

# Educational sheet - Africa2020

Sauve qui peut le court métrage - Centre Yennenga



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# THE FILM

*On just another regular day in Cairo, Egypt, 18-year-old Nour gets a call from her brother that he will no longer be able to pick her up. To avoid being late to work, Nour has to take a microbus, not knowing that this trip will forever leave her changed.*

## Crew

**Director:** Maggie Kamal

**Producers:** Ahmed El Khashab, Maggie Kamal

**DOP:** Kamal Samir

**1st Camera assistant:** Ali

**Sound design:** CCNY's Sonic Arts Center

**Editing:** FilmLab, Mohamed Abouhamed, Nihal Farouk, Sandy Ismail

## Cast

**Dalia Shawky:** Nour

**Mohamed Abu Dahad:** driver



# THE DIRECTOR

**Maggie Kamal** is an Egyptian American filmmaker based in NYC. Maggie holds a BA degree in Media & Communication and a master's degree in film from New York's City College.

Her first short film, *Koshary* (2019) was awarded both the Best Director Prize and the Best Actress Prize at the Impro Film Festival. That same year, she took home the Ostrovsky Family Fund Award for the *Microbus* script. The film had its European premiere at the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival and was later selected at the Carthage Cinema Festival (2022) and at the Feminist Border Film Festival. She directed a number of experimental films that took the form of video installations in contemporary art exhibitions.

Maggie Kamal's films have a strong element of **social realism**. Maggie aims to provoke a feeling of unease in her audience, to have them **question** and **engage with taboo subjects**.



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# A ROAD MOVIE



Nour is waiting for her brother who is meant to take her to her new job. She tries to reach him on the phone but the calls remain unanswered. In the car park, touts are announcing the direction of the mirobuses. Tilted camera angles translate the girl's unease and hesitation. Masculine voices mingle with the dial tone, creating a dense and anxiety-inducing atmosphere. To avoid being late for work, Nour ends up taking the bus.

The driver sits her next to him at the front. She tells her brother to meet her on the motorway between Cairo and Alexandria. The bus is full. A cheerful Egyptian tune accompanies the sequence. We follow the interactions between the various passengers and the driver in an aesthetic reminiscent of documentaries, giving the film a pervading and immersive social realist dimension. The passengers get off one of after the other until Nour finds herself alone with the driver.

# A ROAD MOVIE



A road movie is a cinematic genre born in the US. It usually depicts travel by car, motorcycle or public transport. The characters set off on the open road to escape the daily grind and embark upon a rite-of-passage transformative journey. They will be different people when they arrive at their destination and must overcome a number of hurdles along the way, much like the titular characters of Ridley Scott's Thelma & Louise (1991).

Thelma and Louise decide to run away for a weekend but things take a dramatic turn when Thelma is assaulted in a night club by a man who tries to rape her. To defend her, Louise kills the aggressor and the two women find themselves swept away on a wild ride with dramatic consequences. Similarly, in *Microbus*, the main character is a woman and she will find herself **transformed** along her journey after a sexual assault.

# HARASSMENT

Unlike *Thelma and Louise*, in *Microbus*, Nour faces her aggressor alone. On the bus, the camera is set along two axes, alternated during editing. From the back of the bus, it allows us to see the backs of the passengers, as if we were also sitting at the far end of the vehicle. From the front, the camera on the dashboard allows us to observe Nour and the driver. The driver seems nice, he is smiling and even offers a trip to the last passenger to setp out of the vehicle. But Nour's worry is perceptible: she checks her watch and wriggles in her seat.

An ellipsis occurs when the last passenger gets out: the bus is now outside the city and driving through the desert. Nour is isolated. The driver starts up the conversation. The dialogue is filmed in shot/reversed shot. It's a classic filmic device often used to stage dialogue. The shot is what the camera shows us.



# HARASSMENT



The reverse shot is the space opposite the shot and represents what the character in the shot is seeing. The shot / reverse shot is an editing technique that consists in alternating between the shot and the reverse shot in turn. By choosing to show this forced dialogue in this manner of shot / reverse shot, Maggie Kamal really highlights the arrogance of the driver. He doesn't take into account the uneasiness of Nour who is now stuck and remains silent, shooting him occasional wary looks. He becomes insistent, he asks questions and faced with Nour's silence, also makes up the answers. Tension escalates when he remarks that she doesn't have a ring on her finger and assumes therefore that she isn't married. Nour, adopting a defensive stance, stares straight ahead towards the horizon, as if to escape the driver's shamelessness.

# HARASSMENT

He parks the vehicle, gets out of his seat and sits behind Nour. The camera at the back of the vehicle makes us witness the scene. From the jerkiness of his movements and his ragged breathing, we guess that he is masturbating. Maggie Kamal avoids the erotisation of the scene and shows the perversion of the driver who sits behind her to create ambiguity in his movements. The effect is of an extremely uncomfortable situation during which we share Nour's deepening unease.



I didn't do anything to you

The man, to seal his victim's silence and underline that he is the one calling the shots, tells her as he picks up a cigarette: "I didn't do anything to do, I don't know why you're scared." This type of rhetoric is classic amongst sexual abusers who deny the violence of their actions in order to guilt-trip their victims. He then gets out of the bus to greet Nour's brother, as if nothing had happened, with total impunity.



# WOMEN'S RESISTANCE STRATEGIES



Although in *Thelma and Louise*, the women kill their aggressor, Nour remains petrified during her own assault. This reaction is a psychological defence mechanism called the "state of shock". In reaction to the extreme anxiety caused by the assault, the victim is paralysed, which reduces their psychological and physical suffering. They can't react. This mechanism often provokes misunderstanding and confusion and victims feel ashamed that they didn't hit back and defend themselves.

Elle semble nous prendre à partie. To break this pattern of shame, Maggie Kamal has chosen to open up and end the film on a portrait of Nour. Bathed in sunlight, her face expresses pride and dignity, refusing any victimisation or submission. With tears in her eyes, she looks into the camera with an **accusing stare, an intense and dramatic look** that questions the viewer and leads them to self-reflect. What would we have done in Nour's place? The camera at the back of the vehicle has placed us in the position of powerless victim. Yet, it is on us that Nour's gaze falls as her eyes are opened to the reality of a society in which too many women are subjected to sexual abuse. She seems to be challenging us.

# WOMEN'S RESISTANCE STRATEGIES

Sexual harassment in public is also something that Egyptian director Mohamed Diab denounces in his film *Cairo 678* (2010). In the film, the three main characters decide to fight indifference and victimisation after having been subjected to an assault. Each woman finds a solution to break the taboo: a divorce for Seba, a sex strike for Fayza and punishment by way of hair clip stabbing for Nelly.

This film focuses on the various strategies for resistance used by women. **It was made after the first court case for sexual harassment in Egypt in 2008.**

Fiction can effectively help us comprehend the scope of violence against women and help open up the discourse to change the mentality around that. In 8 minutes, Maggie Kamal manages to broach a sensitive subject in a convincing manner whilst leaving many questions unanswered to leave the audience free to ponder the subject and open up the debate.

