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الليل والفتى



LA NUIT ET L'ENFANT

THE NIGHT AND THE KID

UN FILM DE DAVID YON

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LA NUIT ET L'ENFANT

de David Yon

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The Night and the Kid

France - DCP - 61 min - format 16:9 - 2015

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In the Atlas steppe highlands. After the wars, on a land where threat still echoes, a young man, Lamine, and a kid wander in the night. From place to place, the past resurfaces from the shadows, through Lamine's stories and the singular rituals he reenacts, all along the re-flowering ruins



*"On a full-moon night
I sang to the pale light of the moon
Until I got tired of being awake
Everytime I think
I am overwhelmed with my passions
And then I only see a past without a future
I escape via my rhymes
to heal the wounds of the past
Barely whispering,
I want to live in silence
I am frozen
I put together broken parts of thought
I am in front of you now"*

excerpt, The Night and the Kid

* director's statement

After *The Birds of Arabia*, my first film, I soon felt the need to return to Djelfa, Algeria, and shoot a second one. The words of these young people, their link to their territory, to History, called for a film to be. While in *The Birds of Arabia* one would hear voices of the past - the correspondence between anarchist Antonio Atarès and Simone Weil - I'd like this new film *The Night and the Kid* to give way to present voices of Djelfa.

The region was peopled with nomad tribes. A pocket of the War of Independence and a hotbed of terrorism in the 1990's, its heavy historical legacy weighs so much that threat intrinsically pertains to it. But despite the blood legacy received, the young Algerians I have met struck me by how they have made this territory their own, how they took me to places still considered by others sullied by danger. *The Night and the Kid* is also part of this recovery. One of the main shooting locations is La Mare Blanche, an oasis in the middle of the steppe. During the 90's, terrorists came along and the farmers left. The White Pond is now uninhabited, frozen in the traces of former violence.

Over time, confidence has developed between me and my friends in Djelfa, the Lahrech brothers – Salah, Ilyes, Idriss – and Boubaker : they have assisted me in the long-term film process. This enables us to consider making a film a collective experiment, a way of setting free both words and bodies. They all are truly active in the making of the film, made with them and not about them.

In the course of my trips to Djelfa, a powerful character has emerged, embodied by Lamine Bachar, the film's main character and a friend of the Lahrech brothers. His commitment and his passion for filmmaking have resulted in the film being built around him and his natural talent for creating a character, both his extended self and someone else. I am susceptible to his way of giving himself and to his graceful, concrete, tangible approach of his environment. The film has been developed by three voices : Algerian filmmaker's Zoheir Mefti, Lamine's and mine.

In the film, by inventing rituals of his own, Lamine tries to have "the ruins re-flower" within a seemingly endless night, accompanied by a kid who is his confidant. I hope this is what the film will document : History seeping out of the territory and young people calling upon it by means of a film, aiming at setting themselves free of it.

David Yon

* Interview with David Yon

The film has evolved over a long period of time. Could you tell us about how the project started and how it has changed in the course of several years? First rather a documentary, it has more and more turned to drama...

While shooting my first film in Djelfa in 2007, I met young people of my age, the Lahrech brothers Salah, Ilyes, Idriss and Boubaker, who became my friends. I regularly returned to see them and my desire to make a film with them and their close ones kept increasing.

The first idea was starting from their Spanish great-grandmother who had been kidnapped by Emir Abdelkader and had to marry one of his lieutenants. The point was, based on History, to find something between documentary and drama.

But once we started asking people around them about this foremother, I realized that the story triggered debates that were more important to their parents' generation than to theirs.

At one point, they said a fictional rather than a documentary film would be better to express what they wanted to. This is how the idea of drama appeared, and as I wanted to make a film about them not just applying my own vision, we tried to find out what kind of feature we could make together. I only brought in the idea of the sun no longer rising, as for the formal aspect, I intended to create a type of image in which what is visible keeps rarefying. Working with HD means everything is highly defined, too dense, and I felt like using darkness and half-light for the image to be full of mystery.

We organized the casting with all their friends. As to them, feature meant more particularly action, they imagined for the casting scene they should have a gun and walk around the place carrying that gun. So several of them walked around this wasteland with the gun. We viewed the footage together and we all agreed on Lamine being the most magnetic of all. Lamine Bachar is Salah Larech's best friend as well as the brothers' neighbor. We then decided that Lamine would be the main character, so all we had to do was writing the script for the feature.

Were the texts and dialogs, at times quite literary, written before, based on made-up or improvised accounts?

As for the past seven years I stayed in Djelfa every year and kept a diary about my impressions, we did have a written basis. Let me quote a passage that is meaningful to me :

« In Djelfa, I often imagined a water drop on a rock, under full sunlight. This image alluded to my experience there, in a country that isn't mine. With heat, sounds, light, organic and mineral environment. Experiencing exhaustion made me let go. From a certain point on, I let go my fear of disappearing, and this is when freedom starts. I wish this film to be in love with such freedom. »

This is about my position, but something important is the fact that I don't speak Arabic and my Algerian friends in Djelfa speak almost no French.

