PARIS STALINGRAD

Documentary, 86’

**Short synopsis**

Paris in the summer of 2016. Refugees arrive from Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Afghanistan, and many other countries, hoping to escape war or political instability. In the City of Lights, they have no choice but to sleep in the streets. Makeshift camps start growing in Stalingrad district. Nothing is planned to welcome asylum seekers. As a Parisian born citizen, I witnessed the French state’s violence against these new immigrants. I followed their daily life, between police raids, massive arrests and closed immigration offices. I began spending time at the camps, listening to their stories and helping them to fill out forms to ask for asylum. I made this film to share their side of the story. In this context, I met Souleymane. A Sudanese teenager who lost everything during the war in Darfur. When others denied his humanity and he faced torture, slavery, abuse, or had nowhere else to turn, Souleymane found solace in the one thing nobody could take from him: his poetry. For him, each poem is a way to say the unspeakable, to transform the violence he endured throughout his journey. At refugee demonstrations, police roundups and meetings with groups of concerned citizens who come to his aid, my camera captures Souleymane in his Parisian wanderings, to the beat of his poetic ramblings.

My camera shows the transformation of the city. At each stage of Souleymane's life, I can see how much Paris is increasingly banning foreigners from public space.

**Director’s statement**

At the beginning of the summer of 2016, I started going almost everyday on the refugee camps around the Stalingrad metro station in Paris. I engaged in conversation with those I met. Because I speak Arabic, I could have deep conversations with Sudanese, Libyans, Iraqis, Eritreans, Ethiopians and Somalis. Before being able to film on the camp, Thim and I spent whole days there chatting with people, explaining to them the desire we had to make this film, and how much we wanted to share the moments we had spent with them. Finally, we started filming with those who understood our approach. This film is a reflection of what we tried to do on the camp of Stalingrad: take the time of the meeting, capture what some pass without seeing, keep track, and in this way, communicate, alert and translate.

This shooting is part of the continuity of an approach I have been pursuing for several years in my documentaries and by which I want to take the time for meeting oppressed people and giving them a voice. I am with those I film, in a close relationship; and this is how it becomes possible to collect stories without filter and that are given to me with confidence. I met Souleymane on a rainy evening at the end of August 2016 on the camp of Stalingrad, he asked me to help him to make the identity photos required by the Prefecture to open his asylum application file. First we shared Arabic as a common language. We could communicate without the need of an interpreter and it makes a difference. In our discussions, when he was angry at the injustices inflicted on refugees, Souleymane summoned the colonial past of France: "All you see here, theses streets and buildings, the people of Africa built it! Who was digging this earth? Those, who come from Africa." We spent long afternoons at the edge of the Saint Martin Canal and we met regularly at the Sudanese restaurant where his whole community goes for lunch. He shared with me his poems and introduced me to his friends.

The balance of the film is built around three types of sequences. The “direct cinema”, the wanderings in the city with Souleymane telling his poems and the punctual intervention of the director personal voice-over that articulates the story. A voice that I wanted discreet, withdrawn and which gives the missing information to the image to understand what’s really happening. A voice in the first person to remind that the film is shot from my point of view, as much as possible alongside the people I met. A voice in dialogue with the images, taking care not to say too much to let the image speak for itself. The scenes of “direct cinema” bring us into the roughness of the everyday life of the exiles in Paris. And finally, the poems open on moments of introspection, which represent a break in a climate of undeniable violence. The film does not aim to explain everything but rather allow what is off frame to also breathe. This is not a survey of the refugee’s journey in Paris, but a film that shows moments spent by them: the brutal experience of a street life and the joys of friendship. I prefer true conversation to interview, to preserve spontaneity in the exchanges. In the editing, I often made the choice to let my questions be heard, not to erase my voice, because it's a way to remind of my presence to the viewer and show the personal relationship that I maintain with those I film. In conclusion, I must admit that in the face of the many acts of violence and inhumanity inflicted on these people, we sometimes thought that we were making a film committed to alert the public. But over the course of the editing, it became clear that the most powerful counterpoint to what refugees endure when they arrive in Paris, is the life force that inhabits them, the extreme lucidity of their analyses and the intellectual and poetic finesse of their writings. Finally, police brutality and administrative violence are, in my opinion, referred to in this film as a setting and not a subject; the real subject of this film is the people it takes as characters.

Director’s Biography

Hind Meddeb currently works between Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Citizen of both sides of the Mediterranean, she has explored the complexity of Arab youth. She mostly films by herself creating an intimacy with the characters she chooses to follow. Her first film “Casablanca. One way ticket to paradise” tells the story of 14 Moroccan suicide bombers who killed dozens of innocent people in restaurants and bars downtown Casablanca after having been indoctrinated by a jihadi movement. The terrorists were in their early twenties and came from the same neighborhood, one of the poorest slums in the suburb of the city. The film is telling their untold stories through the words of their families, friends, and schoolmates. The film received a Bronze Award and a Best Treatment Award at Abu Dhabi Documentary Film Festival with Danny Glover as President of the Jury.

