NICOLAS ANTHOMÉ PRESENTS

2021 OFFICIAL SELECTION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES
UN CERTAIN REGARD
opening film

ONODA

10 000 NIGHTS IN THE JUNGLE

A FILM BY
ARTHUR HARARI

Nicolas Anthomé presents

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SYNOPSIS

Japan, 1944. Trained for intelligence work, Hiroo Onoda, 22 years old, discovers a philosophy contrary to the official line: no suicide, stay alive whatever happens, the mission is more important than anything else. Sent to Lubang, a small island in the Philippines where the Americans are about to land, his role will be to wage a guerilla war until the return of the Japanese troops. The Empire will surrender soon after, Onoda 10.000 days later.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ARTHUR HARARI, DIRECTOR

How did *Onoda* come into being?
For several years, even before the shooting of *Black Diamond*, I had been thinking about making an adventure film. I was devouring Conrad and Stevenson and was intrigued by solo sailors and polar expeditions. Then one day, I was talking about it to my dad, and almost as a joke, he told me this incredible tale about a Japanese soldier who spent several years on an island. And that was my first introduction to Onoda.

Was the appeal immediate?
Yes, I instantly felt a calling. I read interviews, surfed the web, and actually went to Japan to meet Bernard Cendron, who in 1974, co-authored a book with Gérard Chenu called Onoda, *seul en guerre dans la jungle*. He gave me free access to his archives and shared his memories with me.

Did you read Onoda's book *No Surrender: My Thirty-Year War?*
I discovered it later when the script was already written and we were about to start shooting. But not having read the book gave me the freedom to invent the character I wanted. For me, Onoda was a fictional driver and I didn't want to be a prisoner of his subjectivity.

You mentioned Stevenson and Conrad. Were you influenced by Japanese literature when you were writing the screenplay?
I haven't read any Japanese literature. I did wonder if I should read the *Bushido*, the Japanese warrior code of moral principles, but I wanted to avoid a kind of Western fascination with the samurai. For me, the film isn't simply about a kind of Japanese identity; it's more universal, more humanistic than that. By avoiding Japanese literature and turning away from that fantasy, I wasn't cheating with my personal perspective.

And what about Japanese cinema?
Almost everything I know about Japan comes from realistic mangas and most importantly from movies. If there is one director who influenced

Onoda, it is Mizoguchi; he achieves this balance between empathy for his characters and a permanent high visual perspective, and has this distance in his directorial style, which is never cold or overbearing. It's a kind of patient serenity that sometimes lets itself be carried away or submerged. I tried to find that same irrepressible movement that culminates in an emotional and poetic intensification: The characters and the world, the overwhelmed inwardness of men, and the external «order» of things all merge together. And then there's Kurosawa, who achieves this staggering power in a totally different way. Of course, I had in mind the extraordinary combination of epic, picaresque, and cosmically poetic film that is *Seven Samurai*. And there were other influences like Kon Ichikawa and Fires on the Plain, Koji Wakamatsu and *United Red Army*, and the Filipino filmmaker Lino Brocka whose films masterfully combine realism and myth.

What about Western filmmakers?
Renoir, Walsh (*Objective, Burma!*), Fuller, and Leone (*Once Upon a Time in America*). And above all Ford, whose links with Kurosawa are obvious and who was so influential that his framing, camera movements, and scenography are all firmly anchored in me. Another filmmaker who was very important was Monte Hellman, whose The Shooting and *Ride in the Whirlwind* I watched again before we began shooting. The latter struck me not only by its simplicity and realism, especially in the acting, but also by its ability to explore the myth of the bandit while trying to find that way of being, thinking, and discussing in the United States of the late 19th-century. It's a great example of a historical film in the present tense. Sternberg's last film, *Anatahan*, held a special, somewhat ghostly status in my mind: How can you embody such madness in an enterprise so close to your own, while recounting something else entirely?

