

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Martial Frindéthié, Ph.D.

LINGUI, THE SACRED BONDS / Lingui, les liens sacrés (2021) Mahamat-Saleh Haroun (1961-)

OVERVIEW

Author 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 and then journalism at the Institut Technique in Bordeaux. Haroun has produced several documentaries and short films. He has also produced eight feature films, including *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 also selected as a president of the 28th International Love Film Festival at Mons.

Film Among other themes, *Lingui* (which means "secret" in Chadian Arabic) touches on two sensitive issues in Chadian society, namely abortion and the excision of young girls, that is, clitoridectomy. Abortion is forbidden by Chad's legal and religious authorities, but it is performed every day in secrecy, sometimes at great risk to the health of young girls. Excision is also forbidden, but it is practiced openly, and not without casualties. *Lingui* campaigns for the legalization of abortion and the criminalization of excision. The aim remains the same: to protect young girls' lives. *Lingui* won multiple awards, among which the Hamburg Producers Award, at the 2021 Hamburg Film Festival, the National Board of Review Award, in the USA, in 2021, the Interfedi Award for the Respect of Minority Rights and Laity, at the 2021 Torino Film Festival.

Background *Lingui* is set in Ndjamena, the capital city of Chad. The 87-minute drama is a multi-country co-production. The film's cast is made up of local actors, who have appeared in other films by Haroun. The language spoken principally in the film is French, with some rare instances of Chadian Arabic. In making this film, the filmmaker insists that his intention was to be on the side of women.

CHARACTERS

Amina A 30-year-old single mother, who tries to get an abortion for her 15-year-old daughter
Maria Amina's daughter, who gets pregnant as a result of a rape by her elderly neighbor.
Brahim An elderly neighbor of Amina, who rapes Maria and gets her pregnant
The Imam The Imam of the community, who wants to run Amina's and Maria's lives

SYNOPSIS

Amina is a thirty-year-old Chadian woman who has been raising her daughter Maria (whom she affectionately calls 'Mamita') alone for the past fifteen years. Amina makes tea stoves out of recycled iron from used tires, which she sells door-to-door on the streets of Ndjamena. It is a thankless job that barely pays enough to survive, and Amina is tempted by the marriage proposal from Brahim, an elderly neighbor. She just wants to make sure that Brahim really loves her, a question the old man has never really answered. Over the past few days, Amina has noticed that Maria has changed. Her mood is melancholic. Her mother's efforts to get Maria to talk fail, and Maria decides to shadow Amina, who escapes her when she takes a motorcycle cab. Amina goes to her daughter's high school, where she learns from the headmistress that Maria has been expelled from school a few days ago for being pregnant, and that the school is keen to protect its honor. The devastated mother questions her daughter, who refuses to tell her the name of the man who impregnated her, and who is determined to abort the child because, she says, she does not want to end up like her mother. After a few slaps and shouts to convince Maria that an abortion is illegal and therefore out of the question, the mother concludes that,

unless she accepts that her daughter lead the difficult life she herself has been leading, an abortion is the only solution. Escaping the vigilance of the inquisitive imam and nosey neighbors, mother and daughter set out to find an abortion provider. After a failed attempt in a clandestine clinic, Amina finds a nurse who performs Maria's abortion in her own home and provides the young girl with a certificate of miscarriage, allowing her to return to school. Maria finally confesses to her mother that she became pregnant as a result of rape by Brahim, the elderly neighbor who has been courting Amina for some time, promising to be a protective husband to her and a caring father to her daughter. Armed with a club, Amina savagely beats Brahim in an alley, leaving him certainly crippled for life. Amina promises her daughter that they will leave the neighborhood.

SCENES

Single Mom's Hard work Amina salvages wires from used tires. She uses them to make small tea stoves, which she sells on the streets of Ndjamen, the Chadian capital.



Brahim wants to talk to Amina Amina goes to her neighbor Brahim's store to pay back the money he lent her. Brahim insists he would like to talk to her in his back room. Amina hesitates, then she joins him there. Brahim points out to Amina that they've known each other for 10 years. He kisses Amina's dress and puts his hand on her shoulder. She asks him if he loves her. Brahim explains that everyone scorns Amina for being a single mother but that he will love her and her daughter Maria and provide them with shelter and protection. Amina replies that they need no protection, and asks him again if he really loves her.



