

THOMAS LANGMANN AND MICHEL HAZANAVICIUS
PRESENT

BÉRÉNICE BEJO

ANNETTE BENING



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film festival

OFFICIAL SELECTION 2014



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COMPETITION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

THE SEARCH

A FILM BY
MICHEL HAZANAVICIUS

REINE

la gascogne

Orange
Studio

CANAL+

cinéma

WORLDVIEW

wild bunch

Synopsis

The Second Chechen War. 1999. THE SEARCH recounts, on a human scale, a powerful story of conflict told through four lives that will be brought together by a shocking twist of fate.

After his parents are killed in their village, a small boy flees, joining the flood of refugees. He meets Carole, a European Union delegation head, and little by little, with her help, he will return to life. At the same time, his elder sister Raïssa searches tirelessly for him amongst the civilian exodus.

Then there's 20-year-old Kolia... A recent Russian Army recruit, he will gradually be overwhelmed by the daily life of wartime.



Thomas Langmann and Michel Hazanavicius
present

Bérénice Bejo

Annette Bening

THE SEARCH

Written and Directed by
Michel Hazanavicius

starring

Maxim Emelianov Zukhra Duishvili Abdul-Khalim Mamatsuiev

2h15 – French, English, Russian, Chechen – Color – Digital Dolby 5.1 – 1.85 – France/Georgia – 2014

A LA PETITE REINE, LA CLASSE AMERICAINE, FRANCE 3 CINEMA, ORANGE STUDIO,
WILD BUNCH, SEARCH PRODUCTION, SARKE STUDIO/GFIG coproduction

Inspired by the film "The Search" (1948) by Fred Zinnemann,
produced by Praesens-Film AG and Turner Entertainment Company

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After THE ARTIST, I felt a great desire, as a producer, to prolong a wonderful experience and to offer Michel the means with which to make a film as powerful and as ambitious as THE SEARCH.

What I appreciate in the work of a producer is to be able to accompany a director over the course of his films, as my father was able to do with Milos Forman or Jean-Jacques Annaud.

Moving from silent black and white to a humanist film in five languages on a very contemporary subject, I consider THE SEARCH to be the second stage in our collaboration.

With such a singular project, Michel has started again from zero. Risk-taking is what unites us. If we do our job as producers together by taking the risk of financing a film like this, as the director, Michel takes the same risk with his subject matter. And he pulls it off! From a deeply personal desire, he has created a great film that we are extremely proud to present in Cannes and Toronto. This is exactly why I produce films: to be able to give a talented director the possibility of expressing himself under the best possible conditions.

Thomas Langmann

A conversation with ■ Michel Hazanavicius ■



What kind of freedom did *THE ARTIST* bring you, to give you the confidence to throw yourself into a project as difficult and as challenging as *THE SEARCH*?

The project had been there for a long time but, seemed very complicated to me. Without the Oscar it would clearly have been impossible to get the necessary budget. *THE SEARCH* is a film on the edge of the market, on the border of what's achievable: that's to say precisely where I like to be as a director.

What made you choose to make a film about the Second Chechen War?

Several factors played their part. In 2004 I coproduced and co-wrote *RWANDA: HISTORY OF A GENOCIDE*, a documentary by Raphaël Glucksmann, David Hazan and Pierre Mezerette. Raphaël is the son of André Glucksmann, one of the very few French intellectuals who tried to alert public opinion to the events in Chechnya. That was how I was made aware of the Chechen situation. And I suppose that as an Ashkenazi Jew, and the grandson of people who lived through World War II, *THE SEARCH* gave me an oblique way of returning to that story.

A Rwandan friend and survivor of the genocide had forwarded me an email from one of her friends who worked for Médecins Sans Frontières in Dadaab, Kenya, in the world's largest refugee camp, home to 400,000 people. The last sentence of the mail struck me hard: "More than documentaries, we need real films with stories, so people can understand what is happening and be moved by it." Somehow, I took that on board.

I wanted to make a film about Chechnya, not least to oppose the absurd theory according to which all Chechens are terrorists. But I didn't know how to approach such a story, only that it would have to be a war film. I was still in the thinking stages when Nicolas Saada showed me Fred Zinnemann's *THE SEARCH* (1948). It's a melodrama that tells the story of a small boy who gets out of the camps and meets a GI amidst the ruins of Berlin. His mother, who has also survived the camps, searches for him all over Europe. After watching this beautiful film I was convinced that drama could provide the best approach.

Your film may have been inspired by THE SEARCH (1948) but there are marked differences.

It's true that the documentary part, the solemn voice-over, the music, the Christ-like aspect of the mother, the speed at which the child learns English: all of this has dated. We needed to find different ways of telling the story. I also wanted to widen the film's scope. I didn't want to restrict myself to a single point of view. I couldn't show that the Chechens are not a terrorist people, while simultaneously depicting all Russians as Chechen-killers. But I did want to show how systems can crush people in order to turn them into killers, and that's the story I added.

What were your other sources or inspiration?

FULL METAL JACKET, of course, for the making of a killer by the army. But also, and maybe more so, *One Soldier's War in Chechnya*, Arkady Babchenko's book: a description of life in the Mozdok barracks told with sharp analysis by a real writer. To a degree, this book reminds me of Primo Levi's *If This is a Man*. There are very few documentaries about Chechnya. I read Anna Politkovskaïa's political books on one hand and on another, Boris Cyrulnik on the resilience of children, in order to understand the journey of someone coming back to life little by little, after a trauma. Two Chechen friends also gathered witness testimonies and sent them to me. Finally I think the screenplay is interspersed with more or less conscious reminiscences of the Jewish genocide.

Why did you choose to shoot the film in Georgia?

I also coproduced ORANGE 2004, a documentary about the revolution in Ukraine.

