

Director's Note

[*Maoussi*](#) is a love story between two foreigners. It presents a dilemma between the desire for unconditional love and the harsh realities and core beliefs that oppose the two protagonists.

The film reflects upon elements of the modern couple i.e., the intimacy that develops between two people who love each other, as well as the conflicts and sometimes funny discrepancies that can result thereof.

I instilled parts of my personal story in this film which reflects my personal battle to overcome some of the clichés society has impressed upon me, and which I continue to challenge as a western European woman and female filmmaker. Beyond my personal story, *Maoussi* is my way of questioning our society's notions of love and otherness.

In *Maoussi*, I try to address how two people, who love each other and aspire to be together, miss out on each other because of their conflicting unconscious desires. Edo's unconscious desire for survival is expressed through his need for legal documents to avoid being sent back to a country at war. Babette's desire is to go solo as a dancer, but she doesn't quite believe in her own talent, so subconsciously her focus progressively shifts to Edo as she encourages him to see himself as the artist he really is by using his musical talent to obtain the papers he needs. A talent he truly doesn't believe can help him obtain papers. Being a drummer in the society he comes from generally earns you little respect and status. It's something you do if you don't know how to do anything else. Babette's endeavors on the behalf of Edo results in a surprising concert which does not yield the expected results of residency for Edo. He would rather they got married, but as usual, in my stories, the female protagonist is afraid of being had, especially by a man. The famous fear of abandonment.

The themes of empathy and otherness have played a major role in my previous works. Therefore, *Maoussi* is the logical continuation of my short film, [*SLØR*](#).

Through *Maoussi*, I suggest shedding light on our gray areas by putting ourselves in someone else's shoes. My hope is that the audience will understand the two protagonists, even though they don't understand each other.

I approach the underlying subconscious stake of emotional repair through Edo and Babette's differences of culture, but another director could have approached it differently. Each of us uses our own experiences to build our artistic world and we all transpose a part of our personal history into our work.

The Making of the Film

When I started writing the script, I had just moved to New York City after living most of my life in Paris, although I was born and raised in Denmark. Familiar with the varied refugee communities exiled here in Paris after fleeing wars, *Maoussi* always felt like a Parisian film to me. Thus, I returned to Paris to make the movie and settled down again in my heartland.

To find my male lead, Edo, I traveled through parts of Africa, before meeting Moustapha Mbengue, whom I discovered in Philippe Faucon's *Amin* at the Cannes Film Festival in 2018.

Then there was the role of the mouse. Having a mouse play such an important role is no small feat. For the optics, I had chosen a white mouse with black eyes. I found out too late in the process that black-eyed white mice are a genetic mistake, and their mental acuity is often diminished. This meant that the mouse could only learn one task for the film and it was supposed to perform a multitude of tasks. Thus, we needed several mice to play the role of one mouse. One needed to be comfortable in the hands of Edo and Babette, so that one lived in shared custody between Moustapha Mbengue and myself during preparation. Meanwhile, the trainer, Marine Blanchet, taught the others: one learned how to go down the stairs, another how to go from point A to point B with the help of audible beeps, a third one learned how to run on the record player, etc.

Another important part of *Maoussi* was the dancing and drumming for which I had the privilege to work with Elsa Wolliaaston, who did the choreographies for the film. My relationship with Elsa goes far back as I danced in her company for many years and her approach on dance and movements is of great importance to me.

Maoussi is now ready to meet its audience. I think that anyone who lives as a couple will identify. I am also convinced that the film will speak to those who have migrated and encountered the same problems as Edo. Because, when all is said and done, there are two kinds of people in our world: those who are free to move around as they wish and those who aren't.

My warmest thanks go to the film crew and all those who have supported me and continue to do so.

Making a film is a marathon.

Charlotte Schiøler