

P R E S S K I T



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE 2026
HORS COMPÉTITION



UGC PRESENTS
AN OUTSIDE FILMS AND LES FILMS DU KIOSQUE PRODUCTION

ANTOINE REINARTZ

EMMANUELLE BERCOT

FORSAKEN

A FILM BY
VINCENT GARENO

COMING SOON

RUNNING TIME : 1H40

DOWNLOAD MATERIAL AT UGCDISTRIBUTION.FR/FILM/LABANDON

DISTRIBUTION

UGC DISTRIBUTION
24, AVENUE CHARLES DE GAULLE
92200 NEUILLY-SUR-SEINE



PRESS RELATIONS

NACIMA CHITA
NCHITA@STUDIOTF1.COM

A man with glasses and a dark jacket stands in a classroom, looking thoughtful with his hand to his chin. He is holding a blue marker. In the background, there is a world map on the wall and a window showing greenery. In the foreground, the backs of several students' heads are visible as they sit at their desks.

SYNOPSIS

Everyone has heard of Samuel Paty, but few know the actual details of his story. On October 16, 2020, Samuel Paty was murdered leaving the middle school where he taught history and geography. The film retraces his last eleven days and the spiral of events that led to his tragic death as revealed by the investigations and trials.



ENTRETIEN

VINCENT GARENQ

***Forsaken* retraces the story of Samuel Paty. How did the project for the film come about?**

The name Samuel Paty is known to all, but in truth, few actually know his story. Like many people in France, I was shocked and stupefied by the news of his murder. I felt great sorrow and distress as well. In talking with Outside Films, the producers (later joined by Les Films du Kiosque), I realized that beneath the collective sense of horror, there was a story and that this story, an absolute tragedy down to its inner workings, had to be told. But then, you never really know why you undertake a film.

You have an intuition, a desire, and you go with it. It's during the process that you discover the real reasons for making a film. What inspired me early on was the natural dramaturgy, the unities of time, place and action. The impression of a middle school under siege. The Kafkaesque dimension. All these very real elements had great cinematographic potential. I felt it necessary to recount the mind-blowing chain of events, the links of cause and effect that led to this catastrophe and that few people are aware of. And also, the humanity of all the characters who gave Samuel Paty their support: the principal and

her vice-principal, the school receptionist, the teachers, the Muslim families and so on.

Why the title?

Because owing to a succession of desertions, neglected opportunities, dysfunctions, and acts of cowardice or naivety, Samuel Paty was totally forsaken. The title also expresses the solitude of a teacher trapped in the gears of a machinery that devours him. In the film, you get the feeling that some machine is spinning out of control even though very early on it is clear that the girl lied. That is a devastating aspect. We know that the misunderstanding

in the class in which the students stepped out was totally resolved. That a girl wove a lie around that event. That the video campaigns launched by girl's father's and the Islamist on social media were fabricated. And yet the machine continued to spin out of control, never stopping.

A spiral for which social media is largely responsible.

The issue is all the more confounding as from the outset, the population mix in this little city and in the school seems relatively harmonious. It is a peaceful French suburb, with low-cost housing as well as more middle-class apartment complexes. And what appears to be a minor incident - one student's lie - takes on huge proportions. In fact, what happened in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine could have happened anywhere. This story is a snapshot of our times. The characters are not monsters. They could be our neighbors or our children. It's not the people who are bad, it's the ideologies they are manipulated by. The social media, rumors, the prevailing climate that pushes people to hate each other. There are no more grey areas. Everything is black or white. Things can get out of hand very quickly.

The national education system, represented in the film by the character of the secularism officer, is remarkably apathetic.

Perhaps, but the film levels no accusations. It

does not seek a scapegoat. It merely recounts the facts. With hindsight, it's easy to say what should have been done or said. The errors and malfunctions are everywhere. In their defense, no one could have dared imagine such a horrific outcome. Today, since that tragedy, things are handled very differently. You can't take the moral high ground. You have to humbly put yourself in the hazy position the protagonists were in when the events took place.

The investigation undertaken by the internal police inspectorate (IGPN) highlighted a number of fairly serious dysfunctions.

That is unfortunately true. There were countless phone calls, a frenzy of activity, plenty of bureaucracy, but Samuel Paty was not protected. His colleagues were the ones who sometimes drove him home so that he wasn't out walking alone.

From beginning to end, there's almost a visceral sense of being in Samuel Paty's skin. A diffuse anxiety is mounting...

The power of fiction is that it allows you to recount events by giving life to the characters through actors. And yet, of course, I never met Samuel Paty. All I know of him was that famous photograph and the written traces he left, and accounts about him. We did not try to make Antoine Reinartz look like him. We just dressed him in similar clothing, gave him the same haircut and had him speak things

that Samuel had written.