It was directed by Raphaël Glucksmann who, as a result of various encounters, ended up settling in Georgia, where I visited him. I discovered the country, with the Caucasus Mountains on one side and Chechnya on the other. I thought it corresponded to the idea we all have of Chechnya: the material, texture, a whole world in ruins evoking the films that came right after World War II: *THE THIRD MAN*, *A FOREIGN AFFAIR*, *THE SEARCH* (1948), *IT HAPPENED IN EUROPE...* This kind of look seemed an effective allegory of the characters' emotional state.

Did you have to recreate the sets?

Very little. The barracks are real barracks, located in the suburbs of Tbilisi. Carole's apartment is a real apartment – we simply broke down the walls... The refugee camps were recreated with real tents in a field at the foot of the Caucasus Mountains. I refused to use green screens: I didn't want to multiply extras digitally. I wanted to be on site.

Was the crew half-French and half-Georgian?

Yes. You could also say it was 100% French and 100% Georgian. About fifty French and at least the same number of Georgians. I thought we'd be working with a small crew, but it quickly turned into a big shoot. I always have this fantasy that things can get done easily... but everything was complicated: the country, the army, filming with children, non-professional actors, four languages on set: French, English, Chechen and Russian...

What particular difficulties did you face?

Essentially logistical problems related to the different working cultures. Georgia was once the studio of the USSR, but the country hasn't

got a culture of films as they are made today. I was most familiar with winter images of the Chechen War: washed out, shot by CNN or amateurs. But in Georgia the weather is beautiful until November. Everyone was delighted except for Guillaume Schiffman (DP) and me. We had to do a lot of waiting around, and move to another street where the sun wasn't shining, use huge frames to create shade...or trucks to hide that the background of a shot was bathed in sunlight. We didn't stop running and got fewer shots than planned. It was always the case of as close as we can!

But also I think the fact that I had to depict war, death and violence, in a raw fashion, gave me a lot of trouble as a director. I think I put myself under a certain amount of pressure insofar as this is – to my knowledge – the first film of this scale about the conflict, which gives me a great responsibility: the responsibility of telling a fragment of the history of a people. All the more so since I am not of this people. So I really felt that I had no margin for error in representing this history. That puts the pressure on...

In concrete terms, what were your options as a director for addressing these questions?

One of the main challenges was the combination of the fictional and the "realism" of the film, in any case, its raw aspect. The choice of filming on location, with non-professional actors, using each character's language, clearly follows that direction. From a purely filmic point of view, I wanted the image to be quite rough but detailed, I wanted the contours of faces, and to retain the substance and the patina of our locations. I wanted a truly cinematic image, but one that also took the picture we all have of that war into account: very grey, washed-out news footage. The choice of shooting on

film rather than digitally was obvious right from the start. On the other hand, for the interiors, I asked all the heads of department to systematically remove anything that smacked too much of "movies: pretty" or overworked lighting, too-obvious sets, over-sophisticated hairstyles, overly made-up faces, etc...

We did a lot of tests in order to achieve the image we obtained in the film. During these tests Guillaume Schiffman and I chose to develop the film by using the bleach bypass method – a process he had already used on *Bernie* (1996) – in order to obtain this particular texture, this rough effect. It's a process that requires very precise lighting. Paradoxically, trying to obtain a "non-lit" effect requires even more work. The fact that this is the fourth time Guillaume and I have worked together made things easier, and what he achieved is remarkable, as always.

In terms of decoupage, framing and camera moves, I also tried to stick to the rule I had set myself. Very little obvious movement, filmed almost entirely with handheld camera, sometimes with scenes shot entirely from the same camera, as if the operator had just turned around to film another character. I strove to have only very simple-looking sets even if, once again, this required more work than usual. The attack scene, for example, is a sequence shot that might seem less spectacular than a classic war scene, but closer to the character. That's the effect I wanted, anyway, and it's not easy to achieve, even if it looks simpler when you watch it.

THE SEARCH opens with very harrowing video images showing the execution of a Chechen family by Russian soldiers.

Yes. I've always had problems with "serious" depictions of violent death in the movies. But to

talk about a conflict like this, at some point you have to embody the horror, to touch it. Once is enough, but that one time is essential. The dirty, grainy video, a handheld camera, a format that is not yet the format of the film, all this seemed to me to be the most appropriate visual representation. It's me holding the camera, for a sequence shot lasting five long minutes... I like that it opens with total darkness and someone yelling: *"Fucking hell, why isn't this working?"* I really like the idea of starting a film with failure, and also to mark a multiple temporality, since you see the death of the parents twice in the video and then on film.

THE SEARCH is both a war film and a drama. But it's also a film scattered with lighter – even comic – moments. This is not surprising coming from you, except that here the setting is far from comic.

I'm not sure these are comic moments, strictly speaking... In 2006, when he was 24, Florent Marcie directed a fabulous documentary called *ITCHKÉRIE KENTI* (THE SONS OF ITCHKERIA). You see, in particular, some women talking during a bombing, about their domestic concerns, their problems with windows... I found this very poignant: even in the worst of situations humans manage to make each other laugh. I told Florent Marcie I wanted to film a fictionalized version of this scene. He agreed. There is certainly a rupture, a touch of comedy in an otherwise serious scene. But to me, the essential point is to show that our humanity remains, even in the midst of the most tragic of situations.

Generally speaking, it is tragic situations – funerals, break-ups, and so on – that contain the funniest moments. People who have a sense of humor have what Riad Sattouff calls "antennas for the absurd". They have enough

distance to know when they are about to slip into the ridiculous. Those who have political awareness give their comedies a serious tone, within a structure. It's a good exchange. This is what the scene of the windows is about, and also, as is often the case in my films, it's about playing with clichés – the clichés of the depiction of war to be specific. I didn't want a battle film. You quickly become the little boy fascinated with tanks and explosives, and just as quickly, you risk getting what you want to talk about wrong. To play with clichés is to stand on the border of absurdity. I have always thought that that's where you have to be if you want what you are making to be a success: right up close to the absurd without ever falling into it.

THE SEARCH combines several stories, each developing at length and in parallel with the others. How did you work the narration, with its several voices?

