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international
film festival



Mustafa Shehata Islam Mubarak Mahmoud Elsaraj Bunna Khalid

YOU WILL DIE AT TWENTY

a film by AMJAD ABU ALALA

سِتوت في العِشرين



SYNOPSIS

Sudan, province of Aljazira, nowadays - When Muzamil was born, a prophecy by the holy man of the village predicts that he will die when he is 20 years old. Muzamil's father cannot stand the doom and travels away from home. Sakina, as a single mother, raises her son with over protection. One day, Muzamil turns 19...

INTERVIEW WITH AMJAD ABU ALALA

What drew you to filmmaking?

I am 37, I am Sudanese, with Sudanese nationality but I was born and raised in Dubai. I spent five years in Sudan when I was a teenager, and my film has a lot to do with this period. There, I fell in love with cinema, watching for the first time a film by the late Egyptian director Youssef Chahine. I began to look for all his films and then for works from other directors. Later on, at the university in Dubai, there was a camera available for the students and I used it for my first short films.

Was shooting this film a way to get back to your sudanese roots?

Certainly. Being raised in Dubai helped me to understand what a film industry could be and to meet people: I created a production company and I produced some shorts from other directors. Meanwhile, I was always wondering why Sudanese cinema had totally stopped: the older directors were vainly waiting for money government, but as a new generation, we saw new ways.

From 2009, we started to do workshops through the Sudan Film Factory, then in 2014 was held in Khartoum the first edition of the Sudan Independent Film Festival that I enjoy programming a lot. In Sudan, young aspiring filmmakers can only see Arabic or US commercial films: they feel a big gap between what they see and what they want to do. The idea was to open a window, to show another cinema from the world. The government let us proceed: they officially supported the Festival, but their way of support was just not forbidding it!

Where does the subject of *You will die at twenty* come from?

Originally, there is a short story by a very known Sudanese writer and activist, Hammour Ziada. He lives in Egypt because he was banned from Sudan for ten years... I read his story in

2016 and immediately I knew it will inspire my first feature. This story connected me deeply with my own childhood: I am quite a joyful guy, I love life, I talk too much, I drink, I love to partying, etc. But there is always something about death in my mind. When I was a kid in Sudan, I lost my best friend, then three months later one of my aunts. Those two deaths struck me. I became a very quiet kid, stop talking for weeks, then talked again, but very few till I went to university and discovered theatre and cinema. Then I talked again a lot - and never stop since!

Would you say that this story is a fable about what prevents people to really live their life?

The film addresses how much a strong belief can really affect people's lives, and the way it sometimes has been used politically. The Sudanese government of Omar el-Beshir used Islam to shut everyone's mouth - when you say "God says", nobody talks any more.

My film is an invitation for freedom. Nothing and no one can ever tell you: this is your destiny, it is written somewhere. You have to decide yourself what will be your life. That is what Suleiman tries to teach Muzamil.

Suleiman says you have to experience sin to pick the right way...

Why saying "sorry" before making the mistake? Go make the mistake and then be sorry. Suleiman wants Muzamil to live his life: a life full of good and bad, where nobody tells you what is the right way. You have to experience life to know who you are.

Is the story set in today's Sudan? Is the village realistic?

We shot in my dad's village, where we used to go on vacation. And apart from changing some colors here and there, we did

not build anything, this is the village as it is. The short story was set where Hammour Ziada was raised, in the north of the country, close to Egypt. I told him I wanted to bring it to my place, central Sudan. It was even truer because Sufism, this kind of mystic Islam, opposed to Salafism, is very strong in this region: the ceremony where the dervish collapses is Sufiism. The village is three hours south of Khartoum, it is the part of the country between the two Niles: the Blue Nile, which we see in the film, and the White Nile, the both meeting in Khartoum to give birth to the large Nile.

Where do the images Suleiman shows to Muzamil come from?

Those clips of Sudan before the Islamic regime come from a documentary called Khartoum, made by a very known director, Jadhalla Jubarra, died in 2008. I wanted to send my regards to. We see people dancing in Khartoum... People were free before 1989, when the Islamic government closed every bar, then shut down the national cinema institution... The religion card was played, and Sudan became a dark spot for thirty years.

Last spring, Sudan finally got rid of Omar el-Beshir, who ran the country since the 1989 coup. Is the film a message to Sudanese people, a call for freedom?

Is Muzamil final running is a metaphor of what the Sudanese people are doing right now! Even if, eventually, we still have to deal with the army. I wrote the film before the revolution, but freedom was always my subject. We started shooting mid-December, on the same day when the first spark of revolution started in the very north of Sudan, in Atbara. Everyone on the set was so excited. Even the foreigners, and especially the French people, were passionate. The smell of freedom was all over our set.

