
PLAYTIME PRESENTS AN EPITHÈTE FILMS PRODUCTION
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF
SWANN ARLAUD
FINNEGAN OLDFIELD
JISCA KALVANDA
CHARLES BERLING
ESCAPE FROM RAQQA
A FILM BY
EMMANUEL HAMON
LE CERCLE NOIR POUR F I D E L I O

PLAYTIME PRESENTS
AN EPITHÈTE FILMS PRODUCTION

A FILM BY **EMMANUEL HAMON**

ESCAPE FROM RAQQA

(EXFILTRÉS)

WITH **SWANN ARLAUD, FINNEGAN OLDFIELD, JISCA KALVANDA**
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF **CHARLES BERLING**

FRANCE - 103 MIN - SCOPE

INTERNATIONAL SALES

PLAYTIME

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SYNOPSIS

Unbeknown to her husband Sylvain, Faustine leaves Paris with her five year old son to join ISIS in Syria. But she realizes soon after reaching Raqqa the hell she has put herself into. Sylvain quickly understands that the French services are powerless to help, and plans with a few friends of his, a high risk exfiltration operation to save his wife and son. A true story.

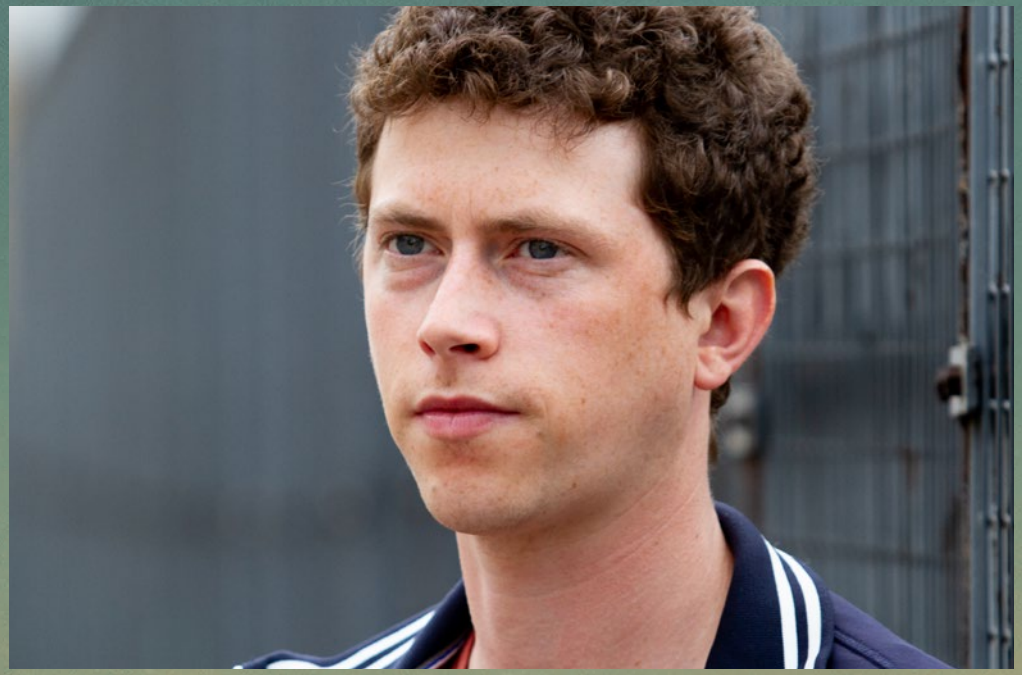


ORIGINS

Escape from Raqqa was inspired by a true story, fleshed out with detailed accounts given by the five main protagonists interviewed by the screenwriter, Benjamin Dupas, who explains: “I realized there was the possibility of shining a light on an unknown but important and highly contemporary part of the world stage, a place that is remote from me and yet touches all of us for different reasons.” Accustomed to writing for television series, he borrowed the narrative codes to tell the story in “an ensemble indeed mosaic-like fashion, with each character having a different political vision and several complementary ways of seeing the world.” After a year spent putting things down on paper, Benjamin Dupas was joined by film director Emmanuel Hamon in the writing process to ready the script for the film shoot in France and Jordan in the spring of 2018.