By being mathematical, but not overly so. Each story has to have a concrete coherence. It has to be logical – the audience needs that – and the ensemble has to have an emotional coherence. There are correspondences between the different stories of *THE SEARCH*, which I hope are strong, in terms of theme and development. The child's trajectory, for example, is the opposite of the soldier's. One goes from death to a societal life, the other from a societal life to death. Visually, Hadji moves from a world of rubble, dust and ruins to something cleaner. Kolia does the opposite and ends up in chaos and destruction.

The narration with multiple voices allows for huge ellipses... When the audience sees a character again, it's easier to accept that he will have changed during the interval. It is also necessary to create dynamics for the ensemble;

you can't jump from the fifth to the second one. For example, it was tricky to move from the violence of the scenes with the soldier to Carole and Hadji. I realised early on that the realism of the story with Raïssa, the older sister, functioned as a good decompression chamber between the two.

Within this complex narration you also chose to insert several testimonies.

During the writing I thought that the central theme of *THE SEARCH* was commitment. Yet it is the theme of bearing witness that became vital: who is talking? What is at stake for Hadji by telling his story? When something happens, the person who relates it takes on a certain power. To have the power of the story change hands, that was the profound challenge of *THE SEARCH*.

I gathered testimonies that I re-wrote and had actors reenact them. Three remain in the film that I believe give credibility to the whole. Carole is introduced this way: she listens to a testimony for three minutes. It was a way of establishing what is essential about this character from the outset: Carole is not a player in the event itself; she is there to record it.

Carole, played by Bérénice Bejo, works for a NGO. She is your version of the American soldier (Montgomery Clift) in *THE SEARCH* (1948). Why the transformation?

At the end of *THE SEARCH* (1948), when the soldier does not adopt the child, the audience doesn't feel so sad for him. Clift looks like a beautiful god, he is going back to the US... He is a man, there are no time restrictions on his having children. For a politically committed 35-year-old woman, far from home, adopting a child implies a radical change of lifestyle.

The situation seemed much stronger this way. Another reason for the character's transformation from male to female is that in Chechnya, women – journalists, members of associations, the mothers of Russian soldiers – have often been more courageous than men. I wanted multiple confrontations in the film: Russians/Chechens, civilians/soldiers, adults/children, but also men/women. And then, you often find in this kind of film an imbalance that consists in saying that “occidental” stories – and above all, American stories – are more interesting than local stories. I have a moral problem with that. Carole's story could not be stronger than all the others. But for this particular story – which rests on very small things – to hold its own against the others, it requires time. Not only did Bérénice provide – as is her habit – a vast amount of analysis and contextualisation of the text, she also agreed to play a character who has a lot of scenes with a child, and progresses on a very restrained, minimal line.

The relationship between Carole and Hadji, the Chechen boy, is indeed very subtle: it doesn't follow any circumscribed path. For instance, it's not a mother/son relationship....

The issue here, examined through Carole and Hadji's relationship, is the role of westerners: what attitude must we have, what empathy? Accepting the pain of others is complicated. Hadji doesn't speak the same language as Carole, he doesn't know her... I wanted Carole to be reluctant at first. I wanted her to tease Hadji, without realising that he is nine years old and has just lost both parents... I am touched by people who take action against the grain, in a disinterested way... and I wanted Carole to be like this, but perhaps with an

excess of propriety, sometimes expressed by unfortunate jokes, like when she says, before stopping herself: *"At least you don't have a problem with your family."*

Carole is not committed emotionally: neither to a child nor to a lover. All her commitment is activist, political. At the same time that she starts to realise the superficiality of this commitment, a personal commitment is born, not only an intellectual one, but much more emotional.

The speech Carole gives in Brussels, in which she tries to alert the Members of the European Parliament to the gravity of what is happening in Chechnya is a particularly important scene in the trajectory you are describing.

We used to see that a lot, in Frank Capra films or courtroom dramas: the director delivers, through a character, if not his own, then the film's message. But here we know the story: a grandiose scene to state that Europe didn't do anything would have been grotesque. Carole is distracted, her audience is limited, she realises she will not succeed. The scene starts with "official" shots, with a long focal length. As soon as she starts getting confused we get closer to her and the focal length shortens.

It is never easy for an actor to give a political speech, to act indignation. You have to surrender, you have to accept that you believe in this: once again, cliché and the absurd are not far away. Bérénice dreaded this scene before we shot it. I told her there was no need to play it first degree, but rather like an accident that occurs, a machine that breaks down... There is a moment I love in this difficult scene: Carole looks up with a faint, disillusioned smile, as if she is almost enjoying with her failure.

How did you choose Abdul-Khalim Mamatsuiev and Maxim Emelianov, the actors who play Hadji, the young boy, and Kolia, the young man forcibly enrolled in the Russian army?

Hervé Jakubowicz, our casting director, saw 400 children. It's not that many. I saw 50 and Abdul-Khalim was the only one who really acted fear, who really cried, without pretending... Abdul-Khalim is an amazing boy who has the kind of flair for acting that actors dream about; but being a child, he doesn't know how to channel it. Sometimes we had to be very patient.

For Kolia, I was constantly being told about fantastic Russian actors, but I preferred to start looking in Georgia and Ukraine because of the subject. I wasn't convinced. We organised a casting in Russia, making clear that we weren't making a pro-Russian film. The actors came with full knowledge. I saw an exceptional level of acting, in particular from Maxim. Like most Russian actors, he has a direct relationship with the character and the situation, very embodied, without any distance. It's very striking, in particular when it comes to being beaten. The Russians don't pretend. I watched the scenes where Maxim gets hit, image by image: by the eighth take he's still not moving! It's unsettling!

How did you convey Kolia's transformation into a killer, while making sure the character did not lose an audience's sympathy?

Kolia hasn't asked anyone for anything. He is a victim who, little by little, turns into a killer. I wanted an actor who looked like a hero, not a bad guy, but who you would constantly think is going to rebel. That's where the suspense comes from. I was also lucky that Maxim and Abdul-Khalim look somewhat alike. It wasn't planned at all, but one could be the

younger version of the other. This mirror effect interested me even more since Hadji, who is an absolute victim, lives in constant guilt for having had to abandon his younger brother.