Maria is pregnant Amina's daughter Maria, whom she affectionately calls Mamita, is melancholic. Her mother wants to know why. Maria refuses to talk to her mother. Maria withdraws into her room. Brahim calls out to Amina. She tells him that she is in a hurry. Maria has nightmares. Her mother wakes her up and wants to comfort her in her arms. She recoils and refuses to be touched. Maria skips school Amina follows Maria on her way to school. Maria does not enter the schoolyard. She takes a motorcycle cab to an unknown destination. Her mother tries to catch up, but it is too late. Amina wants to know what Maria does all day. The headmistress tells her that Maria was expelled a few days ago. Maria is pregnant, and her condition is tarnishing the school's reputation.



Who is the father? Maria comes home. Her mother greets her with a slap. Amina tells her daughter that she should be ashamed of being pregnant at her age. Amina calms down and begs her daughter to tell her who is responsible for her pregnancy. Maria refuses to say a word. Maria tells her mother that she wants an abortion. Amina starts sobbing and tells Maria that she knows full well that this is impossible. Amina tells Maria that Islam forbids it. Maria replies that she could care less about Islam, that she wants an abortion, and that it is her body that is at stake.



Maria runs away Amina starts beating Maria. The girl runs out of the house. Amina goes after her daughter through the streets of Ndjamen. Maria is nowhere to be found, and she does not answer her phone. Maria wanders for a while and ends up at one of her schoolmate's birthday party. Maria's schoolmate tells her that rumors on social media have her pregnant. Maria gets upset and leaves the party.



Maria almost drowned Amina resumes her search until nightfall. When she returns home, a young man accompanies Maria to the house. Maria has tried to drown herself and has been rescued by a group of swimmers. Brahim watches Maria's arrival from a distance.



I do not want to be like you Maria tells her mother that she does not want to be like her. She tells her that everyone thinks Amina is a loose woman, and no one respects her. Amina explains to her daughter that she, too, was expelled from school because of her pregnancy, abandoned by Maria's father, the only man she ever knew and loved. She explains that she has been banished by her entire family. Amina and her daughter embrace.



A frightened doctor Amina lies awake thinking all night. The next day, she accompanies her daughter to the clinic for an abortion. The doctor is afraid of being arrested and ruining his career, and refuses to help them. Maria gets angry and accuses the doctor of being a male chauvinist. The doctor says he knows some nurses who would do the operation for 1 million francs (about \$2000). Amina accepts without hesitation, even though she has no money.



Not without risks Amina goes to see a traditional practitioner. She explains that she wants an abortion for her 15-year-old daughter. The practitioner says she can help her, but she makes no secret of the risks, which she says are common, but are Allah's will. Amina looks unsettled. Her gaze wanders over the traditional practitioner's antiquated work tools. The woman tells Amina that she also performs fake excisions on girls whose parents are against clitoridectomy but do not want to let people know.



Not enough money Amina and her daughter are making stoves to sell. Sitting in front of the mosque, the men watch them walk by with puzzled looks on their faces. Amina and her daughter evaluate their sales. They realize that they will never be able to raise the million francs they need by selling stoves.



To seduce Brahim Amina has her hair and face done. She puts on a beautiful blue dress and goes to Brahim's house. She tells him to sit down and starts undressing in front of him. Brahim becomes increasingly offended as Amina undresses. Brahim asks Amina what the matter is. She replies that he always wanted to make love to her, and now he can do it for a million francs. Brahim tells her she should be ashamed. He gets up and leaves her alone in the room.



Yes, I smoke too Maria catches her mother smoking. Amina confesses that she smokes, and no longer intends to hide. Amina puts on some groovy music and starts dancing.

At the Mosque: Men are in, women are out Amina goes to the mosque. She prays outside while all the men pray inside. After the prayer, the imam confronts her. He wants to know why she missed the morning prayer. Amina replies that she was tired. The imam reproaches her for blaspheming and advises her not to miss any more prayer sessions.

