

De quelques évènements sans signification



***De quelques évènements
sans signification
(Mostafa Derkaoui, 1974)***

**69 Berlinale. Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin
Forum. Archival Constellations**

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By Mostafa Derakoui

Produced by Basma (Morocco)

Film restored by Filmoteca de Catalunya



Screenings:

13/02 15.00 h – Arsenal 1

14/02 13.00 h – CinemaxX 6

(Press and industry screening)

15/02 20.00 h – Arsenal 1

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In 1974, in Morocco, Mostafa Derkaoui filmed *De quelques évènements sans signification* (*About Some Meaningless Events*), a political film highlighting the singularity of cinematic language and its relationship to society, which was banned under the country's censorship laws.

In the working-class neighbourhoods of Casablanca, the filmmakers ask an assortment of young people about their connection with Moroccan cinema, while a labourer, dissatisfied with his job, murders his boss. The negatives were developed in a Spanish laboratory and, following editing in Morocco, were taken from Madrid to Barcelona to be blown up from 16mm to 35mm. Remarkably, the film was exhibited in a film festival in Paris, but its circulation was subsequently limited to clandestine copies on VHS and DVD.

Forty years later, the original material – which came from a laboratory that had gone bankrupt in 1999 – was brought to the FilmoTeca de Catalunya, where the restoration process was begun under the supervision of Mostafa Derkaoui and his brother Abdelkrim, the director of photography. Today, this film, half documentary, half fiction, and associated with the New Wave movements of the 1960s, demonstrates its modernity within the context of Moroccan cinematic history.

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Around the port's streets and popular bars of Casablanca, a group of filmmakers conduct discussions with people about their expectations of, and aspirations for, the emerging Moroccan national cinema. When a disgruntled worker kills his superior accidentally, their inquest shifts focus, and they begin to probe the context and motives of the killing. At the heart of *De quelques événements sans signification* is an interrogation on the role of cinema (and art) in society, documentary and the Real, and what constitutes an urgency for a national cinema that is being born. This unique filmic experience was conceived as an independent and collective effort of militant filmmakers, actors, musicians, poets and journalists at a time of heightened repression on freedom of expression in Morocco and was funded by the sale of paintings by several contemporary painters. The film was first screened in Paris in 1975 but was immediately taxed with censorship and forbidden from exhibition and export. It was forgotten until a negative print was found in the archives of the FilmoTeca de Catalunya in 2016 and restored there. 45 years after its completion, the film will finally be released. (Rasha Salti)

Mostafa Derkaoui

Born in Oujda, Morocco in 1944. Between 1963 and 1964, he studied at the French film school Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques (IDHEC, now La Fémis) in Paris before studying at the Polish film school Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Filmowa i Teatralna in Łódź from 1965 to 1972. In 1974, Derkaoui and his brother founded the production company Basma Productions. *De quelques événements sans signification* was his first feature-length film.

Films

1964: Les quatre murs. 1968: Amghar (4 min.), Adoption (4 min.). 1969: Les gens du caveau (20 min.), Les États généraux du Cinéma. 1970: Un jour quelque part (20 min.). 1974: De quelques événements sans signification / About Some Meaningless Events. 1976: Les cendres du clos (105 min., collective film). 1982: Les beaux jours de Chahrazade (97 min.). 1984: Titre provisoire (120 min.). 1988: La femme rurale au Maroc. 1992: Fiction première (120 min.), Le silence (18 min., episode of omnibus film La Guerre du golfe et après?). 1993: Le doux murmure du vent après l'orage (22 min.). 1994: Je(u) au passé (81 min.), Les sept portes de la nuit (100 min.), La grande allégorie (67 min.). 2000: Les amours de haj Mokhtar Soldi (130 min.). 2003: Casablanca by Night (100 min.). 2004: Casablanca Daylight (100 min.).

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A collective project through and through

In January 1974, Mostafa Derkaoui returned to Casablanca from his studies at the film college in Łódź, Poland. Together with his brother Abdelkrim, he shot his first film in the city's bars and streets, in the harbour and the poorer districts. The independently produced film was borne by a collective energy unique in the cultural history of the country, even if Moroccan cinema was only starting to develop at the time.

