Festival del film Locarno
Official selection

HIKAYET FILMS presents

حكاية فيلم تقدّم

CHECKS & BALANCES

ضدّ القوّى

a film by Malek Bensmaïl













WITH OMAR **BELHOUCHET** HACÈNE **OUALI** HASSANE **MOALI** MUSTAPHA **BENFODIL** FELLA **BOUREDJI** ALI **BENYAHIA** MOURAD **SLIMANI** OMAR **KHAROUM** SAAD **BENKHLIF** AND ALL THE TEAM FROM *EL WATAN*

A FILM BY MALEK **BENSMAÏL** EDITOR MATTHIEU **BRETAUD** ORIGINAL MUSIC PHIL **MARBŒUF** & CAMEL **ZEKRI**

MIXING DELPHINE **THELLIEZ** CAMERA MALEK **BENSMAÏL** & OUADI **GUENICH** COLOR GRADING RÉMI **BERGE**

PRODUCED BY **HIKAYET FILMS** WITH THE KIND PARTICIPATION OF **INA** AND **MAGNOLIAS FILMS**

ina

Magnolias films

WWW.CONTRE-POUVOIRS-LE-FILM.COM

AFAC آفاق

idfa bertha fund

حكايات HIKAYET



HIKAYET FILMS presents

CHECKS & BALANCES

a film by Malek Bensmaïl

with

Omar Belouchet, Hacène Ouali, Hassane Moali, Mustapha Benfodil,
Fella Bouredji, Ali Benyahia, Mourad Slimani, Omar Kharoum, Saad Benkhlif
and all the team from *El Watan*.

french title: Contre-Pouvoirs

feature documentary - Algeria / France - 2015
length 97 min. - coul. - 25i/s - 1,85 - stereo 5.1

CONTACT FILM

Marion Pasquier
Phone: +33 6 79 21 84 67
marion.pasquier@gmail.com
contrepouvoirs@gmail.com

HIKAYET FILMS

Hachemi Zertal
Malek Bensmaïl
malek.bensmail@free.fr
hikayetfilms@gmail.com

www.contre-pouvoirs-le-film.com

CONTRE-POUVOIRS, LE FILM

SYNOPSIS

Accommodated since Algeria's Bloody Decade of the 1990's in the "House of the Press", the journalists of the famous daily newspaper *El Watan* await the completion of their new offices, a symbol of their independence.

My camera is embedded in their newsroom as they follow the events of this new Algerian spring... President Bouteflika has set his sights on a 4th term.

Beyond what we call the Arab revolutions and other mediatized terms, I wanted this film to serve as a memorial to the women and men, young and less young, who battle daily to safeguard the freedom of information in a politically and socially fossilized country.





After in-depth looks inside a psychiatric hospital with Alienations, the corridors of power and the bloody decade in Algeria(s), the HQ of an electoral campaign (The Big Game), and close-up on an Algerian primary school (China Is Still Far), Malek Bensmail set up his camera in the newsroom of the famous daily paper El Watan, the spearhead of the Algerian independent press to film the procedures and thought processes behind journalism during the last presidential election...

EL WATAN

« El Watan was born under Chadli, has hoped under Boudiaf, resisted under Zéroual and survived under Bouteflika »
(Le Hic)

El Watan translates as "The Homeland" in English. This name for this independent newspaper underscores the belief that in representing the opposition the people who began this newspaper believe that they are fighting for the future of their country.

El Watan was begun by Omar Belhouchet and nineteen colleagues in 1990 when they left government owned newspaper El Moudjahid (*Holy Warrior*). The goal of the newspaper is to promote democratic values and democracy in Algeria, and to give a voice to the Algerian opposition. The newspaper has been a powerful vehicle for speaking out about censorship and corruption.

El Watan has been was suspended many times by the government of Algeria. Editors and journalists from the paper have also been jailed more than once for a variety of transgressions. Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists says that *El Watan* reporters have been targets of attacks from both the government and Islamist insurgents.