Imam "lectures" Amina The imam arrives unannounced at Amina's house. Maria greets him. The imam tells Maria that she is now a woman, and should start attending the mosque. Amina emerges from her room, wearing a short dress. She holds out her hand to the imam. He takes offense and gives her his back. The imam reproaches Amina for being lightly dressed, and for holding out her hand to him when she knows he never shakes hands



with women. The imam tells Amina that she has changed a lot in recent days. He says he has come to ask why Amina is absent from the mosque. Amina replies that she is very busy. The imam scolds Amina for blaspheming and orders her to resume going to the mosque.

Abortion Amina and Maria arrive at the clinic for Maria's operation. As Maria waits to be taken care of, the police knock on the clinic's doors. The nurses lead the patients out through a back door. A nurse gives Maria the address of a colleague who can help her. Maria escapes the police. Maria runs home. She knocks on her mother's door, who opens it for her, while Brahim, rifle slung over his shoulder and bare-chested, makes the rounds of the neighborhood. Then, Amina and her daughter arrive at the home of the nurse whose address they were given. The nurse prepares her instruments. When the time comes for the operation, the nurse panics and freezes. Amina reassures her that she trusts her, and that everything will go well. The nurse regains confidence. Amina waits anxiously outside and keeps watch while smoking a cigarette. The nurse comes to tell her that the operation went well. The nurse tells Amina to go and rest, and that she will look after Maria. The mother gives her sedated daughter a kiss and goes home to bed.



Brahim raped me The next day, Maria recovers from her operation. The nurse signs a certificate of miscarriage to allow her to return to school. Maria tells the nurse that her neighbor, Brahim, is responsible for her pregnancy. She confides that Brahim raped her. The nurse advises Maria to talk to her mother. Maria confides in Amina when she comes to fetch her. The nurse escorts the mother and daughter to the gate. The nurse returns the money Amina gave her for the operation. She tells Amina that they are now sisters.

The ambush Amina spies on Brahim's movements. Amina stays awake until dawn. Just as she hears the muezzin's call, Amina walks out into the street, her head covered with a hoodie, a club in her hand. Amina heads for a small alley. Maria secretly tags along. The men leave the mosque. Brahim heads for his house. Amina is waiting for him in the alley. Amina sees Brahim coming and stands up. He is surprised to see her there. She walks towards him. He puts his rosary in his tunic pocket and steps back. Amina advances and strikes him several times on the head with her club. He collapses, his head bleeding. She hits him while he is down. Maria runs to her mother and tries to lead her out of the alley. In the maze of alleyways, mother and daughter get lost. They no longer know which way they came. Brahim struggles to his feet, coughing up blood. Amina and Maria finally find their way out of the labyrinth and return home. Amina promises her daughter to move out of the neighborhood.



Fanta visits Amina Fanta, Amina's sister, who had rejected her, comes crying to her. She begs her to help save her daughter, Maimouna, from the excision that the child's father is demanding for his honor. Angry, Amina refuses to see her sister. Fanta gets up and heads for the compound door. Amina runs after her. The two sisters embrace. Fanta explains that her father threatened to banish her, too, if she contacted Amina. Amina forgives her sister. Amina tells Fanta that she knows a woman who performs fake excisions, and who might be able to help them. Amina explains to her sister that she, too, is in trouble, and that she needs 1 million francs for her daughter's abortion. Fanta gives Amina her jewelry and asks her to sell it for Maria's abortion.



False excision Today is the day when little Maïmouna, Amina's niece, is to be excised. Her father's home is packed with well-wishers and praise singers. Maïmouna's father is ecstatic. He dances and hands out banknotes to celebrate his daughter's excision. I did what we agreed **on** Maïmouna is led into a room where the fake excisor is waiting for her. The excisor comes out a few moments later to tell Maïmouna's father that his daughter has been very brave. The father is jubilant. The excisor turns to Amina and Fanta, winks and tells them that she has done the job as agreed.



