



EFA Young Audience Award 2018

**Handout for moderation
including an introduction for valuation**

The three nominated films:

**GIRL IN FLIGHT
HOBBYHORSE REVOLUTION
WALLAY**

YAA 2018 Kicks Off

The nominations were chosen by an international committee consisting of **Manlio Castagna** (Giffoni International Film Festival/Italy), **Ana Cerar** (International Film Festival Kino Otok – Isola Cinema/Slovenia), **Corinna Downing** (London Film Festival – British Film Institute/UK), EFA Board Member **Vanessa Henneman** (talent agent/The Netherlands) and Holger Twele (film educator/Germany).

On 6 May, the three nominated films will be screened to audiences of 12-14 year-olds in the following 37 countries and 46 cities across Europe:

AUSTRALIA: Brisbane	LATVIA: Riga
AUSTRIA: St. Pölten & Vienna	LITHUANIA: Vilnius
BELGIUM: Brussels	LUXEMBOURG: Luxembourg
BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA: Sarajevo	FYR MACEDONIA: Skopje
BULGARIA: Sofia	MALTA: Valletta
CROATIA: Zagreb	MONTENEGRO: Podgorica
CZECH REPUBLIC: Prague	THE NETHERLANDS: Amsterdam
DENMARK: Aalborg	POLAND: Łódź, Warsaw & Wrocław
ESTONIA: Tallinn	PORTUGAL: Lisbon
FINLAND: Helsinki	ROMANIA: Cluj-Napoca
FRANCE: Bourq Saint Maurice – Les Arcs	SERBIA: Niš
GERMANY: Berlin, Chemnitz & Erfurt	SLOVAKIA: Bratislava
GREECE: Athens	SLOVENIA: Izola
HUNGARY: Budapest	SPAIN: Barcelona, Madrid & Seville
ICELAND: Reykjavík	SWEDEN:
IRELAND: Dublin	SWITZERLAND: Lucerne
ISRAEL: Tel Aviv	TURKEY: Istanbul
ITALY: Florence, Rome & Turin	UK: London
KOSOVO: Prizren	

And it is the young audience that will act as a jury and vote for the winner right after the screenings. In a truly European vote, jury speakers will then transmit the national results to Erfurt (Germany) where the winner will be announced in an award ceremony streamed live on the project website: yaa.europeanfilmawards.eu

Please note:

The following handout for the three films selected for the EFA Young Audience Award focuses on the essentials and does not claim to cover all (noteworthy) aspects of a film.

In addition to thematic aspects for assessing the film, cinematic aspects are equally important. However important and significant a topic may be, the film has to also have succeeded in finding the appropriate form and the appropriate choice of cinematic means or (sub)genre.

First, the basic information of a film is conveyed on an overview page, whereby all films are given equal weight. It also briefly refers to possible triggers that could result from personal (traumatic) experiences or from cultural and religious backgrounds. Next, you'll find the most important thematic aspects as well as information on the cinematic rendition.

The tips and notes for the introduction of the film are always kept short and refer to useful preliminary information about the film and to the inquiry of relevant prior knowledge. After all, the young people should all have an equal chance to see a film without prejudice and any pedagogical influence and to form their own (first) opinions. These can of course be put into perspective and differentiated during the subsequent discussion.

The discussion points are also to be understood as mere suggestions. They do not have to be „processed“ in sequential order. Since every event is, above all, influenced and shaped by its participants, this circumstance must be given sufficient consideration. In other words: It is what particularly moves the young people and what they themselves bring up which should determine the discussion about the film.

The standardized guideline for the evaluation of a film (copies for participants?) is not a prerequisite for well-founded judgement. It is merely an option, no more and no less.

This year, the three films pre-selected for the vote have a common denominator (rather by chance), although they differ greatly in content and form. They always (also) deal with open and encouraging encounters with the foreign. These encounters open up new perspectives for the films' protagonists as well as for us viewers. The foreign doesn't always have to be far away, it can exist right among us - for example in the form of other cultures, traditions, lifestyles or „only“ through an unusual hobby.

