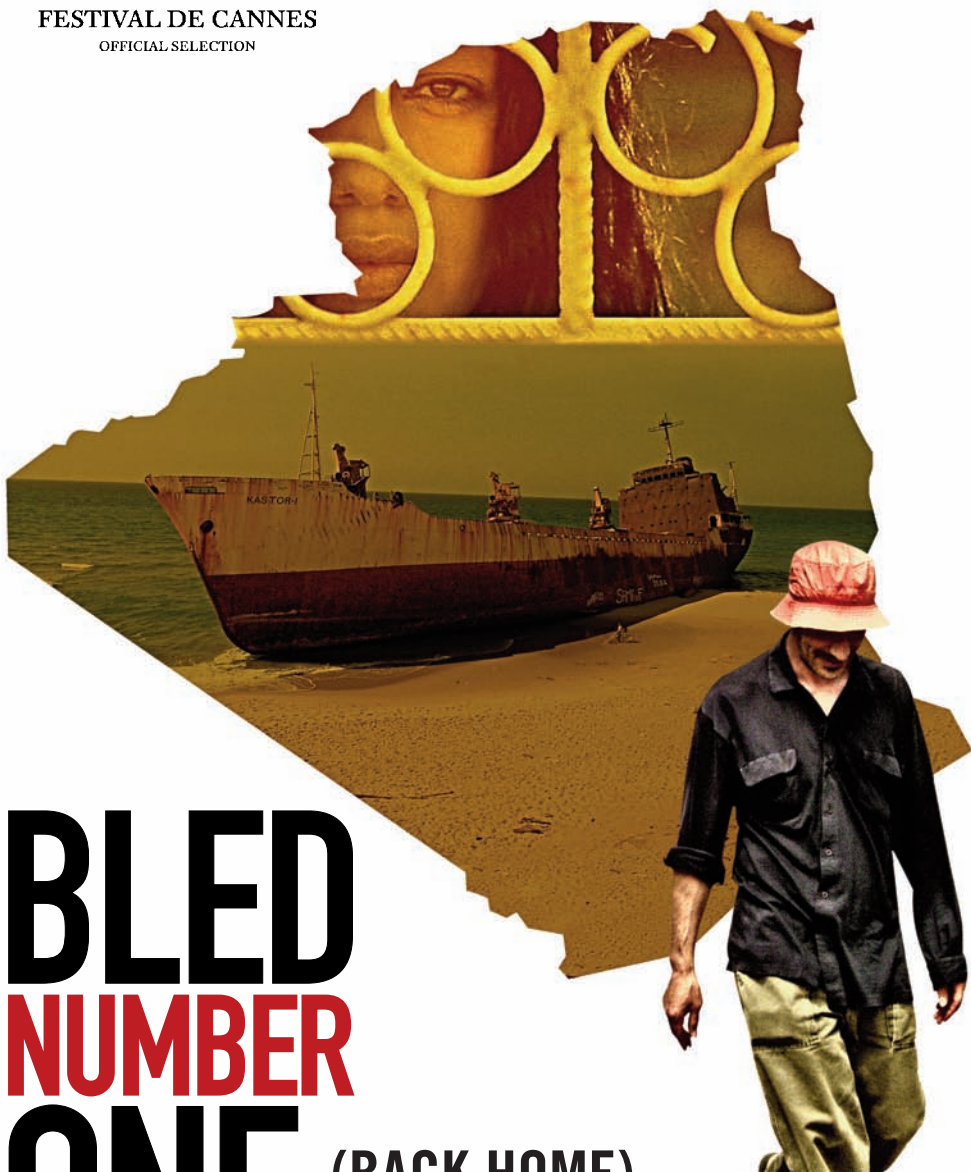


SARRAZINK PRODUCTIONS AND LES FILMS DU LOSANGE PRESENT

BEFORE OR AFTER **WESH WESH**



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
OFFICIAL SELECTION



BLEMED NUMBER ONE

(BACK HOME)

A FILM BY

RABAH AMEUR-ZAÏMECHE



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PRESENT

Before or after **WESH WESH**

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SYNOPSIS



Immediately after his release from prison in France, Kamel is deported to Algeria, his country of origin. In forced exile, he becomes a lucid observer of a society in turmoil as Algeria is torn between the urge to modernize and the weight of ancestral tradition.

INTERVIEW WITH RABAH AMEUR-ZAÏMECHE

BY CLAIRE VASSÉ

/ Back Home features Kamel, the hero of your previous film *Wesh, Wesh*, in which he had just returned to France having been deported to Algeria after serving a term in jail. This time, we see him arrive in Algeria. Is *Back Home* a kind of prequel to *Wesh, Wesh* ?