Through the timeline of facts, the noose tightening around him, you end up being with him, coming close to what he may have felt. I made up very little, such as the scenes with the son he adored. The only real invention I allowed myself is the opening scene in which I have him speak. But based on his own words and what people have said about him. It's a scene I wrote much later on, once I really knew his story. And I was determined to make sure, in speaking to Samuel's sister, Mickaëlle Paty, that the scene suited her.

How did you go about writing the script?

I drafted the first version before the first trial. For months, I had been going through the documents and accounts made accessible to me. I naturally took particular interest in everything Samuel Paty had written, because during that period he had sent numerous emails. Through the material consulted, I already had a feeling for the protagonists in the story. Then I attended the trial (note: December 2024). And there, suddenly, I saw and heard them. I was already very familiar with the case, but there were surprises at the hearing. The front desk receptionist stood out in particular. Her personality is so radiant that she made people in the assistance laugh when she lashed out at the lawyers for the defense. Her character thus became a strong presence in the film.

Let's get back to the writing of the script ...

There was such a natural dramatic surge that I didn't really need to resort to artifice to keep the viewer in suspense. My one and only guiding line was to stick to the facts. So I did research. That's all I did. It's what lends the scenes veracity and at the end, makes it so the viewer believes. On seeing the film, teachers told me they really had the feeling of being in the school, whereas I no more set foot in a principal's office than I did in a judge's for *Présumé coupable*. I adhere to the

facts, always, and I think it's this restraint that enables the viewer to feel genuine emotion, not something fabricated. For films inspired by true stories, I always keep the fiction to a minimum, even if some use of it is naturally inevitable.

You mentioned Mickaëlle Paty, Samuel's sister. To what extent did she participate in the screenplay?

There were lots of conversations with Mickaëlle. She knows her brother's story

better than anyone. She attended the trials, including the one for the youngsters, which was held behind closed doors. We were of like minds regarding the issue of recounting events as closely as possible to what actually happened. The image we agreed on was one of aviation disasters. After a plane crash, pieces of the wreckage are collected and put in a shed to try to understand what happened, to prevent it from happening again. That's a bit what we did with this film.



If the film claims not to take a stance and wants to stick to the facts, why not have chosen a documentary format? What does fiction contribute here?

It brings out feelings and leaves room for emotion. It makes it possible to embody Samuel Paty, integrate his viewpoint, identify with him and feel what he might have experienced. The power of movies and fiction is to make Samuel Paty's life palpable and concrete, to make the viewer experience it in the most human fashion possible. Viewers will learn a lot more about this crime that they have all heard about.

"I never dreamt of being a hero... But for my life to have meaning and purpose... That my classes would spark a calling, I did dream of that." That sentence, which we hear off screen at the start of the film, is poignant.

Those are not Samuel Paty's actual words. But after everything I'd read and heard about him, and through my knowledge of the case I imagined it. As I said, I never met him, so I could not imitate him. But I could tell his story. I gathered so much material that perhaps it ended up resembling him somewhat.

Oddly enough, it's often at the very end of the writing process that you come up with the first scene. And that's what happened. That initial scene is mirrored in the final scene. You don't initially analyze it, but it's that rhyming effect

that moves us so much at the end. Samuel's life has a deep, universal meaning, and the film will convey it forever. I noticed it with the very first screenings: the film has an effect on everyone, people of all ages, including youths to an extent I never imagined. People of all origins, all religions and atheists as well. Everyone I saw was deeply moved. At first, I didn't measure the strength and universality of Samuel Paty's story. Moreover, *Forsaken* is not my film, it's the film that tells Samuel Paty's story, and it is his story that triggers this powerful electroshock.

Antoine Reinartz plays Samuel Paty and Emmanuelle Bercot, the school principal. What guided your choice?

Antoine has a genuine kindness that was essential for the character. He's also very cerebral, somewhat in his own world, and the camera does a good job of capturing that. There's something very authentic about him. He knows how to vanish behind his characters, erasing himself completely. Emmanuelle Bercot also has something very authentic. She doesn't play the "actress." She has a natural authority that suits her so well, while remaining very human. She's a very serious, very focused actor. She's on the set all the time. Both actors are very simple in life, very connected to reality, which helped create quite a fraternal, troupe-like atmosphere.

There are many other characters in the film. Mothers, teachers, several teenagers as well.

With Mathilde Snodgrass, the casting director (and Julie Gandossi for youth casting) we did lots of screen tests and we instantly fell for the actors in all these roles.

Didn't any of the families ask about the film's subject?

