

Momento ! presents

# AFTER BABEL

looking for Batoutos

A DOCUMENTARY FEATURE  
BY VALÉRIE OSOUF

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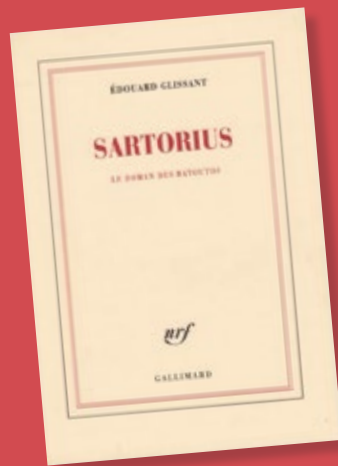


*What is this nation, invisible as a nation, and yet following so closely our tormented paths?*

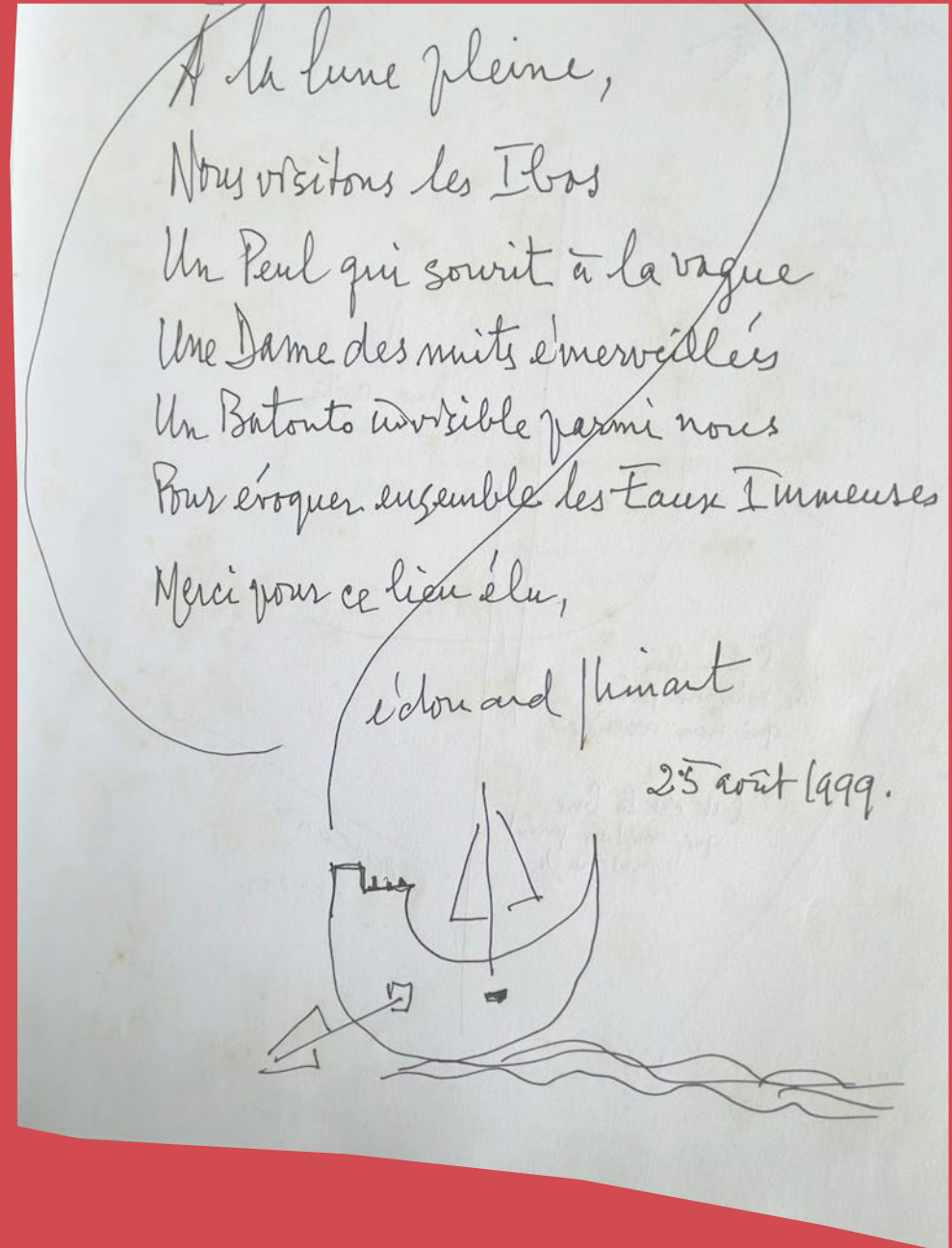
*We call them Batoutos, after the story they told to a few of us.*