A prequel... or a sequel. *Wesh, Wesh* ends with a shot of a lake after a chase between Kamel and a cop. We hear a gunshot but we don't know if Kamel is hit or not. All I know is that Kamel is a victim of "la double peine" - a jail sentence then deportation - so there was scope to make a second film. Two punishments, two films! We had that in mind when we were shooting *Wesh, Wesh*. Whether it's a prequel or a sequel isn't important. Why always think of time strictly in chronological terms ?

/ You introduce the audience to a society that functions according to myths and tradition rather than more factual, "realistic" current events...

Yes, there's a sense of being caught in limbo, an ambiance that's close to melancholy. We shot in bright, clear colours that are ageless. The aim is simply to join together the representation of contemporary Algerian society with the unlikely temporality of this land of origin. In *Wesh, Wesh*, we were in the host country, France. Here, we are in the country of origin. We have gone back to his roots. What distinguishes contemporary France from a patriarchal society like the ones around the Mediterranean basin ? The "atomization" of society. In Algeria, traditional structures are more solid. That is revealed in the scene where they sacrifice the bull - the Zerda. It's a central practice on which the first civilizations were founded, born out of a primitive communism going back to the dawn of time. After the sacrifice, the meat is divided up into equal portions and shared out. That is inconceivable in Western capitalist society where exacerbated privatization is the rule. It's a big shock when you cross from Algeria to France. It takes generations to absorb.



/ Your film shows Algeria as a land that combines various layers of civilization. In the heterogeneous cities, there are traces of different periods...

Yes, we're in a world that's constantly in construction. There are building sites everywhere, full of noise and hustle and bustle. Algeria is in constant renewal, constant regeneration, even if its history is written in blood.

/ Kamel appears like a foreigner in his home country. Women provide his only point of entry into a society that should be his but isn't. It's as if they hold the key the world, as if they have special insight...

That's absolutely true. Without making it a priority, I know that the film captures the essence of the country. In Algeria, women appear to be confined to a submissive role when, in some ways, they have an overpowering freedom, especially in the countryside. Their actions are imbued with values such as honour and dignity. They carry this responsibility and assuming it is what makes them more beautiful.

/ Like when they go to the sea...

Kamel is on a journey. He discovers male society but at that stage in the film, he has broken away from it by fighting with his cousin. Then he realizes, he also has female cousins that he can get to know. Algeria is rooted in patriarchal structures but the country is, above all, a woman. That's how I see it, in any case. So, I couldn't help wanting to dive headfirst into the sea !

/ At the end of the film, Kamel visits Louisa in a mental hospital... A reflection of Louisa's confinement ?

It's in the mental hospital, where Louisa is confined in another time and space, that she escapes her destiny in the most dazzling and unpredictable manner. We met some extraordinary characters there and the presence of the camera provoked some amazing moments. At one point, a woman says twice in a row, "The lunatics are on the outside". There is perspicacity in madness.

/ The doors that keep closing on the characters contrast with the sensual freedom of the landscape...

... that invites us to prolong our journey, to do the same thing as the land of Algeria: open up, take things in... I felt inhabited by the country throughout the shoot. If it wasn't not the land, it was my ancestors! Kamel is forced into exile but he's not a victim... He's flexible and mobile, which is how he transforms his deportation into a voyage of discovery.





/ How did you set his voyage down on paper ?

In writing, we work to free ourselves of the story, to keep nothing but the heart of the situation, its essence. We try to write simple, short, clear, precise sentences. We don't burden ourselves with details and character descriptions that would only be so many restrictions when we're shooting. The script is the skeleton. When I'm shooting, it's gone and forgotten. The situation we're filming becomes natural and imperative. Where should we place the camera? It places itself! In some way, filmmakers and scientists are involved in identical processes. They experiment and see how bodies react. A film is movement, momentum, work, effort, action. Action as life, a life-lesson. That's when you capture something that's alive. You have to remain alive whatever happens.

/ In what way is Kamel alive ?

He succeeds in freeing himself, in escaping his lot. Doing so takes a nonchalant approach bordering on the laidback. It's just an attitude, following the path of knowledge. Art in general, and the cinema in particular, helps people reach knowledge.

/ Which is far removed from a realistic approach to the country's present situation...

Filming dynamically might appear similar to documentary filmmaking but that doesn't mean we're dealing with current affairs. It's another relationship to time, which is not necessarily about filming immediate reality in a realistic way. It's a kind of suggestion, merely presenting things, without passing judgment. For example, we don't show fundamentalists, we depict them as desperadoes. When I was writing, I didn't go back to Algeria at all to see where the youth of today was at. I wrote this story using recollections from my vacations. That was also because I sensed that things hadn't really moved on, that time goes by more slowly over there. Here, life races past you. Over there, you have the time to kick back and think, to be in sync with things.