Prior to the screen tests, I made sure to write a letter to the teenagers and parents to explain my intentions with the film. All were reassured and fully involved themselves in the project. No one backed out. On the contrary, they were all happy to be part of it and thus pay tribute to Samuel Paty. That's how I discovered the real reason I wanted to make the film. To share moments with all these actors from various horizons, to make film of reconciliation and show this "France in the middle," whose voice is less audible now despite being an overwhelming majority. This mixed, tolerant and republican France. The opposite of what extremists try to tell us. The film conveys a positive message of hope, targeting all audiences, youth included. While shooting the film, we found out that they held a minute of silence every year in tribute to Samuel, sometimes without knowing his story. I'd like the film to make people think, for it to change them, for it to question their relationship to social media, rumors and all forms of extremism.



INTERVIEW

ANTOINE REINARTZ

How did you react when Vincent Garenq asked you to play Samuel Paty?

Actually, like most people, despite being shocked by the murder of this teacher, I didn't know half the story. I knew little more than that the girl had told a lie, while ignoring the spiral that ensued. The distortion between the impact the event had and my ignorance of it was very disturbing. I thought of the teachers and students, of the importance of establishing the facts to put a stop to rumors. I said yes. I had no hesitation.

There is only one photo of Samuel Paty that we are all familiar with.

Naturally, I wanted to know more. Although the film focuses mainly on who Samuel Paty was as a teacher, we learn a little more about the man. We know he was divorced and had a little boy, sharing custody every other week. He was at once fulfilled with his son and his students, and somewhat on hold sentimentally, rather a loner. He was solid, calm and he loved his work. We get the sense of someone very structured.

You say you'd have liked to know more about him. I imagine you met his sister, Mickaëlle Paty?

Of course, if only to get her approval. We had dinner together. She watched me all evening. At the end of the meal, she said, "Don't change a thing, you're fine. The way you move your hands is great! Just smile less." I wasn't expressing myself one way or another on purpose, I was just being myself speaking to her about her brother. But her reaction reassured me. I had her go-ahead, and that was very important.

How does one prepare such a role?

I read a lot of books and articles. I read reports as well, of course, and I went to see a friend of mine who teaches eighth and ninth grade history and geography. I wanted to delve back into that atmosphere, to get a feeling for students' language today, and also see how teaching was done, how teachers related to students. I saw to what extent teachers are on the front lines in many regards. It's hard for them to just teach without the "rest of the world" coming into the classroom. I was amazed by the interest and attention the students showed. Visiting my friends' classes - she's doubtless a very good teacher, like Samuel Paty was -, you discard the depressing clichés about noisy, disruptive classrooms. The reality is different.

How did you get ready to work with Vincent Garenq?

Vincent was still in the writing process when we met. He had me come read my role with him, and we reworked a third of the scenes. The danger with this script was to want to say too much. Vincent was determined to stick as closely as possible to the facts and the judicial developments. But Samuel Paty also had a life. Even if during those eleven days he was living in total panic, he wasn't constantly thinking about what was brewing around him. He had an existence, ties, discussions with his son. He had to talk about other things. I tried to round out his character. These meetings were very enjoyable. Vincent listened to me. And likewise, I heard him. There was

real dialogue, a very horizontal relationship. During preparation as well as on the set, he left me a lot of freedom. I knew what I wanted to do and he left me that leeway.

Physically, how did you develop the character of Samuel Paty?

You do little things, but I prefer never to reveal the artifices. They are very subtle and designed to go unnoticed. The aim is never to let the process show, only that the result is unquestionably obvious.

When the controversy begins, you sense that Samuel Paty is destabilized by some of the students' and parents' reactions.

He put a lot of thought into preparing his class,



leaving nothing to chance. He used official documents made available by the Education Ministry.

Even when the secularism officer chimes in to say he had made a blunder...

Samuel Paty is in favor of dialogue. He doesn't understand the attitude of the secularism officer - who is supposed to resolve urgent situations - any more than he understands the attitude of his colleagues who turn on him. But he respects his hierarchy. There is a mixture of pride and humility in him. He remains measured in his reactions. At the same time, he cannot accept the offer made to him: to go on sick leave, shut up, disappear. The only options he has left are to say no, remain dignified and present.

The attitude of some teachers is practically incomprehensible.

I see several explanations for their behavior: ignorance of the initial facts - some of them only learn about what happened via a video full of lies. Then there's the cliché that comes up sometimes - "There's no smoke without fire" - a saying that should be banned because it jumps to conclusions instead of analyzing the facts. Then there is the fear that makes them take their distance, given the pace at which tensions escalate.

What are we to think about the girl's father's attitude, quick to set social media on fire,

work in league with a false imam, and who turns a deaf ear to proof given by the school and other students' parents?

When you become too engaged with any ideology, you wind up seeing the world through that prism. You overlay that ideology on reality. The father sees Islamophobia instead of his teenage daughter's lie. He wants to undertake a fight for justice and can no longer even see the facts as they are.