Maria returns to school Fanta and her sister laugh at their deception. A few days later, Maria is back at school under her mother's proud and admiring gaze.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

AMINA Amina is an independent, strong and determined woman. She has always struggled alone to care for her family, remaining, however, within the strict laws of patriarchy and Islam. However, when her daughter becomes pregnant as a result of rape, she breaks free from patriarchy and religion for good, having her daughter terminate the pregnancy and crippling the man who raped her daughter.

Independent Amina is an independent woman. A single mother, she has been raising her daughter, Maria, since she was born, because her father refused to recognize Amina's pregnancy. When Brahim tells her he wants to marry her to protect her and her daughter, Amina replies that they have no need of his protection. Indeed, from her tea stove business she takes care of her little family, and she has shown that for her daughter, she is a protective mother when she beats up her daughter's rapist.

Determined Amina's determination to see her daughter continue her studies and not repeat the life she herself is living is extraordinary. When Maria tells her that she is pregnant, Amina is devastated and feels powerless in the face of the dictates of religion and the law, which forbid abortion. However, Amina quickly pulls herself together, and makes the rounds of all the establishments, both modern and traditional, to provide her daughter with an abortion. Amina's determination pays off, and Maria returns to school, looking forward to a more optimistic future.

Strong Amina is a strong woman. The filmmaker emphasizes this aspect of her character right from the start of the film, when Amina, huffing and puffing, armed with a knife, attacks a huge used tire to strip it of scrap metal and turn the scraps into stoves. At the end of the film, Amina, armed with a club, defends her daughter's honor against Brahim, the man who incidentally believed himself anointed to protect her. Amina's strength is not only physical; it is also her fortitude to do what is right for herself and her daughter, despite societal and religious pressures.

MARIA Maria is a stubborn, determined girl who sees herself in a future that is different from the life her mother lives. Pregnant, she has no intention of keeping the child that will surely put an end to her studies. She makes her mother understand her desire to break the cycle of poverty in which they both find themselves, and her mother agrees to help her.

Stubborn Maria is a stubborn girl. Pregnant by Brahim's rape, she has only one thing on her mind: to get rid of the pregnancy so she can continue her studies. Neither the slaps she receives from her mother nor the religious authorities can dissuade her. Besides, she says, this is about her body, and religion has no business interfering. Her stubbornness finally persuades her mother, who helps her find an abortion provider. Maria has her abortion and returns to school.

Ambitious "I do not want to be like you. No one respects you." This is what young Maria says to her mother, Amina. Maria aspires to a more fulfilling life than her mother. This requires her to stay in school and continue her studies, so that she can decide for herself and not be dictated to by patriarchal religious power. When a pregnancy threaten to thwart her ambitions, there is only one sensible decision for Maria: to get rid of the pregnancy.

BRAHIM Brahim is the epitome of selfishness, condescension and hypocrisy in patriarchal society. He makes the laws, but breaks them to his own benefit. He addresses women like a master addresses his slave. He thinks only of satisfying his desires, and the rest is irrelevant.

Selfish Brahim is the wolf who wants to enter the sheepfold in the guise of a ram. He proposes to Amina. However, it turns out that it was he who raped Amina's daughter. His desire is to break into Maria's family and satisfy his sexual desires not only with the mother, but also the daughter. He is a most disturbingly selfish character.

Condescending Because Brahim is a man, he displays an exaggeratedly flattering opinion of himself. He has a feeling of superiority, a condescending attitude towards women, and precisely towards Amina, whom he considers inferior. As a result, Brahim believes he has the ability and the right to speak for Amina. He tells Amina that he wants to marry her to save her from the gaze and gossip of the neighborhood, and to protect her and her daughter, Maria. Like most men in the community, Brahim has a savior complex.

Hypocrite Brahim is a big hypocrite. He tells Amina that he wants to marry her to protect her and her daughter, Maria. But from whom does he want to protect them? After all, is he not Maria's victimizer and tormentor? Is he not the rapist who impregnated this 15-year-old child? Brahim is proud to present himself to Amina as a savior, when in fact Amina and Maria should be protecting themselves from him.