GIRL IN FLIGHT

Italy/Switzerland 2017, 78 min.

Feature film



Directed by: Sandra Vannucchi

Written by: Sandra Vannucchi & Michael King

Produced by: Michael King & Ruedi Gerber

Director of Photography: Vladan Radovic

Editor: Osvaldo Barger

Composer: Marcel Vaid

Sound Design: Alessandro Giacco

Main Cast: Lisa Ruth Anreozzi (Silvia), Donatella Finocchiaro (Giulia), Filippo Nigro (Pietro), Emina Amatovic (Emina), Andrea Atzei (Edoardo) a. o.

Recommended from 12 years on

Awards (selection): Woodstock Film Festival 2017: World Cinema Award for Best Foreign Language Feature

Genre: road movie, coming of age-film

Summary

Eleven-year-old Silvia from a small town in Tuscany suffers greatly from the fact that her mother hardly cares for her due to severe depression and that her overstrained father also pays little attention to her. Even the long-promised trip to Rome won't materialize. Silvia therefore secretly sets off on her own. On the train, she meets the 13-year-old Roma girl Emina, who lives in a Roma camp near Rome and opens Silvia's eyes to a world which is as fascinating as it is foreign.

About production and filmmakers

The independently produced low-budget film was shot in a real Roma camp with amateur actors. In her debut feature film, director Sandra Vannucchi draws on her own childhood experiences.

Subjects

Growing up, family, friendship, outsiders, illness (depression)

Triggers

Silvia's mother suffers from severe depression and her hopelessly overstrained father is prone to outbreaks of violence. If one parent is mentally ill, this can become a trigger in affected young people.

Website

<http://lafugathemovie.com>

Essential topics

Mental illness of a parent

Silvia's mother has been suffering from severe depression for at least a year. She spent some time in a clinic for treatment, being suicidal. Back home, she is hardly available for her two children. Their father, a banker, is overwhelmed by constant strain. He prepares the food for the whole family but feels powerless against the disease, which is reflected in tantrums and slight outbreaks of violence. He expects his children to come to terms with this situation.

Depression and other mental illnesses are unfortunately not uncommon in Europe, while those affected are not to blame. The film shows in an unvarnished way how much such a disease can burden the whole family and especially the children from Silvia's point of view. If the mother suddenly feels much better after a simple change of medication, this may initially be due to dramaturgical considerations, but at the same time realistically refers to the problem that every case of illness is different and that there is no standardized treatment which is successful for all patients.



Whether the clearly visible birthmark above Silvia's left eye is a metaphor for how much she is affected by her mother's illness is anyone's guess. In contrast, the fact that she has lost confidence in her parents and even fears that she is no longer loved by them is clearly portrayed. This results in her desire to visit a tourist attraction in Rome, the „Mouth of Truth“ (La Bocca della verità) with her mother. There, she wants to ask the decisive question whether her mother still loves her. According to legend, the large marble disc in the porch of Santa Maria Church, located between the Colosseum and the Tiber River, was used in the Middle Ages as a lie detector to punish swindlers if, according to the court, they did not tell the truth. Their hands were chopped off after they were made to place them in the „Mouth of Truth“.

Friendship and trust

Since she was denied her personal „time-out“ from her family burdens, Silvia decides to travel alone from Tuscany to Rome. On the train she meets Emina, a Roma girl who is two years her senior. The names of the two girls already indicate the kind of relationship which will soon develop between them. Silvia (Latin: „the one from the forest“), who is „naïve“ in the positive sense of the word and still inexperienced in many things ventures alone into the big city jungle and becomes friends with Emina (Arabic: „the trustworthy one“). After initial hesitation, Emina helps Silvia and thus gives her the very feeling of security and trust which the girl has been missing from her parents for a long time. A friendship develops, which is permeated by crises and omnipresent communication problems, but at the same time is based on reciprocity and offers both girls the opportunity to question themselves and their own expectations. This works out all the better because both girls come from different cultures and life contexts, which, unlike for the people surrounding them, is hardly an issue for them. As they get to know each other, Emina initially shows slight prejudice against non-Roma because of her many negative experiences with them. The skeptical physical distance to Silvia at their first meeting on the train and the warm farewell hug for her new friend towards the end of the film are pictorial proof of this.



