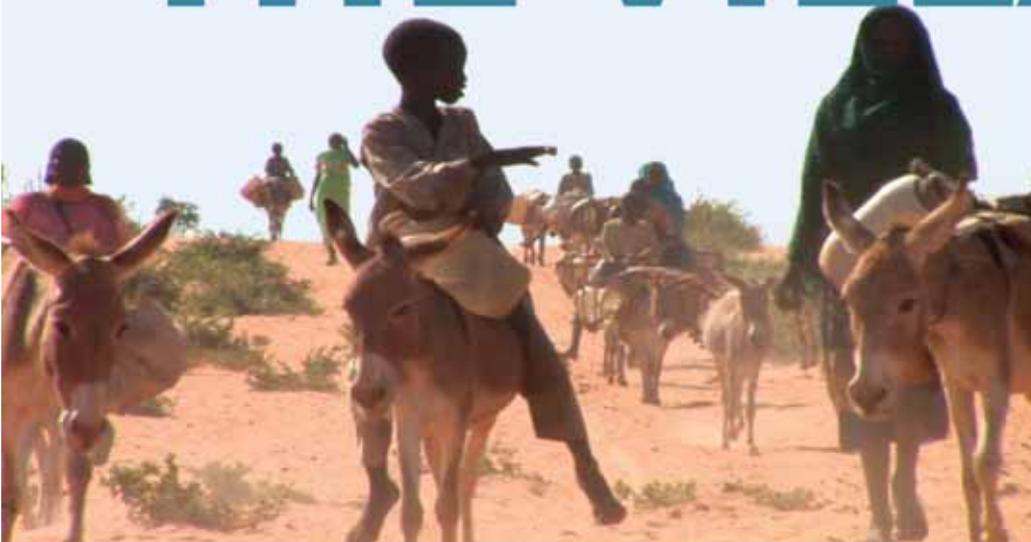


FID MARSEILLE 2008
International Competition
Médiathèques Award

IDFA AMSTERDAM 2008
International Competition

PRINCE FILM AND AMIP PRESENT
A FILM BY OLIVIER ZUCHUAT

FAR FROM THE VILLAGE



Cinematography, sound, editing Olivier Zuchuat Artistic collaboration Corinne Maury Produced by Xavier Carniaux & Pierre-Alain Meier Production Prince Film SA A.M.I.P Coproduction Les Films du Mélangeur Télévision Suisse Romande with the help of Office Fédéral de la Culture DFI Direction du développement et de la coopération DDC Fonds REGIO Films SCAM Pour-cent culturel Migros COOPI (Cooperazione Internazionale - Milano)

trigon-film

Fiche technique / Cast

| | |
|--|---|
| Titre original / original title : | Au loin des villages |
| English title : | Far from the village |
| Italian Title : | Lontano dai villagi. |
| Réalisation, image, montage / <i>Director, camera and editing :</i> | Olivier Zuchuat |
| Collaboration artistique / <i>Artistic collaboration :</i> | Corinne Maury |
| Producteurs / Producers : | Xavier Carniaux & Pierre-Alain Meier |
| Pays de production : | Suisse & France. |
| Format de tournage / shooting format : | HD 25i |
| Format de diffusion / screening format : | 35 mm. Sound SR optical. |
| Ecran / Screen format : | 1,85 |
| Durée / length : | 77 minutes |
| Langue originale / original language : | dajo |
| Subtitles : | Français or English or Italiano. |
| Production : | Suisse : Prince Film (Genève) France : A.M.I.P. (Paris) |
| Co-production : | Les Films du Mélangeur (France). |
| Partenaire : | COOPI (Cooperazione Internazionale / Milano) |
| Avec le soutien de | Office fédéral de la culture DFI, Berne Télévision Suisse Romande, Fonds REGIO Films Direction du développement et de la coopération DDC, Berne, Pour-cent culturel Migros <i>Bénéficiaire de la bourse d'aide à la création de la SCAM « Brouillon d'un rêve »</i> |



FID MARSEILLE 2008 – Compétition internationale
PRIX DES MEDIATHEQUES



Quartz Film Swiss Prize 2009 – Nomination for documentary Film
IDFA – Amsterdam (nominated for Joris Ivens Prize, International Competition)

Festivals

RIDM Montréal 2008 (Compétition Internationale)
Bilbao International Film Festival 2008 (Zinebi)
Téhéran International Film Festival « Ciné-vérité » 2008
FICCO CinéMex MEXICO 2009
One World Human Rights Films Festival Prague
Nyon Visions du réel 2009
Warsaw Planete Doc 2009
Festival International du film des droits de l'Homme 2009, PARIS

www.auloindesvillages.net

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en cours.

