme of identity that he wrote with Alain-Michel Blanc. Two years later, he has worked with the same screenwriter on his second feature, LA VACHE, starring Fatsah Bouyahmed, Lambert Wilson and Jamel Debbouze.





A CONVERSATION WITH MOHAMED HAMIDI

Can you sum up the film for us?

An ordinary Algerian farmer is so fond of his cow, Jacqueline, that he dreams of seeing her compete at the Paris Agricultural Show. When his request to attend is finally accepted, he takes her to Paris on foot, impressing the people that he meets along the way with his good nature, his naivety and his humanity.

How did this idea come to you?

I had wanted to make a road movie in France for a long time. It's a country that I know fairly well because, from the age of 17, and for a number of years, I crisscrossed it a great deal, notably by working as a supervisor in summer camps. And when the kids from troubled suburbs met country people, farmers or others, that led to extraordinary moments that touched me a great deal. One day, Fatsah, whom I've known for ten years now, told me about one of his uncles, a man passionate about agronomy and fertilizers, who regularly asked him for information about the Agricultural Show that he would have loved to attend. With LA VACHE, I have made a cocktail of all that. I

think that, subconsciously, I was marked by LA VACHE ET LE PRISONNIER that I saw ten times when I was younger and also by LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE and A STRAIGHT STORY, two road movies that I find absolutely fascinating.

There are three writers credited for the screenplay. How did you work?

I worked on the main outline of the story with Alain-Michel Blanc for almost a year. Fatsah came in on the dialogue, but he knew about the progress in the screenplay because I wanted him to play the main part. We took the inspiration for the character from our fathers, but the words had to sound right in his mouth and, as we are used to writing together, notably for the Marrakesh Comedy Festival, we had a lot of fun.

We laugh a great deal in the course of this adventure, but we are also touched and often moved. What were you trying to say through the reactions of all the people that Fatah meets?

Often, during the writing of the screenplay, people said I was being too naïve or that I was too focused on the feel-good side. However, I

stuck with this approach until the very end. As in Les Lettres persanes, when someone bearing the best intentions and with a positive attitude arrives in an unfamiliar environment, he reaps what he sows. I wanted Fatah to meet welcoming and open-minded people with whom an exchange would be possible. With a sort of grace, simplicity, lack of prejudice and kindness, he is able to say everything. And people adore him for it. My father, who came from a rural background too, was like that, very forthright, but in such a good-natured way that no one ever took it badly. I did not want to adopt an aggressive approach or the stereotype of systematic rejection of the immigrant. Moreover, I think that a guy like this walking along the road with a cow today would inspire friendly reactions. Especially someone like Fatah.

Fatsah Bouyahmed was already in NÉ QUELQUE PART, your previous film. Did you think of him when writing this role?

Right away. There are very few actors who are capable, like him, of getting across humour, poetry and sincerity at one and the same time.

The other important element is that he is fairly unknown. The average viewer has the impression that this guy has just turned up from his village with his cow. But, quite frankly, it wasn't easy to impose him. When we explained to distributors or TV channels that we wanted to make a film with an unknown Arab crossing France with a cow... we had our work cut out!

As in your first film, we get the impression that you place a great deal of importance on the secondary characters who, from the Parisian reporter to the farmers, via the performers at the village fête, are all excellent.

Alain-Michel Blanc, with whom I already wrote my first film, has taught me one essential thing: even if a secondary character has only three minutes in the movie, you have to take the time to write a biography, what he wants, where he's from, what he's going to bring to the main character and vice versa. This is extremely useful when it comes to briefing the actors. For me, during his or her scene, a secondary character becomes the main character.

Why is the old country virtually omnipresent in your two films?

Probably to reconstitute a past that I never had. What interests me today are my roots, my parents and the shock that immigration represented for them. I don't want to talk about the Paris suburbs, something I did a great deal when I was a teacher in Bobigny or with the Bondy Blog. I find it more interesting to present this comic, simple and naïve character.