An important scene is the one where Kolia, summoned to undress in front of a comrade, rebels by hitting the man and thus earning the respect of his superiors.

How do you go from bad to worse? When every way out is bad, the survival instinct takes over. Kolia makes the worst choice, while believing he is making the best. The principle behind this kind of world – camp, penal colony, military unit... – is to destroy anything with social or civil value. Your reluctance has gone, you have to reverse everything. And you soon find pleasure in it. The film deals with this fall from the positive to the negative. I'd like to stress that this is much less than the reality when it comes to the humiliation and dehumanisation of soldiers. What you read in testimonies is unbearable. The film is only a transposition. The question of what is unbearable is a good question for cinema. How do you make an audience bear that which must be interpreted as unbearable?

The reunion, on the front, of Kolia and his old barracks torturer, also works through inversion: they congratulate each other as if they were best friends.

Kolia's entire journey is like this: when he kills it always ends up in general hilarity. The shot of the building on fire, this infernal image described by the soldier as paradise, was from the start my favourite shot in the whole film. This was another cliché I was interested in: the good old army comrades happy to see each other again, even in the middle of the nightmare.

Annette Bening plays Helen, who is in charge of an orphanage for refugee children.

Annette Bening did a huge amount of research on Chechnya and Georgia. She stayed over a fortnight on the shoot. It was the first time she had travelled so far and for so long during term time: she and Warren Beatty have four children... Annette represents the American Left. She brings to Helen something bigger than the role, for the reason that she isn't just an A-list actress, she is a star. I was happy that, wanting to claim responsibility for something about the position of women, I was able to do it with her.

As I said the film works by way of mirrors. Helen is the woman Carole could or would have liked to have been. She has no personal problem, she has children, a life, she is balanced, she acts... But I didn't want her to be a sexy Mother Theresa, a kind of Yoda you bring in every three scenes so she can give you the keys of the story.

Helen is a little tired, she is a human being. I absolutely love what Annette did with her character.

What about Raïssa, how was she cast?

This happened during the same period of casting as for Hadji. We saw many girls and, quite simply, she seemed the best. Her face bears witness to great strength, but she's also a teenager, with all the doubts and weaknesses that entails. To start with I wanted a younger girl, but when I saw her I thought it would be much more interesting to have a slightly more adult, stronger character. And she had a particular motivation. Before I hired her, stupidly I asked her if being an actress would be fun for her, and she answered no. She thought that it would be very painful but someone had

to do this film and she wanted to do it. She was 17... I was very impressed.

One can't help but be struck by the difference between *THE SEARCH* and your previous films.

Until now I have worked a bit like a cuckoo. I have pinched here and there what I found interesting and remade it, 30 or 90 years later. Cheating too, since I had hindsight, a modern outlook. In my previous films the audience knew it was watching a show. For the first time, here there is no distance – everything is first degree. The idea isn't to say that war is bad and we have to avoid dying... But there is a direct link with history, with characters, that doesn't go through the grey area of the joke, into which everyone can put what he or she likes.

THE ARTIST was a confection. *THE SEARCH* is something else. It doesn't strive to be pretty. I had deny myself the right to make a political film, a melodrama that deals with war, to give my opinion on something that goes beyond me entirely. Choosing to make a film such as this is very ambitious, even pretentious. But I can live with that. All the more so since I hope to be able to make comedies again, which is a genre I particularly love.

Another innovation of *THE SEARCH* is its running time.

Television series have attained such a high quality in writing, acting and directing that cinema has to go somewhere else. Ninety-minute movies are condemned to allegory whereas TV series have taken the place of literature: in-depth characters placed in complex situations without upsetting the balance of the whole ensemble... So I thought

that two and a half hours was a good running time to talk about a conflict no one knows about, from a point of view that no one – to my knowledge – has ever taken, and with several stories in parallel.

Can you talk about the end of the film?

In a film where good and evil are shown in brutal confrontation, I wanted the audience to think that everyone, for want of his or her own reasons, goes through a journey. The film makes no bones about where it stands, without being Manichean. The last scene with Kolia makes things more complex, without becoming didactic: more than the birth of a monster we understand that we have followed a human being. There are often two problems with films like this: either you want to make cinema too much, without respect for the subject, or you respect the subject so much that you forget about cinema, which is equally troublesome. I'm a director, not a historian or spokesperson for the Chechen people. There is something playful in this scene, a way of telling the audience: this is a film.

Not to mention that since there are several stories in parallel, it happens that there are divergent interests. This is the case here. It is an "ironic" ending, not all black or all white. Nonetheless it sounds a note of hope. After two and a half – at times gruelling – hours it seemed to me it was the least I could do. But morally I couldn't give the feeling that all's well that ends well. The moral of *THE SEARCH* is that if you have to choose between the journey of a killer or of a survivor, life will always be on the side of survivors.

Interview conducted by Emmanuel Burdeau.

A conversation with ■

Bérénice Bejo

■
Carole



What was your introduction to the project?

I read a version of the screenplay while I was filming with Asghar Farhadi. The script for *THE PAST* was very complex, a lot of dialogue, intensely dramatic, and I was in almost every scene... When I first read *THE SEARCH* I didn't quite get the scope of Carole's character. I thought she was a silent character. I told myself it would be easy. According to Michel that's how I always react when reading scripts: I see the film and not the character. The more I re-read it, the more I realised that Carole talked constantly, that the kid didn't answer her, that I would have numerous telephone scenes... that, in a way, I would be "playing alone" a lot. Michel explained to me from the start that we were going to shoot a lot of scenes in French, then in English... All of a sudden the workload seemed huge. Here we go, I thought, once again Michel has given me a really complex role.

What kind of research did you do in order to play such a part?