SUISSE :

Trigon Film – Zürich (www.trigon-films.com)



SYNOPSIS

Thirteen thousand people confined to five square kilometres in the middle of the Sahel. An image which instantly recalls the world of labour camps: the Gulag of the warm countries. Yet this "concentration" camp is the saving kind: Gouroukoun, a refugee camp in eastern Chad, 50 kilometres from the Sudanese border.

Gouroukoun is an open-air prison, without cells or wardens. Encircling the camp is a virtual wall, traced by fear.

All around, the civil war acts as a permanent jail keeper...

Outside the camp, in the hills, death is lurking: ten kilometres from the camp, massacres, pillages and rapes are occurring freely.

Inside the camp, people wait. Fed, cared for and protected by aid workers. This is not a life; it is a means of survival.

These refugees are all survivors of the Darfur massacres. After two years of confinement, they are now prisoners of their own memories. Memories of atrocities, now engraved on their bodies and in their gazes. Nightmarish memories, coupled with the fear that it might begin all over again.

For two months in the summer of 2007, I too confined myself to the Gouroukoun camp, alone alongside the Italian NGO COOPI and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

How can one portray the irrepresentable: this civil war, this near-genocide in Darfur ? How can this "landscape of difficulty" be filmed without recourse to clichéd images or the conventional, often sterile representations constantly recycled by media ?

A stroll up and down the camp gives an impression of life in slow motion. Waiting. Waiting for the next round of help and nourishment. Sleeping to avoid waiting. Sleeping to overcome fear. Waiting for the fighting to stop. People walking, carrying buckets of water, queuing patiently for food to be distributed. Children playing football. Rations of sorghum being cooked, the sweeping of huts, or tents provided by international aid, worn thin by years in the sun. People carrying on, their daily routine stifled by the unbearable feeling of waiting.

How can one capture the minuscule movements of waiting?

After days of presence and filming at the camp, from the repetitive images of life in the camp and the long takes scanning it, emerged a glimpse of a distressing reality...The refugees' stories began to seep into the images of this slow-motion existence, gesturing at and bringing to light a (formerly) invisible hint of war. As if traces of the past, scars left by the massacres and memories of pain were making themselves felt within these images filmed at the camp, in the refugees' expressions or on their bodies as they moved about the camp.

Without showing itself, and without being shown, a *mindscape* of war had crept into the images. Even though the war is outside the camp, behind the scenes, images of the camp bespeak this war.

Herein lies the film's paradoxical aim: to film war without showing it. To place the viewer before the irrepresentable nature of war. To convey this repertoire of war imagery that I felt had seeped into the footage I collected.

To let the nearly hypnotic duration of the images run its course, so as to allow this *mindscapes* to do its work. A *mindscapes* of war and fear, force-fed by the refugees' stories.

"The important thing is to find the right distance. Where do I belong in this web? Am I being woven or am I the weaver?"

André S. Labarthe



FIDMarseille Magazine, 2008 No 5

Interview with OLIVIER ZUCHUAT

How did the idea for *Far from the Villages* emerge?

I had planned to make a film about waiting in a Sudanese refugee camp in Chad. The Sudanese refugees at the Djabal camp had just spent three years in tents, awaiting their hypothetical return to their villages. A very wearing form of waiting, which leads to disidentification. A peasant deprived of his land, his cattle and his village, a "willing prisoner" in a camp, kept alive by NGOs and international organisations, is a "stified" person, whose world has been taken away. But circumstances dictated otherwise. Since 2006, the Darfur conflict had spread to eastern Chad. When I arrived at the Djabal camp in the summer of 2007, Chadians from the Dajo ethnic group had just been massacred by members of the Janjaweed militia, who had moved in from Darfur and established themselves all around the Djabal camp. They had constructed unplanned camps and organised their own means of survival, thanks to solidarity among families living in the area. They were hoping that the NGOs would help them in the near future. Reports of recent massacres kept arriving at the camps. So I decided to devote my film to these refugees that no one was talking about. They are referred to as "displaced people" and not as "refugees", because they have taken refuge in their own countries. I filmed the documentary within the 5 square kilometres of the camp of displaced "Chadians", called Gouroukoun. It was no longer simply a film about waiting, but also a film about war. One that was raging less than 40 km from there...

