

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Martial Frindéthié, Ph.D.

Grigris (2013)

Mahamat-Saleh Haroun (1961-)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Mahamat-Saleh Haroun is Chad's first feature film director. Born in 1961 in Abéché, Chad, Haroun studied cinema at the Conservatoire Libre du Cinéma in Paris, then journalism at the Institut Technique in Bordeaux. Haroun has produced several documentaries and short films. He has produced eight feature films, including *Bye Bye Africa* (1999), *Abouna* (2002), *Daratt* (2006), *Sex, Okra and Salted Butter* (2008), *A Screaming Man* (2010), *Grigris* (2013), *A season in France* (2017), and *Lingui, Sacred Bonds* (2021). For a brief period, from February 2017 to February 2018, Haroun held the political post of Minister of Tourism, Culture and Crafts in Chad. Haroun's films have won him several awards and international accolades. In 2011, Haroun sat on the jury for the main competition that Robert De Niro chaired at the Cannes Film Festival. In 2012, Haroun was selected as a president of the 28th International Love Film Festival at Mons.

Film *Grigris* is a 101-minute drama and romance film. The title of the film, which is the name of the main character, derives from the word “gris-gris”, a west African word for a good-luck talisman. The film deals with issues of poverty, survival, love, discrimination, friendship, etc. *Grigris* was nominated for the Palme d'Or at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival and won the Vulcan Award for the Technical Artist. Souleymane Démé won the Muhr AfricaAsia Special mention at the 2013 Dubai International Film Festival.

Background Set in the Chadian capital of N'Djamena, and against the backdrop of one of Chad's protracted civil wars, the film opens with a scene reminiscent of the American classic “Saturday Night Fever.” This is not the only element in the film that is meant to appeal to global audiences. Action movie cinephiles will certainly like the car chases, the underdog trying to outwit the unscrupulous wiseman, and the poetic justice in *Grigris*. Souleymane Démé, who plays the main protagonist, was discovered by the filmmaker in 2011, in Burkina Faso, during a dance festival. Haroun explains that until he met Démé, his intention was to make a film about oil smugglers in Chad. Once he met the young dancer, he rewrote the script to make Démé the focus of the film. Démé, who became crippled at a young age because of the incompetence of a male nurse who gave him a shot on his sciatic nerve, had never acted in a film before his performance in *Grigris*. Neither had Anaïs Monory (who plays Mimi) acted in films before. She auditioned in France, where she lives, and she spent one month in Africa before the shooting, getting adjusted and getting to know the Chadian people and culture. The languages spoken in the film are French and Chadian Arabic. The film was produced by French production company Pili.

CHARACTERS

Grigris A young man with a paralyzed left leg, who dreams of becoming a dancing star.
Mimi A young mixed-race prostitute, who befriends Grigris
Moussa A gasoline smuggler and owner of the bar in which Grigris dances every night
Ayoub Grigris' step-father, who teaches Grigris to be a tailor and a photographer
Aladji A pious cloth merchant, who buys stolen gasoline from Grigris

SYNOPSIS

Grigris, a young man from Burkina Faso with a paralyzed left leg, lives with his mother and stepfather in the Chadian capital of N'Djamena. During the day, Grigris helps his laundress mother and his tailor-cum-photographer stepfather. At night, Grigris dances in the nightclub run by Moussa, the neighborhood kingpin, who also deals in oil trafficking. Every night, Grigris makes the nightclub vibrate, attracting many customers, who come to applaud him. Grigris is only paid by the customers' tips, which is not enough to cover his needs. When Mimi, a young, mixed-race prostitute, comes to Ayoub's studio to have her photos

taken for a modeling competition, Grigris, whom she has already seen in the nightclub, is the one who receives her. Grigris is as impressed with Mimi's beauty as she is with his dancing and photographic talent. As the days go by, they become very close. When his stepfather falls seriously ill and the family need money for his medical care, Grigris asks Moussa to take him on as a member of his smuggler team. Moussa is reluctant because the job requires good swimming skills, and Grigris, he says, has a "dead leg". Moussa hires Grigris anyway, but on his first mission, Grigris almost drowns and is fired. However, Grigris manages to get himself rehired by Moussa, this time as the driver of the illegal oil truck. On his first mission, Grigris manages to outrun the police. Moussa is pleased with him and invites him to a restaurant to celebrate. Grigris arrives with Mimi, whom he introduces to Moussa as his girlfriend. Moussa tells him that Mimi has bad reputation, and that if Grigris wants to work for him, he must stop seeing Mimi. To make Moussa pay for his insult, Grigris hijacks Moussa's next oil shipment and sells it to Aladji, a local trader, swearing on the Qur'an that he lost it during a police operation. However, Grigris is denounced by one of his accomplices and beaten by Moussa's men. Mimi is also beaten by Moussa for giving shelter to Grigris. Hunted by Moussa's men, the two lovers decide to leave town and find sanctuary in the village where Fifi, Mimi's best friend, lives. The women of the village adopt Mimi as their sister and help her settle there. Nonetheless, one of Moussa's men finds Grigris and Mimi, catches Grigris and threatens to kill her. Hearing Mimi's call for help, the village women come to Grigris's rescue, beat Moussa's henchman to death, and set his body and his car ablaze. Then, joining their hands together, the village women vow never to reveal their crime to anyone until the day they die.