In April, I left post-production in Cairo to get back to Sudan to be part of the events. I spent two months there. I was in Khartoum on april 6, when began the giant sit-in, brutally



ended by the military forces a few weeks later. Most of my crew were there and they got beaten very badly and I even lost a friend among the victims.

Of course, all this affected the film. One example: the first time Muzamil goes to Suleiman's house, he listens to a song. I had thought of playing this French song by Charles Aznavour, La Bohème. But then I changed and put a song by Muhammad Wardi, which was the anthem of the revolution of 1983 and which you could hear everywhere in Khartoum this April. Wardi was a communist singer very well known in Africa, who got banished from Sudan. The words go something like "We are all inspired by revolution... and we will get what we deserve."

Tell us about your actors and crew...

There is no cinema industry in Sudan, therefore almost no cinema actors. But I only needed professional actors for Sakina and Suleiman parts. For Muzamil, I met 150 boys, and at the end of the second day, Mustafa appeared...

I gathered an international crew. But if the heads of departments were foreigners, their assistants were Sudanese: I wanted Sudanese technicians to learn how a film is made. I deeply wish the rebirth of a Sudanese film industry. My film is only the eighth feature fiction film ever produced in Sudan!





A FEW HISTORICAL LANDMARKS ABOUT SUDAN

Sudan became independent in 1956, after having spent more than half a century under Anglo Egyptian rule.

For thirty years, the country has been ruled by Omar el-Beshir, brought to power by a coup in 1989. He appointed himself leader of the Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation, turning Sudan into a dictatorship. By 1991, he applied the Islamic law, accelerating the opposition between the Muslim North of the country, and the christian and animist South.

In 2009, he was vainly charged by the International Criminal Court of crimes against humanity and genocide because of his participation in the Darfur civil war.

Last December, a huge wave of protest began in the North of the country, because of the rise in bread prices, and a general impoverishment, since the independence in 2011 of South-Sudan, an oil-rich region.

The government violently fought the demonstrators throughout the country, injuring or killing tens of Sudanese citizens.

On April 11, Omar el-Beshir is overthrown by a military coup. Demonstrations went on, asking the army to give back the power to civilians.

On June 3, soldiers brutally get rid of a peaceful demonstrators camp set in front of the army headquarters in Khartoum: they left more than a hundred dead, a thousand injured, some rapes.

In the beginning of July, an agreement is found: a transition regime will last at least three years, civilians and soldiers sharing the power.



CAST

| | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| Muzamil | Mustafa Shehata |
| Sakina | Islam Mubarak |
| Sulaiman | Mahmoud Elsaraj |
| Naima | Bunna Khalid |
| Alnoor | Talal Afifi |
| Set Alnesea | Amal Mustafa |
| Muzamil Kid | Moatasem Rashid |
| Naima Kid | Asjad Mohamed |

CREW

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Director | Amjad Abu Alala |
| Screenwriter | Yousef Ibrahim, Amjad Abu Alala |
| Production companies | ANDOLFI (France), TRANSIT FILMS (Egypt), DUOFILM (Norway), DIE GESELLSCHAFT DGS (Germany) |
| Co-production companies | STATION FILMS (Sudan) FILM CLINIC (Egypt) |
| Producers | Arnaud Dommerc, Hossam Elouan, Ingrid Lill Høgtun, and Michael Henrichs |
| Co-producers | Amjad Abu Alala, Mohammed Alomda, Linda Bolstad Strønen, Marie Fuglestein Lægread and Mohamed Hefzy |
| DOP | Sébastien Goepfert |
| Editor | Heba Othman |
| Sound mixer | Rawad Hobeika |
| Sound designer | Rana Eid |
| Re-Recording mixer | Florent Lavallée |
| Colorist | Brice Pancot |
| Original music | Amine Bouhafa |
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| In coproduction with | |

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INTERNATIONAL PRESS VENICE:

The PR Factory
Julie Vanderhaeghen - +32 473 37 38 07 - julie@thepfactory.com
www.thepfactory.com

INTERNATIONAL PRESS TORONTO:

Betty Bousquet
+ 33 6 85 95 57 61 - + 33 1 47 53 27 37 - betty.bousquet@unifrance.org

WORLD SALES: PYRAMIDE INTERNATIONAL

+33 1 42 96 02 20
amauruc@pyramidefilms.com - constance@pyramidefilms.com

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