/ Your film is never didactic. It's an accumulation of nuances, colours and emotions. It is imbued with a relationship to the world rather than presenting a message about the world...

I really like Delacroix's paintings of Algeria and I think that's how he worked, building gradually stroke by stroke, one layer after another. At the same time, I direct very naturally, spontaneously, accepting the unexpected and unpredictable, which turns out to be what has to be filmed, the thing that stands out from the rest.

/ Like in the final shot with the characters silhouetted against the light, in the background almost like mythological figures...

Yes, that shot is weighted with that kind of mythological energy. It just happened. There were people passing by totally by chance and they represented something mythical. It was fate. We didn't plan it that way, except for the lighting.

/ And for you to go out of shot, was that planned ?

That was just a case of adapting to what was in the frame. We wanted the shoot to be flexible, dynamic and leaving things to chance, which offers scope for improvisation, even if it means standing the shooting schedule on its head. It's a working method that requires plenty of discipline as well as a relaxed, reactive attitude. It's my approach...



/ To directing ?

Yes, and also to life in general. I always want to be on the verge of something, following my own path, being part of the world without being affected by considerations of my place in society. For me, making movies isn't a profession, it's a way of seeing the world. I'd go even further than that, in fact. It's a hub of transformation and evolution. To understand things, it's enough sometimes to delve into your dreams. You can't remove the concept of dreams from films. In this case, they are dreams that don't belong just to me but also to anybody who can relate to them.



/ With that approach, why did you also choose to play the lead ?

I act because I get a sense of being overwhelmed by things and I feel the need to embody them physically. Also, being both actor and director can be very liberating. When you switch from one to the other, it means you are less preoccupied by the constraints of each job, it gives you a sense of perspective and enables you to move things forward. Like Kamel who forces his way across frontiers. Kamel is an exile.



/ Tell us about the other actors in the film.

In *Wesh, Wesh*, we were in a contemporary urban setting. Here, we're deep in rural Algeria. But it was part of the same process for me. It's all about being curious to learn and having a sense of adventure. After my cousins in the inner city in *Wesh, Wesh*, I went and filmed my other cousins in their village. It shows that you don't necessarily have to go far beyond your own environment to immerse yourself in the cinema and discover wonderful things. As for Meriem Serbah (Louisa), her talent as an actress and singer transforms the film. Abel Jafri (Bouzid), the guardian of the temple in *The Passion of the Christ* literally melted in with the inhabitants of the village. For me, the distinction between professional and non-professional is irrelevant. As soon as the camera is on you, you are an actor. They all contributed so much by their generosity, devotion and energy.



/ What does the original title, *Bled Number One*, mean ?

It's a little dig at our Moroccan and Tunisian neighbours. People from North Africa like to joke with each other. Given that the subject was the Algerian diaspora, I had to go back to the "bled" (village) where it all started, the first "bled". We could have called it Bled 0, but that would have required a little less susceptibility from the Algerians! If we'd called it that, they wouldn't have allowed us to film in their country. And I couldn't have shot the film anywhere else. The reality of *Bled Number One* is specific to Algeria and, at the same time, because it is rooted in that way, I believe it can attain universality.

/ The film also depicts the brutality of people's interactions...

I'm not fascinated by violence but I wanted to film its necessity, or at least its omnipresence. We all have an animal instinct, we're all predators and that's not a bad thing. It's very good news, in fact. The main thing is not to lose our bond with the land.

/ Do you think that being French of Algerian origin makes you see the world differently ?

Yes. Everything seems much bigger. Thankfully, humanity doesn't yet derive from a single culture. Being divided between two cultures makes you more keenly aware of the fact that everything is in a state of flux, everything is changing. That's what's happening in a more general sense with the young guys of North African origin in the inner cities here in France. They are a long way from their country of origin and their culture, so they have to invent a new way of expressing themselves. But it's in everybody's best interest to avoid the trap of ghettoization, of labelling people. Which is why I choose to act and produce as well. Being my own producer enables me to do what I want, to be totally free. I'd feel too restricted in a more traditional production set-up. The situation is still critical in Algeria. Another producer would have freaked out about shooting over there. I didn't learn to make movies at film school or by working as an intern, I learned by making films in a very empirical way. It's like something that floods out of you, and I discover the result in the editing room. I want to make the films that I have carried inside me since I was a kid.

/ Do you have other projects lined up ?

Yes. A pirate movie !