SCENES

Grigris dances A young disabled man named Grigris dances in a nightclub to the applause of a jubilant crowd. A young man passes a hat through the crowd to collect money for Grigris. The hat quickly fills up with banknotes. Grigris is not happy with the amount of money he receives from the tip collector. Moussa, a friend of Grigris and owner of the nightclub, asks where all the money has gone. Moussa threatens the tip collector to stop trying to cheat Grigris, or he will have to answer personally to him.



Grigris's Family Grigris lives with his mother, a devout Muslim, and his stepfather Ayoub, a non-believer. The mother comes to wake Grigris for morning prayer, but the stepfather asks the mother to let the young man sleep. Ayoub smokes and coughs a lot, and his wife asks him to smoke less. Grigris mother is a laundress. She collects the townspeople's dirty laundry, washes it in the river and returns it to them for a price. Grigris helps his mother at work. Grigris' stepfather runs a tailor shop and a photography studio. Grigris also helps him with his work.



Mimi needs photos Mimi, a young prostitute who saw Grigris dancing the night before, comes to the photography studio to have her photos taken for a modeling contest. Grigris, in charge of taking Mimi's photos, is captivated by her beauty.



Mimi likes Grigris Mimi picks up her photos. She finds them very beautiful and is pleased with Grigris' work. Grigris watches Mimi leave, in admiration. That evening Grigris sees Mimi at the club. She is with a man and looks sad. As soon as she sees Grigris, her face lights up and she waves to him. Mimi invites Grigris to dance. She asks him what his name means. He replies that it means good luck. Grigris tells Mimi that his real name is Souleymane Démé, and that he is from the country of Burkina Faso. Mimi tells Grigris that she is from a Chadian mother and a French father, whom she never knew. Mimi has to leave. Grigris wants to know where she lives. She whispers her address in Grigris' ear and gives him a kiss on the cheek.



Defending Mimi Grigris' mother hands him Ayoub's prescription. She tells her son that she has no money to buy the medicine. Grigris returns to the bar to dance and earn some money for his stepfather's medicine. Mimi is there. She is drunk and a man is pestering her. Grigris snatches her from the man's arms and puts her in a cab, which he pays for and gives the driver Mimi's address.

Step father is ill Ayoub, Grigris' step father, falls ill and is hospitalized. He is afraid that he is going to die and tells Grigris that he wants to leave him everything he has, including his tailor shop and photography studio. Grigris' mother confides in Grigris that the doctors are asking for 700,000 francs (around \$1400) to save Ayoub. Grigris goes to Aladji, a textile merchant, asking for a loan of 30,000 francs. Aladji tells him not to worry about Ayoub, because Ayoub is not his father, but merely his mother's husband. Grigris replies that Ayoub is just like his father. Aladji reluctantly hands 20,000 francs to Grigris.



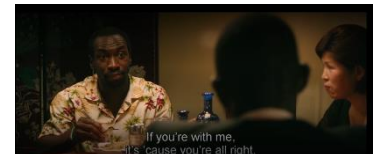
Grigris seeks a job Moussa is an oil smuggler. Grigris goes to see him about joining his team. Moussa is reluctant to hire Grigris. He tells him that the job requires that all limbs be strong and that one must be able to swim. Grigris convinces Moussa to give him a chance. Moussa hires Grigris. The oil smugglers set to work at dusk, after a short prayer to ask Allah for protection. Each man harnessed to several plastic containers of oil, they swim across the river. Grigris panics and begins to drown. The others come to his rescue. Moussa is furious and fires him as soon as they get to the shore. Grigris returns to the club. He adds a fire-eating act to his dance routine. Mimi gives Grigris her phone number and makes him promise to call her.