Speaking of her, how did you relate to the youngsters in the film?

I'm fairly accustomed to shoots with young people and nonprofessionals. The idea was to hone as closely as possible to what happened, to strive for accuracy, never to be untruthful while making sure that things did not become rigid. I always had the feeling we were acting together in the same adventure. They were all aware of how loaded this story is.

What about Paty's jokes at the end of class, truth or fiction?

They really existed. Samuel always had his "Book of Jokes" with him. He wanted his classes always to be lively.

A word about Emmanuelle Bercot, your acting partner.

Her presence reassured me. Emmanuelle is pretty impressive, somewhat mysterious as well. It was easy to find the relationship of authority there is between our two characters.

The film had high stakes. We were very focused. She prepared alone, and so did I, but she always had a kindly eye. At no point did I feel the eye of the great director she is. She knew what her place was in that moment.

You manage to build up almost organically the nervousness and then the fear that grips your character.

You never play a character from a global standpoint. I had to be in this place, then in that place, while conveying the sense that despite the growing nervousness and fear, Samuel Paty doesn't give up. He questions himself, wonders, but never once does he feel guilty. On the other hand, he feels very alone, an immense solitude, and takes a hammer in his backpack to defend himself against the threats he knows are weighing on him.

From one film to the next - since Robin Campillo's *120 Beats per Minute* - you give the impression of literally vanishing behind your characters.

It's hard to answer that, but it's true, that's what I look for: to vanish so that my character can fully shine through. We are here to serve our characters. To serve reality. One should never be able to detect a distance between us and the character we play.



A portrait of actress Emmanuelle Bercot, looking slightly to the right with a serious expression. She has blonde hair pulled back and is wearing a dark, patterned top. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

ENTRETIEN

EMMANUELLE BERECOT

What was your reaction when you read the screenplay?

Being familiar with Vincent Garenq's films, in *Forsaken* I found that very factual framework so typical of his films, "the facts and nothing but the facts" that serves as dramaturgical guideline and the very concrete narrative that progresses relentlessly in the tradition of films programmed on the *Dossiers de l'écran*, a cultural debate program that I loved and which always started with a film that was powerful and audacious enough to lend itself to discussion.

And your reaction to the offer of playing the middle-school principal?

First of all, I was touched that Vincent showed an interest in working with me. As for the role he was offering, I was somewhat wary. In a film that has to condense an extremely complex story into an hour and a half, you can't do justice to all the protagonists. Some of them have to be "accelerated." And I was afraid that there might be elements missing that would help to understand the principal's trajectory through this tragedy. But Vincent was very open and attentive, and even eager

to hear my remarks and reservations, which he took into account as much as possible. That reassured me in the end.

When Samuel Paty was killed, the role of the school principal was hardly discussed - or only in very general terms.

My previous answer hints at the fact that I was worried she would come across as having been passive and irresponsible. Which I don't believe was the case. Basically I think she did everything she could, and the film shows it. But of course she didn't fully

gauge the tragedy that was playing out. All of us, when we watch this story, this film, we know how it ends. But we mustn't forget that for those who experienced it, the outcome was unthinkable! To prevent a murder, you have to be aware that the threat exists. And I remember having said to Vincent Garenq that it was important for people to understand that she had an entire school to manage, and no doubt other irons in the fire, and that bringing the Samuel Paty crisis under control was not her sole occupation.

How did you prepare with Vincent Garenq before the shoot, and then on the set?

Prior to shooting, it simply involved readings with Vincent, just the two of us, to specify things, dig deeper, ponder the principal's trajectory in the story. On set, Vincent places a lot of trust in his actors and gives them great freedom. When he has something to say, it's always very precise and gentle. We could sense that he was transfixed by his "mission" of bringing this true story to the screen and also very moved. And honestly, my only aim was to serve him to the best of my ability.

Were you given access to the real principal's testimony at the trial?

When I received Vincent's proposal, I was already reading the Le Monde's reports of the Samuel Paty trial on a daily basis, because it was going on at the same time. So I naturally

took a particular interest in the principal's testimony. I was struck by the fact that she said that during the day of tribute that the school held for Samuel Paty, she felt guilty for not having been able to protect him.

When you see the film, you understand that the National Education ministry has plenty of tools at its disposal to deal with the situation Samuel Paty found himself in after his class. Perhaps too many. Your character and the vice-principal seem somewhat overwhelmed by the number of them. And finally, all these tools, except for the dispatching of the secularism officer, seem terribly ineffectual.

Yes, and that's the Kafkaesque maze of the administration... Too many intermediaries, too much hierarchy. All that diluted what should have been an absolute state of emergency. But once again, no one (except probably Samuel) sensed the tragic tangent the crisis was taking.