Checks and Balances

In Algeria, it is easier to define “checks and balances” than it is “power”. An Algerian journalist even suggested a fascinating definition: "checks and balances". There is no abuse of power but abuse of obedience. The checks and balances in place are a form of disobedience, not of counterweight like in a democracy. A resistance to what is standard, and therefore to standardisation. Pluralism, but also digression, dissidence, recalcitrance. The issue is in the words: the authorities dismiss all forms of checks and balances under the label “the opposition”, and shields itself under the label of “the State”. Yet the checks and balances in place are polytonal. They are in the body, the verb, the party, the cry, the march, the demonstration, even the violence, the institution, the debate or the process. The system of checks and balances reveals regimes as parodies of a State.

In Algeria, the system of checks and balances is under siege both by the power of the regime and by conservative orthodoxy – a duel dissonance. The authorities also present a duel nature by calling themselves both God and martyr. The system of checks and balances is pushed out towards the margins where it asserts itself as the centre of resistance.

In Algeria, power is adulatory; the checks and balances in place reveal the real history of Algeria. They tell the true story, because it comes from real life.

Kamel Daoud, journalist and writer



A LOOK AT TODAY'S ALGERIA

The desire to make a film often comes from the films that came before it, the questions they raised but that were left hanging, unanswered.

After my documentaries *Algeria's bloody year*, *Alienations*, *Holydays Despite all*, *The Big Game*, and *China is far away*, I began to think about a project that focused on the question of democracy, freedom of speech, and everything that entails. A project that could examine what "checks and balances" really means, both in terms of freedom and democracy but also in terms of thought processes.

To return to Pasolini's synopsis for his film *The Anger*, he describes the normality of the post-war period. That normality where people no longer look around themselves, because "man tends to be numbed by his own normality. He forgets to question himself, loses the habit of judging, no longer knows how to wonder who he is".

"That's where the anger begins, after this grand, grey funeral," Pasolini concludes. As I read this, I think about the anger of those Algerian journalists who have too often been the Forgotten of contemporary history.

Over a hundred of them fell victim to a bloody civil war. But following a return to "normality", no one watches, no one writes about, no one films Algeria's indignation anymore.

So, who are the defenders of intellectual anger in Algeria?

This film is about finally taking interest in them, residing with them, far from the international headlines, whether "springlike" or bloody. Taking the time to listen, watch and learn; taking the opportunity to examine and understand the questions of a nation through the history and evolution of its independent press, and the complexities it has faced since its emergence.

We know that Algeria has a political system that is authoritarian, locked down. Yet paradoxically, 25 years ago, this same "system" authorized this one unique freedom: that of expression in the written press. In the 1990's, it allowed the birth of the so-called "independent" press in Algeria, at the dawn of the multi-party system.



The privately-owned Algerian press was born in a context of political violence. During the civil war that lasted for over two decades, journalists and intellectuals were viewed as enemy targets by both rival factions: the Islamic fundamentalist movements and the military-backed government, made up of FLN top dogs and the "politico-financial mafia". Over the course of this extended conflict, more than a hundred journalists and intellectuals were killed, which seriously delayed the development of the independent press.

Today, violent attacks on the media have somewhat eased, but journalists still remain the adversaries or the prisoners of the political leadership, the military and those of influence.

Will the Algerian press become a Fourth Estate? Exactly what power does the press have in Algeria? What forms does it take? What are the roots of its power? How does it work? What are its strengths? This project examines all of these issues, from that of access to information on the one hand to the analysis brought by the journalists on the other.

And then there is the question of language. Oh, language! The newspaper… is in French. The issue of language in Algeria has always been very visible in my films, because it has so often been both the object and the instrument of political controversy. *El Watan* is in French and therefore accepts the legacy of this language, which raises the question: Has the French language become an intrinsic part of the opposition in Algeria?

In this emblematic newsroom, all of the key topics are examined: The history of the FLN, Arab and international politics, the economy, oil and gas, dirty money, corruption, terrorism, Algeria's relationship with the Gulf countries, Morocco, education, Algeria's relationship with France, with the French language, with Islam and Islamicism, with power, with the Bouteflika "system", with the army…

As my obsessional questioning of the complexities of my society continues, this project seems to me an essential addition to the "contemporary audiovisual memory". It is not enough to show the violence or to tell the news. There is a duty to continuously record the evolutions, the criticisms, the battles; to record the process of a democracy that is struggling to emerge, but which is, nevertheless, developing. To record "our" collective memory, which inevitably combines both sides of the Mediterranean.