THE CHARACTERS
AS SEEN BY THE SCREENWRITER BENJAMIN DUPAS





SYLVAIN (SWANN ARLAUD) 35 YEARS OLD, is Faustine's husband and Noah's father. Fragile, sincere and endearing, completely unaware of his wife's plans for departure, he must helplessly accept this fait accompli as well as the French authorities' refusal to become involved. He has to force himself not to sink into despair. Despite this betrayal, he is able to recreate a connection with his wife by telephone; his motivation is not just to get his son back, but also a need to understand his wife and be reunited with her. His dependability and discretion help him to rally the support of the people around him, notably with the doctor who is head of the department in the Paris hospital where Sylvain works as a nurse.

GABRIEL (FINNEGAN OLDFIELD), 25 YEARS OLD works in Turkey for "Sedonia," a non-governmental organization. Born in Paris, his father is a surgeon and his mother a Lebanese political activist, who despite her absence transmitted her mother tongue, Arabic, to her son, as well as her taste for commitment. Obsessed with the conflict in Syria, he compulsively seeks to keep himself informed about the situation and has thus acquired a deep understanding of the conflict, notably through amateur videos made by activists and fighters. Gabriel is someone who takes action: he naturally goes from theory to the field, from intellect to emotion. He represents a new, connected generation, for whom borders no longer make much sense. He finds NGO rules too strict. Instead, he uses his fighting spirit and intelligence to support the Syrian rebels, although they are already fighting a losing battle, and helps to extradite Faustine.



PATRICE (CHARLES BERLING) 55 YEARS OLD, is Sylvain's department head and Gabriel's father. He gives himself over entirely to the search for Sylvain's family, and becomes the link between the two worlds when he asks his son for help. Despite his good intentions, Patrice represents the old world, whose methods are no longer effective. He doesn't really understand what motivates his son to work in Turkey, believing him to be in a phase where he is lost, soul-searching. As a result of this adventure he has to face his own powerlessness, despite his connections to the circles of power in Paris; but all this brings him closer to his son.



ADNAN (KASSEM AL KHOJA), 22 YEARS OLD, is a Syrian rebel and activist who was tortured by both the Syrian Regime and then Daesh. Nonetheless, he hasn't lost his joy, generosity or thirst for life. He embodies a form of universal youth. His story mirrors Faustine's and they cross paths, without meeting, when she arrives in Syria while he's escaping. He meets Gabriel in Turkey and they make a deal: Gabriel will help him ask for political asylum in Paris in exchange for Adnan sharing his network so that Faustine's exfiltration can be organized.



FAUSTINE (JISCA KALVANDA), 25 YEARS OLD, is a social worker in a poor Parisian suburb, and 5-year-old Noah's mother. Originally from Zaire (today known as the Democratic Republic of Congo), she doesn't feel integrated in France and is unhappy in her marriage. She believes in the promises made by Daesh in Syria to create a new world, avenging the oppressed. She leaves for Raqqa with her son to work in a maternity ward, motivated not by religious fanaticism, but essentially the desire to make herself more useful than she feels in France. Once having arrived in Raqqa, she quickly realizes the horrible circumstances she has dragged her son into. Filled with a powerful energy and determination she does everything she can to escape. The heroine of the film without really being one herself, Faustine partially personifies that which is inexplicable. This journey symbolizes the loss of one's self. She will turn out to be the first woman to return alive after having joined Daesh in Syria.



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR EMMANUEL HAMON

After having been assistant director for Patrice Chéreau *(Queen Margot)*, Maurice Pialat *(Le Garçu)* and Robert Altman *(Ready to wear)*, Emmanuel Hamon decided to devote himself to directing political, social and historical documentaries for over a decade. *Escape from Raqqa* marks his return to fiction and his first feature film.

What aroused your interest in this story?
In my documentaries, I was deeply interested in the violence exerted by States, including democracies, and in the way individuals make do with the system, whether they adapt to it or not. I wanted to work in fiction again, and one of the film's producers who was familiar with my work told me this story, as he knew one of the people involved. I found that it had something to say about the world we all live in and about a very young generation that we tried to represent in the film. It's also a story that has great dramatic effect, with the potential of being a thriller, an aspect that Benjamin Dupas and I worked on during the writing process.