Meeting of two worlds

If members of the non-settled Roma people (Romanes: Rome = man), who moved from the Indian subcontinent to Europe about 700 years ago, but always remained a minority, call themselves „gypsies“ or „tziganes“, that is okay. Otherwise, these expressions should be avoided against the background of their centuries-long persecution leading up to their annihilation during the time of National Socialism. This is because it is still associated with prejudice and exclusion, as the film makes clear and as human rights organizations regularly remind us. In some Eastern European countries in particular, the Roma often live in ghetto-like conditions in what is a kind of parallel society. They are being persecuted and excluded from public life.

The film, which was shot in a real Roma camp, uses Silvia's experiences in her encounter with Emina as a vivid and casual reminder of their poor living conditions. These conditions are evidently not self-inflicted, yet they do not rule out a life of dignity and joie de vivre. People there would like to take up regular employment if they could find a job. Also Emina is forced to beg on the streets so that she and her family can survive. The film does not avoid common prejudices against the Roma, which are once more explicitly mentioned in regards to police work during Silvia's interrogation. The film contrasts the still existing prejudices that the Roma only steal and beg, but do not want to work and even kidnap other people's children, with a much more differentiated picture. The real threats Silvia is exposed to in the big city are posed not by the Roma but by locals, for example by an elderly pedophile who wants to lure Silvia into his car, or by two young people who take offence at Silvia's begging with the Roma children and who later carry out an arson attack against the Roma camp.

Coming of age: Future and identity

Silvia learns a lot through her friendship with Emina. Their encounter makes her mature to some extent. She can see her own problems from a distance and in relation to other people's problems. And, finally, she gets infected by Emina's self-confidence and joie de vivre and dances in public with some Roma children.

Although the older Emina, who already has much more life experience and grew up in a less protected environment than Silvia, had to struggle throughout her life, she also benefits from the encounter. After Silvia encourages her and asks her about her hopes in life, she responds that, against all odds and despite the hostility, she wants to finish her school in order to have a better future. In a make-up scene, the film makes it clear that both girls see and recognize each other in each other's mirrors, and that they are not so different after all.



Thus, this can be considered a classic Coming of Age film with an unusual starting point and character constellation that revolves around the difficulties of growing up, the search for belonging and acceptance, for the „meaning“ of life and for identity, all against the background of the conflict with the parents.

Film literacy

A road movie and the importance of the journey

Even if Silvia only travels to Rome by train, by bus and on foot, the film fulfills the structural requirements of a road movie, because on her journey, she meets new people whom she shares many valuable experiences with and who allow her to mature and change her life drastically after her return. The film clearly indicates this in the last scenes.

Camera and montage

The empathetic and often symbolically charged pictures of cameraman Vladan Radovic, born in Sarajevo in 1970, deserve special attention. He has repeatedly worked with children and young people, for example in „Rosso com il Cielo“ (2006), „Anime nere“ (2014) or „Figlia mia“ (2018), which is noticeable throughout the film. The film deliberately focuses on the subjective perspective of its young protagonists and their emotional landscapes. On the one hand, this makes the film very authentic and, on the other, it avoids placing too much emphasis on the aforementioned social and political conflicts. Still, these become the wrapping to Silvia's „journey“, which is dubbed an „escape“ in the film title. Already through its montage, the film makes it clear how important this time-out from everyday life is for Silvia. Long before she actually starts on her journey, the film anticipates important moments of the train ride in several interspersed scenes. The fact that the film is deliberately not told in chronological order here is one of the numerous moments of irritation through which the audience is challenged and invited to reflect.

How much the mother's illness burdens the two children is indicated without complicated dialogue in two almost identical scenes at the family dining table. Whereas the children are very sad when their mother is in a bad state, their mood changes noticeably after she responds well to her new drugs.



