

LES FILMS PELLEAS PRESENTS IN COPRODUCTION WITH NIKO FILM AND PROLEGOMÈNES



OFFICIAL SELECTION
UN CERTAIN REGARD
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

WHERE PAST MEETS PRESENT

UNTIL THE BIRDS RETURN

A FILM BY KARIM MOUSSAOUI



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2017 / FRANCE, GERMANY, ALGERIA, QATAR / COLOUR / 1.66 / 5.1 / 113' / ARABIC, FRENCH

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A large flock of birds is seen flying across a sky filled with soft, grey clouds. The birds are silhouetted against the lighter parts of the sky, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall mood is contemplative and expansive.

SYNOPSIS

Algeria today. Past and present collide in the lives of a newly wealthy property developer, an ambitious neurologist impeded by wartime wrongdoings, and a young woman torn between the path of reason and sentiment. Three stories that plunge us into the human soul of a contemporary Arab society.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

At the dawn of the 21st century, Algeria is emerging from a bloody decade, the traumas of which are still very much alive now.

New ways of living and thinking are falling into place and we live, in a way, without worrying about the future, without any perspective, in a state of blissful amnesia. However, this system quickly reaches its limits. A form of distress that endures within us, frozen in time, returns to the fore.

The stories in my film take place in this context.

Three tales set in the present day that unfold over a single week in various parts of the country.

The screenplay is driven by a series of portraits of men and women dealing with life, everyday existence and the recent history of Algeria. They are ordinary characters living an ordinary life.

Why three stories, why just three stories? Because I believe that through the tales I have chosen to film, I provide a cross-section of the country's diversity. The diversity of its social world: from the bourgeois couple (Mourad) to the humble family (Aïcha), from the «emancipated» woman (Rasha and Lila) to the traditional woman (Aïcha, rebellious though she is, or

the victimized woman), from the rich man of experience (Mourad) to the young idealist (Djalil) or to the one who is obsessed by climbing the social ladder (Dahman). The diversity of the characters (with, alongside the stories, digressions that reveal or hint at other possible situations) allows me to provide an exhaustive glimpse of what interests me in my country. I also feel that I have tackled all the questions that I wish to deal with. A single story would have related a unique experience whereas these three stories allow for a global view, thereby erasing a possible notion of singularity or exception.

I film life choices while placing the aspiration for a better life - through desire, willpower or strategy - alongside the accomplishment or failure of these aspirations. The goal is to lead the audience to discover a stalemate that has persisted for too long, the result of a system of paradoxical functioning and thinking. In this film, the idea is also to show the relations between men and women, along with each one's place in society. Mourad and Lila are a «modern» couple in a conservative environment; Mourad and Rasha, a mixed couple. Djalil and Aïcha, children of the middle class, meet and lose



each other, powerless to confront their desires. And, finally, the rape victim, first abandoned by her family, then by her friends and her social group, is waiting for a man who will recognize her «bastard» child so that he may have the rights of other citizens: an identity, an education and work.

Three stories that aim to be a description of stalled situations and that, in my opinion, are significant of a state of being.

The characters are prevented or prevent themselves from making the life choices to which they aspire or which they desire. The three situations highlight the risk of giving up what, in the eyes of the characters, is of the order of things, even if that goes contrary to their desires or deep-seated aspirations, or even their principles.

The events are imaginary but possible at least, inspired by my personal observations. For example, in the third story, «the woman» is trying to find a father for her son because the Algerian legal system does not allow a child without a father to have a name. By asking this man, who witnessed her rape, to recognise the paternity of the child, she hopes to save the latter from a future tragedy: children born to an anonymous father in Algeria cannot have a family name or an identity.

My goal in this film is not to describe society, but to evoke aspects of it that arouse my interest at the very spot where the process of change has stalled. I also attempt to examine and share with the audience all the possibilities with which we are confronted and how we can be the creators of our multiple lives.

To get across the idea that we are dissecting a territory, the story takes us from the north to the south of the country.

The different characters move through ever-changing landscapes: the suburbs and city centre of Algiers, the vast, semi-arid landscapes of the Aurès mountains, the roads installed hastily in sections thanks to recent highway construction.

We encounter various settings: a bourgeois home, a modest apartment, a hospital, an ordinary hotel, a nightclub, a shack in a shanty town... Enough different places to provide a glimpse of modern Algeria.