The scene in which Philippe, the count, writes a love letter for Fatah to his wife is irresistible.

I had already dealt with the father-son relationship, but not with the one between men and women. Couples in Algerian villages are very modest. They never make tender gestures towards each other, never hold hands and never kiss in public. They are not at all demonstrative. but in the end love passes between them of course. I was always surprised to see how reserved our parents were about their emotions. But when you pay close attention to the songs that they listened to, the songs of Oum Kalthoum for instance, they are incredibly romantic with countless lines saying, «I love you», «I miss you», «My love», etc. I show this paradox in that scene, my favourite, when Fatah dictates a letter to Philippe (Lambert Wilson) in an attempt to win his wife back.

Do you feel that LA VACHE is also a political film?

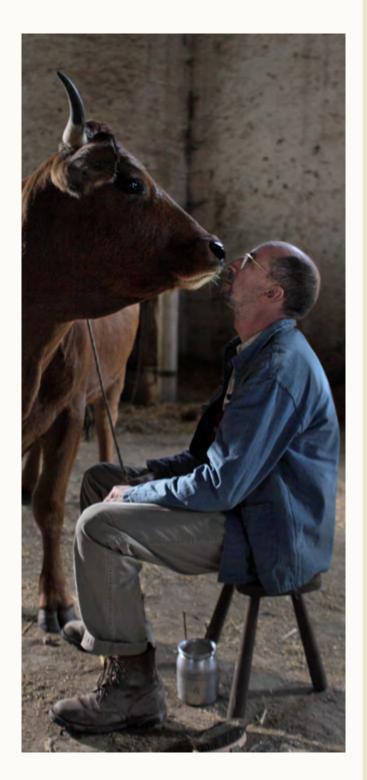
Despite appearances, yes! But, as in a fable, it was important for me that this should be implied and not shown. In these troubled times when some people want to oppose religions and ways of life, I wanted to show that individuals, wherever they come from, can live together and share things despite differences in culture, social status and religion... I was raised in that frame of mind. An example? When Fatah, a practising Muslim who prays calmly by himself, sees a church for the first time, he is happy to go inside to visit it. Like my father who, on holiday, used to say, «Come on, let's see what it's like inside.» He would greet the priest and ask him loads of guestions! This curiosity, the simplicity in exchanging things, this open mindedness in a way, is something I find hyper political but typical of the character. Fatah also sees farmers and breeders' demonstrations, placards with slogans against milk quotas, the desertification of the countryside... He is an Algerian farmer who arrives in France with his dreams and who discovers that people are in the shit here as well.

Why does he say that you can only see men with moustaches on Algerian TV?

At first, I wanted him to say, «You turn on the TV and you see Bouteflika! You change channels, Bouteflika! You turn off the TV, Bouteflika! It's TV Bouteflika!» But Bouteflika was very sick and I replaced him with the prototype of the Algerian politician: men with ties and moustaches and it became «TV Moustache». A way of saying that in Algeria there is not much room for entertainment, nor for free and diversified information. It is mostly the government voice expressing itself. Fortunately, the written press is more open.

We are familiar with Belgian humour, Northern French humour, Anglo-Saxon humour and when we listen to your characters speaking, we discover the humour of Algeria's villages.

Algerians are very funny people. You need to hear the jokes they make and stories they tell each other! When I'm back in the village with my cousins, the local café is one of the places where I laugh the most in the world.