Also other moods in the film are depicted less through language, but rather through images and their symbolic power. When Silvia and Emina go their separate ways after an argument, this is dissolved into a metaphor for their different futures when Silvia goes down the straight paved path, while Emina diverts into a convoluted gravel road. The idyllic nature with the radiant sun hitting the window after Silvia's solitary overnight stay in the caravan of the deceased fortune teller already indicates that the film will end positively for Silvia.



Music

The overall optimistic mood of the film is reinforced by the music, which conveys peace and harmony even through its more dramatic moments.

Before screening

- Short information about production and director
- Previous knowledge a) about the illness depression, b) about the Roma people?
- What is a Coming of Age movie and what is a road movie?

Basic talking points (after screening)

- Why was Silvia so desperate to go to Rome? Was that brave, reckless, an escape?
- What fascinates Silvia about Emina and why does she engage in this relationship?
- What does this friendship change for both of them? Was that believable?
- How well has the film managed to convey Silvia's development in particular?
- With the disease of depression and the exclusion of the Roma people, the film attacks two very different topics. How (coherently) did this pair „come across“?
- Prejudices against the Roma are also raised. Has the film changed something about your own perceptions and judgement?

HOBBYHORSE REVOLUTION

Finland 2017, 90 min.

Documentary

Directed by: Selma Vilhunen

Written by: Selma Vilhunen & Okku Nuutilainen

Produced by: Venla Hellstedt & Elli Toivoniemi

Director of Photography: Saari Aaltonen & Selma Vilhunen

Editor: Okku Nuutilainen

Composer: Henrik Oja

Sound Design: Christoffer Demby

Main Cast: Mariam „Aisku” Njie, Elsa Salo, Alisa Aarniomäki, Milla Kivimäki, Roosa und Reeta Javanainen, Ada Filppa, Eemeli Aapasuo Jessica Hallila a. o.



Recommended from 10 years on

Awards (selection): Cinekid 2017 (Public Award), Jussi Award (Best Documentary)

Genre: documentary, coming-of-age

Summary

The filmmaker, who refers to herself as a „horse girl“, follows three girls who have long left their childhood behind in the exercise of their extraordinary hobby as passionate hobbyhorse riders over a period of about three years. Firmly integrated into a community that already counts more than 10,000 members in Finland, they are exposed to many prejudices and hostility from the outside world, but consistently follow their own paths.

About production / filmmaker

The Finnish director and screenwriter Selma Vilhunen (born in 1976) made several short and documentary films, including „Do I Have to Take Care of Everything?“, which was nominated for the Academy Award in 2013. After her documentary „Hobbyhorse Revolution“ she shot the feature film „Little Wing“ (Tyttö nimeltä Varpu), which won the Nordic Council Award 2017.

Subjects

Hobby, friendship, belonging, identity, exclusion, bullying, prejudices, sports, competition, imagination

Trigger

Anyone who, like some of the girls in the film, has already been excluded, bullied or even beaten up, could react particularly sensitively to this film.

Website

<http://www.tuffifilms.com/production/hobbyhorse-revolution>; <https://www.folketsbio.se/>

Essential topics

Hobbyhorse – Hobby

With this documentary, (also) laughing is allowed! The film quickly makes it clear that it won't be at the expense of the three protagonists Alisa, Mariam and Elsa, who are already significantly older than 13 years. They are not ridiculed in any way, although, at first glance, they practice a hobby that is not commonplace and is often dismissed as mere child's play. The girls' courage to „out“ themselves in the face of the repeated hostilities addressed in the film, which include bullying, and to consistently pursue their own goals deserves the highest recognition and respect. Should - contrary to expectations! - the viewing trigger some derogatory comments, you can point out the centuries-old cultural tradition of the hobbyhorse, which has existed not only in Europe since antiquity, but also in many other countries of the world, including in America and Asia. Because the hobbyhorse, from which the commonly used term „hobby“ for a personal passion was derived, is not merely a children's toy. As such, its basic construction consists of a stick and a horse head made of fabric and filling material, which is held with both hands between the legs and tilted upwards. Hobbyhorses are also used for ritual processions and ceremonial dances in many regions. In the European Middle Ages, the Christian church even tried to ban hobbyhorses used in pagan customs during that time.