Our relationship can't be based on spoken language. This is why I shot situations without focusing on words, being all the more attentive to gesture, movement, light and links appearing on the image. My desire as a director was to make a film that could be a collective sensitive experience. For the film to be good, it had to combine elements of a personal story and this search for light, for the representation of man. This is why I asked Algerian filmmaker Zoheir Mefti, who lives in Spain, to provide his artistic help in the making of the film. We would view together the footage I had shot in Algeria, and he helped me understand what exactly I had shot. I got the meaning of the images after a kind of necessary delay, so I would have the appropriate distance to them and to what they were telling.

As we intended to avoid a certain type of realism and to bring in a few fantastic aspects, we wrote a script based on the characters, locations, accounts collected and texts previously written.

Zoheir is about the same age as Lamine. They've had similar experiences as they were born in the late 70's-early 80's. They spent their young years 10 to 19 in the period of terrorism.

Zoheir had written poetical texts based on his own experience. The script we first wrote was a kind of western, unfolding an initiatory trip: « After a murder, an adult and a kid on the run explore a territory ». This script, translated into Arabic, enabled me to exchange with my friends in Djelfa and do the scene preparations.

On the set, I asked Lamine to improvise, starting from a given situation, from written texts, from his own experience and from what he knew about his character. He very well understood this was drama, but that it had to be fueled by his own experience. He did reveal his very generous, natural talent as an actor. When I asked him if some of his own photographs or texts could be used, he brought several of them. For instance, the voice-off at the beginning of the film is a poem written by Lamine when he was in his twenties.

For a major scene of the film, with that red background, shot on the last day of the first shooting, I asked him to express full front camera what he felt like about himself. I didn't understand what he was saying, but I felt something was going on: he was staging himself, choosing this red background, putting on glasses, he was really taking the film in hand, in order to express through the feature something personal. Back in France, someone translated the scene and I realized that it dealt with his childhood, and with terrorism that had ruined it. These were indeed major common elements between the situations already shot, but I felt we still needed a few more, in order to properly spin the whole story with Lamine, the kid, the dark period, the lost childhood, the territory to be explored.

This is why we needed a second shooting, for such scenes, and also in order to go further into the drama. Having the opportunity of several scoutings and shootings was a real treat, interweaving writing and editing periods. The project of making a film with them and not about them resulted in such back-and-forth.



At what point of the scriptwriting did the kid appear?

As soon as we started writing the drama. As a cousin of the Larech brothers, Aness had been with us on location scouting. (You can also see him in the first shot of my first film).

We once were strolling around with him and Lamine, I filmed them and this is in the film the daylight scene with bees. I immediately realized that their relationship would be the touchstone of our film. It's about him and the kid. Lamine had touched me because I had felt how sensitive he was, both shy and with a strong longing for another type of life, and something from his childhood was still very strong in him. Acting with the kid could be for him a way of revealing himself and the child within.

Aness is now 14, when we started shooting he was the same age Lamine was when his childhood was taken away from him. This is a transition period, in which one is still a child, but soon will become an adult. An interesting age because as a child, Aness considered the shooting as a kind of game, he would for instance kick off thistles... so I would be inspired by what he was naturally doing on location and have him re-enact it in a shot. But at the same time, his childhood was coming to an end. To him, the most important wasn't making a film, but being with adults and doing things with them. Growing-up.

What was your shooting method? How did you choose locations?

We're a small team, I have the camera and my sound engineer is French, we both do not speak Arabic. The only person speaking both languages is Salah, one of the Larech brothers, who therefore is our translator and assistant director. All other members of the crew are friends of the Larech brothers and not trained at all.

While exchanging, they suggested locations where they thought some scenes could be shot. We then all prepared the scenes: some were in charge of props, wardrobe and light, others acted. Starting with such situations, we returned several times to the locations until the result became something that made sense for the film.

