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Nadia Kounda

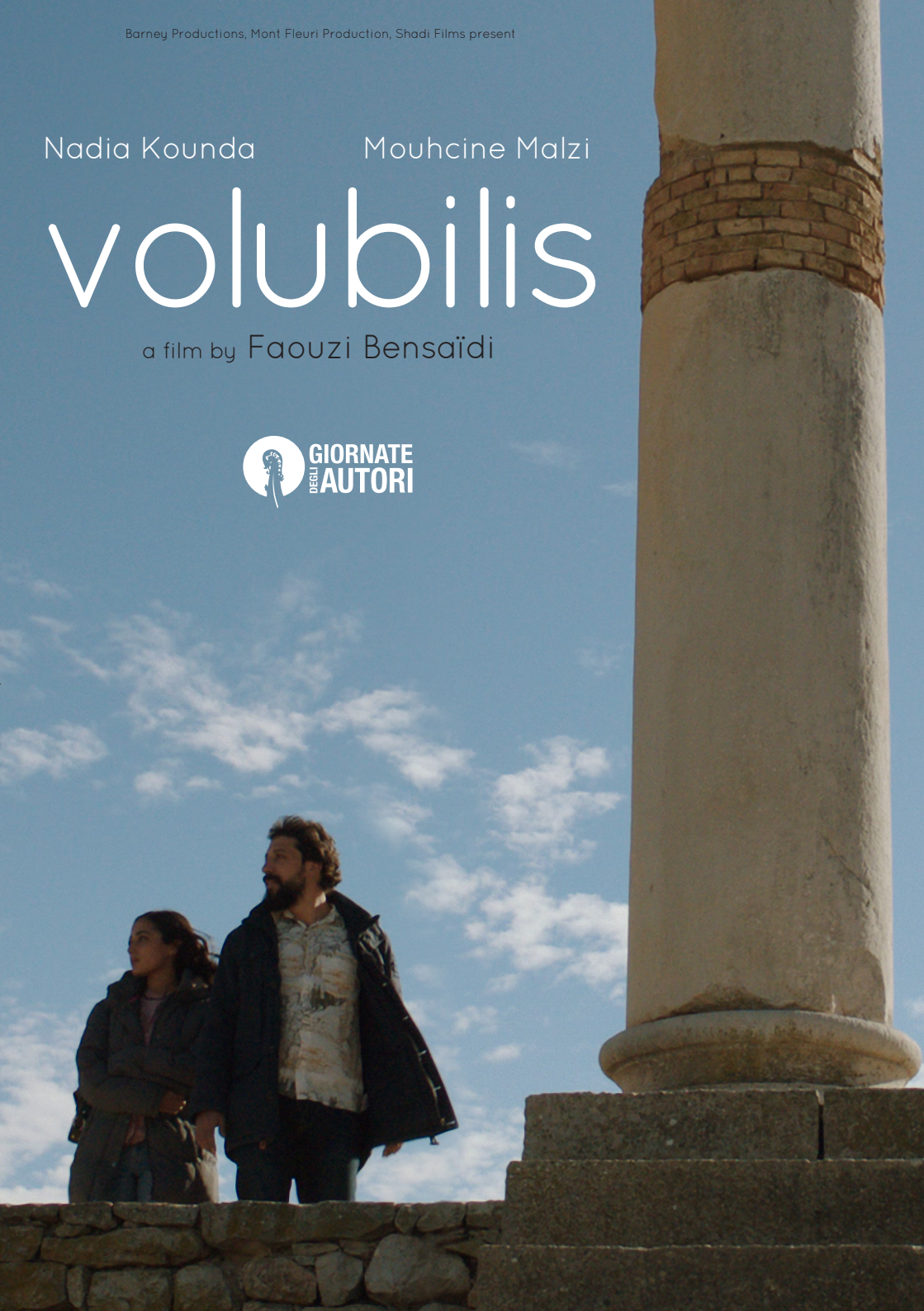
Mouhcine Malzi

volubilis

a film by Faouzi Bensaïdi



GIORNATE
DEGLI
AUTORI



s y n o p s i s

In the Moroccan city of Meknes, recently married Abdelkader and Malika struggle to make ends meet. They dream of leaving the family house and finally start a life of their own together. But one day at work, Abdelkader experiences a violent incident that will turn their destiny upside down. Volubilis is a tale of love in a world of despair, of beauty among the ruins.