In recent years, a movement has emerged in Finland that sees riding hobbyhorses not only as a game, but as an energy-intensive sporting discipline with clear rules, competitions and championships. As in „real“ equestrian sport, there is dressage and show jumping. Skill, technical ability, endurance and personal style are also important in hobbyhorse riding. And, as in „playing the air guitar“, the power of imagination is key. Thanks not least to communication technology such as blogs and Internet forums, the community in Finland now counts more than 10,000 members. This enthusiasm for hobbyhorse riding has long since spread to other Scandinavian countries. Alisa, Mariam and Elsa, who are portrayed in more detail than the others in the film, are among the pioneers of this phenomenal development. Since, from a cultural-historical point of view, hobbyhorse riding has spread mainly in places where real horses are not a part of everyday life, it remains to be seen whether this current movement will also spread to other European countries.

Self-discovery and self-assertion

„Hobbyhorse Revolution“ is much more than a documentary about the community and its development, because it directly involves the three girls who are coming of age and are searching for their identity and a very personal perspective on life. It is therefore a documentary with them, not one about them. A close relationship of trust between the protagonists and the filmmaker that had grown over the years was an indispensable prerequisite for this. Topics such as personal disappointment, problems with parents and other caregivers, exclusion or even bullying are also addressed without giving them too much room, for it is not the negative and the difficulties of growing up that are the focus, but the encouraging and imaginative search for one's own „center“ and for one's „inner hobbyhorse“. In doing that, they mainly had to overcome their own fears and prejudices. In an interview for „Finland Today“, director Selma Vilhunen summed up what was particularly important to her:

„I wanted to encourage people to find their inner hobbyhorse and to use their imagination even when they are older than 13. Another thing I find really beautiful within this phenomenon is the diversity of the people in the community and how they accept one another. I encourage people to investigate their own prejudices.“

Three life plans - one hobby

Three individual fates emerged from a multitude of encounters and stories during the shooting. The three girls could not be more different, but are closely connected through their common hobby, which gives all of them support and acceptance. The film also repeatedly features personal meetings between them. What they all have in common is the experience of having been excluded by other young people

because of their hobby. At any rate, all of them were forced to live in two largely incompatible worlds, that of their hobby and that of their everyday life, where little understanding of their hobby prevails. Mariam and Elsa became aware of the hobby especially through Alisa's video posts on the Internet. By then a student of biochemistry, she remains the driving force of the movement until the end of the shooting. She knows how to inspire others, organize well and use the media to achieve her goals and needs. At the end, she organizes a flash mob in Helsinki, which calls on the public to „respect the hobbyhorses“. The hobbyhorse has helped the other two girls overcome great personal problems and opened up new perspectives in their lives. Mariam had a difficult youth and ended up living in foster care. When she comes away empty-handed from a competition despite her good performance, she temporarily retires from the community, but in the end decides to set up her own team to lead as a trainer. Elsa, who was suffering from depression, had a particularly hard time. She got therapy lessons with the riding horse Fiona, who died later. She tries to compensate for her loss through hobbyhorse and painting and finally discovers her artistic vein and ends up wanting to attend an art school. All of them have finally found their way!

Film literacy

Camera and montage

The film is always close to its protagonists without giving the impression of being pushy or even voyeuristic. Even shots with a handheld camera don't seem hectic and don't mean to invoke a chaotic world of emotions. Rather, they testify to empathic closeness and balance, even in the competition scenes themselves, which are defined by emotions. This does not mean that the film is boring in any way or that it has no tension arcs. This is ensured by the skillful montage of scenes with very diverse cinematic means. Besides the cut-in interviews with the girls, there are many scenes about their training, their public relations work and the organization of competitions in several Finnish cities. Also included is direct communication between the girls or communication via social networks. Even parents infected by their children's enthusiasm are not being ignored.

The importance of media and especially social networks for the community can be seen in many shots. Alisa has her own website, which is directly referred to in pictures and text. The girls are constantly pulling out their smartphones, and Mariam even documents one of the competitions simultaneously with a smartphone and a camera. Also chats visually move into the picture several times.