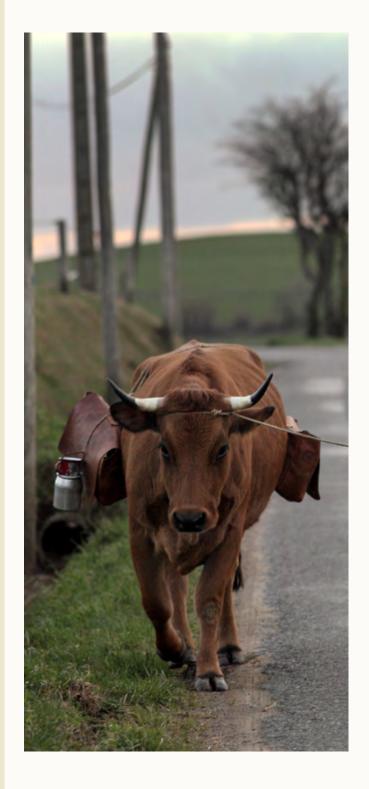
ABOUT THE SCORE BY IBRAHIM MAALOUF

« Ever since TIME OF THE GYPSIES. I have been a big Kusturica fan. For me, no one has ever filmed the great migrations better than he has. For NÉ QUELQUE PART, Armand Amar, the composer of the score, asked Ibrahim Maalouf to handle the brass section. It was fantastic. For LA VACHE, I wanted not only brass band music but I also wanted Ibrahim to be the conductor. Armand told me, «You may as well work directly with him.» Ibrahim read the screenplay and was very enthusiastic, but he warned me, «I'm ready to give it a try, but I only have one month and it's going to be tricky.» I took that risk. I went to join him for four days in Lebanon to listen to demos that he had recorded, alone, on his computer with his trumpet and a small keyboard. I love what he had done right away and we simply fine-tuned a few things. Ibrahim has written a great score and I'm sure it will leave its mark. »

ABOUT JACQUELINE

« We went through a genuine casting process that posed a lot of problems. Since I could not take a French cow to Morocco - where we shot the scenes that take place in the Algerian village - nor bring a Moroccan cow to France, we had to pick three identical cows, one in each country with a stand-in just in case... I had been working on the idea of the film for three or four years and I regularly attended the agricultural show where I saw hundreds of cows with one imperative in mind: Jacqueline needed to be brown to be credible as an Algerian cow. The first one I picked was a Jersey, but the tandem that she formed with Fatsah was not believable. She was a little too small. Then, when I learnt that there was a farm breeding Tarentaise cows in Morocco, I went to see them and I found them to be very pretty, bigger, browner and of a good size. From that point on, we did the casting

process in reverse. I first chose a beautiful Tarentaise in Morocco and then looked for her double in France. I must have seen at least 300 cows in the Alps! The two that we picked were sent to Pierre Cadéac, an animal trainer for the cinema living near Fontainebleau. That's where Fatsah and Jacqueline became acquainted. Meanwhile, the Moroccan Jacqueline had been put indoors and fattened up. Souad Lamriki, the Moroccan film producer, had entrusted her to a young boy, Icham, to take care of her and, in a way, train her. He became crazy about her. We decided to surprise him by offering her to him on the final day of shooting. He was over the moon.. »





A CONVERSATION WITH FATSAH BOUYAHMED

You're virtually unknown on the big screen yet you have the leading role in this movie. How was that as an experience?

A totally fantastic one! In my whole life, I had never worked, nor even hoped to work, for 40 days in a row, and here I had the opportunity to work today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow... It was a journey into the unknown for me. How was I going to react? Would I be disappointed? Would I catch a cold? Without it really showing, I prepared for this role a great deal on my own. I knew I had to be at peace, in shape and totally available. But, in fact, I am an actor. I have lengthy training in Commedia dell'Arte, I spent around 10 years with a specialist in Italian comedy, Carlo Bosso, becoming one of his disciples, and I have even hosted lecture-shows on the subject. I have performed in street theatre all over France. Then I joined the Jamel Comedy Club and subsequently worked a great deal with Jamel. But I never would have imagined making movies. When we began, I realized, «It's true, I wanted to do this as well. »

You talk in the film like an Algerian villager but, in fact, you were born in France and of course, you have no accent.

Some people are even very disappointed when they hear me speak in real life! I speak in the film the way my father does. He is a real clown! He has always made people laugh. In our housing block, all the neighbours adored him, meaning that my mother was really jealous because he made all the other women laugh!

How did you collaborate on the screenplay?

