

## *Film Review: 'Bloody Beans'*



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*Mislabeled a documentary by certain festivals, Narimane Mari's quasi-hallucinatory reverie takes an experimental approach to the subject of war.*

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Taking a surprisingly effective experimental stance, [Narimane Mari](http://variety.com/t/narimane-mari/) (<http://variety.com/t/narimane-mari/>) obliquely comments on [Algeria](http://variety.com/t/algeria/) (<http://variety.com/t/algeria/>)'s War of Independence in the quasi-hallucinatory reverie "[Bloody Beans](http://variety.com/t/bloody-beans/) (<http://variety.com/t/bloody-beans/>).” Though it wears its metaphors too heavily at times, the pic uses a group of children tired of eating a staple diet of red beans to reflect on the high cost of colonialization and the absurdity of killing. Indebted in part to “Lord of the Flies” in its presentation of near-feral kids, the film has a performance-piece feel while still being cinematic, making it an attractive offering for cutting-edge fests.

The English-lingo title has undergone changes, first appearing as “Red Beans” (the literal translation) in Turin and “Bloody Beans” at Dubai and CPH:Dox. Even the helmer’s name has variants: Dubai’s catalogue lists her as Narimane Mari Benamer. More troubling is that CPH:Dox (where “Beans” won the main prize) and Dubai programmed the film as a docu despite a total absence of nonfiction elements. If movies set in the past appear in docu sections merely because fashion spouts nonsense about permeable genre boundaries, then the treachery of relativism will have wreaked havoc on the very concept of reality.

Fortunately, the pic’s strengths overcome such inaccurate pigeonholing. Mari places novice d.p. Nasser Madjkane smack in the middle of a group of kids at the beach in Algiers, where the camera is immersed in their frolicking. It’s sometime during the country’s battle for independence from France, and the discussion keeps coming back to food. Someone claims to have seen luxury comestibles like chocolate and eggs in the French barracks, and the children discuss raiding the enemy’s pantry.

Before then, they’re alerted to a pig-masked man who’s beating a Spanish woman (played by helmer Mari), and they chase the perp away in a creepy scene whose symbolism — violent patriarchal colonialist figure is a pig — is far too obvious to be effective. When night falls, they paint their faces (a la William Golding) and head to the barracks, first passing through a phantasmagorical Christian cemetery. Once at the garrison, they kidnap French guard Bertrand (Samy Bouhouche) and bring him back to the beach, though perpetuating violence isn’t on their minds.

At the end, the kids recite lines from Antonin Artaud’s “Petit poeme des poissons de la mer,” with its key question: “Is it better to be than to obey?” The answer, of course, is “yes,” since blind obedience enables the sort of violence that characterizes all conflicts. Mari refuses a doctrinaire response to Algeria’s war, and her use of children is singularly successful in how their response to the bloodshed is filtered through basic human needs rather than ideology. Though the kids are largely boys, a few girls join the group, from the curiously self-assured Lilia (Ghania Aissani) to the more sympathetic Poupouna (Rehab Bakir), who refuses to be excluded from the boys’ mission, telling them that girls aren’t created “for dishwashing and cooking your beans.”

Though unsuccessful, the pig-masked-man sequence references the Arab world's current unrest, as the kids yell "Degage!" ("Clear off!"), a chant commonly used during recent protests in the region. For Mari, the scene also alludes to her past as the daughter of an Algerian father and a European (French) mother whose relationship was frowned upon, but such extratextual baggage adds nothing.

Intense workshopping helped bring out the best in the non-pro tyke actors, whose simmering, almost balletic energy drives the rhythms of the film as much as the accomplished editing. Madjkane's active camera practically dances alongside the children, and long takes suit the flow of action. Music and curious soundscapes form a prominent element of the overall dreamlike picture.

## **Film Review: 'Bloody Beans'**

Reviewed at Turin Film Festival (A Moveable Feast), Nov. 23, 2013. (Also in Dubai Film Festival – Muhr Arab Documentary.) Running time: **83 MIN**. Original title: "Loubia hamra"

### **Production**

(Algeria-France) An Allers Retours Films, Andolfi, Centrale Electricque production. Produced by Narimane Mari. Co-producers, Arnaud Dommerc, Olivier Boisshot, Jean-Baptiste Legrand.

### **Crew**

Directed, written by Narimane Mari. Camera (color, HD), Nasser Madjkane; editors, Caroline Detournay, Anita Roth, Mari; music, Zombie Zombie, Cosmic Neman, Etienne Jeman; costume designer, Lila Brahimi; sound, Guillaume Pellerin, Olivier Luce, Benjamin Laurent.

### **With**

Adlane Aissani, Amir Nourine, Chems-Eddine Boudjema, Feycal Ould Larbi, Ghania Aissani, Housseim Eddine Chatouani, Haitem Hala, Kawtar Bakir, Madjid Bouabdellah, Mounir Laid, Mohamed Brahimi, Nassim Brahimi, Nedjmeddine Benarafa, Rehab Bakir, Rabam Issam Hadj Aissa, Yacine Bennou, Samy Bouhouche, Narimane Mari. (Arabic, French dialogue)