*In the multiplied times of today, we barely see them.  
They watch over us, wherever our hopes have not met  
our actions.*

*Thus, we dream about them, rather than know them.*



Édouard Glissant – Sartorius ou le roman des Batoutos.



# PITCH

They are a clandestine people, wandering  
among travelers, refugees,  
immigrant workers, foreign students  
and business people...

Everywhere, they watch over the Relation.

They call themselves Batouto  
Carried by the breath of movement,  
through places of multitude and diversity,  
from Gashora to Toronto through of Moscow,  
Tiandu Cheng and Abu Dhabi, After Babel  
takes the journey of the outraged and  
celebrates the globality so dear to the poets.

What if freedom of movement was as vital as  
the air we breathe, and open borders not a  
problem but a solution?

The African coast seen from Europe (Tarif, Spain)



babel

**RELATION**

invisible

dignity

story

clandestine

travelers

migrants

**GLOBALIZATION**

poetry

borders

right to opacity

breathe

archipelago

cosmopolitan

abyss

**UTOPIA**

root

imaginary

quest

people

otherness

radical humanism

territoiry

**ENCOUNTER**

world

créolization

domination

feeling

police

eating

times

decolonial

poecept

exfiltrated

lovers

ephemeral

**CROSSING**

consent

connected

laughter

chessboard

rhizome

# SYNOPSIS

Never on earth have there been so many borders, walls, barbed wire and controls. With the pandemic, these have become real for everyone. But while progressive de-confinement has allowed wealthy Westerners to regain their freedom of movement and enjoy its fluidity, for many others, nothing has changed.

Structured in 5 tableaux and an epilogue, *Après Babel* progresses through successive immersions in 6 emblematic sites of globalisation: cosmopolitan archipelagos, rootless territories, polyglot microcosms, epicenters of diversity, hosting yet hostile places, through apparently totally different administrative, cultural and economic conditions, yet all driven by the same motto: the need, the will and the desire for movement.

Amongst these different spaces and their inhabitants, the film identifies people who, for the first time on screen, embody the Batoutos. This imaginary people, invented by the Caribbean poet-philosopher Edouard Glissant, form an invisible community that originated in Central Africa at the start of the slave trade and which, even today, all over the world, maintains the Relationship between human beings, beyond their origins, their economic status, their religions, their occupations, their ages, their genders, their sexualities, their territoriality and their levels of power. Immersed in the daily life of these diverse and segmented communities, the film forges bonds between people who would never have met.

Carefully sharing certain gestures common to all humans: eating, drinking, sleeping, reading, desiring, chatting, arguing, pining, working and loving, in their personal and cultural variations and their physical, climatic and economic constraints, *After Babel* moves away from the thrill of otherness to share the tremor of the Encounter.

*Après Babel* immerses itself in six epicenters of the great contemporary flows, in which six figures evolve:

- the refugee in a transit camp in Rwanda,
- the migrant worker in the neoliberal laboratory of Abu Dhabi,
- the tourist in Tiandu Cheng in China, a copycat city of Paris,
- the foreign student on the campus of the Peoples' Friendship University in Moscow,
- the successful migrant in Toronto, a fantasized Eldorado
- of the world's poor rubbing shoulders with indigenous populations surrounded by barbed wire,
- and finally, the businessman at the World Border Security Congress in Venice, an international conference where those who thrive on blocking the movement of all the other protagonists in the film will be brought together.

