



presents

Grigris

A film by Mahamat-Saleh Haroun

"An engaging tale of quiet desperation..."

– Stephen Dalton, **The Hollywood Reporter**

"A constant to-and-fro of aspiration and adversity..."

– Shaun Munro, **Film School Rejects**



France, Chad / 2013 / Drama
French & Arabic with English Subtitles / 101 min

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FULL SYNOPSIS

Despite a bum leg, 25-year-old Grigris has hopes of becoming a professional dancer, making some extra cash putting his killer moves to good use on the dance floor of his local club every weekend. His dreams are tested when his step-father falls critically ill and he's forced to risk his future by smuggling oil to pay the hospital bills. When he befriends Mimi, a beautiful but damaged prostitute, the two will try to start a new life together. But as bad decisions begin to catch up with them, they'll have to run for their lives. Their pasts, however, are never far behind, bringing them to a perilous climax.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Despite his bum leg, 25-year-old Grigris has hopes of becoming a professional dancer, making some extra cash putting his moves to good use at a local club. His dreams are tested when his step-father falls critically ill and he's forced to risk his future by smuggling oil to pay the hospital bills. When he befriends a beautiful but damaged prostitute, the two will try to start a new life together. But their pasts threaten to follow them all too closely, putting their dreams in peril.

LOGLINE

Despite his bum leg, Grigris dreams of being a professional dancer; when he turns to oil smuggling to earn much needed money, all his aspirations are put in peril.

FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

WINNER:

Cannes Film Festival - Vulcan Award, Technical Achievement

OFFICIAL SELECTION:

Karlovy Vary International Film Festival

AN INTERVIEW WITH MAHAMAT-SALEH HAROUN

/ How did you come up with Grigris?

I wanted to make a film about those petrol smugglers I could see all over N'Djamena who got involved in car chases – they would load their cars with petrol cans and then get chased by customs officers. This is a widespread phenomenon that I wished to address in a crime film, while keeping away from the genre's clichés. In 2011, while I was attending the FESPACO Film Festival in Ouagadougou, I went to a show where I discovered Souleymane Démé, a dancer whose left leg was crippled. When he got on stage, I thought to myself "That's the hero of the story I want to tell." I remember that back then he dyed his hair blonde and that there was something supernatural about him that drew me in. That encounter helped me come up with the storyline.

/ So the narrative was based on his own story?

It was to some degree since I knew he was going to play the lead. It was a comfortable process because I was familiar with his body language and his choreography, which helped me write the narrative. It didn't take long before I thought I had a convincing script as it had a documentary quality about Souleymane Démé. However, I wanted to focus only on his dancing persona and how he came to dancing. I didn't want to find out too much about his background in order to make room for fiction. I usually like to start with true facts and then branch out to fiction which paves the way for questions and perspectives.

/ Grigris and Mimi are two castaways who carry the burden of their difference in their flesh.

That's right. They are both outcasts who find themselves in the same place – the shady realm of nightlife, where you can cross the line and where you try to survive in spite of suffering hardships and being aware that you've been relegated to some kind of no-go area. That connection between the two characters accounts for their mutual attraction. I'm always deeply moved by the kind of "community" you create for yourself when, at some point in life, you recognize yourself in others. Once they have met, they move towards building a kind of family and accepting themselves, no matter what challenges they have to overcome. You learn a lot about tolerance from their relationship.

/ You've often taken an interest in dropouts and outcasts...

Yes, I'd rather deal with the fringe than the mainstream, because the mainstream is all about affluence and happiness and because it is a position of privileged, upper-class people I have no use for. When you're in the mainstream, you're at peace and you tend to be conservative, both artistically and ideologically. On the other hand, the fringe is all about adventure and movement – and thus life itself – towards the mainstream. It is the fringe that is liable to irrigate and contaminate the mainstream. Just like the movement of rivers and streams going towards the sea, not the other way around.

/ Did you tread into forbidden territory when you addressed prostitution in Africa?

Yes indeed. It's amazing how hypocritical society is. However, my role is to break social taboos in order to allow people to discuss them openly, accept the crude facts of life and challenge them. At any rate, these are my concerns as a Chadian film maker: I need to make breeches in this society, or else I would regard myself as too mainstream.

/ Still your film includes some codes of the thriller genre.

I wanted to revisit this movie genre by introducing a personal point of view and a typically Chadian situation and yet avoid the clichés. That's why I wanted first to immerse the viewer into a coded world and then to explore other less known territory – the dance theme allowed me to deconstruct the genre.

/ The two main characters express their lust for life and yearning for freedom with their bodies...

It is as though they were expressing their angst and their lust for life with their bodies because their bodies had been tainted by original sin. The reason they expose their bodies and even « abuse » them is that these bodies are the bearers of their difference and the source of their suffering. Mimi is of mixed race and Grigris is physically crippled – both are in essence « anomalous » creatures, social cripples and they mishandle the place in which their suffering is located, i.e. their bodies. They both have a love/hate relationship with their bodies. When Grigris is auditioned but fails to get the part, he blames his leg for holding him captive. And Mimi can't blend in with her people because of the color of her skin and she must even wear an African style wig in order not to be excluded.