CAST & CREW

Louisa.....MERIEM SERBAH
Bouzid.....ABEL JAFRI
Kamel.....RABAH AMEUR-ZAÏMECHÉ
Loubna.....FARIDA OUCHANI
Ahmed.....RAMZY BEDIA
Doctor.....SAKINA DAMMENE-DEBBIH

Director.....RABAH AMEUR-ZAÏMECHE
Screenplay.....RABAH AMEUR-ZAÏMECHE
.....LOUISE THERMES
Original Score.....RODOLPHE BURGER
Unit manager.....SALIM AMEUR-ZAÏMECHE
Assistant Directors.....GILLES GUILLAUME
.....KARIM MEZDOUR
Camera.....LIONEL SAUTIER
.....HAKIM SI AHMED
.....OLIVIER SMITTARELLO
Sound.....TIMOTHÉE ALAZRAKI
.....BRUNO AUZET
.....MOHAMED NAMAN
Intern Assistant Director.....BENJAMIN BEAUFORT
Costumes.....SABRINA CHENITI
Make-Up.....DELPHINE BIRARELLI
Production Coordinator.....SARAH SOBOL
Production Assistants.....JULIETTE MENUET
.....NICOLAS RETSIN
Production Managers.....CÉCILE RÉMI-BOUTANG
.....RÉJANE MICHEL
.....MARILYNE CHARRIER
Line Producer (France).....CAROLE SOLIVE
Line Producer (Algérie).....LOTFI BOUCHOUCHI
Film Editor.....NICOLAS BANCILHON
Sound Editor.....NIKOLAS JAVELLE
Sound Mixer.....DENIS LEFDUP / LE SNARK
Post-Production Coordinator.....GUILLAUME PARENT
Assistant Editor (film & sound).....MATHIEU FARNARIER
Foley Artist.....PATRICK EGRETEAU



MERIEM SERBAH

MERIEM SERBAH trained as a singer. She explores with passion the musical worlds of jazz and soul. Meriem sings, writes and composes for the group Jazz Jefferson. She has also performed in many plays and musicals, such as *"De la poudre aux yeux"* and *"Les Enfants gâtés"* by Jean-Claude Penchenat.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2005 **BLÉ NUMBER ONE** by Rabah AMEUR-ZAIMECHE
- 2002 **L'ESQUIVE** by Abdelattif KECHICHE
- 2001 **LE CAFÉ DE LA PLAGE** by Benoît GRAFFIN
- 2000 **LA FAUTE À VOLTAIRE** by Abdelattif KECHICHE
- 1997 **GREVE PARTY** by Fabien ONTENIENTE

LOUISE THERMES

WRITER

- 2005 **ON NE SE REFAIT PAS** by David CHARHON
- 2004 **BLÉ NUMBER ONE** by Rabah AMEUR-ZAIMECHE

WRITER-DIRECTOR

- 2004 **J'ETAIS SOLITAIRE...**
- 2000 **LE SECRET DE LUCIE** (*short*)
- 1998 **COMME NEIGE AU SOLEIL** (*short*)
- 1997 **L'ILE AUX TRESORS** (*short*)

ABEL JAFRI

Born in Tunisia, with a Touareg father and Italo-Tunisian mother, Abel arrived in France as a baby. He grew up in Aubervilliers, on the outskirts of Paris.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2005 **BLÉ NUMBER ONE** by Rabah AMEUR-ZAIMECHE
- 2004 **ASYLUM** by Olivier CHATEAU
- 2003 **AVANT L'OUBLI** by Augustin BURGER
- 2003 **THE PASSION OF CHRIST** by Mel GIBSON
- 2002 **LES AMATEURS** by Martin VALENTE
- 2002 **FUREUR** by Karim DRIDI
- 2001 **3 ZEROS** by Fabien ONTENIENTE
- LES ROIS MAGES** by BOURDON/CAMPAN/AMSARA /ZIEGFRIED
- 2000 **ET APRÈS** by Mohamed ISMAIL
- 1999 **EN ATTENDANT LA NEIGE** by Antonio OLIVARES
- 1998 **MONDIALITO** by Nicolas WADIMOFF
- COURS BELSUNCE** by Augustin BURGER
- 1997 **NÉ QUELQUE PART** by Malik CHIBANE
- L'AUTRE COTE DE LA MER** by Dominique CABRERA
- 1994 **NELLY ET MR ARNAUD** by Claude SAUTET
- UN DIMANCHE À PARIS** by Hervé DUHAMEL
- 1992 **SUSPENSE** by Guy PINON
- 1990 **JALOUSIE** by Kathleen FONTMARTY
- ISABELLE EBERHARDT** by Ian PRINGLE



RABAH AMEUR-ZAÏMECHE



Born in Algeria in 1966, **RABAH AMEUR ZAÏMECHE** comes to France in 1968. He grows up in Montfermeil, on the outskirts of Paris. After social studies, he creates his own company, **SARRAZINC PRODUCTIONS**, in 1999. Then, he makes his first film: **WESH WESH** (2002). The film gets many awards including the Louis Delluc Prize and the Wolfgang Staudte Award in Berlin. In 2005, he writes and directs **BLÉD NUMBER ONE (BACK HOME)**.