Grigris drives the car Grigris asks Moussa to give him a second chance. He tells Moussa to give him a driver's job. Moussa gives in one more time. Grigris is driving Moussa's getaway car. The police are on his tail. He calls Moussa, who tells him not to stop. In an alley, Moussa's accomplices block the way of the police, pretending a breakdown. Moussa is pleased that Grigris was able to outrun the police and save the pirated gasoline.

Mimi is a prostitute Mimi tells Grigris that she was turned down as a model. She says they think she is too fat to be a model. Mimi invites Grigris to her house. Grigris asks Mimi why she prostitutes herself. Mimi replies that she has to eat, and that she is not doing it for pleasure.

She is everyone's girlfriend Moussa invites Grigris to the restaurant to celebrate. Grigris brings Mimi. Moussa wants to know what Mimi is doing at the table. Grigris replies that she is his girlfriend. Moussa retorts that Mimi is everyone's woman. Mimi gets up and leaves. Grigris runs after her. Moussa orders Grigris to come back. Grigris freezes. Moussa tells Grigris to choose between Mimi and his job. Grigris returns to the table. Moussa tells Grigris that Mimi has gone through all the men, including him. Moussa tells Grigris that if he wants a woman, he must get a good one, not a whore.



Grigris steals Moussa's gasoline Grigris goes to see Aladji. He tells him he has gasoline to sell. Aladji immediately whisks him inside. Grigris diverts Moussa's gas for his own profit. Grigris drops a bundle of banknotes into Ayoub's bed. Ayoub is so thrilled he almost loses his breath.



Moussa threatens Grigris I will kill you if you lied Grigris bangs his head on the wall until he bleeds profusely. He then goes to Moussa and tells him that the police caught him, beat him up and confiscated all his gasoline. Moussa is furious and beats Grigris. He tells him he does not believe his story, and that if he finds out that Grigris has lied to him, he will kill him. Moussa sends one of his henchmen to tell Grigris that he



must swear on the Qur'an to prove his innocence. Grigris accepts Moussa's proposal.

Grigris is beaten up One of Grigris' accomplices confesses that Grigris has diverted the gasoline for his own profit. Grigris is snatched from a street in the middle of the night and driven into the bush by one of Moussa's men. He is beaten and then abandoned, with orders to bring back the gasoline in two days if he wants to live. Grigris arrives at Mimi's house, bleeding. Mimi tells Grigris that he can spend the night at her place, but that she will not be back until early morning. Mimi comes home puffy-eyed and bruised. She has obviously been beaten. She tells Grigris that it was Moussa who hit her, and that he knows Grigris is hiding in her house. She says that Moussa promises to kill them both if Grigris does not return his money. Mimi advises Grigris to seek help from the police, and that she cannot hide him forever. Grigris leaves Mimi's. Moussa's men track and intimidate Grigris. He decides to leave town.

The escape Grigris goes to fetch Mimi. They both decide to leave town on a motorcycle. They drive until they run out of gas, and then walk the rest of the way. Mimi is sick. She vomits. The two fugitives end up in a small village. Fifi, Mimi's best friend, sees them arrive and runs to embrace Mimi. Grigris introduces himself to Fifi as Mimi's husband.



Mimi is pregnant Fifi asks Mimi if Grigris knows who she really is. Mimi says nothing. Fifi assumes that Mimi has not told Grigris that she is a prostitute. She advises Mimi never to tell Grigris. Mimi tells Grigris that she's pregnant and doesn't want to keep a child who will never know who its father is. Grigris replies that he will marry her and be the child's father. Mimi tells Grigris that sooner or later, he will resent her for her past.

Welcome The village women dance and sing to celebrate Mimi's arrival in their community. They tell her that from now on she is a sister to them. The village women thank Mimi for choosing their village as her own. They bring Mimi provisions. They bless the child Mimi is carrying in her womb.



Blown cover Grigris and Mimi adjust to their new life. Grigris teaches the village children to dance. Grigris sees Moussa's henchman's car circling the village. He is worried, but keeps it to himself. Moussa's henchman spots Mimi and Grigris. He gets out of the car and chases after them.



This is our secret Mimi calls for help. The village women sound the alarm by ululating. They order Moussa's man to free Grigris. He points his pistol at the women. A woman hits him with a club, and the other women pounce on him and beat him to death. The women join hands in allegiance. They repeat in chorus, "This is our secret until death." Then they put the body of Moussa's man in the car and set it on fire.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

GRIGRIS Grigris is a young man grateful for the fatherly love of his mother's husband Ayoub. Determined to help Ayoub meet his medical expenses, Grigris performs fearless; bolds acts that earn him the wrath of the neighborhood kingpin.