Repeatedly, pictures of the Finnish landscape can be seen in full view, especially during the hobbyhorse training or during the car and train rides to the competition venues. They underline the local character, but also often match the mood of the protagonists.

The montage very impressively conveys what has changed during the three years of shooting. At the beginning, Mariam trains all alone with her hobbyhorse on a delimited, tree-lined property in front of the backdrop of a silo. No one is supposed to see her. At the Flashmob in Helsinki at the end of the film, dozens of enthusiastic hobbyhorse fans publicly endorse their hobby. They don't have to hide anymore.



Sometimes the film crosses the boundaries of a documentary film, examples being the powerful, ever optimistic musical background or the animation of a drawing by Elsa. In summer camp and during the

ride to the Finnish Championships, the film works with atmospheric sequence montages, i.e. in an elliptical narrative style with a streamlined plot, partly faded out original sound and a musical background which serves as brackets for the respective scenes.

Refute prejudices

A film which, according to the director, explicitly wants to encourage people to question their own prejudices should do so not only on a linguistic and action level, but even more so on a visual level. This is often perceived unconsciously or as a moment of surprise, which makes it easier to overcome possible internal resistance.

Four examples which the film uses are picked out.



When Alisa photographs her handmade hobbyhorse which she made for another girl, it becomes clear that her hobby not only includes playful and sporting aspects, but that technical, artistic and social aspects also play an important role. The dynamic image structure with the table diagonally moved into the picture and the lighting underline this. As soon as the white hobbyhorse has reached its new owner, the chosen setting (cadrage) with the background refers to the fact that the hobbyhorse always also references real horses - it's just that not everyone can afford them, which is when imagination comes into play.



Just recently, Alisa was busy with her hobbyhorse. But she rides motorcycles just as naturally - a scene that was not to be expected and is suitable to make oneself aware of possible prejudices. The animated drawing by Elsa is no different. What may have been perceived as mere enthusiasm now turns out to be a special talent that opens up a path into the future.

Before screening

- Previous experiences with documentary films in the cinema?
- What is a hobbyhorse? Query about own experiences/expectations.
- Brief information about the director and long-term documentaries.

Basic talking points (after screening)

- How were the girls and their hobby perceived at the beginning of the film?
- What has changed in the course of the film?
- Why is this hobby so important to girls?
- Why don't they ride real horses?
- Alisa and Mariam „only“ felt excluded, but Elsa warranted pity.
Why were things particularly bad for Elsa?
- (How) has the film succeeded in breaking down prejudices against this hobby?
- Can the film encourage the viewer to stand by yourself and your hobby even against external resistance?
- Which scenes were most surprising and/or impressive?
- Is this a well-made documentary, especially for young people?

WALLAY

France / Burkina Faso / Qatar 2017, 83 min.
Feature film

Directed by: Berni Goldblat

Written by: David Bouchet

Produced by: Nicolas Anthome

Director of Photography: Martin Rit

Editor: Laurent Senechal

Production Design: Papa Kouyaté & Karim Lagati

Composer: Vincent Ségal

Main Cast: Makan Nathan Diarra (Ady), Ibrahim Koma (Jean), Hamadoun Kassogué (Amadou), Joséphine Kaboré (Mamé), Mounira Kankolé (Yéli) a. o.



Recommended from 11 years on

Awards (selection): Cinekid 2017 (Jury's Price), Int. Kinderfilmfestival Vienna 2017 (UNICEF Film Price)

Genre: road movie, coming of age-film, culture clash drama

Summary

13-year-old Ady from Paris grows up alone with his father, who originally comes from Burkina Faso. When Ady embezzles money, his father sends him to his uncle in Africa to familiarize him with the cultural roots of his homeland. What begins for Ady as a holiday stay quickly turns into a culture shock for him, but also allows him to mature and to take responsibility.

About production and filmmakers

Born in Stockholm in 1970, the Swiss director, producer, lecturer and distributor Berni Goldblat has begun making documentary films shot in West Africa or dealing with this region in 1999. In his adopted country Burkina Faso, he founded a production company and the organization Cinomade, which deals with participatory film reception. „Wallay“ is his feature debut.

