



Les Sauteurs

Those Who Jump

Moritz Siebert, Estephan Wagner, Abou Bakar Sidibé

Producer Signe Byrge Sørensen, Heidi Elise Christensen.
Production company Final Cut for Real (Copenhagen, Denmark).
Directed by Moritz Siebert, Estephan Wagner, Abou Bakar Sidibé. **Screenplay** Moritz Siebert, Estephan Wagner. **Director of photography** Abou Bakar Sidibé. **Editor** Estephan Wagner.
Sound design Henrik Gamov.

DCP, colour. 79 min. French, Bambara.

Premiere 17 February 2016, Berlinale Forum

World sales WIDE House

Mount Gurugu overlooks the Spanish enclave of Melilla on northern Africa's Mediterranean coast. The European Union and Africa are separated here by a high-security border facility consisting of three fences. Refugees, mostly from the sub-Saharan region, live in the tree-covered foothills, from where they try to cross the land border between Morocco and Spain. One of them is Abou Bakar Sidibé from Mali, who in *Les Sauteurs* is both the protagonist and the one doing the documenting. After 14 months in the informal camp and numerous failed attempts to beat the fence system, Abou starts filming – his daily routine, his surroundings, the mind-numbing wait for the next “jump”. His footage gives insights into the social organisation of the refugee community and provides a mournful look at the supposed El Dorado of Europe.

Les Sauteurs carries out a unique shift in perspective: the abstract, anonymous thermal images of the surveillance cameras stand in contrast to the subjective gaze of an individual. After meeting Moritz Siebert and Estephan Wagner, Sidibé takes on the responsibility for their camera, tirelessly documenting his living conditions on the sidelines of an EU under lockdown.

Caroline Pitzen

A radical change of perspective

In Bertolt Brecht's *Flüchtlingsgespräche (Refugee Conversations)*, written at the end of the 1930s, while Brecht was in exile in Denmark, he wrote, 'The passport is the most noble part of man.' Seventy years later, with daily news about the migrant situation at Europe's borders, the statement remains a disturbing truth.

For those of us born on the right side of the fence, impermeable borders are a rare encounter. But for those on the other side, like Abou, who happens to hold a Malian passport, the options are extremely limited.

When reports of the massive attempts to storm fences in Melilla began to spread in 2014, we were deeply struck by the resilience of the mainly sub-Saharan men on Mount Gurugu. Regardless of how often they fell, no matter how painful their failures – they just seemed to stand up, wipe off the dust and carry on towards their goal.

Granted, there is no shortage of stories of the tragedies at Europe's borders. But our impression is that the circulating images are rather limited. One voice seemed always missing: the voice of the people concerned.

In order to challenge the dominant image of a migrant, we had to first challenge our own approach as filmmakers. We decided to radically take the perspective of our protagonist, and leave him to decide what aspects of his life would be filmed. So we passed the camera to Abou. We were curious to learn what he would film, what aesthetic choices he would make, and how these choices would relate to the existing images of migrants.

Abou's approach to the project initially differed from ours. His main concern was to tell the world about the great injustice he and his friends endure at the fence of Melilla. But gradually the filming itself became an interest and form of expression for him. He switched from being the protagonist to the co-director. Ultimately, *Les Sauteurs* also became a film about making a film.

Moritz Siebert and Estephan Wagner, January 2016

"I wanted to show that we are alive"

Les Sauteurs is a documentary experiment – the protagonist becomes the documentary filmmaker. How did your collaboration come about? Where and how did you meet each other?

Moritz Siebert, Estephan Wagner: The term 'experiment' captures the process very well. During our research for the project, we sought an approach that, if all went well, would add a new quality to the existing works on the theme. Through a photographer from Melilla, who has been working on the topic for years, we came into contact with Abou Bakar Sidibé and the other refugees. Initially, we gave Abou and his friend Baba a camera each and spoke a little about the fundamentals of filming; then the two began to shoot. When we first viewed the material, it turned out that Abou filmed a great deal and clearly had fun trying out working with the camera. This in turn intensified our collaboration with him.

At first we had specific ideas about what Abou could film. During the process, however, many of them turned out to be impracticable and unrealistic. In the end, what was most interesting were the things Abou filmed that we never would have thought of, for example scenes like the one with the little donkey and his use of music.