MOROCCO - FRANCE - QATAR / 106' / 2017 / FEATURE FILM

i n t e r v i e w

faouzi bensaidi



The film tells an impossible story in an inegalitarian Moroccan society, what inspired you to make it?

The film came into being as the result of feelings and observations, among which the hardship of simply living in today's world. What should be everyone's basic right to LIVE has been transformed into "SURVIVE". This is the day-to-day life of a large fringe of society, whether in Morocco or elsewhere. The shopping malls that thrive everywhere in Morocco are temples of consumption

and the blind, greedy world of money that takes over our lives and our dreams. Today, having a job does not guarantee a dignified life.

He's a security guard and she a cleaning lady; they love each other, theirs is a magnificent, romantic love. They marry but continue to live in the respective homes of their parents; it's a terrible situation. They are too poor



to have a home of their own. Their intimacy is violently thwarted by their social and economic condition. Can love survive? Can it resist the social and economic pressures? This was the film's starting point, but in fact it was another aspect that made me decide to make the film. How does one find a cinematographic idea? That's what making a film is all about. All ideas are not cinematographic! There are films that resemble plays,



or novels, but they're not films. I often hear "I've a great story for a film" – and they're often truly great stories, but not for the cinema.

What meaning do you give to the movement that Abdelkader is drawn to? How have you constructed his character?

We can continue to stigmatize those who vote for extremist political parties, or instead, try to understand a man who grew up at the beginning of this century, someone who is confronted with the absence of any sound thinking, of any luminous and inspiring ideology, who lives in a world where art and culture can be summed up as entertainment, as generating a buzz and a celebrity effect. A man who no longer has access to images that, while entertaining, inspire thought. And

when all this stupidity ends in an identity crisis, or an existential crisis, or simply in an adolescent crisis, he only finds as a way to look forward or as some kind of response, religious or fascist extremism. The result is a complex character, one who is interesting but who asks to be listened to, to be followed. He is not a sympathetic character at first glance. But his belief in the human being is without limits. So a new world, a new man is possible. The combat is not over, far from it...



As much in its content as in its form, the film makes one think of an American melodrama. Is that the film's main reference?

I think I've always written melodramas, adapting them

to today's world. The directing has to encompass the film's tonality, its color. In this case, for me, this meant avoiding the traps of a saccharine well-meaning, right-thinking approach, by opting for a sometimes disengaged, "Brechtian" approach. This doesn't cancel the melodrama, but strengthens its lyrical dimension instead, anchoring it in reality.



It is in this film that I have allowed my camera to be the most permeable to feeling; it's the film where I've shot the most close-ups and where the actors are the film's very essence. And again, melodrama is a form that is very close to us, the Arabic people; we are a sentimental people par excellence! Maybe this is not the image one has of us, but what about the men who cry and tear themselves apart with every "Ah" of Umm Kulthum or



Abdelhalim Hafid? Just have a look at their concerts. There's some kind of synthesis to be found involving Douglas Sirk, the Egyptian cinema and the Arab soul.

This is the first time that you've shot a film in Meknès, your hometown. How did that go?

The shoot was neither happy nor unhappy, but complex. It wasn't easy for me! There are places that I filmed that are filled with feelings, where memories abound. It's strange. Placing one's characters on my route to school was both marvelous and troubling at the same time. The film has been nourished by things like that, and by others that sometimes I control, sometimes I don't.