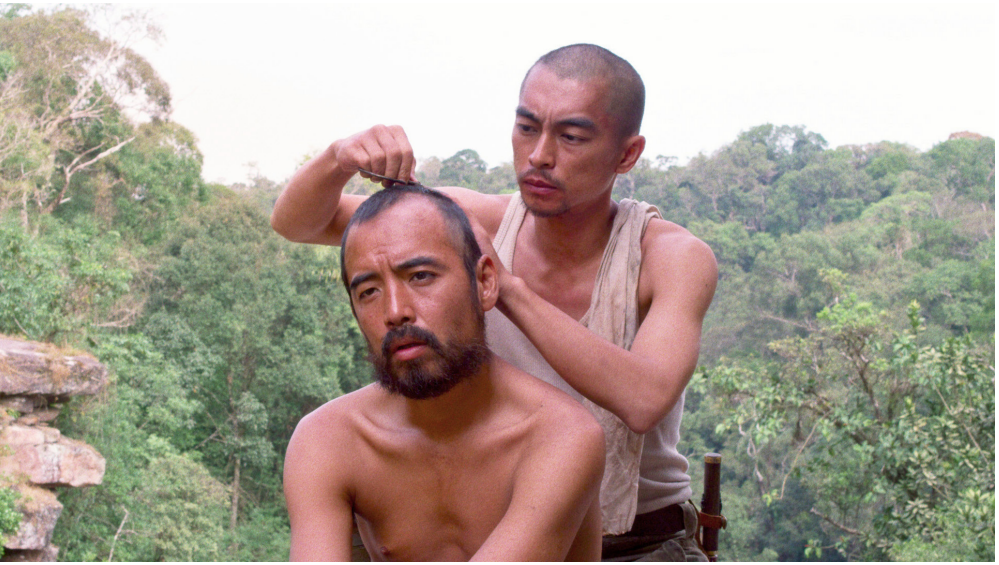
It's a composite film, but what genre would you describe it as? A western?
The western is the genre towards which all others converge quite easily, because it is the perfect cinematographic form of an epic tale. It condenses the primitive obsessions of Western literature and comes closest to myth, storytelling, and a certain purity. Every time I make a film, I return to the western. In terms of Kozuka's death, the most obvious reference is Boorman's *Deliverance*, which I see as an almost conceptual re-reading of the western and that genre's place in the American subconscious. In the harpoon scene, the Japanese are the

cowboys and the Filipinos are the Indians, but they would all have ended up looking physically similar to each other because they were stuck in the same territory.

How did you cast the film?
Casting the film became almost obsessive! I immediately offered the role of Akatsu to Kai Inowaki whom I had discovered as a child in Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Tokyo Sonata* and whom I thought was great. For other roles, the process was extremely long and complicated because once I'd abandoned my initial ideas, I immersed myself in a kind of deep web of local acting talent. With the help of casting director Rioko Kanbayashi, producer Hiroshi Matsui, and translator Éléonore Mahmoudian, I compiled a huge list of actors. Endō Yūya, who plays young Onoda, was chosen thanks to a photo that struck me among hundreds of others. His face didn't look like that of a young actor. I saw something in it that resonated with me.

You picked him from a photo?
I picked him out to come meet with me. And then I later saw bits of scenes in which he featured. Our first meeting in Tokyo was striking because Endō-San told me straight away that for him, acting was never obvious; it was always a problem. That appealed to me. And during his tests, his performance was totally sincere, flowing against the tide of the other candidates. I should also mention the other actor in the title role, Kanji Tsuda. It was Yu Shibuya, who translated the script and worked

as an interpreter on the set, who drew him to my attention. He also plays an extraordinary character in *Tokyo Sonata* and has a filmography a mile long, but only of supporting roles, in particular with Kitano who gave him his debut role, and he has never had such a big role as that of Onoda. He merged with the character and seeing that physical and almost spiritual change was one of the most powerful things about the whole experience. At the end, I felt like he was levitating, that branches were really connecting him to the landscape. He is a unique person, a poetic being.



What rules did you impose for the acting?
No rules, but I did ask the actors to hold back. The Japanese can have a very fixed image of what war, authority, and hierarchy represent, and to conform to this idea, they often perform with a voice that comes from the belly. I didn't want them to act with authority or fervor. On the contrary, they had to give something more simplistic to avoid any clichés. I regularly told them I didn't feel like they were giving me their voice. I wanted them to speak with their own voice, in the physical sense.

Would you say your film is based on reality?
My obsession, and one that I share with my brother, Tom, the film's cinematographer, is about capturing something real. The film had to be about experiencing reality. The bodies were there, the hands were there, and nature was there. It's about capturing something. We became obsessed with the sweat, the dirtiness of the costumes, the tangibility of the elements. The film took on a more sensual dimension than I had imagined; the rain had to really fall on the viewers. Here again, we were guided by an equilibrium between classical harmony and a direct, immersive aspect, in order to create a particular experience of time and space. There are two coexisting spaces in time in the film: That of the villagers, open to the outside world and caught up in a chronology whose dates punctuate the different stages in the film; and that of Onoda, closed in by the outline of the island, where time is cyclical and constitutes a stasis that evolves very slowly. Between the two, there is a border that Onoda regularly approaches to get supplies, but which he refuses to cross completely. Many scenes in the film are built on this principle of an almost irreconcilable shot-counter-shot.