I worked with Mohamed on all the dialogue. I have been playing my character since 1997. I used to call him «my young dad» and he was my alter ego in Algeria. When I met Jamel, I was doing stand-up comedy and, from time to time, I would let my father in: «My dad says this or that.» The character was already in Mohamed's first feature.

Did you know each other before making movies?

I met Mohamed through Jamel: we were both working for him. We immediately hit it off. He is from Bondy and I am from Aubervilliers, we belong to the same generation and we both know all of Michel Jonasz's songs by heart - which is a pretty rare thing! I told Mohamed that back in the village, a farmer uncle - the only one of my father's brothers who has stayed in Algeria and the only one who can read and write in French - asked me once, «Can you bring me photos of the agricultural show in Paris? I'd love to go there one day to see the machines, the animals...» That story made him laugh and gave him the idea for LA VACHE.

What was the most powerful moment during shooting for you?

When I found myself face-to-face with Lambert Wilson. I was terrified for about three seconds. Even so, ahead of time, we had talked a lot and rehearsed, yet when we began to shoot, I don't know what went through my mind but I started thinking, «Shit, it's him!» It all happened very fast! After all, there was plenty of reason to be impressed. He has appeared in so many films that it's like being in the presence of French cinema! But as shooting proceeded, a relationship very close to that of our two

characters fell into place. I felt supported and enriched. Until then, I had mainly worked with comedians. They are people who are always on the move, continually trying to make others laugh. Lambert is a focused actor who prepares seriously and painstakingly. For example, in one scene, he enters the living room to join me and he is out of breath. I saw him run off and race back to be... genuinely out of breath. Now, I want to do my job the way he does and look for the right gestures and attitude.

At the start of the film, we see you digging your garden singing old French popular songs by performers from Aznavour to Jonasz, via «Joe le Taxi» by Vanessa Paradis. Is that how they sing French songs back in Algerian villages?

I could answer that the greatest conservationists of French popular culture are the Algerians. My father's generation, in any case. For him, France means good manners. At 75, he is outraged when a man does not open a door for a woman. This worship of French culture goes from songs to three-piece suits!





You have worked and improvised a great deal with Jamel. Does he still surprise you?

Oh, yes! For starters, Jamel and I have the same improvisation techniques. In the very first sketch that I did with him, in 2006 or so, I played Zidane's brother back in Algeria and he interviewed me. I had never met him before, I sat down opposite him in front of the mike and we were off! And it continues today. Jamel always improvises a great deal. When I read something I've written to him, he says, «Okay, that's funny, but I can come up with something better.» In the scene in the van where the two of us are with Lambert Wilson, he came out with a line that was not in the screenplay. We burst out laughing. The three of us had a lot of fun together.

Your character comes across as fragile and very tender...

Absolutely. This kind of Arab exists, but we don't really know him. On watching LA VACHE ET LE PRISONNIER, he cries on seeing Fernandel leave his cow. He explains to Lambert who is worried, «I'm too sensitive for an Arab.» In North Africa, a man has to stand up straight, and be strong, he has no rights to be afraid, he has no right to give in. This character on the other hand is not ashamed of his tears, He accepts and recognizes his weaknesses and he says, «I need others.» He is not afraid of appearing naive or stupid. He is a lot like me.

ABOUT HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH JACQUELINE

«I had never touched nor even been close to a cow in my life before! Like everyone else, I had seen cows, but always on the other side of a fence. And I had never been to the Agricultural Show either. In North Africa, we don't speak to animals in the same way that people do in France. We don't give them names - we just say «the dog», «the cow», «the donkey» - we don't pet them, we don't approach them. And so the Moroccan cow was afraid of men. However, by spending time with her, by observing her from a distance, by looking at her closely, by listening to her breathe, I was able to tell when she was scared, tired or calm. I met the French cow in Fontainebleau. Mohamed found her very beautiful and, above all, he thought that we could easily find the same one in Morocco. Since I wanted her to be MY cow, I spent several days taking care of her, handling her, feeding her, making her walk and stop... Little by little, I had the impression that she was speaking to me. And people were often impressed by our relationship.