I watched the documentary Michel gave to everyone as reference for the film, and I read a little... Michel and I have a few Chechen

friends and we are quite aware of the situation over there. My research didn't go much further than what I knew already. I didn't go deeper. I couldn't, before or during the shoot. Carole isn't someone who knows. She discovers. She listens. I think that's the reason I didn't want to know more about Chechnya than what I did already, namely a people being oppressed by another.

We know very little about Carole. Did you and Michel imagine her back-story?

Michel didn't, I did. I needed to know why she was there, at 35. Why she didn't have any children or a man...

It was important for Michel that Carole stayed in the background. So I had to be modest in the way I tackled the story and the shoot. Usually, in narratives like this, the western characters are amazing, totally involved, kind-hearted, out to save the planet. That's not the case here. It's difficult to feel too much for Carole's problems when you've just seen a five-minute sequence shot in which an entire Chechen family is massacred. Above all we had to avoid any unhappy love story for her, and to try to balance her small story with the larger

one... I had to accept that my character needed time to develop, and that the audience only gets interested in her gradually, through her actions. Unlike Hadji, Carole doesn't have the audience's sympathy right away. At the beginning she's like the spectator in the cinema: she observes, she is passive. Then, little by little, she becomes a hero in the film, but what I like about her is that she does so almost in spite of herself. It takes time for her to accept Hadji's arrival; she doesn't want him at first. Then she can't help it. She reveals herself as a very sensitive, very sympathetic person, who is going to open herself to the others and lose her certainties.

What is the process by which Carole's character starts arousing interest and emotion?

It's her encounter with Hadji that will make Carole allow herself to be overcome by the situation and to become a little more realistic, to acknowledge that a war is not as simple as she thought. Thanks to this child, something is going to give way. Carole will understand that it might be more important to look after Hadji than to try and save the whole of Chechnya. She will understand that perhaps one should start with the simpler things. I believe this is the message Michel wants to convey through Carole's journey: sometimes you have to think small in order to see the big picture.

I became aware of this during the scene at the European Parliament in Brussels. It was my last day of shooting. I didn't want to play this scene. Michel told me it was pivotal for the character, but I thought it was long and tedious. Above all I didn't think it brought anything to the film. Everything that Carole talks about, we've already seen in the film. I didn't really see what point it served. And on top of that it was very long to learn: four

pages in French, then in English. It's one of the scenes I played in both languages! But after talking with Michel I understood his intentions, I understood that this scene marks the end of her journey, the beginning of a new story for her, and also the end of her certainties. Carole will never be the same after this. I was overcome emotionally many times while playing it. It's funny, by the way, the French and English versions are very different. I started in English and this version is more restrained. In the French version, Carole is more distressed, more overwhelmed.

This scene reminds us of the one where she talks about the transition to the year 2000 with her two colleagues. She starts by disparaging the interest everyone shows in these kind of events, before understanding that this occasion is important too, if only as a distraction from life's worries.

True. Carole arrives with her certainties, but reality quickly catches up with her. It is not all so simple. Convictions are not enough to change the world. And despite life's difficulties, the small, simple joys are important, necessary, vital and permissible! She understands that we have the right to be frivolous, especially during wartime. It's about accepting to let life in, about saying that life is stronger, despite everything. This is what Carole learns throughout the film. I like this scene: at first she doesn't understand her colleagues, but she is intrigued by them. Pretty soon she finds them moving, full of life, and eventually she likes it and almost agrees with them. It is at this point that Carole starts to change.

Are you Carole in some ways?

The telephone scenes when she gets annoyed, the scene in front of the MEPs, yes, in these moments I'm like her... My mother was a

lawyer and an activist, my father was a director and an activist, I come from a politically engaged family... But I would have never been like her with a child like Hadji. I would have been maternal right away. I had to be very careful with my body language. When you have a child in front of you, you tend to bend down, to talk kindly, softly. Michel immediately warned me against this: I had to have a more neutral, simple rapport with Hadji. I told myself it should be a man-to-man relationship. While preparing for the part I thought of him as a friend of my own age. That's how I tried to build my relationship with him. I had to get rid of anything maternal, sweet, cute, and gentle. I enjoyed that, it added up to removing everything that's in my nature.

Have you ever acted with a child?

Not really, a little in *THE PAST* but not much. And Abdul-Khalim had never acted before. It was difficult to create a bond since he didn't speak English or French. The first two weeks of the shoot were devoted to the scenes between Carole and Hadji, in her apartment. It was quite difficult, we didn't know each other. He was tense because everything was new to him, and of course sometimes time passed slowly and he got bored. I was also tense since it was the beginning of the shoot; I wanted to do well, and wanting to do well is a very bad thing for an actor. I had to find my bearings and accept getting things wrong. It always takes me a few days to let myself go. I'd love to be able to re-do the first day of shooting like Hitchcock, that's what he used to do. But in a way, it wasn't a bad thing: Carole's awkwardness with Hadji is also mine. And vice versa. Then, little by little, Abdul-Khalim grew more relaxed and found his place in the team. He is very polite, very sweet. He and Michel developed a

strong and very special bond. Often he would beg Michel to finish with a scene because he'd already done it 15 times, he would look at him with his sad child's eyes and say: "Micheeeeeel?! Again?" and Michel would say: "Yes, again." And he would do it, like a dutiful little soldier. His good manners wouldn't allow him to say no. He really did a great job. I'm very proud of him. It wasn't easy, but it was an extraordinary experience for me, a real challenge. Something I had never done before. Abdul Khalim calling Michel on set is now an integral part of making the film for me. Just like the "Michel" spoken by the young Brigitte Fossey at the end of *FORBIDDEN GAMES*. It will stay with me forever.

Is there one scene with Hadji that has left a special memory?

