

Talking about Trees

A film by
Suhaib Gasmelbari



93 mins / Sudan/France/Germany/Chad/Qatar / Arabic with English subtitles / 2019 /
Cert. TBC

Berlin International Film Festival World Premiere (Panorama) 2019
Berlin International Film Festival Panorama Audience Award and Glashütte Original
Documentary Award 2019
Istanbul International Film Festival FIPRESCI Prize (International Competition) 2019

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FOR ALL PRESS ENQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT:

Sue Porter/Lizzie Frith – Porter Frith Ltd
Tel. 07940 584066/07825 603705 porterfrith@hotmail.com

FOR ALL OTHER ENQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT

Robert Beeson – robert@newwavefilms.co.uk
Dena Blakeman – dena@newwavefilms.co.uk



79-80 Margaret Street
London
W1W 8TA
Tel. 020 7299 3685
info@newwavefilms.co.uk

SYNOPSIS:

*“What kind of times are these, when
To talk about trees is almost a crime
Because it implies silence about so many horrors?”
— Bertolt Brecht*

Ibrahim, Manar, Suleiman and Altayeb are the members of the Sudanese Film Club founded in 1989. Unable to make films for years, they have decided to revive an old cinema. They are united not only by their love of cinema and their passionate desire to restore old films and draw attention to Sudanese film history once more, but also by the fact that they all enjoyed a film education outside Sudan.

Their plans to renovate the outdoor cinema come up against bureaucracy, lack of cash and a general fear of upsetting “he who cannot be named.” (The film was made before the recent overthrow of Omar al-Bashir).

In the meantime, they sit together and talk about the past and the history of Sudanese cinema, including their experiences of persecution and even torture as oppositional artists. They recall their times of exile and dream of a Sudan in which art and intellectual thought can be free. ‘We are smarter than them, but not as strong,’ is the conclusion.

Even if their plans may be unfulfilled, the strong solidarity and humour of the four no longer young men, and their new recruit, Hana, do give hope for the future.

Further information and downloads [here](#)

Photo set can be [here](#)



With

IBRAHIM SHADDAD
SULEIMAN MOHAMED IBRAHIM
ALTAYEB MAHDI
MANAR AL-HILO
HANA ABDELRAHMAN SULIMAN
(SUDANESE FILM GROUP, SFG)

CREW

Director	SUHAIB GASMELBARI
Writer	SUHAIB GASMELBARI
Producer	MARIE BALDUCCHI
Photography	SUHAIB GASMELBARI
Editors	NELLY QUETTIER, GLADYS JOUJOU
Sound	ELSADIG KAMAL, KATHARINA VON SCHROEDER
Sound Editing	JEAN MALLET
Sound Mix	JEAN-GUY VERAN
Colourists	HERBERT POSCH, MARINE LEPOUTRE
Assistant Director	HANA ABDELRAHMAN SULIMAN
Co-producers	MELANIE ANDERNACH, MAHAMAT-SALEH HAROUN GOÏ-GOÏ PRODUCTIONS (CHAD) MADE IN GERMANY FILMPRODUKTION (GERMANY) VIDÉO DE POCHE (FRANCE) DOHA FILM FUND (QATAR) AGAT FILMS & CIE (FRANCE) SUDANESE FILM GROUP (SUDAN)
Production	AIDE AUX CINÉMAS DU MONDE CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE IDFA BERTHA FUND EUROPE IDFA BERTHA FUND LA RÉGION ILE-DE-FRANCE WORLD CINEMA FUND FILM UND MEDIENSTIFTUNG NRW DOHA FILM INSTITUTE SANAD DEVELOPMENT GRANT VENICE PRODUCTION BRIDGE
In association with	
With the support of	

Sudan / France / Germany / Chad / Qatar / 2019 / 93 min

SUHAIB GASMELBARI

Suhaib Gasmelbari was born in 1979, in Sudan, and lived there until the age of 16. He studied film in France at the Université of Paris 8 and worked as a freelance cameraman and editor for Al Qarra, Al Jazeera and France 24. He has written and directed several short films, both fiction and documentary. *Talking about Trees* is his first feature-length documentary. He is also a researcher with a special focus on audio-visual archives. Through his research, he was able to find some long-lost Sudanese films and he actively participates in international and local projects for saving and digitizing Sudanese films, including those of Ibrahim Shaddad, Suleiman Mohamed Ibrahim and Altayeb Mahdi.

FILMOGRAPHY

2012 ODA NAGAM (Ode To My Feet) (short film)

2017 SUDAN'S FORGOTTEN FILMS (TV Series documentary)

2019 TALKING ABOUT TREES



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I can say without hesitation that this film was born from an epic, yet real, image that happened in front of my eyes. I remember it clearly. It was the first time that I participated in a screening at a village with the four friends. After they set up the canvas screen and the show started, a sandy wind began to blow, moving the screen left and right. Two of them (Manar Al Hilo and Ibrahim Shaddad) quickly got up and sat on each side of the screen to anchor it down by tying both corners to their chairs. No one left despite the wind and the audience continued watching the film engagedly. As the wind strengthened, the screen blew up and deflated like the sails of a boat and sometimes the picture went off the screen and then came back. I was watching the faces of both men as they held the screen while laughing nervously like sailors in a storm. I felt that this trip to a nearby village of Khartoum granted me one of my most important existential lessons about resistance and determination. It was then that the necessity to make this film was born. This image that granted me the motivation to create this film is not included, just like the many other images that these four filmmakers had wanted to accomplish in the past forty years. However, the aggressive political winds of the country stood against their dreams, leaving behind a great bitterness but also a strong desire to fulfil them. *Talking about Trees* is the tale of their 45 years of attempting to make and show films and of the tireless hope that unites them forever – the story of a struggle of four crafty men with a witty sense of humour.

FILMED INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR (English and German)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpZB7ZBv8JY>



THE SUDANESE FILM CLUB

IBRAHIM SHADDAD

Ibrahim studied filmmaking at the Filmuniversität Babelsberg Konrad Wolf (at that time Academy for Film and Television of the GDR) and graduated in 1964. Over the course of his career, he has made many medium-length and short films, including *Hunting Party* (1964) and *The Rope* (1984). Several of his projects have been banned by various governments in Sudan. He spent years in exile in Egypt and Canada before returning to Sudan. His love of cinema is deep and his vision of art is radical.



SULEIMAN MOHAMED IBRAHIM

Suleiman studied documentary filmmaking at the VGIK Institute of Cinematography in Moscow from 1973 to 1978. He was awarded the Silver Prize for his short film *It Still Rotates* at the Moscow International Film Festival 1979. He is the driving force of the group. He is very disciplined and inventive and finds the answers to all the practical questions. Suleiman refused to go into exile following the military coup in 1989.



ALTAYEB MAHDI

Altayeb graduated from the Cairo Higher Institute for Cinema in 1977. He has directed several artistically daring short films such as *The Station* (1988), *Four Times for Children* (1979) and *The Tomb* (1976). Altayeb is a man of few words but his brevity will always deliver the missing thought.



MANAR AL HILO

Manar graduated from the Cairo Higher Institute for Cinema in 1977. He was always dedicated to support the works of his other friends. He worked on the production of all their films produced in Sudan. His smart wit persuasively found miraculous solutions to overcome production obstacles in a country without production means. He is a radical dreamer who loves cinema and does not cease to question the moral legitimacy of wanting to talk about cinema in a time of assassination and atrocities.