In the scene where she gets stuck in the mud, we were obliged to clean her with a power hose and I could tell that she was not enjoying the experience. We shot several takes and, at one point, I realized that she was breathing more and more rapidly. When she began to shake her head very violently, I stood close to her and took one of her horns in my hand thinking very hard, «Calm down, calm down.» Her breathing became more regular and she recovered a sort of tranquillity. Everyone saw that. What touched me the most was that, as soon as we were shooting and it was just the two of us together, she never took her eyes off me. Something occurred that I cannot really explain, the kind of thing that happens when you meet someone to whom, all of a sudden, you want to talk so much that you forget to leave.»

WHERE DOES THE NAME "JACQUELINE" COME FROM?

«Back in the days of landline telephones, I would give out our number at home and my father would complain because, for him, the phone was only there to communicate with Algeria. If we spoke for more than a minute, he would butt in, «Careful, maybe Algeria is trying to reach us!» When girls called, my parents never remembered their names. So my father would say, «It was another Jacqueline.» For him, that meant: a young French girl. When Mohamed said that he was looking for a name for the cow, I suggested Jacqueline. And he adopted it.»





A CONVERSATION WITH LAMBERT WILSON

What interested, amused or touched you on reading the screenplay?

It immediately made me laugh. I then found the writing very lively, very effective, and the subject very moving. It's a story with a great deal of humanity, a story that unites people after breaking down the barriers that separate them. That is what I liked about it and that is what we need right now. You could say it's a feel-good movie, but it avoids clichés, with an amused and occasionally extremely ironic distance.

Tell us about your character, Count Philippe.

He is a penniless minor aristocrat who has lost the family fortune, a chronic depressive whose wife has left him and, probably, from a Catholic background. It is impossible to get any further away from the Algerian Muslim farmer who turns up straight from his village! Philippe comes from an extremely specific social and cultural background that I know well and from which I have taken a way of behaving, dressing, and even speaking with a blend of refined language and curses. On meeting Fatah, he is going to be subjected to 3000 volts of simplicity,

good humour, energy and human warmth. And, in the end, thanks to this little man, he will leave his path of bitterness and isolation to discover a new taste for life.

What kind of director is Mohamed Hamidi?

Since Mohamed is also the writer, he knew his characters very well and, in a fairly radical fashion, always knew what he wanted and what he was expecting. I found that very pleasant. For example, since I ride, I suggested a scene in which my character is on horseback on his estate. He didn't want that and clearly explained why: too theatrical, a little excessive and cliché. I loved the way in which he explained that to me. He had a very clear idea about our costumes too. He pushed Fatsah and myself in a much clearer comic direction. We tried to resist, because both of us have a theatrical background, but in fact he was right. He held his ground because he knew that was what would set his film apart. Finally, he has a genuine sense of humour and creates a very warm atmosphere on the set. We were a family that loved each other, a family of good people who were very happy to be making this film.

Had you already worked with Jamel?

Yes, we were together in LE MARSUPILAMI where I played the dictator who was mad about Céline Dion. I am a big Jamel fan: he fascinates me. He makes me laugh, of course, but I am also dazzled by his humanity, his curiosity about everything and his great kindness. His eyes are always sparkling because everything interests him.

Jamel improvises a great deal. Was that not unsettling?