100 million have fled conflict, violence, human rights violations and persecution.

In Gashora, the Rwandan transit camp for refugees exfiltrated from Libya, awaiting dispatch to the West by the UNHCR.



290 million people, 3.6% of the world's population, live in a country other than their State of birth

In Abu Dhabi, where only 8% of the global workforce is made up of nationals.



## 6.1 million international students in the world



In Moscow, at the Peoples' Friendship University campus, with scholarship students from the Global South, some of whom will become the future leaders of the next geopolitical chessboard.

In Canada, that country with such a hospitable reputation, where all the world's displaced poor want to go as if to the moon, rebuilding their existences on the ashes of the first peoples genocided, then parked in reserves on their own lands.

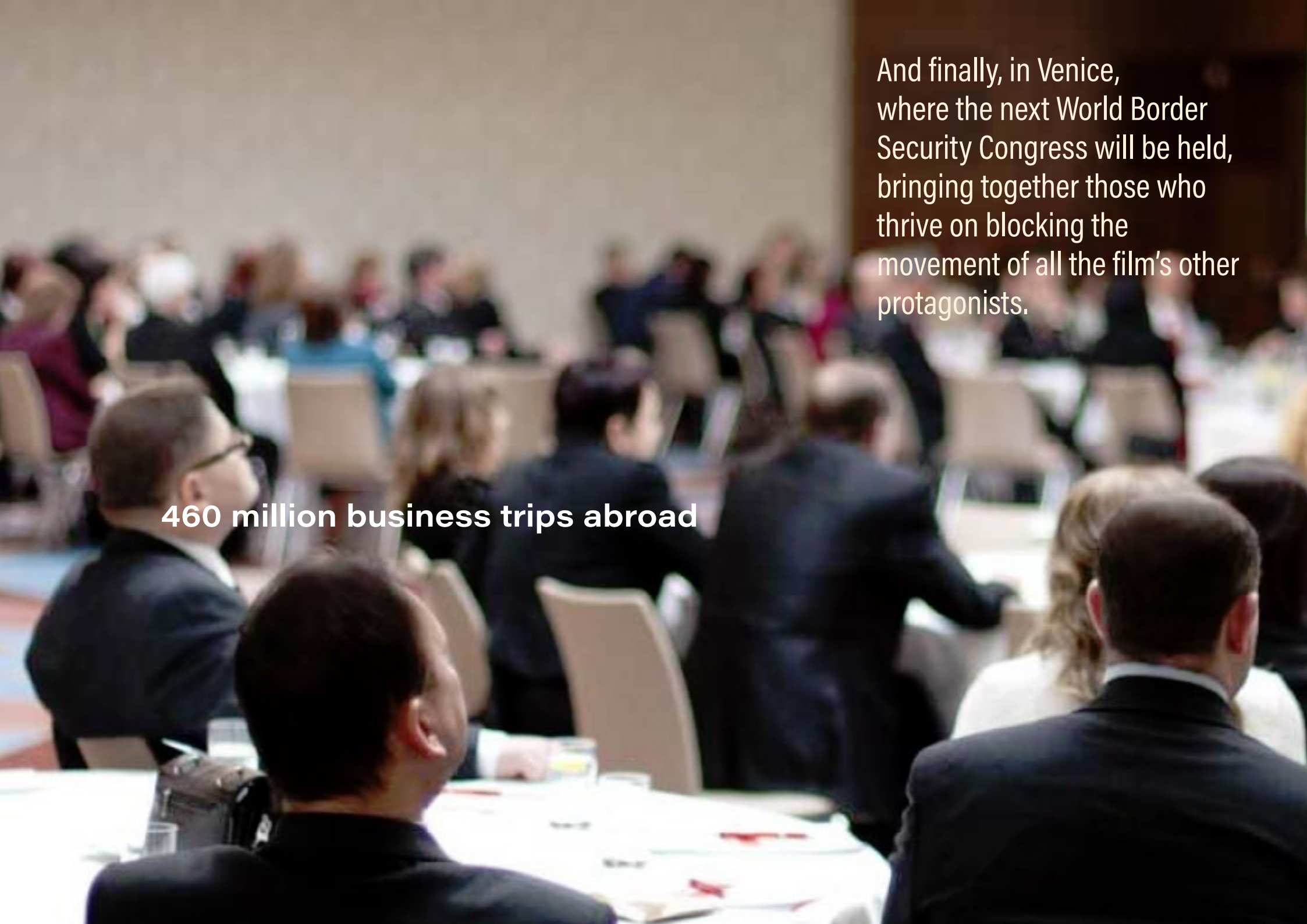
A photograph of a protest or demonstration. A person in the foreground is holding a large white sign with bold black text. The sign reads: "CANADA IS A SERIAL KILLER OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE!". The person holding the sign is wearing a blue jacket and a brown hat. In the background, there is a large crowd of people, some wearing winter clothing like hats and scarves. A pink flag with a yellow sun-like symbol is visible on the left side of the frame. The scene is outdoors, and the lighting suggests it might be daytime. The overall atmosphere is one of a public demonstration or protest.