Censorship kept the film from being screened in public for so many years that, in the end, the participants could only remember the extraordinary shoot. And many people had participated: first of all, the modern painters (Melehi, Chebaa, Hamidi and others) who helped fund the film by selling their works; then the group of people who were always near Mostafa Derkaoui, most importantly his brother, but also the actors from the municipal theatre, the musicians of the popular group Jil Jalala, as well as the politically engaged writers, journalists and poets (Mostafa Nissabory and Mohamed Zeftzaf) – at least those who were not in prison.

For more than a decade, these rebellious spirits, most of whom had recently returned from studying art, film or literature abroad, had been subjected to strong repression. The magazine "Souffles", which had offered them opportunities for free expression, was banned and its founder Abdellatif Laabi was arrested, along with many other underground sympathisers and activists of the Marxist-Leninist parties working towards revolution. Two failed military coups in 1971 and 1972 exacerbated the political situation in Morocco, intensifying the country's isolation and King Hassan II's accompanying repression. This background explains why the film was banned, as it depicts a Marxist youth culture and the revolt of a worker who kills his boss. Mostafa Derkaoui wanted to make a film about 'a normal Moroccan and everything that can happen to him, and a film against authoritarian power relations'. A film aimed against those who consider themselves oppositional and hold aloft the ideals of emancipation, while actually helping oppress the people by acting as 'henchmen of the regime'. In Derkaoui's film, the rebels are not the director and his group of Marxist artist friends who interview people and reflect on culture and society; the rebel is the young man who kills his employer because he can no longer stand being exploited.

(All quotations are from a talk between Mostafa Derkaoui and Léa Morin, held in June 2015 at Mostafa Derkaoui's home)

The restoration of the film



After the end of the shoot, the 16mm original negative was developed in the Spanish laboratory Fotofilm. The editing was done in Morocco, and the material then moved from Madrid to Barcelona, where it was blown up from 16mm to 35mm. In 1975, the film was shown at a film festival in Paris. Since it was neither allowed to be shown or exported, its distribution

from then on was restricted to secret screenings.

In the early 2000s, thanks to the collector Mostafa Dziri, a friend of Derkaoui, some VHS copies and later some low-quality DVDs circulated in cinephilic circles. In 2011, the filmmaker Ali Essafi used excerpts from the film in his short film WANTED. The original negatives went missing after the Fotofilm lab declared insolvency in 1999.

Only when Léa Morin, a film scholar specialising in the history of Moroccan cinema, began her research in 2016 did she come across the negatives in the Filmoteca de Catalunya in Barcelona. This discovery and the ensuing correspondence between her, the Derkaoui brothers and the team at the Filmoteca de Catalunya led to the protracted restoration of the film, so that forty years after it was made it could finally be discovered and shown internationally.

The restoration project has been carried out “in house” by Filmoteca’s team and external collaborators Ferran Alberich and Manel Almiñana and had consisted of scanning the original negative 16mm, colour, edited in ab rolls, to 4 K (3996x2160 DPX 10 bit log) using a Northlight-I. Given the condition of the original negative with extensive damage and dust from the 1974 laboratory processing, it was necessary to undertake a digital restoration using DIAMANT software. A colour correction and sound restoration was done with the help and supervision of the film director Mostafa Derkaoui and photographer Abdelkrim Derkaoui.

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The film was restored in parallel to Léa Morin's research (L'Observatoire, art et recherche). The latter led to a book, an exhibition and a series of events in which filmmakers, art historians, film critics and artists took part.

With the support of L'Observatoire, the Musée Collectif de Casablanca, the Filmoteca de Catalunya, the Arab Fund for Art and Culture (AFAC), Akademie Schloss Solitude and Kibrit.

More information:

<https://www.arsenal-berlin.de/en/berlinale-forum/archival-constellations/de-quelques-evenements-sans-signification.html>