Many. I was blown away by the ease with which he was able to access an emotion in a few seconds. All the scenes where he has to cry were quite easy to shoot. He could cry systematically each time Michel asked him to! It was extremely disconcerting to watch. For instance, the scene where he scribbles the drawing, he cried big tears each time. And there were at least ten takes! Can you imagine the kind of pressure he put me under? It was a huge relief for Michel, he knew at least that was easy. In another way, I love his testimony. What I like best about that scene is what his testimony speaks of: a child coming back to life, accepting his past and moving forward. It's magnificent. I cry every time I watch it and I realise that I'm crying when Carole cries. It's a beautiful love scene, a declaration of love for life. I like it very much when Hadji talks about his parents... And when he says: *"I wanted to give you jewels because you've given me so many things and I've given you nothing."*

On one hand you play opposite a child who isn't an actor and on the other with a star, Annette Bening.

When Annette arrived the set turned into a real film set. Meaning of all a sudden, we worked normally, as we are used to doing. Each actor finds his or her bearings, tries things out, and adjusts according to the director and to his or her partners. It seemed so easy. It was really funny. Annette brought us ten calm days. That must be the power of Americans! She came by herself, without any demands. Like a friend who comes and visits the set, not wanting to disturb anyone, who wants to do well and become one of the team as quickly as possible. She was very prepared. She had read a vast quantity of books and seen a mass of documentaries, enough to blow everyone's mind, it was superimpressive. She knew her subject really well and we could feel that she was proud to be part of this project. She won us all over, all of us! I loved her and was very proud to be acting with her.

You and Michel know each other really well. How is he with you on set?

Generally speaking Michel doesn't give many compliments. That's how he is with everyone. When he is happy we move on. When he isn't, we do it again. He loves to play, he has a very childlike spirit. He often handles things with jokes or word games. If he sees he is annoying me because we're doing take after take after take, if he sees that I'm getting cross, he'll start to tease me and it usually works. He makes me laugh and defuses the situation. I think we do pretty well and that the crew around us isn't subjected to a couple's relationship. I love working with him. His take on acting is mostly connected to rhythm. He's always striving for simplicity. I love the scene

where I tell Hadji that he is lucky because at least he doesn't get worked up about his family. I don't know how many takes we had to do for this one line! Michel told me to take my time, to really listen to what Carole had just said, to understand with her that she's said something stupid. To take the time to realise that this kid is all on his own, to look at him and apologise very simply. These are very valuable and pleasant directions. This scene is touching thanks to these small moments. A scene is successful if the rhythm is right. What was tricky for me was allowing Hadji the time to respond. We couldn't have every scene with him becoming a long monologue. Even if we know he won't answer, he has to have the possibility of doing so. It's quite a complicated exercise. You feel lonely. You alone are the one controlling the rhythm of the scene. That's when I'm very happy to have Michel by my side because I know he has a very good sense of rhythm, thanks in part to the comedies he has directed. I also know he is an excellent editor. I have blind faith in him. I do what he tells me, even if I don't always understand what it is he is trying to achieve. This doesn't stop me making my own suggestions, but in the end he only does what he wants. That's what's fun about him. That's the way he works with everyone, producers, technicians, actors. He says yes then does exactly what he wants.

This is your third film together. Did you experience anything new?

The main challenge for Michel with this film is that it wouldn't look phony, that it would be realistic, that it would be respectful of history. He often said he couldn't permit himself any mistakes because it was a true story. That if his film looked fake he would feel ashamed. And it was this fear that guided

him all through the filming. He questioned the realism of each take. That was a new thing for him. Until *THE SEARCH* he had only directed period films. For example, he took great pain with the extras. He dreaded the ridiculous. Absurdity is one of his major issues, with all his films. He was constantly extremely vigilant when it came to realism without nonetheless tipping over into documentary. This is a film first and foremost, a work of fiction.

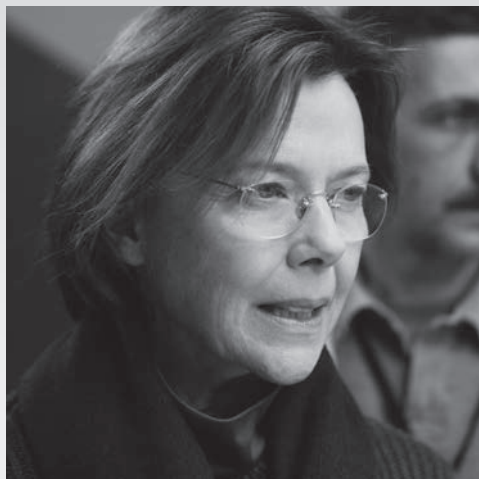
This was new for me too. I was on set every day, even if I only acted 35 days out of 60. I was there every day as a member of the crew. It was important for me to not cut myself out of the film and its making... to be there for Michel, because it was difficult, but also for the technicians, because I'm grateful to see all these people give life to Michel's' project. Another film we made *en famille*. To be on set everyday was my way of telling myself that I wasn't taking it easy while they were all working. I didn't do anything extraordinary, I ate lunch with the crew, took photos, motivated people, looked at the monitor, but I think that united us in some way, we were always together. And Michel needed me to be there, to look at the takes, to give him feedback... I loved being able to participate in the film in this way too.

Interview conducted by Emmanuel Burdeau.

A conversation with ■

Annette Bening

■
Helen



How did you imagine the character of Helen from the screenplay?

Helen seems direct and very much a realist. That aspect of the character connected with me immediately. Although she's a supporting character, I think Helen is an important voice in the story Michel Hazanavicius has chosen to construct to talk about about a conflict as complex as the Second Chechen War.

You are politically committed. Do you see a connection between your engagement and Helen's?

There's nothing systematic in my commitment. I think of myself first and foremost as an actress. I don't commit myself easily and I don't necessarily take pleasure in it. I do it when it's necessary. I liked playing a woman of conviction, a woman who works for an organisation as remarkable as the International Red Cross, which has a down-to-earth relationship with politics. Helen has a very practical nature, and children: that mattered too.

What differences do you see between Carole and Helen?

Carole is an innocent, someone who doesn't recognize the forces around her clearly. She is a perfect vehicle to tell the story. Helen has been there for a long time, she understands what's at stake.

You did a lot of research into Chechnya and Georgia...