A counter-shot that you refuse to show...
It is Onoda who refuses it, and it was my choice to be in his shoes, or rather, standing by his side. He is locked in his world, and we are, too, until the young backpacker arrives. And he brings the counter-shot that invades everything, turning things upside-down.

Isn't the film also all about the number two? Two spaces in time, two fathers...

And two shores, especially at the end of the film when Onoda meets the young backpacker. The heart of the film is built around two couples: Onoda and Kozuka on one side and Shimada and Akatsu on the other. From the very beginning, I was thinking about the duality between Onoda and the young backpacker that structured the script to such an extent that the latter appeared almost as a reincarnation of the former. In a way, this traveler represented a new pacified version of the fighter, someone who would continue things and be a kind of relay. Suzuki [the backpacker's real name] is Onoda free of all authority, who chooses his adventures alone and for himself. As for the two fathers, they were already present in *Dark Inclusion*. But here, the substitute father - Major Taniguchi - embodies a duality himself, and a paradoxical one at that, by ordering his pupil to obey and at the same time, imposing absolute autonomy on him. "You are your own officer", he says. In the same way, he traces a sacrificial path for him, while forbidding him to die. Thus Onoda is permanently inhabited by the emptiness of an absent paternal authority, and it is his own very unique freedom that is at stake. This paradoxical relationship to the father figure led me, in the final scene of surrender, to show Onoda strangely more sovereign than Taniguchi. Through his adventure, he has gained full autonomy, but is it thanks to his superior, or in spite of him? It remains an open question for me.

This duality maintains an ambiguity in certain scenes.

Shimada's death is a good example because the scene is set up as a mirror, with two symmetrical shots. Is he killed or does he kill himself? When I was looking for the actor to play the Filipino who shoots, I wanted him to physically resemble Shimada in order to maintain that confusion.

What place did you give to the viewer in your plans?

It was a very complicated challenge, both in terms of writing and editing. Generally speaking, the viewer is not totally naive when watching the film and, with some rare exceptions, the viewer knows what Onoda's situation is. It was therefore necessary to place them in a critical position where they could feel both empathy for the character, despite his mistakes and actions, while being able to put him at a distance and wait for the counter-shot. Hence the initial scene with the young backpacker, which was not initially intended to be there. This fragile balance between adhesion – even fusion – and distance is something that obsesses me. Classicism, especially in cinema, is a great tradition for not giving in to fascination or pure amazement. I understood very quickly that the film would not be feverishly baroque in its style. On the contrary, it was necessary to convey the slow construction of a world; a temporal and moral vertigo that would not erase our critical or ironic distance.

Your film raises the question of heroism. Is Onoda a hero?

It is impossible not to see Onoda as a hero, even if his adventure is highly ambiguous. Heroes in all mythologies, especially Greek, are often those who are allowed to commit terrifying acts. There is no heroism without ambiguity, without a dark side. Onoda is heroic because his story embodies values that many Japanese people recognized at some point. But you don't have to be Japanese or of a military tendency to be struck by his story. Onoda escapes himself. He is on the losing side, but he accomplishes, almost unwillingly, something that goes far beyond what he is.

Might one say that the film takes up the different stages of the birth of humanity?

Paradoxically, Onoda becomes more humane as he performs shocking acts. I'm thinking of the death of Iniez, the Filipino woman. While Kozuka refuses to shoot as if there is something resisting inside him, Onoda

doesn't hold back. But the look on his face afterwards as he stares at Iniez's corpse in the grave he digs, is new. He's never looked at any other "enemy" that way before. He understands what he has done, and to whom he has done it.

To complete his recovery of his humanity, he must pass into the world of the dead. Could one compare him to Odysseus?
I became aware of the reference to Odysseus thanks to my producer Nicolas Anthomé, so much so that we thought of opening the film with a quote from Homer. Odysseus has to travel the Mediterranean Sea before he is allowed to return home. Onoda is also stuck in a similar bind, returning to Japan after enduring all the hardships that were imposed on him. I can also see connections with Ford's *The Searchers* or Ang Lee's *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, but there's an essential idea the film shares with Homer, about the individual who is sent to fight for the survival of the community, and as a result, is excluded. They are sidelined, or they sideline themselves from humanity in order to save the society to which they belong. And this suggests they enter the world of the dead. When we first meet Onoda, he admits to being afraid of death but he ends up sowing death all around, before going on to live amongst the graves of his comrades. This theme is further reinforced in Onoda's case because he has been forbidden to die.