El Watan becomes a symbol of Algeria's initiation into democracy, and at the same time the social tie to this highly mythologised capital.

MAIN PAGE CAST

مع



Omar Belhouchet, Publication Director *(center)*
Ali Benyahia *(left)*, Mourad Slimani *(right)*, Editors-in-Chief



Hacène Ouali, Dosmestical Politic



Hassan Moali, International



Mustapha Benfodil, Society, and 'Mouvement Barakat' member



Fella Bouredji, Society



Omar Kharoum, Managing Editor*(left)*
& Saad Benkhlif, Caricaturist

-"Come on! Back to work now!"

Omar Belhouchet

THE BARAKAT MOVEMENT

In a little over a month, the Barakat Movement ("Enough!") became a major player on the Algerian political scene, epitomizing the opposition to a fourth run by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the frontrunner in the April 17, 2014 polls.

The name of the movement sums up its mandate. Barakat was the Algerians' cry of rage when, at the end of the War of Independence, (1954-1962) the clans began to tear each other apart to get into power. "Seven years [of war], barakat!", they shouted in the street to ward off the risk of an internecine war.

If these demonstrations did not attract huge crowds, the movement still imposed itself as a new political force in the presidential campaign, and the supporters of Abdelaziz Bouteflika lashed out at it, accusing it in particular of being in the pay of foreign powers. An accusation that still hurts in a rigorously nationalistic country.

It also arouses suspicion among the opposition parties, which see it as a rival. *(AFP)*



KHALIL GIBRAN, *THE PROPHET*

The film is punctuated by two excerpts from the book:

« *And an orator said, 'Speak to us of Freedom.'*
And he answered:



Then a mason came forth and said, 'Speak to us of Houses.'
And he answered and said:

Build of your imaginings a bower in the wilderness ere you build a house within the city walls.

But you, children of space, you restless in rest, you shall not be trapped nor tamed.

Your house shall be not an anchor but a mast. »

Between the two quotes, the film acts as a response.

The Prophet, Almustafa, has lived in the foreign city of Orphalese for twelve years and is about to board a ship which will carry him home. He is stopped by a group of people, with whom he discusses topics such as life and the human condition.



MALEK BENSMAÏL

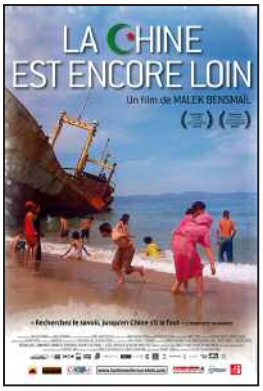
Malek Bensmaïl was born in Constantine, Algeria in 1966. Early in his youth, he shot films in Super 8. Since completing his film studies in Paris and training at *Lenfilm* studios in Saint Petersburg, he has devoted his filmmaking efforts to the documentary genre. All of his films relate to the history of his country.

His signature cinematography depicts the complex, sensitive contours of humanity. His aim is to use film as a medium for cultural reflection and comparison.

His films have received critical acclaim and have won awards at a number of festivals worldwide.

Filmography (extract)

2013 - ULYSSE, LE BRÛLEUR DE FRONTIÈRES ET LA MER BLANCHE DU MILIEU (film and installation)
2012 - SECRET WAR OF THE FLN
2010 - CHINA IS STILL FAR AWAY
2004 - ALIENATIONS
2003 - ALGERIA'S BLOODY YEARS
2001 - HOLYDAYS DESPITE ALL
2000 - DÊMOKRATIA
1999 - BOUDIAF, A HOPE ASSASSINATED
1998 - DECIBLED
1997 - ALGERIAN TV SHOW
1996 - TERRITORIES





The last years two years ago, Malek Bensmail directed **SECRET WAR OF THE FLN IN FRANCE**, a documentary for France 2 and RTBF.