I like to research for a part. It's one of the pleasures of the job, to be able to get inside a particular world... Among the reading I did, Anna Politkovskaïa was particularly important. Thanks to his propaganda, Putin was able to control how the conflict was perceived. Politkovskaïa was one of the rare journalists who took the risk to go out there and tell the truth. As we know, she paid the price.

Other books helped me: *One Soldier's War in Chechnya* by Arkady Babchenko or *The Angel of Grozny* by Asne Seierstad, another journalist who spent time in Chechnya, and who recounted incredible things about what happened after the war had supposedly ended. I was also very lucky to be able to talk

with someone from the Red Cross who had worked in Chechnya. It is an organisation that endeavours to not take sides: its mission is to transcend sides to help those in need. In the plane to Tbilisi I sat next to someone who worked for the Red Cross in Northern Georgia. It was fantastic to talk with someone like that. It's something an actor always looks for: to go beyond the general nature of the problems in order to understand the people, their families, how and where they live...

You stayed in Tbilisi for over two weeks...

I arrived early so I could find my feet and wouldn't have to jump into the shoot the minute I got off the plane, still jetlagged... Georgia is a wonderful country. I was able to follow the campaign for general elections; there was a huge rally right in front of my hotel. I went to the theatre, I was able to visit the area around Tbilisi... It was a fantastic experience.

Helen has several scenes with Hadji, the young Chechen boy played by Abdul-Khalim Mamatsuiev. Can you tell us about working with him?

Abdul-Khalim is an adorable little boy who is also irresistibly mischievous. I loved watching him work with Michel. When you have been an actor for a long time, you take your work seriously. It was very refreshing to watch a little boy acting for the first time, having fun, pulling faces... I learned a thousand things from watching Abdul-Khalim play in an instinctive and innocent way.

Helen also has several scenes with Raïssa, Hadji's older sister, played by Zukhra Duishvili.

Zukhra has an extraordinary face. I just had to observe her, to let her face tell the story...

Some young actors can immerse themselves in the reality of the situation in a second. Zukhra adored Michel. We spoke little because of the language difference but, I remember she told me: "*He's a good man.*"

Bérénice Bejo told us about the immense pleasure she took in acting with an actress such as you, after the sometimes difficult scenes that her character Carole has with Hadji.

Michel and Bérénice spent a huge amount of time working with the non-professional actors. When Bérénice and I acted together, they were indeed relieved. We tried different things, experimented, diversified... Bérénice is astonishing in the film.

Did you know Michel Hazanavicius' previous films before working with him on THE SEARCH?

I knew *THE ARTIST*, of course, shot in L.A. It's a marvellous film. I was very impressed when I learned the director was preparing such a different film. It's very brave of Michel to have taken the time to throw himself into such project. Michel is very direct, unpretentious. It's very easy to communicate with him, as it is with Bérénice. Both are professionals who, like me, also like to have fun. Even during the most serious moments there's always a place for laughter. They have a real love of life and a great curiosity towards the world. Me too. We had some excellent times together. I was delighted to be part of such an important film.

Interview conducted by Emmanuel Burdeau.

A conversation with ■

Maxim Emelianov

■
Kolias



How were you chosen to play the part of Kolias?

Tatiana Kliminskaya, an excellent casting director, called my agent to tell her a French director was looking for Russian actors. We didn't know who the director was at that point, or what kind of film it would be, just that it was a big project. The casting took place in four stages and I only met Michel Hazanavicius during the fourth. It's almost a miracle for me to have been associated with such an ambitious project. I felt as if I was taking my first step towards the European market...

How did you react when you read the screenplay?

At the first reading I couldn't believe that everything he was talking about were true. I had my doubts. I didn't believe Russian soldiers could have been guilty of committing such terrible acts. Even when I saw the photo of a soldier laying dead for two weeks, his bones showing... then, little by little I began to understand.

How would you define your character?

Kolias is an ordinary boy who falls into the hell of war. For me, the best way to define

him is to invert the popular metaphor: Kolias is not a caterpillar turning into a butterfly but a butterfly that turns into a caterpillar. That is the effect war has on him. At the beginning Kolias is like a flying butterfly, he knows how to be happy at any moment, every day. By the end he is the opposite, incapable of any true happiness, crawling like a caterpillar.

How did you prepare for the part?

I looked at a lot of documentation about Chechnya and Afghanistan on the Internet. I tried to meet people who had lived through these conflicts. I underwent an intense 2-month training in order to build muscle mass and gained eight kilos. And I imagined Kolias's story: I didn't tell anyone about it but I had to understand him and why he does what he does... For me, Kolias is a boy who lived alone with his mother and who was teased a lot... This situation is more and more common in Russia: you find boys in boarding schools calling their teacher 'Mummy'. I went through the same thing. I completely understand Kolias's pain.

Were you also brought up by your mother?

By my grandmother and my mother, who was a make-up artist working in films. I think it helped me choose a profession - acting - that some still consider feminine. We lived in a small apartment, my mother used to work late into the night. She was the sole breadwinner. She also had to support my uncle; he's only ten years older than me. It wasn't an easy situation.

I understood the consequences of it after I started at the Theater Institute. I couldn't stop crying. I remember once we were playing a scene where I had to bury a loved one: my teacher, Vladimir Arkadievitsh Erëmin, took me to one side and asked me why I was suffering so much. I think this often happens with boys who grow up without a close male role model.

What impressions have you kept of working with Michel Hazanavicius?

On the eve of my first day of shooting I was terrified. I couldn't sleep. I didn't know if I would get along with the director, which is so important for an actor. But not only is Michel a terrific director, he is also very gentle man. In Russia, directors often shout at actors. Michel gets what he wants by other means. I was also very happy that we could do many takes. Up until now, on the Russian films I've worked on, we rehearsed then did three takes, no more.

Which scenes left a particular memory?

There wasn't any one scene I enjoyed shooting more than the others. Rather, the scenes I preferred were those in which I felt I was becoming Kolia. I think of the scene where the Colonel beats me. That might sound strange, all the more so since my lip got cut, but I really liked shooting that scene.