How important was faithfulness to the facts for you?
Since I decided to leave documentary filmmaking behind to do a piece of fiction, there was no question of producing a geopolitical treatise, or to explain the truth of what is going on in the Middle East. However, I did want to give the audience bits of information that would allow them to understand what is actually happening in the field. I really wanted to favor the fictional side of the story, so I didn't hesitate to choose easily identifiable actors like Swann Arlaud *(Bloody Milk)* who recently won the César award, Finnegan Oldfield *(We need your vote)* and Jisca Kalvanda *(Divines)*, not to mention Charles Berling.
At the same time, it was just as important to have actors who make you believe in the truth of the story, who embody it. Kassem Al Khoja, for example, who plays Adnan the Syrian activist, comes from the Raqqa region in Syria. He arrived in France by boat two years ago and had never acted in a film. We worked on the screenplay together for two months so that he would be able to play the role without compromising his authenticity, remaining the person he is in real life.
We found the people who play the roles of other

Syrians in refugee camps in Jordan, where a million Syrians have taken refuge. Films whose subject takes place in this geographical area are often shot in Morocco, but I refused to do that because I wanted to shoot in a country that resembled the Syria we describe in the film as much as possible. This was the case for Jordan which shares a border with Syria. The story that emerges through the screenplay was thus entirely linked to the people who were always present during the shoot: we couldn't cheat. Furthermore, in Jordan at the time, everybody feared that Daesh would reach their border. As soon as someone came out in a "Daesh costume," the neighbors would report us. The cops came a number of times to check up on our film shoot.

How did you choose the other actors?

I was very impressed by Jisca in the film Divines, and as soon as we met this feeling was reinforced. I was also surprised to learn that she, as well as other actors of her generation who played in the film, knows someone in their social circle, more or less closely, who has been indoctrinated. To play the role of her husband Sylvain, Swann Arlaud's big challenge was not to make his character too passive: he had to be a hero without the room to maneuver in order to really be one. Swann had this intensity about him and he had just had a baby so he was able to readily identify with the young father.

For Gabriel the French activist, I found that Finnegan Oldfield exuded a restlessness due to his youth and at the same time personified a maturity that reaches its height during the exfiltration, when he explains to his father that he is the one in charge. This moment is a sort of transmission from one generation to the next. And finally, I had seen Charles Berling on stage just before the casting process and I found that not



only was he the perfect age, but that he is perfectly at ease with it – it's his intelligence as an actor – which allows him to combine his image of a handsome man with that of a man who has reached a certain maturity. He is ready for this moment of transition with his son.

The universality of youth, as well as the daring and commitment that come with it are major themes in your film: why did you choose to focus on them?

On the film shoot in Jordan, where Kassem hadn't returned since the end of the war in Syria, he introduced Finnegan to the Syrian community, and Finnegan did the same thing for Kassem in France, introducing him to his social circles. Now you could say they are like brothers. It's not just a story of actors. It's the matter of a generation. What lies underneath the surface of this film, for me, is the idea that Syria has become the conflict of a generation at the beginning of political maturity; a generation who gradually sees how the geopolitical lines are being drawn in the world they live in, and who decides to get involved at different levels: sometimes in a positive way, like Gabriel and Adnan, but also like Faustine, although she gets involved for the wrong reasons.

This generation manages with the means at their disposable, in this instance an iPad, cell phones, a bit of common sense and, for Gabriel and Adnan, an acute awareness and knowledge of the field. They don't have the same means as the government or the secret services, who for their part don't really want to get involved with the exfiltration of this woman and

her child. Patrice, the character played by Charles Berling is the complete opposite: A successful surgeon who has social influence and economic power, but who realizes that his world no longer has the answers. We realize that going any further can only be done through this young generation, people who get involved outside of the government machinery. So even though it's a rather dark thriller, the fact that there are people like Gabriel or Adnan in this world is positive.

Indeed, beyond the numerous dark aspects of the film, it's above all a story about cooperation that goes beyond both physical and social borders.