Moritz and Estephan, the decision to pass the camera on to the protagonists is special. Abou, what was your motivation for accepting the camera?

Abou Bakar Sidibé: The whole thing was a process within which my motivation changed. At first the money I received was important. It meant that I could buy food for my friends and myself and that I no longer had to beg or look for food in garbage bins. At the same time, it was very important to me that this time on the mountain and everything that happened there should be documented, so that our story, my story, would not be forgotten one day. And I wanted to show that we are people who are alive, not dead.

How did the filming take on structure? For how long did you collect material? During that time, did you meet and film together?

Moritz Siebert, Estephan Wagner: Abou had filmed for almost three months before, after sixteen months on Gurugu Mountain, he finally managed to jump the fence. We flew to Melilla every four weeks and met Abou on the mountain. The material was shot by Abou himself and in part by his friends. What we did together were minor filming exercises: we spoke about shots or about different ways to resolve scenes.

Abou, how did the camera affect you on Gurugu Mountain? What significance did it have for you and the community?

Abou Bakar Sidibé: At one point, many more than a thousand people lived in the camp, and of course I didn't know them all, and not all of them wanted to be filmed. So I filmed only the people who were close to me and trusted me. At first, I simply wanted to capture our life there on the mountain. In time, while shooting, I discovered ever more details. Suddenly I perceived various moments, including beautiful moments, more consciously than before – for example, how the moon gleams at night over the calm sea. That, too, was part of our life in this misery, and it was important to me. At some point I began sometimes laying music directly over the pictures by playing it from my smartphone. In this way, I wanted to express feelings and show that we are alive. This footage that now exists preserves those moments for the future. At the same time, filming became a task for me, a meaningful mission during the long wait on the mountain.

To what extent did you work together during the editing process? How did the text of the voice-over develop?

Moritz Siebert, Estephan Wagner: Estephan edited the film in Copenhagen, and Moritz was able to take part using a clone of the editing project on his computer in Berlin. At this time, Abou was initially living in Spain, later as an asylum-seeker in various accommodations in southern Germany. That temporarily hampered our collaboration.

Our most intensive collaboration was on the voice-over. After Abou had come to Germany, he began writing his story. Together with the audio interviews we conducted during and after the shooting, we developed ideas for the voice-over. We often put together passages from the original material and sent these texts to Abou, who in turn made changes and additions. Then, in October 2015, we shot the preliminary voice-over with a video camera in one day in Berlin. In the further course of things, whenever we wanted to make a change or an addition, we discussed and found agreement on it with Abou; he then spoke it into his smartphone and sent it to Moritz in

Berlin. Moritz made a pre-selection and sent it to Estephan in Copenhagen, where it was integrated into the editing.

Interview: Caroline Pitzen, January 2016



Moritz Siebert was born in Stuttgart (Germany) in 1973. He initially began studying Medicine and Cultural Anthropology in Berlin before completing studies in Documentary Filmmaking at the National Film and Television School in the UK. *Les Sauteurs* is his second feature-length film.

Films

2005: *Belgrade Backspin* (34 min., co-directed by Anne Misselwitz). 2008: *My Name is Karl* (32 min.). 2009: *Anne and Gail* (15 min.), *Long Distance* (30 min.). 2010: *Blue Elephant* (15 min.). 2013: *Harvest Hand* (70 min.). 2016: *Les Sauteurs / Those Who Jump*.



Estephan Wagner was born in Viña del Mar, in Chile in 1976. He originally trained as an editor in Germany, and has edited numerous feature films and documentaries. In 2008, he earned a master's degree in Documentary Filmmaking at the National Film and Television School in the UK. *Les Sauteurs* is his first feature-length film.

Films

2008: *Waiting for Women* (35 min.). 2009: *The Finishing Line* (29 min.). 2011: *Vanishing Worlds* (28 min.). 2013: *Last Dreams* (59 min.). 2016: *Les Sauteurs / Those Who Jump*.



Abou Bakar Sidibé was born in Kidal, Mali in 1985. After earning a university degree in English, he worked as a teacher, among other jobs. *Les Sauteurs* is his first film.