Shooting a film in its entirety in Meknès is a first. Part of my film *La Falaise* (*The Cliff*) was shot there, but for

this film, the return was total. Each film provides the opportunity to visit a city, at least a little. I love it when cities and spaces in general exist, breathe, add new things to the story, to the characters. One doesn't film all cities in the same way, like one doesn't film all actors in the same way. There's a specific viewpoint for each city, just like there's a specific angle from which each actor is viewed.

You have extensive experience in directing plays, does that determine your choice of actors?

My ten years of theatre and maybe also because I'm an actor myself from time to time make me very aware of the place reserved for actors in my films. First of all, I think that it's the actors who are the most exposed in the making of a film; it's very courageous to offer one's soul to the camera, because the invisible that the camera films emanates from them, film directors being a little bit like soul thieves. And I don't think you can direct actors on the set, there's never any time for that; one corrects, changes a little or improves, one adjusts slightly, but the music has already been composed. For me, directing the actors begins during casting and continues throughout the film preparation period. And I think that one directs with what one has understood about the task, but that one also directs actors with what one is and what one has experienced. With one's experience of life. This question has never ceased to trouble me throughout my professional career. There are connections that are practically inexplicable. Of all the elements that go to make up a film, the actors are the most mysterious, the

most unexpected; they are rich and interesting.

Some of the actors in *Volubilis* have already played a role in your films, others are new. How do you go about your casting?

There's a troupe spirit: this is Nezha Rahil's and Choubi's fourth film with me, they are permanent members; then there are the new members -- Mohcine Malzi for which this film is the second, and then there are the new arrivals, Nadia Kounda, Mouna Fettou and Abdelhadi Taleb.

I was very sure of the actor for the security guard; for the girl it was more complicated. I looked a longtime, but the day that Nadia did her first screen test, the choice was obvious. I am present during all stages of the casting; for me it's a moment of researching my



work, a very interesting time of trial and error, I can't imagine missing this moment. Plus, it shows respect for the actors for the director to be present. The same applies in looking for shooting locations: how can one judge a place based on photos, when a place has a soul, is steeped in experience; there's a manner in which to view it and film it that makes it exist. You have to be there physically.

You play a rather important role in the film and we see you more and more often acting for other directors. How do you structure these two “jobs” in relation to each other?

Directing is the very air I breathe; without directing a fictional world in the cinema or earlier in the theatre, I can't see any reason for my existence. Playing a role is intoxicating, a waft of sweet smoke that I love enormously, that does me a lot of good, that enriches me because it puts me in a comfortable position, both literally and figuratively, because it allows me to observe and to continue to learn. I very much love to play a role in my films. Directing is an invention of the 20th century. Before, the Molières and Shakespeares were first of all actors and directors of troupes, so they both acted and directed. I like this position because it reconnects me with the beginnings of this art and with a few filmmakers who I admire enormously and who gave me the desire to do this work, and who both play a role and direct: the great Welles and others...

After Cannes and Berlin, this is the second time that you'll be showing a film in Venice. How does launching the film

here affect you?

This is the fourth time that I will have returned to Venice. I was there first with a short film entitled *Trajets* (*Trajectories*), a second time as the film script writer for André Techiné's film *Loin* (*Far*), and a third with my second film, *What a Wonderful World*, which Venice Days had selected and which I am particularly fond of because it's crazy, free, fragile and insolent, shot from inside the system, which I think would be impossible today. Venice Days opened its arms big and wide for the film's premiere, and what followed was superb. I hope for as much and better for *Volubilis*.

cast & crew

WITH

MOUHCINE MALZI

NADIA KOUNDA

ABDELHADI TALBI

NEZHA RAHIL

FAOUZI Bensaïdi

MOUNA FETTOU

DIRECTOR AND WRITER

FAOUZI Bensaïdi

PRODUCER

Saïd Hamich

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

MARC-ANDRÉ BATIGNE

SOUND

PATRICE MENDEZ, ALEXIS MEYNET, SAMUEL AICHOUN,

EDITOR

MAXIME GARAUULT

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MONTFLEURI PRODUCTION

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SHADI FILMS

c o n t a c t

international press

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