**CANADA IS  
A SERIAL KILLER  
OF INDIGENOUS  
PEOPLE!**



In Tiandu Cheng,  
a copycat city of Paris in the  
Hangzhou region of China,  
where people marry under the  
Eiffel Tower against a backdrop  
of flying pigeons, without  
setting foot on foreign soil.

**More than 900 million international tourists in the world in 2022**



And finally, in Venice,  
where the next World Border  
Security Congress will be held,  
bringing together those who  
thrive on blocking the  
movement of all the film's other  
protagonists.

**460 million business trips abroad**



*Relation is a product which in turn produces*

Edouard Glissant

# STATEMENT

An ethos. First and foremost.  
Poetic. Resolutely poetic.  
Not just what is, but what we do with it.  
A political gesture that never asserts nor prescribes..

A cinematographic act which offers a horizontal space in a fundamentally vertical equation  
Dignity as abscissa, consent as ordinate  
To invent together  
With the people we meet, who will themselves play their own roles,  
their own lives, aware that a film will not help them out, but happy to take part in it.

A McDonald's in Beijing is not a McDonald's in Paris.  
There are no non-places.  
There are saxifrages, these little grasses that sprout in concrete,  
this life in spite of everything that upsets  
the commercial order that sells human beings and extracts all the life-blood from the planet  
the administrative order that sorts them into categories, giving them more or less rights  
Mutating them into rights-holders

And always this resolute need to move, to leave,  
movement, travel, transport, adventure, discovering oneself and the world  
this urge of air, since the dawn of time.





That makes people go away,  
that this brother and not another  
under fire of war will leave his country,  
cross the sea and the mountains at the risk of his real or sym-  
bolic death

That this sister opts for crossing the Tenere desert when her twin  
stays in the village

That this businessman will fall in love  
with this distant woman at a conference  
when he was meant to marry his cousin

All of this is a mystery, and this mystery is the pulse that will link  
all the characters of the movie

I don't care about departures, I focus on the impulse.

*« Thus were born all civilizations: by rubbing against others. Rubbing  
can be making love, it can be waging war. It burns, it stings, it trans-  
forms. »*

Valérie Osouf.

