

SIRA

Interview

The poignant film that reveals the strength of Sahelian women in the face of terrorism



Credit photo: Apolline Traoré

During her visit to Brussels for the presentation of her latest feature film, Sira, we had the pleasure of meeting director Apolline Traoré. In an interview, she spoke to us about the situation of terrorism in the Sahel, highlighting the people who live there. She also talked about the passion felt by the Burkinabè people during the last edition of FESPACO where her film was shortlisted for the Etalon d'Or.

Sira addresses terrorism in the Sahel. What exactly did you want to show?

In making this film, I had two goals in mind. First, I wanted to inspire the people of the Sahel by bringing them hope, strength and resilience. The film starts somewhere in the Sahel, where you can see that Burkina Faso, my home country, is not the only country facing difficult times.

Despite the hardships that have weakened us, we are still standing. My second goal was to inform an international audience about what is happening at home. Although the war is a common topic of discussion in the world, few people really know what is happening in the Sahel. As a filmmaker and writer, I wanted to address this issue and make the situation known around the world.

The film shows women from different facets. Despite the violence they suffer, you show them to be resilient, supportive, and courageous.

In my films, I try to show women in all their aspects, exploring the full experience of femininity. Although we are strong beings, we laugh, we cry, we have weaknesses, and we are above all human beings.



A striking example of this exploration is the pregnancy of the protagonist in the film, which elicited reactions of surprise and incomprehension from my male producers, who underestimated the capacity of women to cope with difficult conditions. This reaction is representative of the lack of understanding and recognition of women's pain and suffering that men often have. In my film, I wanted to give women, and in particular African women, a glimpse of the pain that so many of them endure in their daily lives.

I have met displaced women who have endured unimaginable suffering but are fighting to protect their children. However, the children in their care are often neglected. These children have witnessed atrocities and are likely to become easy recruits for terrorist groups. They often feel pity or resentment towards their mothers, and many of these young people are vulnerable to recruitment. Women are fighting hard to prevent this and to protect their children from the grip of terrorist groups.

The conditions for shooting the film were extremely difficult: relocation, extreme climatic conditions... How did you manage to cope with the many pitfalls?

When we learned that we would have to relocate the set, my producer and I were confused as to how we would handle this situation. Although the contracts were in place, it was clear that this relocation would have a significant financial impact. We would have to move and support about 60 people for three months in the desert. However, despite these obstacles, we maintained a glimmer of hope. We didn't



Crédit photo: Apolline Traoré

know where it was coming from, but we kept going because of our passion and belief in the project. In addition, the determination of the film crew and actors who all bought into the script kept us together and supported each other through the difficulties.

At the last edition of FESPACO, you were shortlisted for the Yennenga Golden Stallion Award and the Burkinabe people were behind you. Did you feel the pressure?

You know, I had the most difficult eight days of my career. We had already successfully presented our film at the Berlinale, and I had already participated in major festivals in the past. However, I was worried about presenting my film in Burkina Faso because of its sensitive subject matter, linked to recent events that still affect the population. However, when the teaser was launched, I felt a strong sense of solidarity with the people of Burkina Faso, who perhaps needed to see the subject addressed in this way. Despite this, when I arrived at FESPACO, I felt intense pressure. I couldn't go out into the street without being told: "You have to bring the gold,

the cup home! I was afraid of disappointing the public if things didn't go as planned.

You finally won the Yennenga Silver Stallion Award. How did the Burkinabe population react?

When I arrived at the stadium, I felt a certain disappointment among the crowd. Although the Silver Stallion Award is a great reward for my career, the audience did not seem to see it in that light. However, I shared my joy with them because my victory was largely due to their support. In addition, among the letters of appreciation I received, one said that the film had succeeded in bringing together a population that had been divided for seven years. I was very touched by this. It is worth noting that President Roch Kaboré attended the screening of the film, alongside the putschists and the current Chief of Staff, in the same room. This moment made me realise the impact of my film work. After all the difficulties we went through to bring this film to life, it is a great gift.

What's coming up next?

First, it will be about taking the film as far as possible. Then I will work on the next project: a feature film or a series. Let's see.