
Night cap with *Prends mon poing (Fist)*

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Interview with [Sarah Al Atassi](#), director of [Prends mon poing \(Fist\)](#)



What inspired you to create Bilal, the main character?

Prends mon poing is my first movie to be produced, so I chose to address a subject that I am committed to as an artist: marginalization, body language, prejudice... To do this, I wanted to explore the concept of the antihero and the exclusions therefrom. The character of Bilal was a visceral necessity: it had to be him at the core of the film, or nothing at all! In a way, Bilal is a response to my frustrated desires: that man that I will never be. Overthinking things, I sometimes feel prohibited. Prohibited from being, saying, or fighting. Bilal is the exact opposite. A reflection of Nicolas Winding Refn's *Bronson*, he is a man of action, not thought. The antithesis of society's example, he is vulgar, selfish. Overall, he embodies everything that is morally reprehensible. He doesn't speak, he shouts. He doesn't eat, he drinks. He doesn't make love, he fornicates. I would even go so far to say that he doesn't live, he survives. I admire the "self-asserted barbarian" side of him that makes him invulnerable to contemporary diktats. With his busted moped and his run-down camper, he is almost one step ahead of our hashtag society. Where some may see gratuitous violence, I see a conscience. Deep down, it's not society that rejects him, but it is he who marginalizes himself from it.



What did you find interesting in the use of the night in many of the scenes?

In this film, it was important to place the intrigue at the heart of a significant temporality - a temporality that expresses itself not through a concrete timeline, but more through a connection between day and night. Hence, the character's violent journey advances with the cycle of light. Bilal's primitive instincts come alive at night amongst the lost souls who seek a reason to be at the party - where sexiness rhymes with emptiness - and then die at sunrise when there is no

longer a need for combat as he finds himself combated by the existent. The night is a unique unit of measure that confers a rhythm outside of time. Anything is possible there, the good as well as the bad.

The first night, Bilal is invincible. When he fights, his victory is assured. But when night falls again, Bilal is defeated: his camper is set ablaze, he loses everything. The 24-hour cycle acts as an initiatory journey for the hero. This is all the more convincing because the story takes place outside for the most part. *Prends mon poing* is a very cyclical film, both in the sets and in its connection to the day. Framed by dusk and dawn, the blue hour, the story begins and ends on Bilal's lot. He who was accustomed to acting beneath the cover of darkness is finally forced to reveal himself face-to-face with the Other. At that moment, night can finally fall, but it will no longer have an effect on the hero because he is no longer a victim of his own violence. He can finally let himself live.



Are violent characters a subject that you are particularly fond of, and do you have any plans to stage violent characters as the heroes in your future films?

For me, violence is not a subject in itself. What interests me are the characters and their journeys instead of their violent tendencies or to be an apologist for violence. That said, I must admit my aspirations to stage some particularly hot-headed characters. With this in mind, I am currently developing my first feature-length film, *Suce ma kalash*, a project based on the “rape and revenge” genre. In my next film, the idea will be to go beyond this concept's simple base of action/reaction, and explore the reasoning and consequences of violence.

In my opinion, violence is an undeniable aspect of a character. Acknowledging his violent character is to accept his humanity, and hence the contradiction it implies. Once this stage is passed, the violent authority fades away to reveal the character's intrinsic sensitivity. At the beginning of *Prends mon poing*, Bilal acts in an absolute, almost fatalistic way. His routine is methodical: he drinks, he fornicates, he fights. In the end, he opens up to the unknown and opens the door to possibility. That is what interests me: ambivalence rather than dualism.



Why did you choose a moped instead of a quad or a drifting car?

On this point, I was inspired by my own life. My two brothers and I all went to school by moped. I grew up in the Touraine (Indre-et-Loire) where the film was shot. The roads Bilal takes are the

same roads I roamed on moped when I was a teenager. And I liked the idea of him struggling to race his rival. He could have easily modified his exhaust pipe to boost the power of his scrambler, but no. Once again, a pure contradiction. All day long, the guy repairs motorbikes for others, and he drives a wreck!