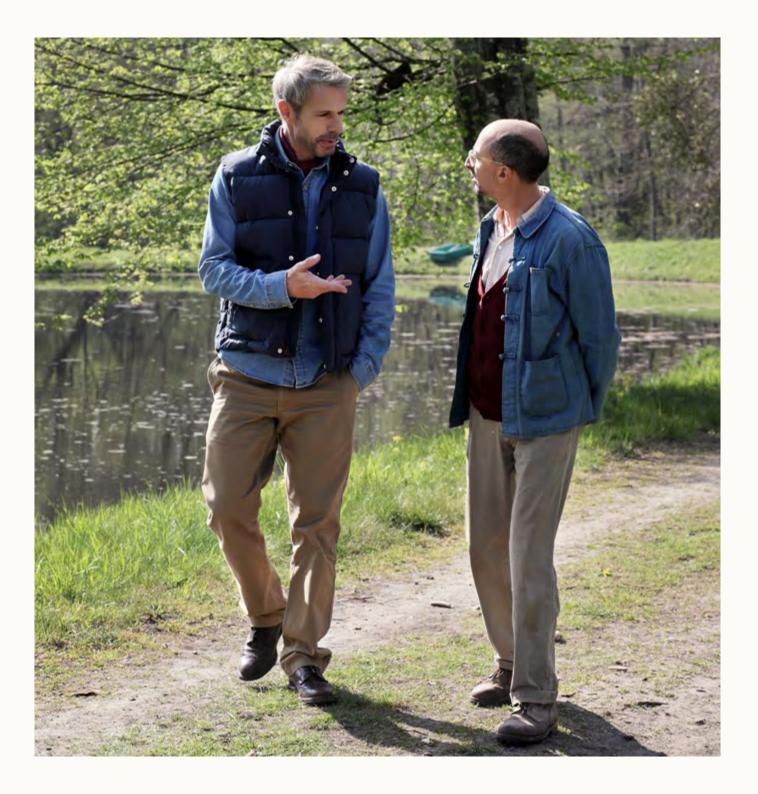
Actually, it's a very controlled form of improvisation, very close to the initial writing. And, at the same time, he has an incredible sense of repartee and loves to tell stories. With him, the camera could film for hours on end. It's the same with Fatsah. The two of them come from that stand-up comedy background where people are capable of improvising infinitely. That's less my thing but I felt very comfortable with them. We had some great moments of helpless laughter together.

You had a lot of fun on this shoot.

Yes, but it was more than that. We had a lot of fun, it's true, but with the feeling that we were telling an excellent, very beautiful story. That's rare. With some comedies, you think, "This is funny, it's nice." But in this case it was touching and inspiring because we felt that there was genuine potential...

In conclusion, an indiscreet question: at the end of shooting, you wrote each one a very beautiful personal letter. Is that something you usually do?

Absolutely not. I really wanted to tell them how happy I had been on this film, because I felt that they were all wonderful people, that I believed in the story, that I had been moved by what it relates and that it had to be made as it had been made. Sometimes, when you are truly happy, you have to say so.





A CONVERSATION WITH JAMEL DEBBOUZE

How did you become co-producer on the film?

In a totally natural manner. Mohamed directed my first show and he is a very talented guy. I like how he sees things and his way of telling everyday stories that touch everyone. Moreover, this is the kind of director and story that I want to support.

With a cow and unknown in the leading role, it can't have been easy finding backers.

A cow and an unknown actor are precisely the cheapest thing going on the market!

You have discovered many talents, including Fatsah and Mohamed. How did you spot them?

They spotted me! When Mohamed came to me with his first screenplay NÉ QUELQUE PART, I discovered a guy full of humour and resource, with a genuine thought process behind it. He is a very attentive director because he knows exactly where he's going. He has the confidence of people who know their path. On the set, I don't know how he feels inside, but we always have the impression of being with someone calm, settled, steady, available and very precise.

He and I share so much, we have so many affinities, but we never feel as if we are working. But we must not forget that he is a teacher of economics, a highly qualified one too, and that The Professor as we call him never gives up on anything. With him, we have the feeling of being in a playground where we work.

As for Fatsah, I discovered him through a sketch that I saw on DVD. He made me laugh a great deal but he also touched me deeply, like Bourvil. He is a very tender, very deep and very funny character and he is the one with whom I have performed the most these last few years, be it at the Marrakech Comedy Festival or in sketches where we form a tandem.

Is it very different from performing with him on film?