Yes, it's also a story about three young people who wouldn't have ever met under normal circumstances: A Syrian refugee and resistance fighter, the face of a migrant today who, in public opinion, is rarely seen as a hero; a black French woman from the Paris suburbs who has converted to Islam, and a young well-to-do Parisian man. In the end, two of them are going to achieve together what the secret services refuse to do: save the young woman, a bit to their own detriment. They jeopardize Adnan's Syrian network, as well as their ideals, in order to save this lost girl who has drifted over to the side of the enemy, and it works. They are complex and ambiguous characters, and I hope that after having seen the film people will ask themselves questions, and realize that it is possible to accomplish things outside of the established circuits.



FILMOGRAPHY
EMMANUEL HAMON

FICTION
DIRECTOR – WRITER

2019 **ESCAPE FROM RAQQA**

2008 **NORD-SUD**
Short Film

1998 **COUP DE LUNE**
Short Film

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Between 1990 and 1998, on numerous features including:

QUEEN MARGOT (LA REINE MARGOT)
by Patrice Chéreau

LE GARÇU
by Maurice Pialat

READY TO WEAR (PRÊT À PORTER)
by Robert Altman

INDOCHINE
by Régis Wargnier

PROPER ATTIRE REQUIRED (TENUE CORRECTE EXIGÉE)
by Philippe Lioret

LACENAIRE
by Francis Girod

DOCUMENTARIES
DIRECTOR – WRITER

2016 **RUSSIAN REVOLUTION THROUGH ITS FILMS**
Arte, 90 min.

IRLANDE(S), L'AUBE D'UN PAYS
Arte, 2x52 min.

2014 **LES DEBRÉ**
France Télévisions, 62 min.

DE SARAJEVO À SARAJEVO
Arte, 52 min.

2010 **MAURICE PAPON, ITINÉRAIRE D'UN HOMME D'ORDRE**
France 2, Planète, 90min.

2009 **UNE ÉPURATION FRANÇAISE**
France 2, Planète, 60min.

2006 **DEMOCRACY AT LARGE**
Arte/RTBF, 52 min.

2004 **GARDES À VUE**
Planète/ RTBF/TSR, 55 min.

2003 **SELVES AND OTHERS, A PORTRAIT OF EDWARD SAÏD**
TV5 / Al Jezira/RTBF/TSR, 54 min.

2002 **MATERNITÉS : L'ATTENTE DU PREMIER ENFANT**
France 5/TSR, 2x13 min.

2001 **URGENCE JEUNES**
France 5/ TSR/ RTBF, 52 min.

HISTOIRE DE THÉÂTRE : THÉÂTRE DE DIJON
France 5, 13 min.

HISTOIRE D'ÉCRIVAINS : JEAN PHILIPPE TOUSSAINT
France 5/ TSR/ RTBF, 13 min.

HISTOIRE D'ÉCRIVAINS : EMMANUEL CARRÈRE
France 5/ TSR/ RTBF, 13 min.

CAST

SWANN ARLAUD
SYLVAIN

FINNEGAN OLDFIELD
GABRIEL

JISCA KALVANDA
FAUSTINE

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF CHARLES BERLING
PATRICE

KASSEM AL KHOJA
ADNAN

ETHAN PALISSON
NOAH

SOPHIE CATTANI
CAMILLE

ANDRINO MPIOSO
ISSA

DRISS RAMDI
MOURAD

MATHIEU LOURDEL
VINCENT

AURÉLIA PETIT
MARIANNE

CREW

DIRECTOR
EMMANUEL HAMON

SCREENPLAY & DIALOGUES
BENJAMIN DUPAS

ADAPTATION
EMMANUEL HAMON
& BENJAMIN DUPAS

MUSIC
ARMAND AMAR

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
THOMAS BATAILLE

EDITOR
YORGOS LAMPRINOS

SET DESIGNER
PASCALE CONSIGNY

COSTUMES
ANNE-SOPHIE GLEDHILL

SOUND
OLIVIER PÉRIA
RYM DEBBARH-MOUNIR
VINCENT VERDOUX

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR
JOHANNA COLBOC

LINE PRODUCER JORDANIA
RULA NASSER

POST-PRODUCTION
CHARLOTTE REICHENBACH

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CINECAP 2
COFINOVA 15
MANON 9

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& LA PROCIREP-ANGOA

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
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