Lastly, this film is a story about size. The other is taller and has a bigger bike. Bilal and his rival fight as in a real cock fight: they spend their time punching each other in the face to see who has the bigger one! We could say that *Prends mon poing* is a sort of contemporary western where motorbikes have taken the place of horses.



What interested you in this game with Death?

This is not a game for Bilal. That doesn't make him a killer though. He doesn't strike to kill. But if he strikes, it is to defend himself. And that can lead to a point of no return... During the first screenings of the film, I noticed a split between the viewers in their perception of Death. Some immediately thought that it would end tragically given the escalation of violence in the duel. Others hadn't grasped the aborted drowning that implies the end of the final combat. In reality, there is more than just that, for *Prends mon poing* is also a combat between Man and Nature. The elements play a dominant role in this struggle. Bilal wanted to impose himself like a dominant combattant, but he will always be faced with a superior adversary: Nature. Thus, it begins with fire, which defeats his violence when his rival burns his camper down. It is said that we must fight fire with fire... Here, it is used as the perfect weapon to neutralize the character's ardent violence. The coals are a manifestation of the coming end. Hell is not far, its depths have opened up. This scene marks the death of the soul. Yet, Bilal comes out on top during the final combat. He is just inches away from crossing the ultimate line: the death of another human being. The drowning is the culminating point in the duel. Here, water opposes fire, touching the character like an angel from his conscience. Bilal lets up and saves his rival and makes him an ally. It is the act of brushing up against the irreversible that allows the heroes to recover. In the end, we see two new friends sitting before a fire of a lesser intensity. They are finally at peace with one another, but also with nature.



Why does your character live in a camping car?

When I was a kid, the holidays were synonymous with camping. Every summer, my brothers and I discovered France little by little: my parents set up the family camping car in a new region, offering new adventures and a change of scenery. Just like the moped, these experiences marked my childhood. In the story, the camper represents the character. It is almost organic in nature. Like Bilal, it suffers from the blows of his rival. It reflects his difficulty to take part in the world. Bilal is an outsider who lives an almost monastic life on his lot. He has voluntarily marginalized himself from our progressive society. His daily life is rural, reclusive and self-sufficient. His relationship with others is expressed outside this private domain. Yet, his refuge is a perfect representation of his contradiction. Bilal comes across as a free spirit, yet his life is rooted in a protected sedentariness. In this respect, this character is blocked by his ability to roam free. The camper embodies a castrated freedom, just like the wrecks of the mopeds that litter his lot... Bilal never follows through, except when it comes to fighting.



What sort of freedom would you say the short format allows?

The short film format was one of the challenges of this film. It gives razor sharp tension to the story. It also plays a role in how we tell the story. If I had to envisage this story in a longer format, I would have reevaluated the sparsity of dialogue that defines this film as it is. The concentrated length of the action allowed me to showcase the bodies. *Prendre mon poing* is a situational film where the character's background doesn't matter. A film *punch*: we take it, and think about it afterwards. I wanted to create a cinematic object where the image and the sound were sublimated. The form is in response to the format.



If you've already been to Clermont-Ferrand, could you share with us an anecdote or story from the festival? If not, what are your expectations for this year?

I admit, this is my first time, and I am more than up for it! This selection in the National Competition is an unprecedented honor. Like my father says, "the Clermont Festival is the Mecca of short film!" Participating in this festival is a veritable springboard in my budding career. I am very proud of the fantastic team who worked with me in the making of this film. I hope that this festival adventure will bring encouraging professional success to all. As for me, I am expecting a lot from this once-in-a-lifetime experience. It is my turn to take some blows (the kind that make you dream)! I can't wait to plunge into today's cinematic works, to consume films for an entire week to the point that I'm completely full, and God willing, to experience some beautiful human moments. I hope I will be meeting my future collaborators!

[Prends mon poing](#) is being shown in [National Competition F8](#).