I do not attempt to make the settings all the characters look ugly or pretty, nor to underline a specific detail that would comfort us, me and/or the audience, with commonplace or biased images. I make sure my gaze, which I lend to the audience, provides a dynamic, active, occasionally poetic but never categorically fixed view.



INTERVIEW WITH **KARIM MOUSSAOUI**

Your short film *The Days to Come*, shown in Competition in Locarno in 2013, was set during the civil war in Algeria. Do you see a link between your two films?

The Days to Come was indeed set in the first half of the 1990s, at the start of the civil war. The stories in my feature film take place after that war, in the «new» Algeria that is trying to move on and turn its back on violence.

What led you to write and direct *Until the Birds Return*?

I began by asking myself about people's involvement in society. What makes them feel concerned about what happens to us or not? And, above all, at what point can we say that our implication and commitment are the catalyst of change?

Both the original and international titles of the film refer to the notion of time. How do you view the recent religious and political developments in Algeria in relation to your film?

In the first part of the film, characters ask themselves, «when are things going to change?» Whether they are

political or religious, such questions cannot possibly find an answer without including the parameter of time. The time to process and integrate new ideas.

Can you talk about your decision to tell the story in three parts?

The structure imposed itself on me naturally. I had to give the feeling of relating a country. To do that, it was necessary to tell three stories in three different parts of Algeria. Then the journey forms the link between them.

This journey was also a pretext to reveal different social categories: the rich upper class, the middle class and finally the poor. All these social classes are made to interact, the first two having to face situations that oblige them to call their way of thinking into question.

How does the cinematography serve the different stories?

The director of photography and I made sure to film the characters moving in the different environments. The challenge facing us each time was to choose the right shot and lens to show both the characters and their surroundings.



The film takes place in various beautiful locations in Algeria rarely seen on the big screen. How difficult was it shooting there?

Shooting in Algeria is always a little tricky. For instance, in the place where we shot the second story, there were no hotels. The beauty of the setting made us forget that problem and we found accommodation solutions. Besides, I have only ever shot in Algeria and the difficulty of working here is a parameter that I have assimilated, including during the writing process.

The actors are brilliantly cast. How was the casting process organized and how did you select the main actors?

I chose the actors for the main roles by basing myself on what they embody in real life. They can be complex and tormented, just like the characters in my film.

FILMOGRAPHY

UNTIL THE BIRDS RETURN 2017
CANNES 2017, UN CERTAIN REGARD

THE NATURE OF TIME (short) 2013
LOCARNO 2013 - COMPETITION
NAMUR 2013 - JURY SPECIAL PRIZE
CÉSAR AWARDS - NOMINATED FOR BEST SHORT FILM

CE QU'ON DOIT FAIRE (short) 2006

NOIR SUR BLANC (short) 2005

PETIT DEJEUNER 2003



CAST

MOHAMED DJOUHRI: MOURAD
SONIA MEKKIOU: LILA
MEHDI RAMDANI: DJALIL
HANIA AMAR: AÏCHA
CHAWKI AMARI: AÏCHA'S FATHER
HASSAN KACHACH: DAHMAN
NADIA KACI: THE WOMAN
SAMIR EL HAKIM: HER BROTHER
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF **AURE ATIKA RASHA**

SCREENPLAY: **KARIM MOUSSAOUI AND MAUD AMELINE**
DIRECTOR: **KARIM MOUSSAOUI**
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: **DAVID CHAMBILLE**
SOUND DESIGNER: **ARNAUD MARTEN**
EDITOR: **THOMAS MARCHAND**
FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: **FRANCK MORAND**
SECOND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: **HASSEN FERHANI**
SCRIPT SUPERVISOR: **ELSA MELQUIONI**
PRODUCTION DESIGNER: **HAMID BOUGHRARA**
COSTUME DESIGNER: **MAYA BEN CHIKH EL FEGOUN**
CASTING DIRECTOR: **ABDELMADJID KELLOU**
CHOREOGRAPHER: **GEORGIA IVES**
SOUND MIXER: **ANDREAS HENKE**
CO-PRODUCER: **JABER DEBZI**
CO-PRODUCER: **NICOLE GERHARDS**
PRODUCERS: **DAVID THION ET PHILIPPE MARTIN**

CREW

LES FILMS PELLÉAS PRESENT
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DÉVELOPPEMENT, VENICE GAP - FINANCING MARKET 2016 - QMRA
INTERNATIONAL SALES MK2 FILMS
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