# WHY NOW!

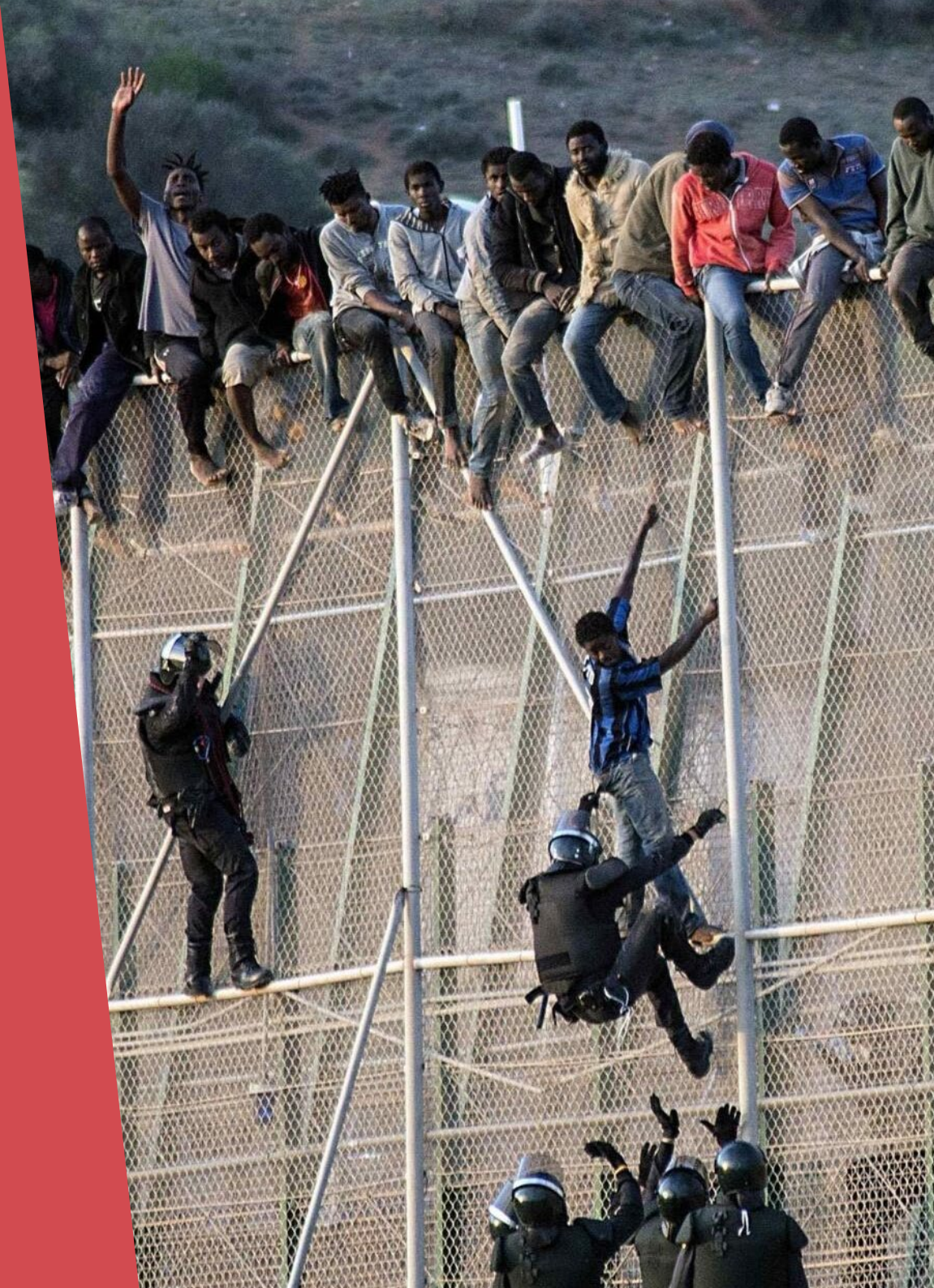
Migrations never have been so instrumentalized yet topical and restrictions on movement so deadly

In the 21st century, mobility has supplanted property as the ultimate sign of social domination

Fascism is rising again, all over the north of the globe

Because there is only ONE WORLD and ONE HUMANITY

and it's the function of Cinema to offer counter-narratives to the dominant storyline.



# ARTISTIC APPROACH

After Babel combines all that I have always wanted to express within a feature film : the blur between documentary and fiction, a highly work aesthetics that embodies the accidents and surprises of life, always in motion, with strong visual choices, the politics, the poetry, the highly ethic demand, the sublimation of my capacity of encounter, the exceeding of sociology to try to reach what's deeply common between all of humanity.

I want to direct a film that can be watched by many diverse audiences, cinephile and not, educated and not, young and old, poor and rich, not dogmatic with multiple layers of reading.

I aim for the film to incarnate Pluriversality.



