



الايام، الايام

Alyam, Alyam

Oh the Days!

Ahmed El Maanouni

Production company Rabii Films Productions (Casablanca, Morocco). **Written and directed by** Ahmed El Maanouni. **Director of photography** Ahmed El Maanouni. **Editor** Martine Chicot. **Music** Nass El Ghiwane. **Sound** Ricardo Castro.

1978, 35 mm, colour. 87 min. Arabic.

Set in a small village in the Moroccan countryside, *Alyam, Alyam* tells a story culled from the lived reality of young men almost forty years ago while still remaining very much of the present day. A young man named Abdelwahed pins his dreams of a better life for himself and his family on travelling to France and finding work there. As the eldest of eight children, he becomes the principal caretaker and breadwinner for his family after his father passes away. He fills out forms and waits for his work permit to arrive. Meanwhile, Hlima, his recently widowed mother who's reticent to let him go, tries in vain to dissuade him and enlists the help of Abdelwahed's grandfather too. As the days flow by to the cadence of life in the countryside, marked by the hardships of farming, Abdelwahed waits. All he can do is wait. Straddling fiction and documentary, *Alyam, Alyam* is Ahmed El Maanouni's first narrative feature, and the first Moroccan film ever to be selected at the Cannes Film Festival. Recently restored, the film's splendor and finely crafted editing has become available once again for cinéphiles and new generations to discover.

Rasha Salti

The dissipation of lost generations

Alyam, Alyam is a film about shattered dreams and the circumstances leading up to that point; about the shaking of the traditional social structure; about the strength born of desperation and the unrelenting dissipation of lost generations. This is stressed from the first notes of the opening music, by the strangely empty building frame that is slowly filled with people, by the village space, by the silence of the wandering woman who smokes, until the last shot of the film, when a crowd appears from behind a deserted hill. The dreams of a society growing smaller, unable to hold on to the resources that could help it survive, are mirrored by the mother's helpless prayer, 'I need your shadow, I need your light, I need your face'.

I simply wanted to show the farmers' faces, to honour their sounds and their images, their silences and their words, and that's why I chose not to interfere and to opt for deliberately restrained composition, movement and mise-en-scène. I tried to minimize the camera's ability to distort, make a point, or discriminate. I wanted each aspect to be presented equally. I did not look for spectacular beauty, but made an effort to let the imagery of the rural world speak through abstraction and silence.

Almost forty years later, when I watch *Alyam, Alyam* again, I am still comfortable with my aesthetic choices and my intuitions, but I cannot avoid noticing how, from beginning to end – from the opening shots with the bloodshed by the camels, to the crowd of peasants appearing from behind the hills – it all seemed to presage the current tragedy experienced by the thousands whose broken dreams lie at the bottom of the Mediterranean, on which the voice of Larbi Batma (from the band Nass El Ghiwane, which created the music for the film) seems to strangely resonate: 'Alyam Alyam, oh, those were the days! Why are you crossed? Who changed your course? You were once sweet like milk, now you're bitter. I love all men as if they were my brothers. My brothers have crushed me. I will silence my pain and let my love be loud.'

Ahmed El Maanouni

Abdelwahed's dream

First I collected material, anecdotes and facts from the lives of farmers living in the Casablanca region. When I proceeded to put together the mosaic of the film, I asked the farmers to perform in the film. The film ranges between their experiences and my observations. My feature film is also a documentary, and my documentary is a feature film. Abdelwahed does indeed wish to leave his homeland, but in reality his mother has already consented. She immediately understood why I asked her to embody the conflicts that arose in the family from her viewpoint as mother. I chose them because Hlima has a strong charisma and her son is very ambitious. Right now he dreams of a chicken farm, but he is still an agricultural labourer in the village.

Ahmed El Maanouni

Obey against oneself?

Observation is the key to understanding the expository and visual style of *Alyam, Alyam*. Ostensibly the story of a young Moroccan who wants to break with the traditions of peasant life and leave for 'the city', the film is more of an enddistanced view of

the way people live. However, the conflicts and dichotomies are expressed only in the words of the character, not in the images.

There is no attempt to create artificial drama. We see what we need to see relative to the narrative being presented. In a two-way conversation, El Maanouni may be content not to cut back and forth between the speaker and listener. Rather, he may leave the camera on one person throughout so that we observe an individual. These stylistic qualities create a sense of continuity, a sense of sustenance, a sense of survival.

In the middle of the film, the hero and his mother have a talk. She begs him to 'obey' and stick around to help her. He asks, 'Obey against my future?' We cut to images of farm life. The objectivity of the shots suggests that the viewpoints in the film are created by individuals – not by some cold force of fate or destiny. And that's precisely what gives *Alyam, Alyam* the extraordinary integrity that it has.

<http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/event/alyam-alyam-oh-days>

Ahmed El Maanouni was born in 1944 in Casablanca, Morocco. He studied Economics at the Université Paris-Dauphine before transferring to the Université Internationale du Théâtre, also in Paris. He then graduated from the Belgian film school INSAS. In 1978, he made his first film, *Alyam, Alyam*. El Maanouni is a director, cinematographer, and producer.

Films

1978: *Alyam, Alyam / Oh the Days!*. 1981: *Al hal/Transe* (90 min.). 1984: *Les Yeux du golfe/Eyes of the Gulf*. 1992: *Les Goumiers marocains/The Moroccan Goumiers* (52 min.). 1999: *La Vie et le règne de Mohamed V/Life and Reign of Mohamed V* (52 min.). 2006: *Maroc-France, une histoire commune/Morocco-France, A History in Common* (Three parts, 52 min. each). 2007: *Al quoloub al mouhtariqua/Burned Hearts* (84 min.), *Conversations avec Driss Chraïbi*. 2015: *Mohammed V, les chemins de la liberté*.