THEMES

Power In gender relations, the Chadian man is a very powerful man. Society gives him virtual immunity for his crimes against women. Fifteen years earlier, Amina's studies were interrupted by a man she loved, and whom she believed also loved her. Pregnant with her daughter, Maria, Amina was expelled from high school, and the man who got her pregnant refused to take responsibility, leaving her to face the intolerance of society. Today, her daughter, Maria, pregnant as a result of rape by Brahim, a man who could be her grandfather, has been expelled from school. The mother swears she will not let her daughter suffer the fate that befell her. It is in Amina's determination to save her daughter from a subaltern future that the power of women comes to the fore. Indeed, in defiance of men's prohibitions against abortion, women mobilize around Maria in secret. Money is needed for Maria's illegal abortion. Amina's tea-stove business barely raises a fraction of the funds she needs. But then Amina's sister, Fanta, arrives and offers to sell her jewelry for the cause. Fanta needs her sister, too. She wants to protect her daughter from the excision the girl's father is pressing for. While looking for an abortion provider for her daughter, Amina meets a woman with a reputation for performing fake excisions. Called in to help, the woman performs a fake excision on Amina's niece, saving the little girl from genital mutilation. A nurse performs a clandestine abortion on Maria and issues the girl with a certificate of miscarriage, thus allowing her to return to school. Amina avenges her daughter by violently beating Brahim with a club. By mobilizing their strengths, unsuspected by men, the women get themselves the justice that the patriarchal system denies them.

Patriarchy In this community, whose life is governed by Islam, men are considered saints, taking on the role of regulating women's lives. As a result, the community's Imam follows Amina's every move, not failing to call her out when he considers she has departed from the holy scriptures. Has she missed the morning prayer, been absent from the mosque for more than a day, has the Imam noticed anything unusual in Amina's dress or gait, that the Imam would call out to the young woman to admonish her. In fact, all the community's women must submit to the Imam's authority. One day, when he visits Amina to inquire about what he suspects to be a change in her attitude, the Imam finds her unveiled and wearing a little dress revealing her knees. He looks away from her, and when she offers him her hand in greeting, he takes offense and accuses Amina of trying to lead him down the devil's path. However, after observing Maria, Amina's teenage daughter, long enough to realize that she is now a woman, the Imam urges her to start attending mosque, that place where, to mark their superiority, men make women pray outside, in bad weather, while they reserve for themselves places inside the mosque, protected from wind, rain and sandstorms. Amina's neighbor, Brahim, who says he wants to marry her, offers to be a protector for Amina and her daughter, Maria. What kind of protectors are these patriarchs who, praying to God, take shelter in the mosque, leaving women to the mercy of nature's whims?

Appearance Indeed, Brahim, who makes the rounds of the neighborhood with his rifle at his shoulder, pretending to watch over Amina's sleep, is nothing but a great hypocrite. It is Brahim, the man who proposes to be a husband to Amina and a father to Maria, who has raped and impregnated young Maria. Brahim's declarations of good faith are nothing more than the bluster of a pedophile rapist. Brahim would never have been punished for his crimes if Amina had not taken it upon herself to punish him by beating him with a club. And Amina's punishment of Brahim is all the more poetic in that he receives it as he leaves the mosque, where he has gone for the first prayer of the day. Are some hypocrisies more forgivable than others? Perhaps, one might say, duplicity is forgivable when it serves to right a wrong;

that Amina who, in violation of the shibboleth of patriarchal good morals, smokes on the sly to relieve herself of patriarchal frustrations is redeemable; that the excisor who performs a false excision on Amina's niece to save the child from brutal genital mutilation is redeemable. Perhaps one could say that Amina and all the doctors and nurses who, in violation of the law and putting their reputations and jobs on the line, abort Maria's fetus so that the teenager does not have to live with the trauma of raising a child born out of rape, are forgivable. Perhaps one could say that the masks of appearance do not hide only villains.