# HOW?

To resist the physical obstacles faced by the characters, the camera is in constant motion, fluidly handheld, embodying the quest for freedom of movement. Long sequence-shots in permanent motion - slow and faster depending on the situation - will be recurrent. In contrast, rare steady shots will parsimoniously underline the power of megacities' architecture and States structures. Indeed, all the locations we chose are highly cinematic in this way, whether Moscow, Abu Dhabi, Tiandu Cheng or Venice. We will also portray the contrast of the seasons and climates, which highlights the sense of time as most of the characters of the film live in a permanent present hoping to migrate. This will also emphasize the sense of their vulnerabilities and the diversity of their surroundings.

In each tableau, we will recognize variations of comparable ingredients with recurring situations (everyday life): one socio-political observation immersed in the often hard life conditions of the protagonists, in exteriors, enlightening the contrast between the monumental architectures of megacities and their fragilities, and intimacy made of solidarity with other foreigners but also deep loneliness, fatigue and longing, in the interiors. The use of various screens will also be recurrent, knowing that some of our characters communicate with their relatives only through face-time or whatsapp for years but also that tik tok is the main social network amongst the migrant community in Abu Dhabi and Moscow.

The soundtrack will be inspired by the location's atmosphere and the musical choices of the protagonists, although a score and its variations will be composed for the film within a musical residency-workshop of three artists from different cultures linked by their love of contemporary jazz.

The multiplicity of languages is an important component of the film, as the local language of the country is rarely spoken (Swahili, Arabic, Pashto and Korean, etc.).

We are casting (a) main character(s) in each location, Batoutos, characterized by their non alignment on social or ethnic origins, who will be the ones provoking encounters through very diverse environments.

Each person will "act" as their own person(a). There will be no staged straightforward interviews, no testimonies but we will rather interact and observe in order to capture what transcends sociology and injustice with the quest of celebrating radical humanism. Conscious of the camera's influence over reality, we will rather use it as an advantage allowing us to perform staged situations that are dear to our protagonists. We will blend "cinéma vérité" and "mise en scène" so that one doesn't really know which is which, except at the end part of each chapter, when we will set a celebration (karaoke night, goose game etc.). The film is structured in tableaux for the viewer to build their own reflection. As a lot of documentaries dictate, we propose.

# PROJECT STAGE AND TIMELINE

Having received the support from three French regional funds as well as the French National Center for Cinema and Moving Images (Centre National du Cinéma, CNC), we were able to organize and bring to fruition scouting missions in Rwanda, Abu-Dhabi and the Caribbean island of Martinique.

The preliminary location scouting resulted in the editing of a presentation teaser and a new phase of script-writing.

Our next steps are the submission of the script to the CNC World Cinema fund in Autumn 2023 and the conclusion by then of the current negotiations with Belgian, Swiss and Dutch potential co-producers.

The two months of shooting are planned for the end of 2023, followed by six months of image editing, soundtrack composition and sound design followed by two months of image treatment, SFX and post-production.

We are aiming towards finishing the film by the end of 2024.



# KEY CREATIVE PERSONAL



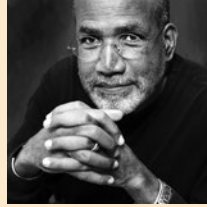
Valérie Osouf -  
director

Is a French documentary director, visual artist, activist and film programmer. She spent all her youth in Dakar, Senegal, where she studied journalism, theater and philosophy.

She directed 4 shorts and 2 feature films, the last one, *Beyond Territories*, shot in Russia, China, Mali and Mauritania, being distributed in the US by Cohen Media, alongside Abderramane Sissako's next feature next year. She exhibited at the last Berlin Contemporary Art Biennale.

She also co-curates *Tigritudes*, a 126 pan-african films program which premiered in Paris in 2022 and will tour in the UK, the US, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Rwanda, South Africa and Ivory Coast in 2023. She taught documentary filmmaking at BFA (Film academy of China) and at the Cinéfabrique.