Between 2011 and 2013, Hind Meddeb directed two feature documentaries observing the Arab revolutions through the eyes of young musicians in the slums of Cairo and the poor neighborhoods across Tunisia. In “Tunisia Clash” she enters the underground Tunisian rap scene, fighting for freedom of speech and social justice. In Egypt, she discovered a new sound born in the slums of Cairo that combines pop, electronic music and unconfined lyrics, which breaks the taboos of the conservative patriarchal society. Hind Meddeb captured in her films the creativity and the sociocultural bubbling that is being born in these illegal districts. She shaped the word “Electro Chaabi” and made the world discover this new musical genre. Electro Chaabi was selected at BFI London International Film Festival, Göteborg International Film Festival, Rotterdam International Film Festival, Seattle International Film Festival, Crossing Europe Film Festival Linz, received the “Charles Cros Academy Award” and was broadcasted on “Al Jazeera Documentary Channel”.

In her new film, “Paris Stalingrad”, Hind Meddeb shows to the world a hidden side of Paris, while the city closes doors to asylum seekers, building fences to expel them from public spaces, creating new borders downtown. Since 2016, Hind Meddeb has been involved in supporting refugees arriving in Paris. In 2018, she created a “cinema workshop” at « Villa Saint Michel » a cultural Centre welcoming foreign unaccompanied minors fleeing war and violence, arriving alone from all over the world. She made these teenagers create their own documentary, a kind of “self-portrait” to share their life paths, between hopes and sorrows. Since 2017, Hind launched poetry workshops with refugees including publishing translations and performing on stage. Afterward, she created “musical poetry nights” and live performances at “Le Trianon”, “Maison de la Poésie” and “Institut du Monde Arabe” making French musicians like Arthur H and Gael Faye collaborate with artists in exile.

Co-director’s biography

With a scientific background, Thim Naccache did his training as a film maker at the "European Film College" in Denmark, where he directed his first short movie, "Breaking in" in 2005. In 2006, he traveled to Bolivia with director Gregory Shepard to meet Evo Morales, the presidential candidate. For four months, they have been following him on the road across Bolivia, during his whole campaign, all the way to his election. The documentary “A Nation Journey“ was the first documentary to show the rise of a Native American peasant to the summit of the state in a Latin American country. On this film, Thim Naccache was both director of photography and editor.

Thim Naccache then worked as an editor and a director of photography on documentaries, short features and experimental films. He met Hind Meddeb in high school and started working with her on the editing of her first movie, "Casablanca. One way ticket to Paradise”. In 2013, he directed "Misconception", a short movie selected at the International Short Film Festival in Berlin. On January 2019, he assisted Joseph Paris in directing "Dying Graciously”, a 24-hour ritual film broadcasted live on Youtube. In 2016, during a documentary shoot in the Grande-Synthe refugee camp, he met volunteers who alerted him about the existence of the Stalingrad camp in Paris. Surprised by the low media coverage given to this situation, he began to film the daily lives of refugees arriving in Paris. Along with Hind Meddeb, he then embarked on a long-term shoot.

Their new movie **“Paris Stalingrad”** was selected for the official competition of “Cinéma du Réel” International Film Festival in Centre Pompidou last march in Paris.

CREDITS IN ENGLISH

With Lami T. Nagawo, Souleymane Mohammad, Valérie Osouf, Houssam el Assimi, Adam Misscall, Galaxy Mohammad, Agathe Nadimi, Ousmane, Lamrana, Johan Corceron

Director: Hind Meddeb Co-director: Thim Naccache Producer: Sylvie Brenet Co-producer: Abel Nahmias Cinematography: Hind Meddeb, Thim Naccache Editor: Sophie Pouleau Sound design: Damien Tronchot Sound Effects: André Fèvre Color Grading: Christophe Reynaud Music: Bachar Mar Khalife « Ya Nas » / InFiné Music Producer assistants: Raphaël Deslandes, Léa Sansonetti Executive producer: Sylvie Brenet Productions companies: Les Films du Sillage, Echo Films Post-production : Seppia Translaters : Fred Chast, Philippe Aronson, Michelange Quay, Omer Omrane, Abubaker Mohamed Imam Graphisme : Myriam Barchechat Special Thanks to: Amina Meddeb, Joseph Paris, Abel Nahmias , Michel Zana Thanks to: Alex Akoka, Shona Bhattacharyya, Nour Abichou, Clara Menais, Dina Amer, Milo Pus, Catherine Cody, Jane Sautière, Théo Stefanini, Johan Corceron et la garage « Carrosserie Précisium Jcp Auto » Subventions and Grants Grant “Brouillon d’un rêve” of SCAM (The civil society of multimedia authors in France) Writing and Development Grant of CNC (National Film and Moving Image Centre in France) Writing Grant of the “Région Ile de France” Production Grant “Fonds Images de la Diversité” of CNC Development Grant of Procirep Angoa Post-production Grant of “Région Grand Est” Production Grant of “Arab Found for Art and Culture” (AFAC)