Might one say he almost becomes a monk?
It might seem shocking when you think about it, but Onoda has this enormous experience that eventually gives him a kind of inner peace. He has to confront horror, abjection and absolute loneliness in order to achieve serenity.

And this change allows him to become one with his island...
Before this serenity is reached, he discovers the beauty of the island and its sensuality. The foliage that he wears, at first to camouflage himself, allows him to merge with the vegetation. He changes into a pastoral figure who totally communes with nature. And his departure is a kind of an uprooting.

One might say that Onoda is Arthur Harari's double and that the soldier's experience is close to a cinematic experience.
The connection between Onoda's world and the world of cinema is obvious. For me, cinema is a way of living with a reality that I could not bear without it. Since childhood, I have dreamed of having a heroic destiny, but I never will, except through the characters I film. But what links me most intimately to Onoda is certainly the question of integrity.

What is next for you?
Nothing is fixed as yet. I'm torn between the need to talk about my country and the need not to talk about myself except through others. I need to film the current times in France, without locking myself in. With *Onoda*, I realized I have developed a taste for stories that are difficult or impossible to tell and I like this challenge. It's an adventure that involves finding a narrative, aesthetic and poetic form for vertiginous subjects. That is all I know right now.

Interview by Yannick Lemarié
Extract to be published in the summer issue of Positif

EXAMINING THE WAR THROUGH THE LIFE OF A JAPANESE SOLDIER

**by Naoko Seriu, lecturer in Modern History,
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies**

In late 1944, Japan was losing the war. Therefore, Hiroo Onoda received a secret guerrilla training at the Nakano school in Futamata before being sent to the island of Lubang in the Philippines. When the American army landed there at the end of February 1945, he and other soldiers retreated into the jungle. As planned, they formed a small group in order to survive. Lieutenant Onoda found himself in command, along with three other men: corporal Shimada, and privates Akatsu and Kozuka. Long after the capitulation was signed in early September 1945, and despite various appeals, they would not surrender their weapons. Onoda finally agreed to lay down his arms in March 1974.

The story of this soldier, who refused to surrender for almost 30 years, has been heard not only in Japan, where he was hailed as a hero, but also around the world. Measuring fame is not an easy task, and yet Onoda is the most celebrated of the «stragglers (zanryū nipponhei)», the soldiers who remained in arms after Japan capitulated. In 1972, soldier Shōichi Yokoi was found on the Guam Island in a highly weakened physical state. When he returned to Japan, he became famous for a while. But the interest sparked by the return of Onoda and his martial appearance was even greater.

Much was made of Onoda's return, and it was a major media event. He was first treated as a perfect soldier by the Philippine authorities and President Marcos himself, who granted him a pardon for the crimes he had committed in Lubang. His upright posture, his exact military salute, and his sharp looks during his "surrender" made a strong impression on the Japanese public. On March 12th, 1974, the crowds went wild when he arrived at Narita Airport. His acts and experiences inspired a flood of comments and discussions. For many, Onoda embodied values like bravery, sobriety, pride, and most importantly, the loyalty to the mission. His physical and mental strength was unanimously celebrated. Everywhere he went, he drew crowds, received letters from admirers, and appeared on television. His memoir, *30 Years War on the Island of Lubang*, published in August 1974, was a bestseller, translated and published worldwide.

However, for all those who hailed Onoda in Japan, there were many voices that disagreed. For some, Onoda was a victim of military education and it was not appropriate to consider him as a hero. The writer, Shōhei Ōoka, author of works including *Taken Captive: A Japanese POW's Story and Fires on the Plain*, talked about the responsibility of the Japanese state with regard to the failed rescue operation and the inherent flaws of a military education. While mentioning the case of another Futamata soldier who stayed on the Mindoro island until 1956, he questioned the order that Onoda received to stay on the island and carry out the mission forever. The writer Akiyuki Nosaka, author of *Grave of the Fireflies* and *American Hijiki*, was also critical. According to him, the uneasiness Onoda may have felt in his own family, especially towards his brilliant soldier brothers and his father, might help explain why he thought it was his mission to lead a guerrilla war to the end. He believed that Onoda himself did not write his memoirs alone and regretted that there was no mention of any responsibility on the part of the Emperor, an important preoccupation for the young generation. In 1977, Noboru Tsuda, a journalist and ghostwriter of Onoda's memoirs, wrote the book *Hero of Illusion* revealing the process behind writing Onoda's autobiography. A retired soldier, he sounded the alarm against the political use of Onoda.