She gives the impression of being almost numb in the face of the runaway escalation of a situation that originates in the girl's lie, even though it was soon found out...

Yes, it is certainly beyond her! Because social media is so tentacular. Had the conflict remained between the student's parents and the school, in other words between physical

persons, it probably would have been resolved quickly. What is uncontrolled is the video that was circulating and that unfortunately landed on the screen of a terrorist. What could she do against that? We see her take a firm and offensive stance with the student's father and the fake imam. She stands up to their radicality. She is familiar with religious diversity and certainly respects it.

In the film, you are physically very different from the actress we are accustomed to seeing on screen, but also very remote from the real principal's physique.

When I was keeping up with the trial in the news, and even more when I got the screenplay, I absolutely wanted to know what the principal looked like. But I only found a rather blurry photograph. It was obvious we didn't look much like one another. But that didn't matter, because the public is not familiar with her face. I noted that the physical description of her at the trial specified that she wore a straight skirt, a tailored jacket and had a fairly classic look. I quickly told Vincent that I wanted to contrast with the real principal's supposed sartorial style and come up with a more modern, dynamic style with prints and a degree of creativity. Something that broke with the cliché of female school principals. Later I found a group photo in which she is seen standing, and I drew inspiration from her posture.

Tell us about Antoine Reinartz, who you play opposite.

I'd never done a movie with him, just come across him now and then. He's an ideal partner. First of all, he's very kind, and for me that's essential. He's there, he knows his lines, he studies, he's at once focused and relaxed. He's not at all full of himself. In the end we only had three days together! But I remember perfectly the first scene we did together (the one coming out of the police precinct where we filed a complaint) and

having been stunned from the start. I wasn't seeing Antoine, I was seeing Samuel Paty. I was fascinated by his gestures, the very frantic way he moves. And in the scene with the secularism officer, he did such a good job of embodying Samuel's fragile, cracked, completely lost side, his total solitude, that I wanted to cry, but the principal couldn't do that, so I spent all the takes holding back my tears! And that day I left with the feeling that I had (really) met Samuel Paty... and had seen him suffer.

You're in the process of shooting *L'Enragé*. How do you reconcile acting and directing?

I reconcile them easily, because one gives me a rest from the other. For me, they are two entirely separate activities that don't involve the same parts of my brain or use the same energy. Yet, one nourishes the other. So it's all constructive.





INTERVIEW

NEDJIM BOUIZZOUL

Playing Kader, Bashira's father, who initiated the digital fatwa against Samuel Paty, is not a trivial role. What made up your mind?

I grew up in Blida, Algeria, fifty kilometers from Algiers, during the Dark Decade. I know what terrorism is. At the time, I must've been seven or eight, a French teacher was killed in

our neighborhood. She refused to wear the headscarf despite the Armed Islamist Group's orders. They arrived in front of her school and called for her. She came out and they murdered her. I can still see my aunt coming home in tears, screaming:

"Our teacher is dead! The terrorists killed her!" I spent my childhood and teenage years

surrounded by bombings and booby-trapped cars. I left Algeria because my family and I wanted secularism. So Vincent's screenplay obviously resonated with me. I immediately said yes to the role. I knew it would be hard, but I knew that people would be able to distinguish between the character I play and who I am.

You're a musician, singer and songwriter, as well as the leader of the group Labess. After Hassan Guerrar's *Barbès, Little Algérie*, this is the second time we're seeing you in a movie.

It's true that acting is very new for me. *Barbès, Little Algérie* was the perfect opportunity to get my foot in the door. Hassan Guerrar had faith in me. He introduced me to an agent who sent me the script of *Forsaken*. It gave me a new opportunity to test myself//to see what I could do in this world with a powerful role.

Do you remember your reaction to Samuel Paty's death?

In 2020, more than twenty years after emigrating to Quebec with my family, I was starting to make frequent trips to France. I often came, but did not have any ties here

yet. His murder shocked me terribly, but I did not look into it about it any more than that. I was sort of in denial.

After the attacks in France, many Muslim citizens felt a kind of stigmatization in their daily lives. It was all the more difficult as these attacks affected the entire country, including Muslim families, whose loved ones were also killed or seriously injured. Like many, we were deeply pained. The main thing today is remind people that we are all united against these ordeals and that solidarity remains the best response to such atrocities.

Let's go back to the film. How did you prepare this character?

I talked to Vincent Garenq at great length, I did research and that's when I really measured the gravity of the event. It blew my mind.

Kader is convinced that his daughter's suspension has to do with her refusing to leave the classroom, as she told him, whereas Samuel Paty supposedly asked Muslim students to leave before showing the caricatures of Mahomet. Without looking into it, he set social media on fire ...