What was it like filming the Dajo refugees?

I went to the Goukoukoun camp for the first time in November 2006. But the filming was interrupted due to attacks by rebels from Sudan. I then waited six months for the rainy season to make the roads inaccessible and enclave the region for two months, so as to be guaranteed safety, albeit relative and temporary. I then returned to the camp for two months to do the actual filming. To film waiting, one must wait. Much of my time was spent sitting, observing, listening, explaining, not doing anything, without taking my camera out of its case. I taught one of the refugees to operate the sound. Day by day the distance lessened; people began talking to me. This film was made in collaboration with the Italian NGO Coopi, in charge of healthcare in the camps, and with the support of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). So in a way I was seen as one of the people "bringing aid".

Your film is composed of head-on sequences in which refugees vocalise their experiences. How did you come up with this structure and determine its role in the overall composition?

These men and women were massacred amidst total indifference. The Chadian government left them in the hands of the Janjawees from Sudan. For them, it was important to be able to talk about what had happened, to be in a position to tell the "world" about it. For the survivors, the camera lens was the "world" which had come to listen to them in the isolated camp, in this hard to access region. This is why I chose a fixed, frontal approach. It was a way of gathering information, of "making history" without artifice. These massacres had no witnesses; this film is one of the only traces of them. In fact, some of the rushes were sent to the International Criminal Court in The Hague. The key issue for someone trying to film such a situation is finding the right distance, without forcing things, being voyeuristic or creating a spectacle. Just listening, gathering information and welcoming it. I wanted a camera that was recording, but not seeking answers. During the editing I also tried not to cut people off. The story of the battle of 26 September 2005 is eloquent: the speaker pays homage to the victims simply by stating their names and their hometowns. Adam Mursal told me that after reading the 46 names of his friends who had died in the battle of 26 September 2005, it was as if he had "buried them". Following this he had to go off privately and collect himself. In a society with an oral tradition, people's names are not engraved on marble... This patient reading in front of the camera was a kind of "monument" to those who died in the battle.

There is a striking contrast between the horror described and the calmness and composure of the refugees.

You perceived "calmness and composure" in terms of your (our) European cultural references. But I think every culture has its own way of dealing with pain and mourning, which is often not comparable to those of other cultures. So it is difficult for me to speak confidently about that. Life in the camp must go

on. And it seems to me that what we might perceive as “apparent calmness and composure” is a means of “living together” after such events. All the refugees at the camp are survivors; they have all lost a large part of their families and loved ones. There is no room at the camp for individual outpourings. People are in no position to listen to or welcome the pain of others, as everyone has their own to bear. Furthermore, the conflicts among tribes in eastern Chad are age-old: shepherds against farmers, Arabs against blacks, nomadic groups against sedentary ones. Inter-tribal relations have always been marked by low-intensity, yet recurring conflict, resulting in a relatively limited number of victims. But the Kalachnikov AK47s, imported from Sudan with the complicity of the Khartoum government – keen to see eastern Chad ablaze – have altered the power relations and enabled certain armed tribes to carry out large-scale massacres on unarmed tribes. The Dajo farmers from the Gouroukoun camp lost the fight due to a lack of military technology; they only have arrows and lances...

You also show sequences from everyday life, but which appear suspended in the temporality of waiting.

Someone who saw the film told me that it was like time was refusing to pass. I think that sums up what I was trying to do: let the time exhaust each take, much in the way that the time of waiting was gradually wearing out the people at the camp. I filmed the Gouroukoun camp as a “landscape of difficulty”.