Subjects

Growing up, family, (cultural) identity, tradition & modernity, initiation rites

Triggers

Young people in particular may feel inhibited to talk about circumcision openly or in public.

Website

<http://www.bathysphere.fr/fr/films/wallay>

Essential topics

Homeland and foreign lands

In times when more people than ever before have to leave their ancestral home and look for a new one, the term „home“ is not only very topical, but also emotionally charged. Is home where you were born and grew up, or is it where your ancestors came from? Of course, things are not that simple, especially since the descendants of migrants often see their homeland less in their parents' countries of origin, but in the country where they have lived since childhood and where they feel comfortable and at home. But are cultural roots so easy to deny or ignore? The director of the film, Berni Goldblat, is aware of this issue, which he captures in his first feature film „Wallay“ (literal translation: motherland) in a multifaceted way. Goldblat was born in Stockholm to parents from Switzerland and Zimbabwe. He later found his adopted home in the West African state of Burkina Faso, which was under French colonial rule until 1960 and to this day - at least as far as cinematic culture is concerned - is strongly influenced by France.

Young Ady, the 13-year-old main character of the film, also has to deal with his own origins and cultural roots on his journey. He was born in France and has never seen Burkina Faso, the land of his ancestors, which is completely foreign to him. Nor is he familiar with the language Dioula, which is spoken in the film along with about 60 other languages and the official language French. Right in the first scene, which cannot yet be classified by the viewer, the film makes it unmistakably clear that Ady will not stay in Burkina Faso, but will return to Paris at the end. Thus, the whole film is told in flashback after this opening scene. With this artistic trick, any consideration the film might want to show that Ady could be better off in Africa than in France, where he was born and where also his father lives, is excluded. When Ady returns, however, he is richer in many valuable experiences, and his relationship to his own roots has completely changed.

The comparison of two cultures

Although most of the film takes place in Burkina Faso, Africa, France is omnipresent as a synonym for Western European culture. This culture is embodied by Ady, who suddenly and most involuntarily finds himself confronted with a culture foreign to him as well as with the rules and customs prevailing there. Religion also plays a role, because although many religions are practiced on an equal footing in Burkina Faso, more than 60 percent are now Muslims, like Ady's own relatives. In comparing the two cultures, the film avoids making any premature assessments. Rather, it is about understanding and tolerance on both sides, which requires the conscious perception of differences. None of the cultures and religions is inherently better or worse than the other. This does not mean that people from both cultures don't have faults as well, or that they always behave correctly and fairly. Thus, the film conveys that both cultures can learn from each other through an open encounter that is as free of prejudice as possible in many areas of daily life, from the family to the economy and the social system.

When Ady comes to Burkina Faso, he does wear an amulet around his neck which depicts the continent of Africa. Nonetheless, he views himself as a free European who sees and judges life in Africa as a foreigner. Conversely, the locals perceive him as a tourist in clothing, equipment and behavior. Ady first has to learn that everyday life in his father's home country is completely different from what it is in France, for example. Water is precious and must not be wasted, the power goes out regularly and the Internet does not work every day. Boys his age already have to work hard, like the car mechanic Siébou, and only a few earn more than two Euros a day. Nevertheless, Gaoua is anything but „a godforsaken place“, as Ady later notes in astonishment. The biggest differences are to be found in the social fabric. Family is (still) considered sacred there, parents deserve unconditional respect and the grandmother, the only person whom Ady immediately trusts, is a natural authority figure who wields great influence. In contrast, Ady thinks his father is a traitor because he sent him to his uncle, and he shows little understanding, let alone respect, towards his uncle.