I tried to put myself in this person's shoes. He adores his daughter, and I myself have a twenty-year-old daughter whose adolescence was punctuated with complicated phases. I of course did research on Brahim Chnina, the real father of the girl. I see an ordinary, unremarkable guy who wants to help his daughter. He believes she has been a victim of a certain type of racism that exists in France, and he wants to show her that he'll stand up for her.



INTERVIEW

EMMA BOUMALI

How old were you when Samuel Paty was murdered?

I was eleven. I remember because since then, every year in middle school and now in high school, we hold a minute of silence in his memory.

Did you know the circumstances surrounding his death?

I really discovered them while reading the screenplay. At school, when they tell us about Samuel Paty, it's mainly to discuss freedom of speech and critical thought. Reading the script, I was really shocked by how tragically

far Bashira's lie went.

When I did screen tests, Vincent Garenq sort of disguised the scenes of the film. I only knew that the character was a sort of endearing, rather provocative girl, who had a strong personality and who had a tendency to lie.

How did you react when you realized the centrality of your character in the story?

I immediately perceived the impact of the message the film would convey; to what extent our words and actions carry weight, and that behind every act, every piece of information spoken or posted on social media, there are

real lives, there are families. I wanted to be part of the adventure.

You weren't afraid of the reactions your role might trigger?

Vincent explained things well. He wanted to make sure I was conscious of the fact that it was not an easy role; that some people had trouble dissociating a character from the actor who plays it. But I knew why I was doing it and where I was going while doing it. For me, Bashira can enable people my age to become aware of the importance of their acts and make them think.

How does one prepare such a character?

Jl did a lot of readings with Vincent. He was very attentive to the way I speak and we rewrote my lines using my own words. That really helped me get a good grasp on the text. We talked a lot: about human mechanisms – such as fear, and lack of understanding. We had to find the right tone, not just caricature Bashira and make her out to be “nasty.” I worked on all those emotions.

What do you think about Bashira’s father’s attitude?

With him, things instantly take on extreme proportions. He reacts on social media without taking the time to check whether what she tells him is true or not. Even when he’s told Bashira wasn’t in class, persists. He reaches a point of no return, and as the false imam keeps him in a bubble and there are people on social media

who back him, he doesn’t let up. You might think he’s only trying to protect his daughter, but you can also think that his determination to defend his girl in such an excessive way is fateful. It’s a message for youth, parents, and society in general. It prompts people to think.

How did things go on the set?

It was intense, and difficult, because the film tells a story that’s hard to deal with; it required respect and responsibility, and that made me want to give it my all even more. Vincent allowed us to make suggestions. We would act out the lines once, and then allow ourselves to bring the character to life. I was able to put a touch of Emma in Bashira. The film’s messages – about education, intellectual and social growth – were strong enough so that the difficulties of a shoot really took a back seat.

At 17, we’ve already seen you in Teddy Lussi-Modeste’s *Pas de vagues*, and soon we’ll see you in the main role of Syrine Boulanouar’s *Bombonera*. Have you always wanted to go into movies?

My mother did a lot of amateur theater, and she always took us to the movies and the theater. And I think I’ve always had that in me. I like to act, to be filmed, to film myself. I’m very much an extrovert. It’s my nature. But more specifically, it all started with soccer, something I’ve been passionate about for a long time. I was first spotted during a practice and was then selected for a project that didn’t come through. And it was again after practice in Montreuil, a year or two later, that I was spotted to play Sihem in *Pas de vagues*. I’d like to keep doing movies – I love acting! After I pass my baccalaureate, I’ll probably also study sports management.





INTERVIEW

AZIZE KABOUICHE

What did you feel on hearing about Samuel Paty's death?

All around me, my close friends, my family, everyone was traumatized. It was the first time that such an event occurred in France. Like those around me, I was aghast, horrified. And I was afraid. The violence in the world has become so great that we have become prisoners of horrible crimes committed on the planet.

What was your initial feeling toward the character of Tahar that you were asked to play?

It was the first time that a movie gave me the opportunity to play a living character - who moreover is in prison - in such a powerful and traumatizing story⁽¹⁾. I immediately realized that it would be an compelling, demanding, and useful job. I did screen tests. I always prepare my screen tests but this time I also worked on my appearance, a stage that usually

comes only later. I went to my hairdresser with the photo of Abdelhakim Sefrioui (the character's real name) for him to cut my hair and trim my beard the same way. I was totally into it.

How do you get in the skin of a man like Abdelhakim Sefrioui?

By being authentic. People had to believe in my character. It's a matter of respect with regard to the story of Samuel Paty. The film

is fiction and yet it's not. Everything said in it is true. In the Paris drama conservatory, while I was working on the character of Rogózzin in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, Michel Bouquet, who was my teacher, told me, "If your character is mean or evil, the first thing to do is to look for what is good in him." I kept that in mind. So I did some research, reading everything that might shed light on the man's complexity, to go beyond a sole interpretation of the character.