Determined Grigris has his left leg paralyzed. In the tough race to survive the vicissitudes of life faced by his compatriots, Grigris starts out with a disadvantage. However, in his determination to become an international dancer, Grigris does not let himself be demoralized. Instead he uses his "dead leg" as an asset, like an artistic prop, twirling it around his neck or pointing it at the audience like a machine gun. With his gravity-defying movements, Grigris conquers the crowds in his neighborhood on his way to success.

Bold When Moussa humiliates Mimi and tries to control Grigris' life, choosing who he can and cannot associate with, Grigris decides to make Moussa pay for his pretentiousness by hitting him where it hurts, that is, his bottom line. Grigris steals Moussa's gasoline and pretends that it has been confiscated by the

police. It is a reckless act to attack the business of a violent thug of Moussa's caliber. Unsurprisingly, Moussa, who suspects Grigris of making him look like a fool, beats him and demands that he prove his innocence by swearing on the Qur'an. Again, where most Muslim Chadians would have shied away, Grigris boldly lays his hand on the Qur'an and proclaims his innocence, and defying Allah's wrath.

Grateful "Ayoub is not your father. He is merely your mother's husband." This is what Aladji says to Grigris when the young man goes to ask him for a loan to pay his stepfather's medical bills. "Ayoub is like a father to me." This is Grigris' response to Aladji. For Grigris, the man who, along with his mother, has protected him from the pitfalls of a country constantly at war and given him the tools of survival (his skills as a tailor and photographer) deserves as much, if not more, consideration than his biological father. Grigris is a young man grateful to Ayoub for having loved and raised him as his son, which explains Grigris' determination to find the money to pay Ayoub's medical bills.

MIMI Mimi is an isolated, melancholic girl. She hides her distress in alcohol and the hazy atmosphere of N'Djamena's nightclubs. In Grigris, she finds a companion of misfortune with whom she can share her sorrows, and who pulls her out of her solitude.

Melancholic Mimi dreams of becoming a model. Her dreams have so far evaporated, forcing her to prolong her life as a prostitute. Mimi is not happy with the work she does. The customers treat her with contempt, and she has to drink to put up with them. Indeed, when Grigris asks her why she works as a prostitute, Mimi replies that she does not enjoy it, but she has to eat. Only when Mimi is with Grigris does she experience moments of joy and show glimpses of a smile. However, these moments are quickly interrupted by the wickedness of Moussa and his henchmen, who relentlessly hunt her and Grigris down.

Lonely Despite the many men she meets and comforts in the city of N'Djamena, Mimi is a lonely young woman. Abandoned by a father she never knew, estranged from a mother who appears nowhere in the film, Mimi's only friends are her fellow prostitutes and the regulars at the bar. But these friendships are never really sincere, as Moussa's behavior towards her proves. In the end, it is in Fifi's village, where she and Grigris go to hide from Moussa's henchmen, that Mimi finds true friendship with the women of the village, who adopt her as their sister.

MOUSSA Moussa is a hypocritical, violent and intolerant character. His only friends are those he can take advantage of. He is tactless in his dealings with others, and his language is often hurtful. He is willing to kill for money.

Hypocrite Moussa is a hypocritical man. He tells the customers of his nightclub that Grigris is his friend and protégé. But Moussa dislikes Grigris and tolerates him only because the latter helps him fill up his nightclub every night by attracting customers with his dancing. This is the same feeling Moussa has towards Mimi, who is only important to him insofar as customers follow the young prostitute into Moussa's bar and become assiduous consumers of the liquor he sells there. On the other hand, Moussa, the violent and intolerant gasoline smuggler, who can hardly claim to be a man without reproach, all dressed in white, sitting in the mosque, next to the local imam, asks Grigris to prove his innocence by swearing on the Qur'an. This is the epitome of hypocrisy.

Abusive Moussa is an abusive character. The language he uses to address Grigris and Mimi, even in their presence, is hurtful. Moussa calls Grigris a "dead leg" when the young man goes to ask him for a job, meaning that he has no use for a man like him. Similarly, when he sees Grigris in Mimi's company, Moussa loses his temper and tells Grigris that Mimi is everyone's woman, a whore, who does not deserve to be in their company. He threatens to fire Grigris if Grigris continues to see Mimi.

Violent At the beginning of the film, Moussa pins against the wall a man who has sought to cheat Grigris with his money. At that time, one might think that Moussa is the masked avenger, who comes to the rescue of the unfortunate. But all that changes when Moussa attacks the most defenseless members of society. He uses violent words against Grigris and Mimi. He beats Grigris when the latter comes to tell him that he has lost his shipment of gasoline to the police. And he beats Mimi for granting Grigris sanctuary. When Grigris and Mimi flee from his wrath, Moussa sends his henchman after them, with instructions to eliminate them.