/ Grigris has a very close relationship with his surrogate father.

I like the idea that this relationship is not a blood relationship but rather a spiritual bond. When the "father" decides to bequeath his photo studio to Grigris because he is certain he can be a good photographer, this act symbolizes the strong bond that links them. Consequently, I didn't need long explanatory scenes to describe this bond. It is very clear and Grigris gives himself one mission – to save this man, his stepfather who played the role of a father throughout his lifetime.

/ It is also a film about how some human beings control other human beings...

This idea of control of some over others is crucial. Grigris is under the influence of his mother in a very subtle way and he regards it as his duty to provide for his family. Then he falls under the sway of thugs. Mimi is controlled by men and the thugs are under the sway of bosses. And finally there is mutual control, the villagers have a hold on the Mimi/Grigris couple and vice versa. They have duties toward one another because they are bound by a secret – it is exactly what happens within any ordinary family.

/ There is a truly feminist approach in this story and in the characters' trajectory...

Until this film I hadn't created any female role. In this film I pay tribute to all the women that I have met: the female villagers and the anonymous women who carry baskets on their heads and have no say on anything. I also wished to create a community of self-sufficient women, living without men, in a village where they settle their problems by themselves and thus set a wonderful example of solidarity. And they accept the coming child without any comment.

/ The camera follows Grigris, never losing sight of him as if it were a documentary.

I wanted to adopt his point of view and show a character constantly on the move, a character in search of something. So far I had shown characters trapped in situations that paralyzed them. Here the protagonist is on the move, he is a "performer" as they say in the theatre – Grigris is constantly searching and I thought that following him as I did and assuming his point of view made us feel closer to him.

/ How did you manage to avoid all feelings of pity for Grigris?

From the very beginning I wanted to avoid falling into this trap. The challenge consisted in showing the handicap without commiseration, without looking down on Grigris. I had many talks with my cinematographer. I wanted Grigris to be shot at eye level, never belittling the protagonist, never hinting that he was not a *whole* human being. Consequently, he is perceived as an ordinary man, as a dancer with a disabled leg.

/ How did you get to depict the atmosphere at night?

I was inspired by the nights in N'Djamena. It is a town with very poor public lighting. I wanted to have the characters resemble ghost-like figures against the African night. I focused on the contrast between the world of the night and that of the daytime. A feeling of secret illegality runs through the night and there is more emotional outpouring. It is a typically Chadian phenomenon – Chadian society is made up of a majority of Muslims for whom the worst criminal acts take place after sunset. I wanted to depict the flamboyance of this underground life and then get back to a kind of asceticism, which is characteristic of day life. Indeed one tends to let off steam at night but pretends to lead a dignified life in broad daylight. This polarity can be found in lots of people. I was inspired by a neighborhood in N'Djamena where there were many prostitutes. When darkness fell, they turned into someone else to prepare for the appearance on stage of their "characters" and yet they behaved differently during the day to look more respectable.

/ The film is both realistic and stylized...

I wanted to speak of what it's like to be working in hard conditions, in the sewer for example, without stylized effects in order to show that we are not seeing a film set but real life, almost as if it were a documentary. On the other hand, I felt like shooting well-designed, stylized long shots. The challenge consisted in combining the two approaches. As a matter of fact, I enjoyed trying this risky approach to see if it was aesthetically appealing. And at the end of the day I realize that a strong narrative content provides the style of the movie.

/ How did you approach your work on colors and particularly on reds?

Frankly I tried to stick to the colors of the country. I visited several rooms inhabited by single young women and realized that red was often present. Besides the room where we shot, which is supposed to be Mimi's room, is shown on screen just as it is in reality. I guess that red symbolizes desire, attraction and blood in all cultures alike.

/ The close shots of the city stand in contrast to the wide shots in the countryside...

It was in order to show that the two protagonists could blossom in this rural environment. This environment also represents an opening for them. Suddenly a new horizon opens up thanks to the outpouring of solidarity, and with the prospect of a simple happy life near the river. This welcoming open space helps them to reconstruct themselves. Conversely, close shots are more exclusory because they focus on one object and leave out the rest. When they lived in town, the two characters felt hemmed in because the others had a hold on them. When they get into the countryside, Grigris tells Mimi "you're just like the other women." There is a sense of recovered virginity and the prospect of turning a new page. Don't believe I am nostalgic for rural life! It is just another environment where there is such a thing as solidarity and mutual help.

/ Tell us how you cast the actors.