Anxiety Men's language towards women betrays a certain anguish about their own existence. Men speak of women as an invisibility, one that paradoxically haunts them; a specter that threatens their materiality. The men, especially Brahim and the Imam, keep telling Amina that the Muslim community is a brotherhood. Although she surreptitiously corrects Brahim, asserting instead that they are all a community of "siblings-in-Islam", Brahim fails to perceive the distinction and, like the Imam, continues to ramble on about the maleness of the Muslim community. Women are negated and relegated into men's subconscious, pushed to the furthest reaches of men's intimate recesses, where women are both the object of men's desires and their fears. For the Imam, shaking hands with a woman is a dangerous act that could close the doors of paradise to him. And yet, the Imam is obsessed with women's presence in the mosque - even though they are not allowed to pray inside the mosque. Of course, if questioned about their true intentions, the Imam and Brahim, like most men in this community, would say without flinching that all their efforts are aimed at saving women from hell. In truth, one could easily see in this their fascination for women, for the invisibility that is the condition of their materiality, of their existence.

Religion The male gender is the master, and for it to be so, the female gender must be the subordinate gender, subjected to its authority, its law. Men claim to derive this authority from the Qur'an, that is, from God. So, for example, an unmarried woman who is not under a man's protection, who escapes, so to speak, man's authority, is an anomaly to be rectified. This anomaly is even more serious when, as in Amina's case, her celibacy is coupled with the status of a single mother: Amina is rejected by her bigot father, who also orders the other members of the family to avoid her, unless they, too, wish to incur God's wrath. She is singled out by society as the bad weed in God's beautiful garden. So, the Imam and Brahim take it upon themselves to save her from hell, the Imam by spying on her gestures and movements to make them conform to the edicts of the Qur'an, and Brahim by offering to marry her and be a father to her daughter. But Amina is no dupe. She knows that all these maneuvers have only one aim: to put women under men's control. Amina plays the game of the pious woman, less out of conviction than for her own survival, to escape condemnation from the Imam, who is the community's fundamental censor. As for marrying Brahim, it is out of the question for her to be wed to a man who does not love her, and for whom she feels no love.

Secrets/bonds Chadian society seems to be based on secret bonds, bonds woven by men to guarantee their authority through the subjugation of women. It would not be an exaggeration to assume that more than one man keeps other men's turpitudes secret, that men cover up and protect each other in a homosocial logic. In order to survive the blatant injustice of men, it is necessary for women, too, to form a support group, backing each other up and guarding their secrets. Amina smokes cigarettes and jiggles to the sound of wild music. Now her daughter knows it. But this secret will never leave the confines of their home, will never reach the Imam. Fanta, Amina's sister, refuses to allow her little girl, Maïmouna, to be excised. Her sister Amina finds her a woman who has the secret of faking excision, of making a girl look like she has been excised, even though she retains her full anatomy. Neither the girl's father nor anyone other than Fanta and Amina will know. Maria undergoes an abortion in a clandestine clinic. Officially, Maria has had a miscarriage, has violated no laws, and can return to school. Maria's true story is known only to her mother, her Aunt Fanta and the abortion provider. To avenge her daughter, Maria violently beats Brahim. If he survives his injuries, Brahim, Maria's rapist, will be too ashamed to go public. He will certainly lie that he was attacked by strangers, by men. The women's secrets, their "lingui", will remain what unites them most, the bond that glues their sisterhood.

Abortion Haroun explains in an interview that he wanted to deal with the theme of abortion because it is a recurring topic in the intellectual marketplace of ideas, but above all because it is a subject that in Chad symbolizes the hypocrisy that governs the country. Abortion is everywhere in Chad, he explains. Not a day goes by when one does not find a human fetus discarded in a dump or toilet. And yet,

it seems as if the strict legal and Muslim authorities on the subject have actually succeeded in stopping the practice. *Lingui* puts this discussion back on the agenda, highlighting the prevalence of abortion and the risks taken by young girls to have an abortion in precarious conditions in back alleys. This is a way of reminding the government and Muslim authorities of their responsibilities, especially when pregnancies are caused by rape. Haroun claims that, following his film, a women's group was formed, calling on the government to legalize abortion. As for the excision of young girls, this is forbidden by Chadian law, but continues to be carried out under the radar of the authorities. Here, too, the film is an appeal to the government to be vigilant and sincere, so that the law supposed to protect young girls is enforced.