AYOUB Ayoub is an honest worker and a good father and guide to his step-son, Grigris. Ayoub teaches Grigris two honest trades, and promises to leave him his sewing and photography workshops, so that the young man can start life on the right foot.

Mentoring Ayoub, Grigris' stepfather, is an affectionate teacher to the young disabled man. In marrying Grigris' mother, Ayoub also adopted her disabled son, whom he raised as his own. Ayoub, who is a tailor and photographer, trained Grigris in both trades, giving him the skills to take charge of his own life in a world where he arrives, disadvantaged.

Honest Ayoub is an honest man who sits all day pedaling his Singer sewing machine or taking photos in his studio, trying to earn his daily bread. A non-believer, Ayoub leads a more honest life than his compatriots, like Moussa and Aladji, who flaunt their Muslim faith but do not hesitate to dabble in corruption.

ALADJI Aladji is a dishonest and avaricious man. He doesn't like to part with his money, and if he happens to lend it to someone, he is quick to get it back one way or another. Underneath his honest merchant exterior, he is steeped in the murky waters of corruption in N'Djamena.

Dishonest Beneath his honest cloth merchant exterior, Aladji is nothing but a dishonest speculator. Grigris knows this. So, when Grigris tries to sell the drums of gasoline stolen from Moussa, he turns to Aladji. And Aladji does not hesitate for a second to accept the stolen goods and pay Grigris in cash, taking care to pay himself first for the loan he had given Grigris earlier.

Avaricious Aladji is an insensitive man who keeps his pennies close to his chest. Grigris goes to him for a loan to help Ayoub with his medical expenses. So as not to have to give Grigris the money, Aladji wants to convince him that he should not worry about Ayoub, who is only his mother's husband and not his father. And when he finally agrees to help Grigris, Aladji only gives him 2/3 of what the young man is asking for.

THEMES

Religion (transgression of) Chad is a predominantly Muslim country. Haroun explains that the interference of religion in people's lives is a social nuisance, which contrasts with the hypocrisy of the Chadians, illustrated in various acts of transgression of religious principles. Grigris would like to sleep in after an eventful night at the nightclub. But his mother disagrees, waking him up for morning prayers at the call of the muezzin. Grigris' stepfather, who is more liberal, asks his mother to let Grigris rest. The nightclub Grigris frequents is the locus of religious transgression. At night, young people indulge in alcohol, dancing and lewdness. Mimi sells her body to the highest bidder. And when the day comes, they all dress up as pious Muslims. Moussa and Aladji are the most illustrative examples of this transgression of religion. Aladji, by name, is a man who made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and who came back holy and respectable, a wise man for his community. A fabric seller by day, Aladji turns into a vile dealer in stolen fuel by night. As for Moussa, a violent criminal and a gasoline trafficker by night, by day he appears dressed in all-white at the imam's side, absorbed in piety, asking Allah's justice against Grigris, who has stolen the object of his illegal trade. Haroun insists that the duplicity of the film's characters with regard to religion is not merely anecdotal; it characterizes the majority of Chadians.

Poverty "Why do you do this job (prostitution)?" This is the question Grigris asks Mimi, as he sits on her sofa the first time they meet. "Mimi has to eat," she replies. "I do not do it out of pleasure." To eat, Mimi sells her body to men. It's at this price that she can dodge the poverty whose signs are utterly conspicuous in the city of N'Djamena, the Chadian capital. Indeed, although rich in geological resources such as oil and uranium, Chad is a poverty-stricken country whose lack is showcased in the capital N'Djamena. The dirt streets of N'Djamena, which Grigris and his mother laboriously walk along, pushing and pulling their laundry cart, are cracked, transformed into open gutters into which the city's sewage and refuse flow. N'Djamena is a poor city with a poor population. While Grigris' mother, her back bent over in the river, tirelessly washes the neighborhood's laundry for a few coins, Grigris' stepfather toils away on his old Singer, foot-powered machine in the workshop that doubles as a photo studio. The work barely pays

for the day's food. And when Ayoub falls ill, the family feels anguish for never being able to raise the funds needed for his treatment. To help his parents, Grigris returns to the bar to put to work his body already scarred by his disability. Just as Grigris sells his body, Mimi also sells hers by sleeping with men for whom she feels no affection. The only ones who seem to do well in this country are members of the government and those who, like Moussa the smuggler and Aladji the trader and occasional smuggler, have learned to cheat. Grigris tries his hand at their game by stealing Moussa's shipment of gasoline, but he is quickly caught, beaten, and run out of town.