As Souleymane Démé is a dancer and a musician, he has a sense of rhythm. Besides Souleymane is a very physical actor. And I think that a good actor must have a sense of pace to play organically. During the rehearsals we focused on his choreography and on his way of moving. I didn't have to direct him a lot, I didn't have to spell out what I wanted him to do. At the beginning, when I asked him to cry in a particular scene, he answered that he never cried. And one day, while we were shooting a sequence in the park and he had to stroke his leg, he started to cry and said that it was no longer a film that was being shot but the story of his own life. From this moment it seems that he had totally internalized his character's story. As to Anais Monory who plays Mimi, it was also her debut. I spotted her during a casting session and when I watched her audition she exuded such physicality and such freshness that I never had any doubt – out of a dozen actresses that I had met she was the only one who could play the scene in such an original and genuine way. I met up with her again and told her to put on lipstick and thought to myself "this is the one." She reminded me of Youssouf Djaoro with whom I shot *A Screaming Man*, and Daratt, *A Dry Season* because she understood what I wanted right away. Cyril Gueï, who plays Moussa, is an experienced actor. He studied at the Paris Academy of Dramatic Arts. We talked a lot about his character as the gang leader. We wanted the role to have a local tone and not suggest a gang leader from the Parisian suburbs. He managed to portray the character aptly while expressing terrifying violence.

/ The score seems to embrace the movement of the bodies.

Wasis Diop, the musician with whom I worked on *Daratt*, *A Dry Season* and *A Screaming Man* came along with me when I visited Souleymane Démé in Ouagadougou. He composed the motifs according to the Choreography of Souleymane Démé. Grigris dabbles in dancing, in photography, in fixing radios, in other words he has to be resourceful in order to survive. This forces him to be constantly on the move. And the score seeks to relate the everyday life of these ingenious survivors.

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, Director

Haroun was born in 1960 in Chad. He studied film in Paris and journalism in Bordeaux. After writing for several years for many regional dailies, he wrote and directed his first short film *Maral Tanié* in 1994. In 2006, he won the Special Jury Award at the Venice Film Festival for his third feature, *Daratt, A Dry Season*. In the same year, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York paid tribute to Haroun by hosting a retrospective of his films. In 2010, his fourth feature, *A Screaming Man*, won the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival. In the same year, he garnered the prestigious Robert Bresson Award at the Venice Film Festival, and the Premio Humanidade at the 34th Mostra in Sao Paulo, Brazil. He was a member of the Jury for the main competition at the Festival de Cannes in 2011. Shot in Chad in 2012, *Grigris* is his fifth feature.

FILMOGRAPHY:

2013 - Grigris
2010 - A Screaming Man
2008 - Expectations (short film)
2008 - Shadows A video experimental film for the Diaspora Exhibit at the Quai Branly Museum
2007 - Sex, Okra and Salted Butter
2006 - Daratt, a Dry Season
2005 - Kalala (documentary)
2002 - Abouna (Our Father)
1999 - Bye-bye Africa
1996 - Sotigui Kouyaté: A Modern Griot (documentary)

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

SOULEYMANE DÉMÉ (Grigris)

Démé was discovered in his native country of Burkina Faso when director Haroun happened upon a performance where Souleymane was dancing. He is a major part of the inspiration of the film's story since the director knew he wanted Souleymane to be his narrative's hero. This is his first appearance on film.

ANAÏS MONORY (Mimi)

Monory's career has primarily been as a successful French model for the modeling agency IMG. She made her first cinematic appearance in *Grigris*.

CREDITS

CREW

Director	Mahamat-Saleh Haroun
Screenwriter	Mahamat-Saleh Haroun
Producer	Florence Stern
Director of Photography	Antoine Heberle, AFC
Script Doctor	Jacques Akchoti
Editor	Marie-Hélène Dozo
Sound	André Rigaut
Sound Editor	Bridget O'Driscoll
Mixer	Julien Cloquet
Set Designer	Ledoux Madeona
Assistant Set Designer	Chérif Michel Tadida
Costume Designer	Anne-Marie Giacalone
Make-up Artist	Nadine Otsobogo-Boucher
Script Supervisor	Louise Arhex
1st Operator's Assistant	Mathieu Bertholet
2nd Director's Assistant	Emmanuel M'Baïde Rotoubam
Music & Original Songs	Wasis Diop
Casting Director	Gigi Akoka
Assistant Casting Director	Dany Hericourt
Set Photographer	Frank Verdier
Lighting Director	Grégoire Simpore
Head Grip	Roland Naba
Foley Artist	Bertrand Boudaud
Color Grader	Serge Antony
Production Manager (France)	Claude Gilaizeau
Production Manager (Chad)	Sékou Traore
Unit Manager	Alidou Badini

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In association with **SOFICINÉMA 9**
With the financial support of **UNION EUROPÉENNE**
and the help of **GROUPE DES ÉTATS ACP**

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CAST

Grigris
Mimi
Moussa
Ayoub
The Mother
Moussa's Henchman
Alhadj
Fifi
Grigris' Business Manager
Mimi's Friend
Mimi's Friend's Client
False Witness
Casting Choreographer
Drunk Customer
Chinese Woman
Little Boy
Mimi's Client

Souleymane Démé
Anaïs Monory
Cyril Guei
Marius Yelolo
Hadjé Fatimé N'Goua
Abakar M'Baïro
Youssef Djaoro
Rémadji Adèle Ngaradoumbaye
Emmanuel M'Baïde Rotoubam
Achouackh Abakar
Abdel Salam Mahamat
Ahidjo Moussa
Ahmed Taïgue
Xavier Girou
Lian Xehua
Tom Haroun
Cyrus Nersy

With the women of the **Mailao Village Women's Association**