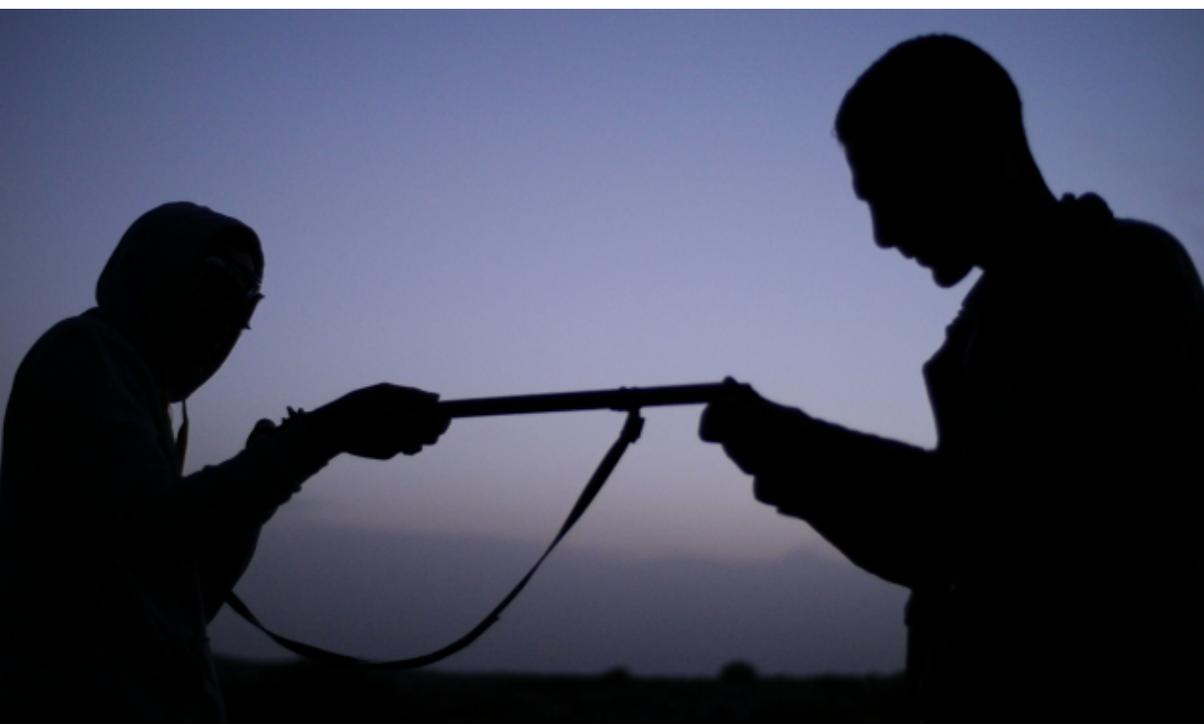
Most of the locations were outside the town, in the steppe and in the forests, first of all because we had no shooting permit, but also because this was part of the initial film project. Most of the inhabitants of Djelfa belong to formerly nomad tribes who used to live in tents out in the steppe (Djelfa is three hours South of Algiers, at the gate of the desert), but because of the period of terrorism, they have settled in town in regular houses. My friends and I shared the desire to be on the move again and to re-occupy some deserted places, as an attitude of emancipation.

Places such as White Pond, a former farmed oasis, abandoned during the dark period. Two of Lahrech brothers, one a shepherd and the other a farmer, tried a few years ago to re-farm it and to live in one of the former farmhouses for six months, but the salty spring poisoned some of their sheep. This is a truly important place to them, but they no longer know how to inhabit it. The story around White Pond improvised by Lamine at the beginning of the film is based on this experience and on the loss of dear ones during the terrorism period.

The military mill, a now empty colonial building, is a place where my friends like to come together on weekends because of the river, the trees and the location on the outskirts of town. Several young people of Djelfa wrote on the walls their names and words of love. A kind of place for free expression.

Salt Rock is a striking location near Djelfa, a unique lunar landscape where they took me several times because it reminds of a SF location. To them, cinema automatically meant stunning settings. This is why we have a scene shot there.

Another major shooting location is the wasteland in front of the Lahrech house, where Ylies built a cabin to herd his sheep. Numerous scenes were shot there, it was all in one a playground and a set. As everyone lives nearby, it is easy to organize shootings and this is also the place where they meet every night for discussions, coming together and telling stories around a fire.





* David Yon : biography and filmography

In 2005, David Yon obtained a Master of Documentary Filmmaking in Grenoble. Then he realized with relatives his desire to create a magazine about cinema that combines a book to a dvd and a website : *Dérives* (www.derives.tv). In 2009, he completed his first film, *Les Oiseaux d'Arabie* ("The birds of Arabia") selected and granted in many festivals. His work as a filmmaker and a writer is linked to a strong

desire of sharing and exchange about cinema : he programs films, he conducts workshops and Film courses in university and several associations and animates a radio programme about cinema.

* *Les Oiseaux d'Arabie*, 40 min, 2009, production : Le Miroir

Award for best mid-length documentary Doclisboa 2010 / Award for best short length documentary Écrans Documentaires 2009 / Etoile de la Scam 2010
Selected in FIDMarseill / Viennale (Austria) / DocBAS (Argentina) / Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin/Madrid, Béjaïa Doc (Algérie) / Filmer à tout prix (Belgique) / CorsicaDoc / Doc à Tunis (Tunisie)...

* Crew

Director, photography : David Yon

Scriptwriting : Lamine Bachar, Zoheir Mefti, David Yon

Advisor : Eric Pellet

Assistant director : Salah Lahrech

Sound : Bertrand Larieu

Editing : Jeremy Gravayat

Special effects : Baker Lahrech

Grip : Ilyes Lahrech

Music : Jean D.L. & Sandrine Verstraete

Production : Carine Chichkowsky & Guillaume Morel, Survivance

Co-production : Karim Aitouna, Thomas Micoulet, Haut les mains Productions

Cast : Lamine Bachar, Aness Baitich, Ilyes Lahrech, Idriss Lahrech



*"At the gates of the capital
The seat of fire
The seat of power
The seat of fratricide
The seat of mutilation
At each person's door
In each one,
a desert of ashes...
Casemates, today empty
and without echoes
No one remembers
their occupants anymore."*

excerpt, The Night and the Kid