She was a member of several film commissions and juries, including the World Cinema Fund of CNC for 8 years. Finally, she is a famous No Border activist in France, which bonds her with the characters of this film, which is gonna be her first cinematic feature.



Patrick Chamoiseau -  
writer

Born on 3 December 1953 in Fort-de-France, is a French writer from Martinique.

He is the author of novels, stories and essays, and a theorist of creolity. He has also written for the theater and the cinema. He was awarded the Goncourt Prize in 1992 for his novel *Texaco*.

After studying in mainland France, inspired by the work of Édouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau returned to Martinique and took a close interest in Creole culture. He published his first novel in 1986. He won the Goncourt Prize in 1992 for his novel *Texaco*, a vast work presenting the lives of Martiniquais over three generations.

A friend of Édouard Glissant, he sought to develop with him the concept of mondialité, with a view to translating, from a political and poetic point of view, a new conception of the world that would be based on the opening up of cultures and the protection of peoples' imaginary worlds, which are slowly disappearing under the uniformizing action of globalization.



Eyal Sivan -  
producer

is a French-Israeli filmmaker, producer, essayist, professor, and independent researcher based in Marseille, in the south of France.

His work revolves around documentary cinema and ethics, the representation of political crimes, the political use of memory, the Palestine Question, amongst other subjects.

Sivan has directed numerous internationally awarded political documentaries, among which *The Specialist*, portrait of a modern criminal, which was presented in international festivals - Berlinale (Germany), Toronto International Film Festival (Canada), Scam (France), Mostra International Del Cinema (Brazil), FilmFest München, DocAviv (Israel-Palestine) etc., Jaffa, the Orange's clockwork -Visions du réel (Switzerland).



Lucas Leconte -  
le chef opérateur

is a Paris based cinematographer who has mainly worked on narrative feature films (Guillaume Canet, Léa Fazer, Olivier Assayas..). He also collaborated with Valérie Osouf on her very first short-film shot in Dakar (in celluloid), *No Comment* (1996). As they are friends since middle school, his complicity with the director is unbreakable, hence his unquestionable commitment to this project.

<https://www.unifrance.org/annuaires/personne/309081/lucas-leconte>



Rami Nihawi -  
editor

born in Beirut in 1982, graduated in 2006 with a bachelor's degree from the Fine Arts Institute at the Lebanese University. He participated in various film and performing arts productions that focused on the social and political questions facing the "post-war" generations in the Middle East.

In 2011, with a group of independent filmmakers, he established *Sakado*, a production collective that served as a platform for various artistic productions and collaborations and where he had the chance to play different roles, such as actor, writer, editor, director, and producer. In 2021, he obtained a master's degree in artistic research at the Netherlands Film Academy.

Ibrahim Maalouf -  
Fallou NDiaye -  
Magic Malik -  
les compositeurs

Valérie did a workshop for her last film's soundtrack with Senegalese percussionist composer **Fallou Ndiaye** and Ivorian-Algerian free jazz flutist **Magic Malik** and it was such a great experience that she wants to pursue it for *After Babel*

She wants to invite lebanese clarinetist **Ibrahim Maalouf** for the creation of *After Babel* soundtrack.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1027920303951509>