After days of presence and filming at the camp, from the repetitive images of life in the camp and the long takes scanning it, emerged a glimpse of a distressing reality...The refugees’ stories that I had recorded began to seep into the images of this slow-motion existence, gesturing at and bringing to light a (formerly) invisible hint of war. As if traces of the past, scars left by the massacres and memories of pain were making themselves felt within these images filmed at the camp, in the refugees’ expressions or on their bodies as they moved about the camp. Without showing itself, and without being shown, a *mindscape* of war had crept into the images. Even though the war is outside the camp, behind the scenes, images of the camp bespeak this war. It was this invisible war that I tried to bring out. Herein lies the film’s paradoxical aim: to film war without showing it. To place the viewer before the irrepresentable nature of war. To convey this repertoire of war imagery that I felt had seeped into the footage I collected. To let the nearly hypnotic duration of the images run its course, so as to allow this *mindscape* to do its work. A *mindscape* of war and fear, force-fed by the refugees’ stories.

And just why did you decide to leave these war images behind the scenes?

In his work *The Future of the Image*, Jacques Rancière questions the representability of certain singular events in the history of humankind, including the Shoah and certain African genocides. He concludes that for art nothing is irrepresentable so long as representation is displaced, so long as the relation between showing and signifying is upset. I directed this film in collaboration with Corinne Maury, who is currently conducting an academic study on the poetics of documentary cinema. She shows, for instance, that there is a “poetics” at work on the screen when one privileges presence over representation. This is perhaps what happens in this film. I received photos of destroyed villages taken by members of the HCR, H el ene Caux and Marcel van Maastricht, but they do not figure in this film. I wanted to privilege the presence of war, in the imagination of the viewer, over its representation on the screen.

***Far from the Village* is composed essentially of fixed and precisely framed shots, with very little camera movement. Why is this?**

I filmed this temporality of waiting in fixed shots, almost like stills. A camp is a prison without walls where fear acts as a jail keeper. The fixed shots bring out this confined space, in which the lives of these “voluntary prisoners” are unfolding. A constantly moving camera would reflect a seeking gaze. Conversely, in this film I am not looking for anything: I fixate on a spot for the gaze, and allow time to fill out the frame. This way the viewer’s imagination is left to do its work. There are only two takes which do not follow this logic of fixity: a long tracking shot panning the repetitive view of the line of huts and a 360 degree circular shot. Both of these shots are nonetheless very geometrical, only this time space is prioritised over time...

Interview compiled by Olivier Pierre

Presse (extraits)



Wednesday 2 July 2008

(...)

Far from the village, by Swiss director Olivier Zuchuat, transports us to another conflict, to another devastated area: Darfur. This time to the Gouroukoun refugee camp in Chad, which houses 13 000 Chadians having fled the Arab Janjaweed militia. By rejecting the tempo of conventional reporting to adopt an approach based on observation and calm attentiveness to the men and women having witnessed murders or suffered atrocities (such as the man whose eyes were torn out with a knife), the film combats the rush of media discourses and the human indifference they promote, providing a sense of immersion in everyday life at this camp where everything is lacking.

(...)



Saturday 6 July 2008

FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DU FILM DOCUMENTAIRE EN DIRECT DE MARSEILLE

(...)

Far from the Village, by Olivier Zuchuat

At the border between Chad and Sudan, Olivier Zuchuat has filmed the refugees of a camp on the plain of Gouroukoun. Far from the world, far from their villages, they wait, losing hope, for the conflict to end. The Swiss director confined himself to the camp for two months, approaching the refugees with great modesty and rigour, in order to create a most beautiful film. Its release in cinemas is anticipated (or should we say hoped for ?)

(...)



Amsterdam Weekly, 20-26 November 2006.

This warm, colorful and even humorous film is set in a refugee camp in Chad near the border with Soudan. Rather than lingering on images of violence, however, it shows the consequences of war. Swiss director Olivier Zuchuat places its camera at a very low angle near the ground, as if to suck you into the camp – which he eventually does. Interviews with refugees, who talk about the horrors they have encountered, are alternated with scenes of everyday life. The film is rather slow and static, but that is life in a refugee camp. And Zuchuat calm approach works. Simply knowing their gruesome background make a scene of children playing in a pool of water the more moving. (Marie-Claire Mezler)



20 november 2008.

Far From the Villages captures the plight of thousands of displaced Chadians sheltering in the Gouroukoun Camp in Eastern Chad, having been driven from their villages by Janjaweed militia crossing over from neighbouring Sudan.