Russian actors accept real blows more readily than others...

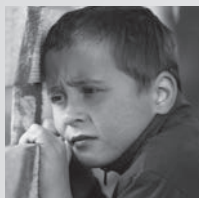
I think that we Russians like to live more than to play. That doesn't mean we didn't rehearse the slaps. We worked on them a lot in order for them to look more natural. In the end, I think I liked playing the scenes where I get beaten. I got used to it.

Another important scene is when Kolia and "Pocket" - the guy who bullied him in the barracks - meet again. Against all expectations, their reunion is a happy one....

It might seem strange, but I agree with Michel: I think Kolia is happy to be reunited with "Pocket." War unites people. It creates bonds, even between a persecutor and his victim, the one he has beaten up, insulted, humiliated... That's how it is: in combat, you have to support each other.

Interview conducted by Emmanuel Burdeau.

And introducing...



Abdul-Khalim Mamatsuiev

■ Hadji

Abdul-Khalim, 10 years old and from Chechnya, was chosen after a long “open casting”. He won over Michel Hazanavicius by his ability to act fear and to cry with remarkable and absolute conviction. His extraordinary natural ability for acting as well as his mischievousness, the jokes and funny faces he would make before, after - and sometimes even during - takes, won the hearts of the whole crew, in particular his three acting partners Bérénice Bejo, Annette Bening and Zuhra Duishvili, who says he’s the most adorable kid she’s ever met.

Traumatized by what he has seen, and overwhelmed by the guilt of having had to abandon his younger brother while they were on the run, his character Hadji is mute until, at last, he finds the courage to tell Carole his story. It is this desperately moving scene and, in a different register, the hard work he had to put in while learning dance, that have left young Abdul-Khalim with his most powerful memories of the shoot.



Zuhra Duishvili

■ Raïssa

Also from Chechnya, Zuhra Duishvili had had no involvement with the film world until she heard of a casting session (for *THE SEARCH*), the final stages of which took her all the way to Tbilisi. Her father, now deceased, fought against the Russians, and her grandfather lives in Georgia, in the Pankisi Valley. Zuhra describes her character Raïssa as a “*strong and courageous young girl*.” Even more than the appeal of acting for the director of *THE ARTIST*, Zuhra feels that it is specially important to be part of a film that will finally show the world the degree of violence to which the Chechen people have been subjected by the Russians.

Cast

Carole.....Bérénice Bejo
 Helen.....Annette Bening
 Kolia.....Maxim Emelianov
 Hadji.....Abdul-Khalim Mamatsuiev
 Raïssa.....Zukhra Duishvili
 Elina.....Lela Bagakashvili
 The Colonel.....Yuriy Tsurilo
 Soldier.....Anton Dolgov
 Father.....Mamuka Matchitidze
 Mother.....Rusudan Pareulidze

Crew

Written & Directed by.....Michel Hazanavicius
 Producers.....Thomas Langmann and Michel Hazanavicius
 Associate Producer.....Emmanuel Montamat
 Production Manager.....Daniel Delume
 DP.....Guillaume Schiffman
 Sound.....Jean Minondo
 Costume Designer.....Les Rincali
 Production Designer.....Emile Ghigo
 Editors.....Anne-Sophie Bion and Michel Hazanavicius
 Casting.....Hervé Jakubowicz
 Postproduction Supervisor.....Frank Mettre
 1st Assistant Director.....James Canal
 Continuity.....Isabel Ribis
 Make-up.....Lucia Bretones Mendez
 Hair.....Paul de Fisser
 SFX Make-up.....Jean-Christophe Spadaccini
 Stunt Coordinator.....Rémi Canaple
 SFX Supervisor.....Georges Demetrau
 Armorer.....Christophe Maratier
 VFX Supervisor.....Philippe Aubry
 Sound Editors.....Nadine Muse and Selim Azzazi
 Mix.....Armelle Mahé and Gérard Lamps
 Stills Photographer.....Roger Arpajou

THOMAS LANGMANN AND MICHEL HAZANAVICIUS PRESENT A LA PETITE REINE LA CLASSE AMERICAINE FRANCES CINEMA ORANGE STUDIO WILD BUNCH SEARCH PRODUCTION SARKE STUDIO/IGFIC CO-PRODUCTION WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF CANAL+ CINE-FRANCE TELEVISIONS IN ASSOCIATION WITH WORLDVIEW ENTERTAINMENT WESTART INVEST NLJ CAPITAL SOFTVONE A FILM BY MICHEL HAZANAVICIUS WITH BERENICE BEJO ANNETTE BENING THE SEARCH MAXIM EMELIANOV ZUKHRA DUSHVILI AND ABDUL-KHALIM MAMATSUEV DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY GUILLAUME SCHIFFMAN A/C PRODUCTION DESIGNER EMILE GHIGO A/C EDITING ANNE-SOPHIE BION MICHEL HAZANAVICIUS CASTING HERVE JAKUBOWICZ COSTUMES LES RINCALI SOUND JEAN MINONDO A/FSA NADINE MUSE SELIM AZZAZI ARMELLE MAHE GERARD LAMPS POST PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR FRANK METTRE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER DANIEL DELUME WRITTEN BY MICHEL HAZANAVICIUS INSPIRED BY THE PRESENTS-FILMAG AND TURNER ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY MOTION PICTURE "THE SEARCH" (1948) CO-PRODUCER EMMANUEL MONTAMAT EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS YVES BOUVIER CHRISTOPHER WOODROW MOLLY CONNERS MARIA CESTONE SARAH E. JOHNSON KEVIN PLANK PRODUCED BY THOMAS LANGMANN MICHEL HAZANAVICIUS DIRECTED BY MICHEL HAZANAVICIUS © 2014 La Petite Reine - La Classe Americaine - France 3 Cinema - Orange Studio - Wild Bunch - Search Production - Sarke Studio/IGFIC