Initiation and Circumcision

The actual conflict between Ady and his uncle does not develop due to Ady's obligation to repay or work off the money he embezzled during the transfers. The uncle wants to make Ady into a real African, and for a 13-year-old boy this includes an initiation into the world of adults. Ady completes the first part in the form of a two-day forced march with Jean, who symbolically becomes an older brother for him. But Ady doesn't agree with the second part under any circumstances. Circumcision of the foreskin in order to „become a man and respect other men“ is out of the question for him. As the commissioned medicine man later notes with horror, the uncle himself is committing a breach of the rules with his plan, because he wants to perform the circumcision secretly and sedate Ady to break his resistance. This is a no-go, also from an African point of view. On top of that, the uncle clearly violates Ady's right to self-determination and physical integrity. By finally saving his physically disabled uncle from drowning by risking his own life, Ady proves that there are other ways „to become a man“. Ady's father can be proud of his son, the uncle says.

Film literacy

Show instead of explain

The conflict between two cultures and lifestyles, which, from a European point of view, takes place exclusively in a foreign country, materializes in images rather than through language. This also facilitates an understanding of the film across countries and cultures. For example, a slap in the face Ady receives from his father must suffice to convey that his father is sending him to Burkina Faso without warning. The story background is only gradually learned together with Ady in the further course of the film. Thus, as a spectator, you never have an experience advantage over Ady. You have to draw your own conclusions on what you see, just like the boy himself. Thus, the photo of a military unit on the wall at best indicates that the uncle may have once served in the French army, became crippled there and therefore no longer wants to use their language. It also remains unclear whether there really are crocodiles in the lake, or if Jean with his warning just wanted to avoid Ady turning the required work into a leisurely activity.

Even if the characterization of the relationships between individual persons is expressed through dialogue, the image plane is much more meaningful. This becomes particularly clear in the welcoming scene between Ady and his grandmother, whom he meets for the first time in his life. Nevertheless, both warmly welcome each other, the chemistry between the two is right from the very first moment and initiates the boy's process of change. In the welcoming scene, the camera remains in a semi-close position, Ady forms the center, his axis of view is directed to the right into the future and Yéli, who might later on continue the legacy of the grandmother, appears in the background. The encounter between the uncle and the medicine man, which was shot in close-up and does not include anyone else, takes a completely different course. Only the face of the concerned medicine man is clearly visible, and between the two men, a wooden trunk symbolizes the dividing factor in their views on circumcision.



Finally, the budding first love and connection between Ady and Yéli is almost casually indicated by the hat which suddenly changes owner. Ady wears it on his arrival in Africa, whereby his direction of travel

also stands for an involuntary look back into the past and into his origins. Yéli wears it at the end of the film to say goodbye, looking to the right into the future, into which Ady has just disappeared by taxi.



Camera perspective



The camera perspective is also remarkable in other aspects. The camera does not take the perspective of the boy but remains at an observing distance even during close-ups. Often the people are filmed from behind, whereby the camera captures them and what they see at the same time. Some pictures are structured like a tableau, especially when it comes to capturing the African landscape.

Fatherland and motherland (Wallay)

Finally, the portrayal of men and women in the film is also of interest. At first glance, this seems to be a patriarchal social order in which men have the say, pursue a profession and women are responsible for home and hearth. A closer look, which also takes the film title into account, reveals a more differentiated picture. The men hold up the order, the women fill it with life. Wallay is not the fatherland, but the motherland, a source of strength.



Ady certainly does not gain access to his roots through the men, like Ady's father, uncle or Jean as a companion, even if they literally give the impetus. Emotionally, and thus much more intensively and sustainably, he finds it through the women, through Ady's grandmother and Yéli. They come from different generations and stand for continuity at the same time.

Before screening

- What is associated with the term „home“?
- Information about the director and Burkina Faso, the location of the film
- What do the terms „initiation“ and „circumcision“ mean?

Basic talking points (after screening)

- What significance does the film title „Wallay“ (= motherland) take on after viewing the film?
- Presentation of the differences (and similarities) between the two worlds.
- Do forms of initiation also exist in Western cultures? Just a gender question?
- To what extent does Ady change in the course of the film? (plot points of the story)
- Why is almost the entire film narrated in flashback?
- What is the „function“ of the uncle and Jean, of the grandmother and Yéli for Ady?
- What could be the reason for the uncle’s (mis)behavior?
- Is circumcision really necessary for a boy to grow up? Is Ady only fighting it just in order not to „grow up“?

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