These criticisms, which are important to study today, make it possible to analyze the opinions expressed in the consensual and controlled media space of the time. As philosopher Nagai Hitoshi points out, little attention was drawn to the damages suffered by the Lubang Island inhabitants, even though up to thirty homicides were counted.

The media buzz about Onoda dwindled after he left for Brazil in 1975. He himself felt weary and wished for more freedom. He returned to Japan in 1984 to found the Onoda Nature School to introduce children to the art of living in nature. According to him, the parricide case of a young student in 1980 motivated him to get involved in the education of the future generation. In the 2000s, he became an activist in a nationalist movement, calling on young people to visit the Yasukuni Temple, a shrine honoring dead soldiers, including war criminals. Since his death in 2014 at the age of 91, Onoda has been more of a symbol, admired by nationalist conservatives and by the Japanese nation, which demonstrates no regrets for its colonialist and warrior past.

ARTHUR HARARI

Arthur Harari was born in Paris in 1981 and has directed several short and medium-length films that have been screened in a large number of festivals. In 2017, his first film *Dark Inclusion*, was nominated for two César awards and won Best Male Newcomer for Niels Schneider. In 2021, his new film Onoda - *10 000 nights in the jungle* opens the Un Certain Regard section at the Cannes Festival.

FILMOGRAPHY

Director

2021 ONODA – 10 000 nights in the jungle (co-written with Vincent Poymiro)
2016 DARK INCLUSION (co-written with Vincent Poymiro and Agnès Feuvre)
2013 PEINE PERDUE (short film)
2007 LA MAIN SUR LA GUEULE (short film)
2006 LE PETIT (short film)
2005 DES JOURS DANS LA RUE (short film)

Screenwriter

2021 ANATOMIE D'UNE CHUTE by Justine Triet (co-written)
2019 SYBIL (co-written with Justine Triet)

Actor

2019 SIBYL by Justine Triet
2017 THE LION SLEEPS TONIGHT by Nobuhiro Suwa
2016 IN BED WITH VICTORIA by Justine Triet
DARK INCLUSION
LE DIEU BIGORNE by Benjamin Papin (short film)
2013 AGE OF PANIC by Justine Triet
2011 PANEXLAB by Olivier Seror (short film)

CAST

Young Onoda	**ENDŌ Yūya**
Old Onoda	**TSUDA Kanji**
Young Kozuka	**MATSUURA Yūya**
Old Kozuka	**CHIBA Tetsuya**
Shimada	**KATŌ Shinsuke**
Akatsu	**INOWAKI Kai**
Major Taniguchi	**Issey OGATA**
Tourist	**NAKANO Taïga**
Onoda's father	**SUWA Nobuhiro**
Captain Hayakawa	**YOSHIOKA Mutsuo**
Second Kuroda	**ADACHI Tomomitsu**
Lieutenant Suehiro	**SHIMADA Kyūsaku**
Iniez	**Angeli BAYANI**
Filipino prisoner	**Jemuel Cedrick SATUMBA**

CREW

Director	**Arthur HARARI**
Producer	**Nicolas ANTHOMÉ**
Screenwriters	**Arthur HARARI** and **Vincent POYMIRO** With the collaboration of **Bernard CENDRON** Freely inspired by the life of **Hiroo Onoda**
Score	**Sebastiano DE GENNARO, Enrico GABRIELLI, Andrea POGGIO, SATO Gak** and **Olivier MARGUERIT**
Cinematography	**Tom HARARI**
Editing	**Laurent SÉNÉCHAL**
Setting	**Brigitte BRASSARD**
Costumes	**Catherine MARCHAND, Patricia SAIVE**
Sound	**Ivan DUMAS** **Andreas HILDEBRANDT** **Alek «Bunic» GOOSSE**
Production companies	**bathysphere** and **To Be Continued**
In coproduction with	**Ascent Film, Chipangu, Frakas Productions, Pandora Film Produktion, Anti-Archive, Arte France Cinéma, RAI Cinema, Proximus**
With the participation of	**Arte France, Canal +, Ciné +, Canal + International**
In association with	**The Asahi Shimbun, Lotus**
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