In 2010, his latest feature-length documentary, **CHINA, STILL FAR**, will be released in French and European movie theatres. The film focuses on childhood and knowledge transfer in Algeria, 50 years after independence. It is a chronicle filmed throughout the changing seasons of a village, Aurès, the "cradle of the Algerian Revolution". The film is in line with his previous work and his memories of the decolonization that began over ten years earlier. This film won **THE BEST DOCUMENTARY PRIZE IN 9TH DIGITAL FESTIVAL IN PARIS, THE SPECIAL JURY PRIZE IN THE 3 CONTINENTS FESTIVAL IN NANTES,** and **BEST AWARD IN DOK FEST IN MUNICH.**

As the summer of 2003 flies by, he directs an urgent film, **ALIENATIONS**, a film that pays homage to his father, a psychiatrist. By following doctors and patients at the psychiatric service in Constantine, where he was born, he modestly attempts to understand the suffering with which Algerians live, confronted by many ideas: religious, political, economical, and familial. The film won many prizes, including the **"GRAND PRIX DES BIBLIOTHÈQUES" IN THE FESTIVAL DU CINÉMA DU RÉEL IN PARIS** and **THE MAGNOLIA AWARD FOR THE BET DOCUMENTARY AT THE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF SHANGAÏ.**

ALGERIA'S BLOODY YEARS, in 2002, is a long and passionate quest, led with Thierry Leclère, to document a bloody decade in Algeria, and filmed in two 80-minutes sections. It is shown in many places around the world and receives a number of prizes.

THE BATHS OF THIS FLOATING WORLD, is a film that seems like a necessary purification after the violence of obsessively questioning human tragedies in his previous work. This is where the idea of collective and public bathing came from. It is a first encounter with Japan, an idea and a compulsion that he proposes for the Villa Kujoyama, Kyoto, for the year 2009.

In 1994, he directs **TERRITOIRE(S)**, a 30-minutes film based on a creative montage combining archival images, excerpts from propaganda films and fiction, and filmed images. The film is a very personal look that overlaps a discourse that puts into perspective the archaic violence in Algeria and the Arab world on the one hand, and the post-modern violence of the West on the other. **THIS FILM WON "BEST DOCUMENTARY DISCOVERY" AT THE FESTIVAL OF NEW CINEMA IN MONTREAL.**

In 1998, at the request of France Institut National de l'Audiovisuel and the network Arte, he co-directs a political documentary, **BOUDIAF, AN ASSASSINATED HOPE** on the Algerian president who was assassinated live on television, six months after his return from a 30-years exile.

This film provides the material for a short fiction, **DÊMOKRATIA**, which shows on Arte in 2002. **DÊMOKRATIA** is a philosophical fable about the machinery of absolute power in an imaginary totalitarian country. The approach taken strictly was to maintain a light oscillating between reality and fiction.

Again in 2001, he wins the **"PRIX DU PATRIMOINE" AT THE FESTIVAL DU CINÉMA DU RÉEL IN PARIS** for a documentary, **DES VACANCES MALGRÉ TOUT (HOLIDAYS DESPITE ALL)**. Featuring an out-of-the-ordinary emigrant family, the film shows a difficult encounter between those who have emigrated and those who have remained in their country.

CREDITS

Duration 97min. - Coulor - 1,85 - Stereo 5.1
Languages: French, Berber, Arab

English subtitles
French subtitles

Written and directed by Malek Bensmaïl

Editor	Matthieu Bretaud
Additional Editor	Cedric Jouan
Music	Phil Marbœuf
	Camel Zekri
Light	Ouadi Guenich
Assistant	Hassen Ferhani
Sound	Hamid Osmani
Color Grading	Rémi Berge
Sound editing and Mixing	Delphine Telliez
Infography	Stéphanie Mée
Translation	Amine Khaled
English Version	Esther Russel
Production	Hikayet Films (Algeria)
Producers	Hachemi Zertal
	Malek Bensmaïl
Assistant	Marion Pasquier
Associate Producer	Gérald Collas, Yann Brolli

With the kind participation of:

Ina, Magnolias Films (France), Thala Films (Algeria).

This film was made with support from
IDFA Bertha Fund & The Arab Fund For Arts and Culture.

And donors friendly.

Festival del film Locarno
Official selection

CHECKS & BALANCES

ضدّ القوّى

a film by Malek Bensmaïl



To the 120 Algerian journalists murdered during the black decade.

ina · Magnolias films · AFAC آفاق · idfa bertha fund · حكايات HIKAYET

Aug. 2015
conception: www.goliathcorp.org