



السراب

## Al-Sarab

### The Mirage

Ahmed Bouanani

**Production companies** Centre Cinématographique Marocain (CCM, Rabat, Morocco), Basma Production (Morocco). **Written and directed by** Ahmed Bouanani. **Director of photography** Abdellah Bayahia. **Editor** Ahmed Bouanani. **Music** Image. **Sound** Yahia Bou Abdessalam. **With** Mohamed Habachi, Mohamed Saïd Afifi, Fatima Regragul.

1980, 35 mm, black/white. 100 min. Arabic.

Morocco during French colonial rule: Mohamed is one of the legions of rural poor dependent on handouts. One day, he finds a bundle of banknotes in a sack of flour he humbly accepted and dragged home. Mohamed sets off for the city of Salé in order to exchange the unexpected windfall. Yet the money turns out to be more of a curse than a blessing: No matter whom he turns to, no one is willing to believe a ragamuffin like him.

„One day, dreaming will be outlawed“ – this sentence marks the culmination of the film’s prologue, the narrative logic of which bows to no convention but the imponderable grammar of dreams. Mohamed encounters tricksters, soothsayers and preachers; he flees from the marching boots of the colonial troops, winding up in surreal landscapes. Ruins. Grottoes and vaults. In fields and on beaches, a nightmare without end.

Ahmed Bouanani’s poetic feature *Al-Sarab* – which he insisted on filming in black-and-white despite great resistance – is at once the director’s first full-length film and the last he ever made. Its influence on subsequent generations is immeasurable.

*Christoph Terhechte*

## Whoever loves film, loves life

To speak of the Moroccan filmmaker Ahmed Bouanani is to speak of a Moroccan cinema whose artistic productions are well structured and rhythmical. For this important Moroccan filmmaker views film primarily as his own personal creative field of work, rather than as an art targeting a mass audience. All the films he was able to realise during his career can be cited as examples, among them *Tarfaya ou la marche d'un poète*, *Six et douze*, *Mémoire 14*, *Sidi Hmad ou Moussa*, *Les quatre sources*, *Côté 2400*, *Casablanca*, *L'Olivier* and especially his wonderful film *Al-Sarab*.

Moroccan film criticism regards the latter as one of the best works in Moroccan film history, because it manages to trace the artistic development of film in this country in an original way.

*Al-Sarab* tells the story of a poor Moroccan farmer in the time of the French protectorate. He and his wife, who works as a servant for a French family, suffer from crushing poverty. Every day brings the same travails, until one day, by lucky chance, the farmer finds a large sum of money in a flour sack. [...] The question then arises of what he should do with it. First he has to exchange the money in a bank. But that poses big problems for him. The simplest way would be if he could find someone to carry out the exchange discreetly and without drawing attention from others. Thus begins a fable situated between yesterday and tomorrow and, as the synopsis of the film puts it, between a scream and silence and that ends as disappointment.

That's how the story of the search for a long yearned-for fortune begins. In the city, the hero, or rather antihero, of this film discovers [...] another world in which everyone strives to realise a lost dream. In the public soup kitchen, the people eat harira and imagine they are eating meat, while the famous singer Hocine Assalaoui intones his beautiful songs, which accurately describe the situation of these poor people. Here, the antihero eats together with his new friend Ali ben Ali, who dreams of building a beautiful theatre in which he can stage his wonderful plays about human freedom. The wife of the hero, in turn, tries to realise her dream of happiness in the city by trusting an Islamic legal dictum that prescribes slaughtering a black billy goat to gain the aid of the jinns.

The antihero (in the cinematographic sense) sees all these societal phenomena before him, but he is unable to realise his dream of using this large sum of money to become a respected man. Even the chance to find in the city his only son, who left the village some time earlier, passes by without result.

The film describes convincingly the vicissitudes of life. The director structured his field of work clearly and divided it skilfully between life in the countryside and life in the city. He has the support of great actors, among them the famous Mohamed El Habachi, the wonderful Fatima Erraguragui and the artist Mohamed Affi.

The film confirms – if confirmation were still necessary – that cinema can convey an artistic picture of society and enables us to dream of all things in life. *Al-Sarab* presents us with a story full of symbols that move us deeply, because they represent the feelings and attitudes of the characters with great seriousness. These are the reasons why people go to the movies – and whoever loves film, loves life. This film by Ahmed Bouanani is an homage to cinema and to life.

Noureddine Mhakkak

<http://www.africine.org/?menu=art&no=6768>

Ahmed Bouanani was born in 1938 in Casablanca, Morocco. He studied Film at the Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC) in Paris. He made a series of short films in the 1960s, and in 1970 co-founded the production company Sigma 3 along with Hamid Benani, Mohamed Abderrahman Tazi, and Mohamed Sekkat. In addition to directing his own films, Bouanani also worked as an editor and screenwriter for other Moroccan directors. He was also a writer and published several volumes of poetry. His one full-length film, *Al-Sarab / Le Mirage*, was made in 1979. Ahmed Bouanani died in 2011 in Demnate, Morocco.

## Films

1966: *Tarfaya Aw Masseurat Sha'er / Tarfaya ou La marche d'un poète* (20 min.). 1968: *Sitta wa Thaniat 'Ashar / Six et douze* (18 min.). 1971: *Thakirah Arba'at 'Ashar / Mémoire 14* (24 min.). 1977: *Al-Manabe' al-Arba'a / Les quatre sources* (35 min.). 1980: *Al-Sarab / Le Mirage / The Mirage* (100 min.). 1981: *Carte de visite* (30 min.). 1982: *Casablanca, bilan et perspectives* (50 min.), *Sidi Kacem ou le rameau d'Olivier* (11 min.). 1984: *L'Enfant, la torture et l'ordinateur* (15 min.), *Complexe sportif Mohammed V de Casablanca* (22 min.). 1991: *Raconte-moi Meknès* (16 min.).