Oil (curse of) Moussa could have been a smuggler of cigarettes, drugs or anything else. Mahamat-Saleh wanted him to be an oil smuggler. This is no casual choice. With this choice, the filmmaker intends to raise the question of the paradox of oil, or the curse of oil in Chad. Chad is a major oil producer. However, due to a phenomenon of illegal draining, this important resource finds its way onto regional and international markets without its revenues positively changing the living conditions of the population. For many observers, oil is the manna that finances armed conflicts in Chad. The Chadian government, on the other hand, claims that Chadian oil educates and heals Chadians. And yet, Chad's youth, as shown in Grigris' character and Moussa's employees, are not educated, and the population, as in Ayoub's case, can only look after itself at the price of insurmountable financial sacrifices. In fact, Chadian oil is traded and sold under the radar, enriching the most crooked and criminal of the likes of Moussa and Aladji. Chadian oil is like the oil of many African countries. It is a curse that, unlike the oil of the Gulf States, which lifts everybody up, impoverishes the poorest and enriches the most corrupt members of society.

Discrimination Grigris and Mimi seem to have found each other because they are both outsiders, invisible in Chadian society, visible only in the dark of night when they are selling their bodies, Mimi by prostituting herself, and Grigris by dancing. Their stars shine in the night sky of N'Djamena, in the subdued, smoky atmosphere of the nightclubs, and die as soon as the sun rises. Grigris is the darling of N'Djamena's night owls, who vibrate to the rhythm of his frenzied movements. But when the day comes, Grigris is confronted with his social inadequacy. The paralysis of Grigris' left leg makes it difficult for him to navigate the rocky, uneven pathways of N'Djamena, and pushing his mother's cart becomes an arduous chore. Once the day has come and the music has died down, those who adored Grigris just a few hours earlier now view him as a nuisance. Moussa tells Grigris, who asks him for work to pay his father-in-law's hospital bill, that he cannot hire a man with a dead leg. Mimi, too, who attracts men at night like light attracts fireflies, is deserted by them at daybreak. She becomes the shame they do not want to associate with. Ayoub scoffs at her when she shows up at his studio for photos to be sent to a modeling contest. Ayoub does not believe Mimi's story and watches her leave, dubious. A prostitute, for sure, he thinks, but certainly not a model. Thus, when Mimi's eyes meet Grigris' in broad daylight, and she senses his admiration, Mimi clings to him and he to her, like a lifeline; two outcasts who decide to make their journey together in order to beat the hostile world of N'Djamena.

Bonds/Secrets *Grigris* announces a theme that Haroun will develop in greater depth in another of his films, *Lingui* (2021), notably the theme of secrecy and allegiance that cement the women's relationship. Indeed, while all the men are out in the fields, and the village in which Grigris and Mimi found shelter from Moussa's men is animated only by its women and children, one of Moussa's men manages to track down the fugitives and catch Grigris. Mimi then calls the village women, who, armed with clubs, come to Grigris' rescue and order Moussa's right-hand man to free him. And when Moussa's hitman refuses to listen, the women, who days before had adopted Mimi as their sister, beat the man to death, put his body in his car and set it ablaze. Then, joining hands, the women swear together that what has just happened will remain their secret until death. Here, Haroun emphasizes the importance of the *lingui*, the secret that unites women in certain parts of Chad, and which they guard for generations without a single whisper, no matter what happens, like a badge of membership of their group. Thus, the murder of Moussa's henchman will remain a secret that none of the men in the village will learn, except Grigris, who benefitted from the women's act, and who has no vested interest in the secret being revealed. Haroun insists that in a male-dominated Chadian society women's *lingui* allows them to even the odds.

Survival How to survive in a society where the state is dysfunctional seems to be one of the questions at the heart of the film. All the survival strategies in *Grigris* seem to be summed up in a single concept: "la débrouillardise" in French or 'hustling', the ability of the individuals to use their means of persuasion or

deception to make the most of the situations they find themselves in. This formula for resourcefulness has developed informal entrepreneurship in Africa to a level never seen before in the world. Grigris' parents, Mimi, Moussa, and Grigris himself are all players in an informal sector that is poorly regulated and often escapes government control. The crab basket of the informal sector includes those who toil within the law. These are the less fortunate, those who assume that people are generally honest, and that by playing the game of trade and exchange honestly, they will one day make a profit. Alongside these honest people, who wonder why fate always deals them a bad hand, there are those, like Moussa and Aladji, who deal from the bottom of the deck, cheat fate, and rarely lose. They always have money at their disposal, but are reluctant to share. Their relationships with others are always tainted by selfishness and a will to power. Moussa says Grigris is his friend, but this is a lie. Moussa loves Grigris only insofar as his dance performances fill his bar. The same goes for Mimi, who only interests Moussa to the extent that she brings booze consumers to his bar. The struggle for survival in N'Djamena is a rat race, where the most honest get eaten up by the most crooked.