How did the work go with the director, Vincent Garenq?

Vincent had warned me, saying "The character of Kader, as well as of Tahar, are the most complex in the film," and gave me only one instruction: "All I want is for him to be human." For the rest, he left me *carte blanche*. I know that I sometimes surprised him on the set. I enormously appreciated the way he worked: "We'll do a reading," he told me. I imagined we'd gather around a table with the main cast. But no, he met with all the actors, one by one. He and I read all the scenes. He went through the lines with me. Occasionally another word

came out of my mouth. He'd remark, "You formulated it differently. Better, isn't it?" We were very focused and it was very productive. Vincent is very attentive to the actors. On the set, if he wanted a specific gesture, he'd tell you. But most of the time, he leaves you free. He really wins your trust, which is fairly rare.

How do you judge the influence your character has over the young student's father?

He manipulates him. He tells him, "You have to create a buzz, otherwise the cops will let it drop." Tahar is very smart. He knows that's the way things go. The father, a devout Muslim, is really convinced he represents the imams of France. The counterpart of a high Church dignitary has taken an interest in him! He is somewhat naïve and traumatized by what he believes has happened to his daughter.

The girl lied. Everyone knows it, but the rumor catches like wildfire...

Yes, it's a media fatwa. Vincent didn't fictionalize anything. No character becomes nicer or meaner. There were students' parents

who recounted the truth, teachers who showed very little support, the national education system that was rather dysfunctional. Not only Paty, but truth was forsaken...

What can you say about the responsibility of social media?

They are an instrument of radicalization. Of many other things as well. There are controls, but even though he had been identified, Abdoullakh Anzorov, the terrorist, he slipped through the cracks.

What did you feel on seeing the finished film?

When you act in a film, you often tend to focus on your acting the first time you watch it. Not this time. The film hit me head on. Right from the start, I was with Antoine Reinartz's character; watching us, Nedjim and me, escalate the tension that would lead to tragedy, I couldn't take it. I started crying. With hindsight, I clearly see to what extent Samuel Paty was forsaken.

1. On stage, Azize Kabouche played the role of Henri Alleg in *La Question* directed by Baki Boumaza at the Georges Pompidou Center in 1990.



INTERVIEW •

MICKAËLLE PATY

I imagine that several directors have approached you. What made you agree to Vincent Garenq's project?

I've always trusted my instinct. From the start. And I haven't been wrong yet. I met with Vincent while he was shooting *Tout pour Agnès*, the mini-series about the murder of Agnès Leroux. When I went to the set and watched him have certain scenes redone, sometimes for tiny details but that he knew were highly important, I realized how demanding he could be. I appreciated his rigor, an essential quality in my eyes. It inspired confidence in me. The film required much more than a duty of remembrance.

What were your exchanges with Vincent Garenq like?

The film absolutely had to be anchored in reality, it had to be fictionalized as little as possible, and after having seen his films, it was clear that this was important to him.

How did you work together, in concrete terms?

He wrote, but he submitted every version of the script to me. I tried to help him as much as possible. It was enjoyable to speak with him because, even at times when we disagreed, it reminded me of debates I'd had with my brother - Samuel was incapable of saying

something without there being, behind it, a two-column chart of "for" and "against," as you see in the film when he is teaching class. One thing brought us together: it was important to both of us that the film have a therapeutic effect. The film does not exist to provide some sort of reparation for the victims. Rather, I'd say, it's there for society. To try to pay tribute to Samuel and through him, to all teachers in France.

The film gives the feeling of literally being in Samuel Paty's shoes

For an hour and a half, we sense what he might have lived through during those eleven days

before his death - his distress and anxiety rising in crescendo.

We all of course know how the story ends, but very few of us know the sequence of events that led to it. The film takes the time to unravel this chain of events; to understand that what happened was not a random killing..

A lie... To think that could have been the end of it

At the time, the media focused closely on the girl's lie and on the videos Brahim Chnina and Abdelhakim Sefrioui made, and indeed, everything could have been stopped there. It wasn't the teenager's lie that caused my brother's death, it was how it was exploited.

Antoine Reinartz plays your brother. Did you take part in choosing him?

I won't deny that my main preoccupation was the actor who would play Samuel. When I learned that Antoine Reinartz had accepted the role, I watched all his films. His roles were all so radically different and he was so totally invested in his characters that I couldn't tell who he was. The producers organized a dinner a few days before shooting was to start. For more than two hours, Antoine and I talked about this and that without ever mentioning the film. I was positioned to watch his postures, listen to his tone of voice, I needed to feel it. And then something amazing happened that I wasn't expecting: at one point, he picked up his fork to eat and I told him, "That's it, you're Samuel. You don't even have to work

on the character." Because Samuel was like that, he had little tics, little behavioral things. He and Antoine were similar in that way. All of a sudden, it was crystal clear. Samuel, like Antoine, was a discreet man who didn't like to make noise. He was that "ordinary hero" after he died, that Robert Badinter had described; the one who got up every morning to go teach in a middle school, to try to train tomorrow's critical thinkers, to try to emancipate them as much as possible from the determining factors of their birth.

