

Educational sheet - Africa2020

Sauve qui peut le court métrage - Centre Yennenga



WILL MY PARENTS COME TO SEE ME ?

2022 / GERMANY / AUSTRIA / SOMALIA

MO HARAWE

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Presented at Berlinale 2022

Poulain d'Or at FESPACO 2023

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INSTITUT
FRANÇAIS

THE FILM

Crew

Director: Mo Harawe

Cinematography: Steven Samy

Production: Mo Harawe

Editing: Alexander von Piechowski

DOP: Mo Harawe

Sound: Mohamed Abdinur Isse

Cast

Xaliimo Cali Xasan, Shucayb Abdirahman Cabdi,
Geenyada Madaw, Mohamed Hersi, Maxamed Axmed Maxamed

In a Somali prison, it is Farah's last day. The young man is sentenced to death. He is escorted by an experienced policewoman. Although they go through the procedures of the justice system with the utmost calm, we can read the emotions on their faces.

Thanks to its pared down aesthetic and the effective simplicity of the performances, director Mo Haware invites us to reflect upon the prison system and the death penalty more generally.



THE DIRECTOR

Mo Harawe is a filmmaker, scriptwriter, DOP and producer.

He was born in Mogadiscio (Somalia) and has been living in Vienna since 2009. He began his career in film by making a number of award winning shorts, such as *The Story of the Polar Bear That Wanted To Go To Africa* (2018) and *Life on the Horn* (2020), *Tanit d'Or* at the Carthage Cinema Festival.

He is also a screenwriter and his feature script *To Mogadiscio*, developed at the *Diverse Geschichten* script lab took home the *Diagonale* prize in 2016. In 2019, Harawe won the *BKA Startstipendium* for his latest feature, *The Village Next to Paradise*, currently in development.



IN THE FACE OF DEATH I



Will my parents come to see me? was shot in both a prison and a hospital in Somalia. Mo Harawe immerses us in this prison environment. The natural light gives this film a dark wethaeti where the characters appear on screen in a **beautiful chiaroscuro**. Their bodies merge with the building's walls, they are **engulfed** by the prison.

We follow the legal procedures Farah has to go through on his last day, before his execution: a medical visit at the hospital, a briefing on how the execution will unfold, his last meal, a meeting with the imam, a last visit, a final night. Each moment is detailed through **still frames**. The camera is never intrusive and observes the scene, leaving the characters to navigate the space. The rhythm is slow, the atmosphere is **melancolic**.

The film is told from **the point of view of the prisoner** by placing the camera behind the bars. Farah is never alone in the frame, he is always chaperoned by the policewoman. In fact, she opens the film. We see her sitting in her car and putting her uniform on before entering the prison.

IN THE FACE OF DEATH II



The camera movements are few and far between. A tracking shot through the canteen shows us the line of people waiting for the cook to serve up. Farah's frail silhouette is outlined against the light shining through the window. The second camera movement is towards the end of the film. The shoulder-mounted camera follows Farah's walk towards the firing squad, the character's emotions clearly visible as he crumples at the feet of the policewoman. As Farah loses his calm, **the camera is no longer still** and follows the character's movements. As he faces the firing squad, the young man is **overwhelmed by his emotions**.

DILEMMA I



The actors in *Will My Parents Come To See Me?* are not professionals. Mo Harawe found them amongst his friends and explained the idea behind the film so that they're free to improvise around the text, without rehearsals. The authenticity and the simplicity of their performances allow the film to avoid sensationalism whilst giving a heartrending intensity to this fateful day. Their sober and taciturn attitude in the face of the gravity of the situation is unsettling.

"Tomorrow is the day your soul will be free," the imam tells Farah, during a sequence-shot in the quarantine, shot in profile. But Farah is already absent! His reactions, whose apparent indifference can seem surprising, appear totally opaque to those on the outside. The only question he asks the court clerk is the one that makes up the film's title: *will my parents come to see me?* But nobody will come to say goodbye. Mo Harawe confronts both viewpoints, those of Farah and the policewoman. He doesn't just tackle the issue of the death penalty through the eyes of the prisoner.

DILEMMA II

The policewoman carries out her job with resignation and passivity, as if alienated by the mechanism of the prison system. She embodies society's attitude towards the dilemma posed by the issue of the death penalty. At the end of the film, she snaps and leaves the scene. She sits in her car and turns the music on.

The camera films her from the side, allowing her to glimpse in the background Farah strapped to the post, a bag over his head. When the clerk asks the woman to turn the volume down, she turns it up and starts the car. She crosses the scene of the execution in an act of transgression and refusal. She then drives across the desert, as if escaping this tragedy. We find her again later on, sitting on her bed in the dark. She is still wearing her uniform, signalling that despite her feeling of rebellion, she resigns herself to stay in her job. She shoots the camera a look that ends the film and questions the viewer's own opinion.



SOMALI MUSIC



They appear incongruous in this rather austere prison environment. Opposite Farah who waits in silence, the clerk is watching a video clip with jaunty music on this phone. His attitude illustrates his indifference. When the policewoman is in her car, she seems to be trying to escape the situation by playing upbeat somali music. Throughout the film, the music deconstructs the pathos, playing against the characters' emotions and counterbalancing the drama. The music allows the film to balance the emotional charge of the various sequences and, like it does for the policewoman, makes the unbearable bearable. The opacity of emotions is thus reinforced by the soundtrack. During Farah's last night, in the heavy silence of his cell, a donkey appears outside through the bars. This animal presence imbues scene with a somewhat mystical atmosphere.

Not a single sound comes to break the silence of this moment, suspended in time. When Farah collapses in front of the firing squad, his cries are muffled. Mo Harawe makes the deliberate choice to remove us from the pleas, the tear and the screams, as Farah is about to die. The music punctuates the narration Through the windows of the cell, we hear the jaunty tune of the brass band rehearsing in the prison yard. The uniformed musicians mumble official hymns.

THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

The thorny issue of the death penalty is also one that Frank Darabont tackles in his film *The Green Mile* (1999), an adaptation of a Stephen King novel. In the same vein as *Will My Parents Come To See Me?* the director exposes us to two viewpoints: that of a man sentenced to death and that of a prison officer, who is also the narrator of the film. It recounts the story of John Coffey, a man who had been sentenced for the rape and murder of two girls. Contrary to appearance, the accused was actually innocent. Despite his indignation, Paul Edgecomb will not succeed in standing up to the judicial system and saving John Coffey.

Unlike *The Green Mile*, Mo Harawe chooses not to reveal what Farah is charged with. The question of his culpability or his innocence is not the subject of the film. Rather it is the **cogs of the judicial system** that the director focuses on. Farah's fatal trajectory is design mechanically. We are faced with a hopeless situation. The director simply presents us with the facts. Thus, he reveals the tragic absurdity and alienation that this system produces. With his fragile demeanour, Farah stokes our empathy. There is a something quite juvenile about the way he asks if his parents are coming to see him. Through this situation, the director invites us to reflect and opens up it up for debate. Who should we blame: the absent parents? Society, embodied by the alienated policewoman? The judicial system? The young man?



TO FIND OUT MORE



[HTTPS://WWW.ARTE.TV/DE/VIDEOS/113494-000-A/INTERVIEW-MIT-MO-HARawe/](https://www.arte.tv/de/videos/113494-000-A/interview-mit-mo-harawe/)

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