<https://viavoxproduction.com/artist/magic-malik-jazz-association/>

<https://www.ibrahimmaalouf.com/en/biographie/>





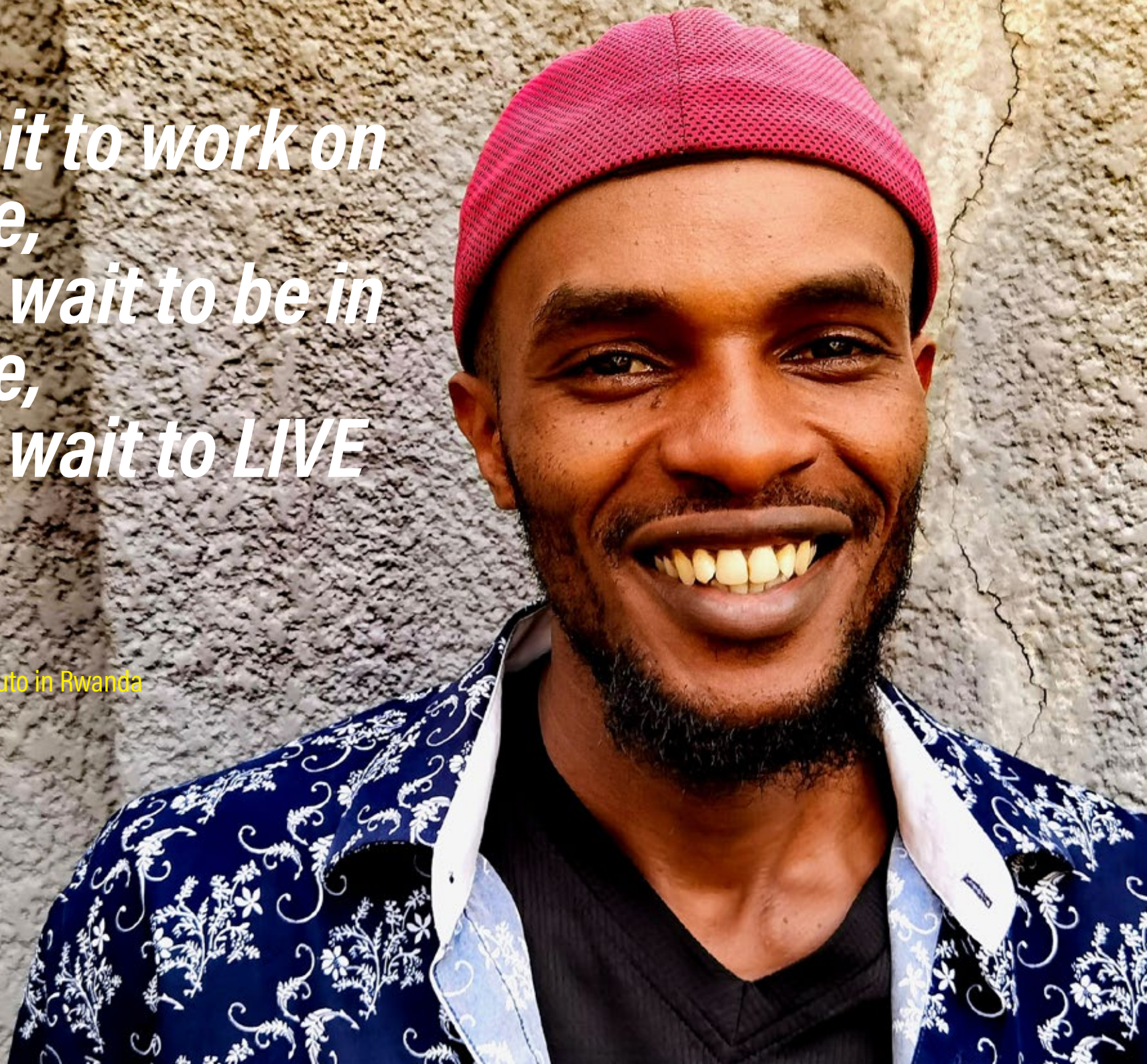
IN TERMS OF VISUAL, STYLES, NARRATIVE AND AESTHETIC REFERENCES,  
WE REFER TO

**Wang Bing** (in particular *Bitter bread*) for his talent for emerging the political without never being dogmatic and his respectful gaze on his characters.



*I can't wait to work on  
this movie,  
no I can't wait to be in  
this movie,  
no I can't wait to LIVE  
this film*

Amdjadi Mugarura Batouto in Rwanda



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## VIDÉO DE PRÉSENTATION (6 MIN)

Images tournées sans chef opérateur durant les repérages de 2019 et de 2022 (la pandémie nous a bloqués pendant 2 ans).  
Cette vidéo exprime l'intention du projet mais ne constitue en rien un teaser ni un trailer. Elle nous offre également l'opportunité d'écouter notre partenaire artistique, l'écrivain Patrick Chamoiseau.

<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/771897153>