Actually, I did not feel as if I was performing but rather that I was in the presence of a family member with whom I am used to exchanging things. He is someone I know well, so it all happened completely naturally. There are very few people with whom I have that kind of relationship.

Why did you choose to play this character?

I wanted to be part of this story, part of Mohamed's world. His cinema reminds me of that of the Italo-Americans. Talking about this form of immigration, as Rachid Bouchareb or Martin Scorsese have been able to do, touches me deeply.

At the start of the film, your character is ashamed of this brother-in-law, forbidding him to tell his family that he lives with a French woman and has children with her. Then he gradually evolves...

I am very fond of this character whom I know well because he closely resembles friends or cousins of mine. People who don't dare to admit who they are or what lives they lead, and who put themselves in unlikely, unviable situations. Whereas, in the end, by speaking out, they would manage to unravel their problems. What I like about my character is that, at one precise moment, he takes himself in hand and accepts what he is. Every complex character is interesting to play, especially when there is a development in their personality.

You had already worked with Lambert Wilson, what kind of partner is he?

We first met on LE MARSUPILAMI in the depths of the Mexican jungle and he was dressed in drag! I really went wild for his legs! We immediately got along with each other. He is someone who is unsettling through his proximity. He has incredible charisma and is extremely accessible. He is funny, kind, affectionate and tender. And he has a great name: «Lambert Wilson». He's exactly the way you expect him to be. You know, in the course of a career, we pass on something of ourselves despite everything. And this guy is not that far removed from his characters. This shoot was a very beautiful experience. To be repeated.

Do you think that in real life, a character like Fatah could unleash the reactions in today's France that he does in the film?

You mean being touched by someone who crosses the whole country on foot with a cow with the sole goal of living out his dream? Helping a sincere and extremely humane man? Yes, I'm sure the French could do that. They're capable of it and have shown it in the past. That's the true France!





CAST

Fatah Philippe

Hassan

Young reporter

Naïma

Mokhtar

Schoolteacher Hamé Hamed

ame nameu

Lucien

Cathy

Magician

Claire

Jacqueline

Town hall official

Farmers' Union leader Farmers' Union member

Nicole

Stéphanie

Suburban youth at Show Samir at the webcafé Fatsah Bouyahmed

Lambert Wilson

Jamel Debbouze

Julia Piaton

Hajar Masdouki

Abdellah Chakiri

Amal El Atrache

Miloud Khetib

Christian Ameri

Karina Marimon

Patrice Thibaud

Charline Paul

Catherine Davenier

François Bureloup

Pierre Diot

Denis Leroy

Brigitte Guedj

Ophélia Kolb

Malik Bentalha

Fehd Benchemsi



CREDITS

Director Screenplay, adaptation and dialogue Original score Director of photography	Mohamed Hamidi Mohamed Hamidi Alain-Michel Blanc et Fatsah Bouyahmed Ibrahim Maalouf Elin Kirschfink	Co-produced by	Pathé France 3 Cinéma Agora Films 14ème Art Production Ten Films
Sets	Arnaud Roth (A.D.C.)	With the participation of	Canal +
1 st assistant director	Arnaud Esterez		Ciné +
Script supervisor	Marie Ducret		France Télévisions
Costumes	Hadjira Ben-Rahou		
Editor	Marion Monnier	Developed with the backing of	CINEMAGE 9
Sound	Pierre Excoffier		DÉVELOPPEMENT
Production manager	Grégory Valais (ADP)		
Producers	Nicolas Adassovsky Duval Yann Zenou Laurent Zeitoun Jamel Debbouze	In partnership with	SOFITVCINE 3 Palatine Etoile 13 Cinémage 10
Co-producers	Romain Le Grand	With the participation of the	CNC
·	Vivien Aslanian Souad Lamriki	and the backing of	Fonds Images de la Diversité
	Bénédicte Bellocq Eric Toledano Olivier Nakache	With the backing of	la Commission Images de la Diversité CNC et CGET / ACSE
Executive producers	Quad Kissfilms	With the backing of	la SACEM

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