Swiss director Olivier Zuchuat spent two months in the Gouroukoun Camp from May 2007, having travelled there with the help of Italian NGO COOPI. "I went there during the rainy season. It is the safest period to spend time there because the area is cut off by the rains and attacks die down," explains Zuchuat. On arriving there, he spent three weeks observing the camp and talking to the residents, with the help of an interpreter with a smattering of French, before he finally picked up his camera.

Zuchuat describes the film as "a manifesto" against the shoot-and-run war reportage favoured by television networks the world over, whereby a news crew will visit a conflict zone for a matter of days, if not hours in search of dramatic footage; whether this exists or not.

"I wanted to do the opposite," explains Zuchuat. "I wanted to capture the sense of time passing slowly. The people are stuck in the camp, waiting, with nothing to do... I also wanted to give the camp residents the opportunity to speak about their ordeals."

The work is composed of long, lingering shots of everyday life in the camp – people collecting water, gathering firewood, carefully sweeping the dirt floors of their makeshift abodes, cooking up their sorghum rations – and uninterrupted accounts from residents of what happened to them at the hands of the Janjaweed.

"By using the long shots, I wanted to give space for the imaginative process to kick in. As it's a film on war without a single war picture in it – the spectators must use their imaginations to fill in the gaps. I have pictures of burned villages but I didn't show them because I didn't want to kill the imaginary process," explains the director.

"I wanted to create a sort of immersive process, whereby if you see the film in the theatre you are fully immersed in the camp; as it's a very slow filmic process, you are really part of this camp life, with all the noise and everyday activities going on", he adds.

Melanie Goodfellow

Olivier Zuchuat

Born in 1969 in Geneva (Switzerland). After studying theoretical physics and literature he became a teaching assistant at the Université de Lausanne (Switzerland). He directed several theatrical productions of works by Bertolt Brecht and Heiner Müller before turning exclusively to documentary cinema. Since 2005, he has been teaching film studies at the Université de Paris-Est Marne la Vallée. He works and lives between Lausanne and Paris.



Documentary films directed :

- 2005 **Djourou (a rope around your neck).**
Film essay on the debt crisis in Africa. Produced by Les Films d'Ici, TV10 Angers, Les films du mélangeur, CNC.
Released in France in June 2005, in Switzerland in September 2006, in Germany in September 2006.
Selected for the following festivals: FIPA 2005, Visions du Réel (Nyon), "Vue d'Afrique 2005" (Montreal), Résistance 2005, One World Festival (Prague 2006), Festival de Gardanne 2005. Tri-Continental Film Festival (Johannesburg).
Award for best documentary, honorable mention, at « Vues d'Afrique », Montreal, 2005 .
- 2002 **Mah Damba Cissoko, A Griotte in Exile.** Documentary 57 min. by Corinne Maury and Olivier Zuchuat. Produced by Canal+ Horizons, Artline films, Les Films du Mélangeur. Shown on : TV5, Canal+ Horizons . CFI
Selected for FIPA-tel Biarritz 2002, Amiens International Film Festival 2002, Fespaco 2003 (Ouagadougou - Burkina Faso)
- 2001 **Dollar, Tobin, FMI, Nasdag and the Others.** (40 min).
Produced by Les Films du Mélangeur, Chiméroscope.
Selected for Résitances (2001), Festival des films Nord-sud Rouen 2003
Selected for Image en Bibliothèque & Documentary Film Month 2002, distributed in Europe, United States, Australia. Translated into Japanese.

He has also worked in editing (mainly for the channel ARTE) with directors Nicolas Philibert, Frédéric Compain, Dominique Gros and with video artist Alejandra Rieja.

Directing for the theatre:

- 1998 Heiner Müller : **Cement**, Created by Théâtre Arsenic / Lausanne and Théâtre du Grutli / Genève, co-directed by G. Schneider. Filmed in Switzerland.
- 1996 Michel de Ghelderode, **Escorial**, Théâtre de la Grange, Lausanne.
- 1996 Heiner Müller based on Aeschylus, **Prometheus**, BFSH2, Lausanne.
- 1995 Marguerite Duras, **The Malady of Death**, Selected for the Festival de Théâtre Universitaire de Rouen, France.

He has also worked as a playwright and assistant with Matthais Langhoff (Théâtre de Nanterre-Amandiers).