Friendship Friendship, the film teaches us, is the alliance that enables people to overcome these difficulties of life. Chad has been at war for almost fifty years, and this film, shot against the backdrop of war, shows that the challenges facing Chadians are enormous, and that alliances are necessary to overcome them. Grigris, with his physical handicap and limited education, will need the friendship of others more than any other Chadian. The viewer is therefore somewhat relieved when, at the beginning of the film, Moussa, the local wise man, warns those who want to take advantage of Grigris that the young dancer is his friend and that they had better treat him well. However, the viewer is quickly disillusioned when he or she realizes that, in fact, it is Moussa who, instead of protecting Grigris, is exploiting the young disabled man, even threatening to kill him, when he no longer needs him. Moussa, Grigris' pompously self-proclaimed friend, paradoxically becomes the one against whom Grigris must protect himself. For this, Grigris can count on the support of Mimi, also a victim of Moussa's, exploited, scorned and beaten up by Moussa. Grigris and Mimi's friendship, forged through misfortune and the fact that they are both outcasts, enables them to overcome the challenges in their path, and teaches us one thing in particular: true friendship is forged through shared experience, where the subject has every reason to question the other in these terms: "You too?"

Love *Grigris* tackles the theme of love from several angles. Grigris has an obvious love for his parents, his mother and his stepfather, Ayoub. When Ayoub falls ill and the hospital demands 700,000 francs (approximately \$1400) for his treatment, Grigris tries to raise the money by any means necessary. Grigris asks for a loan from Aladji, a local shopkeeper, who reminds him that Ayoub is only his mother's husband, not his father, before reluctantly lending him 20,000 francs. For Grigris, Ayoub is his father and deserves his filial love. A friendship also develops between Grigris and Mimi, the young nightclub prostitute, which soon blossoms into a romantic relationship. Grigris and Mimi go through difficult times, which only their love can withstand. Beaten by the henchmen of Moussa, the gasoline smuggler, for cheating Moussa, Grigris finds refuge with Mimi, who is also beaten by Moussa for taking Grigris into her home. The two young people know that their love (that of a prostitute and a disabled man) is not only ill-judged in N'Djamena, but also threatened by those who feel outraged by the "anomaly" it represents. To live out their romance, Grigris and Mimi decide to go into exile, covering their tracks behind them. In the village where they take refuge, Grigris and Mimi are quickly caught by one of Moussa's henchmen, who has been tracking them since they left N'Djamena, and who threatens to kill them. But it is another act of love, the solidarity of the village women, who have made Mimi their sister, that saves them. Called to the rescue by Mimi, the women, her sisters, come running and beat their tormentor to death.

Betrayal Mimi and Grigris are two characters betrayed by society, who decide to take their revenge on this cruel society. Born of a Chadian mother and a French father, Mimi never knew her father, who abandoned her mother before she was born. Mimi clearly grew up in a society in which her integration as the mixed-race daughter of an absent father was not easy. Although beautiful and charming, Mimi is the 'other' in Chadian society, the one whose difference is constantly pointed out. Moreover, her childhood with a single mother ill-prepared her for a fulfilling life; so, Mimi turns to prostitution to earn her daily bread. The men Mimi consoles in her arms at night, like Moussa, become monsters by day, avoiding her, judging her, insulting her and beating her. Moussa forbids Grigris to associate with Mimi, because, he says, she is a "whore". Grigris also feels this betrayal from those who claim to be his friends by night, but

reject him by day. Moussa, who draws people into his bar thanks to Grigris' performances, has no regard for Grigris when he comes to ask him for a job. He calls Grigris a failure, a dead leg, and when he agrees to give Grigris a job, he does not hesitate to get rid of him on the slightest pretext. Under these conditions, Grigris feels that Moussa is not worthy of his loyalty. When the opportunity arises for Grigris to betray Moussa, he does so: Grigris misappropriates Moussa's gasoline shipment for his own use.