Injustice/justice *Lingui* denounces injustice and discrimination against women in general, and single women or single mothers in particular. Brahim tells Amina that the community considers her to be a woman of loose morals. To save her from her bad reputation, he says, he proposes to marry her. When she becomes pregnant as a result of rape, Maria is frightened by the prospect of becoming a single mother, and of being stigmatized by the community in the same way as her mother. In this patriarchal community, it is the men who decree the laws of femininity. Paradoxically, they are also the ones who violate these laws by which they judge women. Amina was abandoned by the man she loved, who gave her a child before fleeing. Maria became pregnant by the man she considered a father. For Amina, if men have stacked the cards so much as to never render justice to women, then women must take justice into their own hands, both morally and physically. Morally, women must subvert the law of patriarchy by rebelling against religion and the legal system through abortion. Physically, it means beating patriarchy to a pulp. Brahim, if he ever regains his mental faculties after Amina's blows to his head, will take time to reflect on the male hypocrisy that has made him the undisputed master and the woman his slave.

Transition "I don't care about Islam. This is about my body." Maria's sentence marks the beginning of a change. Amina has lived her life surrendering her body and soul to the control of patriarchy. A failed woman, according to patriarchy's rules, for getting pregnant when she was not married, it is patriarchy that proposes to save her by regulating her spiritual and sexual lives. When it is not the Imam who dictates to Amina the verses to read and the moral conduct to follow, it is Brahim who proposes himself to her as her savior through marriage. Amina's daughter does not intend to submit to patriarchy as Amina does. She intends to take possession of her body and mind and mold them to her own liking. This decision, which initially frightens her mother, eventually wins her approval. Maria changes the course of history. From now on, the history of Chad will not be written by men alone. Women like her will make their contribution. This is undeniable as Maria returns to school to continue her studies. But the change also took place in the mother, in Amina, who armed with a club, smashes the table of patriarchal laws by clubbing Brahim.

Education "I will not let you suffer my fate." This is what Amina says to her daughter Maria when Maria tells her that she is pregnant. Indeed, suspecting that her daughter is hiding something from her, Amina goes to her school. There, the headmistress tells her that Maria has been struck off the school roster because she is pregnant. Amina's own life flashes before her eyes, and she fears that her daughter is repeating her mistakes. So, what is Amina's fate? And what is she trying to save her daughter from? The fate of not having been able to continue her education, and of remaining a victim of patriarchal subjugation. In fact, fifteen years ago, when she was pregnant with Maria, Amina was expelled from her school, which was anxious to maintain its image as an honorable institution. Her studies interrupted, Amina now works recycling the iron contained in old tires into tea stoves. The work is hard and pays very little. Amina's financial precariousness puts her at the mercy of men, especially the Imam and Brahim, the former who impresses upon her an ethic of life, the latter who claims to be able to save her from the bigotry of the community by marrying her. Amina knows that unless her daughter resumes her studies, she is condemned to a life of subordination. Therefore, the mother fights to get her daughter back into school. Defying the sacrosanct religious laws, Amina does what a few days before she thought was a taboo idea: she pays for her daughter's abortion and proudly watches her child put back on her school uniform to give herself the chance of a better life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain the symbolism at the start of the film in the scene where Amina, sweating profusely, opens up a tire with a knife.
2. Is abortion legal in your country or state? If so, what is the logic behind its legality? If not, what is the logic behind its illegality?
3. Explain your personal position on the issue of abortion.
4. Why does Maria prefer to tell the nurse rather than her mother who caused her pregnancy?
5. Is Amina's punishment on Brahim justified? Explain your answer.
6. In your country, what would have happened to a man like Brahim?
7. What measures are in place in your country for students who become pregnant? Do you think they are adequate? Explain your answer.
8. Maria savagely hits Brahim with a club, but Brahim, though badly hurt, manages to get up. Imagine what happens next.
9. In an interview, the filmmaker said that with this film, he wanted to be 'on the side of women'. Do you think he succeeded without being presumptuous? Can you justify your answer?