Antoine blew me away, and it was both good for me and terrible, because in the space of an hour and a half, he managed to resuscitate Samuel. In that hour and a half, I felt he was alive.

Did you have the same preoccupation about the other roles?

It was different. My opinion mattered less. Vincent sent me the castings and then the choices that were made. I had memorized the faces of those who were going to play Brahim Chnina, Abdelhakim Sefrioui, and the girl. I was prepared. I spent a few days on the set and I admit that Emma, the girl who plays the liar, deeply touched me. I was at the catering buffet when I was introduced to her, and I felt very intimidated. I thought to myself, "How brave she is to come and play that character!" She was intimidated, too. The only thing she said was, "Can I give you a hug?" I didn't say no. It was important to me to feel that in real life, she would never have played such an evil role.

During those few days on the set, I met Emmanuelle Bercot, who plays the school principal in the film. Her reserve, her concentration, and her precision impressed me.

What expectations do you have for the film's release?

I don't expect the film, *Forsaken*, to repair anything for the living - not for our family, for Samuel's colleagues, or for his former students. It won't bring my brother back. What I do hope is that it manages to make the audience understand the facts of a chain of events that led to this ambush, this barbaric execution in front of the school. That without pointless effects, it shows how a horrendous rumor got started, then amplified and exploited; how alerts were minimized or poorly handled; how the institution, the police, certain officials, to various degrees, allowed the trap to close in around him.

The film won't replace the justice system, but it can help posterity remember something other than slogans: the facts, the timeline, the exceptional gravity of what happened - the murder of a teacher for having taught. That's all I hope for: that people don't forget, and that the film helps to prevent it from happening again.



CAST

Samuel PATY
Victoire LANION
Bachira SAIDI
Kader SAIDI
Tahar AMARA
Firmine - School receptionist
Malika - Vice-principal
Colette - Secretary
Alain - Teacherr
Bernard - Teacher
Guislain - Teacher
Véronique - Teacher
Isabelle - Teacher
Secularism Officer
Deputy school superintendent
Hind AMARA
Omar

ANTOINE REINARTZ
EMMANUELLE BERCOT
EMMA BOUMALI
NEDJIM BOUIZZOUL
AZIZE KABOUCHE
MARIE-SOHNA CONDÉ
MOUNIRA BARBOUCH
BARBARA BOLOTNER
ALEXANDRE BLAZY
EMMANUEL LEMIRE
JEAN-MICHEL LAHMI
ÉMILIE PIERSON
PASCALE MARIANI
ÉRIC GÉNOVÈSE, FROM THE COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE
FRANÇOIS PÉRACHE
MILENA SANSONETTI
DIAMADOUA SISSOKO

CREW

Screenplay VINCENT GARENO ALEXIS KEBBAS
in collaboration with MICKAËLLE PATY, based on
STÉPHANE SIMON's book "LES DERNIERS JOURS DE SAMUEL PATY" (© Plon 2023)

Original score NICOLAS ERRÈRA

Photography RENAUD CHASSAING AFC

Editing AURIQUE DELANNOY LMA

Sound REMI DARU SERGE ROUQUAIROL JEAN-PAUL HURIER

Set design ISABELLE QUILLARD

Costumes MARIE-LAURE LASSON

1st Assistant director THIERRY VERRIER

Script YANNICK CHARLES LSA

Post-production manager CHANTAL GUYOT

Production manager ALAIN MONNE

Production OUTSIDE FILMS and LES FILMS DU KIOSQUE

In coproduction with UGC FRANCE 3 CINÉMA UMEDIA

With the essential support of CANAL+

With the participation of CINÉ+ OCS and FRANCE TÉLÉVISIONS

With support from LA RÉGION ÎLE-DE-FRANCE

In partnership with LE CNC

In association with COFIMAGE 37 ENTOURAGE SOFICA 4 LA BANQUE POSTALE IMAGE 19 CINEAXE 7

With support from DU TAX SHELTER DU GOUVERNEMENT FÉDÉRAL DE BELGIQUE

and TAX SHELTER investors

Executive producer OUTSIDE FILMS

Belgian coproducers CLOÉ GARBAY and BASTIEN SIRODOT

Producers STÉPHANE SIMON MARION DE BLAÏ FRANÇOIS KRAUS and DENIS PINEAU-VALENCIENNE

Exclusive exploitation rights UGC