Disability Haroun deals with the condition of the disabled in Africa in general, and in Chad in particular, to the extent that one considers the main protagonist of Grigris to be a Chadian (he is from Burkina Faso). If Grigris speaks little and barely correct French, this is because the character, both in real life and in the fictional role he plays, has spent very few years, if any, in the formal school system. Grigris speaks the kind of French common in French-speaking Africa, spontaneously forged in the public square as the lingua franca of the unschooled populace. In Africa, the physically and mentally challenged are often seen as non-schoolable, because the schools lack the infrastructure to accommodate them. And if the disabled do persist in going to school, the ridicule of their peers and their difficulties in navigating a hostile landscape and architecture quickly discourage them from attending, relegating them to the status of socially non-insertable, and throwing them into poverty. In Africa, the disabled all too often find themselves begging at crossroads and in front of mosques. Grigris, for his part, has decided to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. But watching Grigris push his mother's laundry cart through the alleyways, already a trap for the non-disabled, is an arduous task for both him and the viewer. It is also difficult to watch Grigris being called a dead leg or half a man when he goes to ask Moussa for a job. Through Grigris, Haroun denounces the failure of African states to integrate the disabled into the social fabric, thus wasting - as Grigris' talent proves - a valuable part of their human resources.

Self-confidence In an interview at the Cannes Film Festival, Souleymane D  m   (who plays the character of Grigris) casually confides that his own disability is the result of an injection to his sciatic nerve as a child. Sitting next to D  m  , filmmaker Haroun adds, with marked anger, that it was the work of an incompetent nurse that crippled D  m   for life. Clearly, while D  m   speaks without recrimination, it is those who look on from the outside who, more royalist than the king, want to take offense at his fate. D  m  , like Grigris, the character he plays in the film, does not question his handicap; he does not make a fuss about it. Having accepted his difference from an early age, just as one accepts being born here rather than there, of such and such parents rather than others, Grigris seems to live his life, like any other Chadian, naturally able to do certain things and unable to do others, as is the case for all humans. It is Moussa who calls Grigris a "dead leg" and asks him if he can swim or how he intends to drive a car. For Grigris, these questions don't arise in terms of his disability; they simply arise as they might for any other person, whether disabled or not. He is a man in the Chadian society as it presents itself to him and to everyone else. The answer to how to navigate this society is within him. The question of his ability to navigate it lies elsewhere, within the presumptuous, "superior beings", who arrogate to themselves the right to pity him or to make his existence their struggle. This question is not part of his preoccupation.

Trade/commerce Trade could be first social experience of man, and the one that will outlive all other human experiences. This is why war has never stopped trade. In N'Djamena, despite the sounds of shelling, far from suggesting that the trade that takes place there is necessarily fair, everyone always has something to give to and receive from the other. In this market of give and take, the object of exchange is not always common and ordinary. It is sometimes quite unusual. There are the legal, street-side businesses of Ayoub, the tailor and photographer, his wife, the laundrywoman, and Aladji, the textile merchant. But it also happens that Aladji falls into the camp of underground trade, whose players include Moussa, Grigris, Mimi and the Chadian government. Moussa smuggles equally in gasoline and human bodies. When Haroun's camera pans over the black, tight muscles, glistening with gasoline residue, of Moussa's smugglers, swimming in the dark waters of the river, pulling gasoline cans moored to their bodies, what the filmmaker intends to show is, beyond the oil trade, the more shameful trade in flesh, which enriches speculators like Moussa and shady government officials. The oil trade is not just an exchange of barrels and petrodollars. Below the surface, however, there is a whole flesh-and-blood trade in which people sell their muscles at vile prices to keep this oil flowing, which in Chad does not feed the populace. But the people, betrayed by their oil, have to eat. And to eat, like Mimi, this populace sells its flesh in Moussa's bars. To eat, Mimi offers her beautiful body to those who, for one reason or another, can only pay for love with cold cash. And Grigris offers his body to the mesmerized gaze of the onlookers,

a black body with tight muscles upon which yellow flames roll. Such is the trade that takes place in N'Djamena under the thunder of the bombs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. "Grigris", the name of the main actor, is inspired by the term gris-gris, which in West Africa refers to a good-luck talisman. Is this name appropriate to the character in the film? Justify your answer.
2. The character Mimi is both antisocial and sympathetic. What message does the filmmaker intend to convey in this way?
3. Some of the film's characters and ideas do not seem to have been fully developed. For instance, the film leaves us wanting to know more about Ayoub's fate. Can you name a few unfinished elements and explain their shortcomings?
4. Mimi tells Grigris that she does not want to keep her pregnancy because she does not want a child who, like her, will grow up not knowing his father. What do you think of Mimi's position? Elaborate on your answer.
5. To what extent is *Grigris* a feminist film?
6. Haroun states that all his films have a political dimension. What is the political dimension of *Grigris*?