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Transcript

[+](#) [The Sultan's Burden](#), directed by [Holtedahl, Lisbet](#) & [Jerstad, Jon](#) (Filmmakers Library, 1995), 48:55 mins

- [English](#)

transcript

FILMAKERS LIBRARY, INC. NEW YORK, N.Y. fL PRESENTS[sil.]THE SULTAN'S BURDEN[sil.]NARRATOR Sultan Issa Maigari is the ruler of Adamawa, a province nearly the size of England in the West African state of Cameroon. Until recently, he held the power of life or death over his one million subjects. May God give you long life!

NARRATOR But now the Cameroonien Government does not recognize his sultanate, and has removed his power to raise taxes. So the Sultan can no longer afford to support the lavish lifestyle of courtiers and the royal wives. The Islamic fundamentalists and the peasants are rebelling. With his authority under threat from all sides, he faces a painful struggle to maintain his dignity and position. Today the Sultan must attend the inauguration of a new regional governor. But before he can leave the palace, his horse must be protected from harmful magical spells.[sil.] I am the Minister of Magic I serve Sultan Issa Bring nothing but God's blessing Spirits! Listen to me Spirits and magic are harmful... if you don't know how to conjure them NARRATOR The Minister of Magic trans to conjure up the faces of enemy magicians who might be casting harmful spells on the Sultan's horse. Spirits! Support me Dressed in the white linen of the Dead... You are the most powerful[sil.] Iron cannot hurt me Only God can take me from this world Come, Black Magic! stand with one foot in this world... and the other in the world of spirits[sil.] Sultan Issa Maigari When the White colonizers came a hundred years ago... they let us carry on our traditional way of life Sultans before me could do whatever they wished They could arrest, beat and even imprison people We had no problems with Whites When Independence came to Africa in the 1960's... everything had to change[sil.] Sultan Issa Maigari Today I have to make all the different tribes... live together as one large family[sil.] Sultan Issa Maigari This is my story My grandfather was a Sultan My father was a Sultan I am a Sultan This is the palace where I was born I was brought up as Royalty[sil.] Sultan Issa Maigari Before I was elected Sultan I worked as a tailor I made fashionable clothes for everybody It was the Courtiers who elected me They said they wanted me as their Sultan They brought me to this palace I didn't ask anybody to give me this position[sil.] Sultan Issa Maigari This town has prospered during my reign The railway station was built and the roads were paved Even electricity and street lights came during my reign[sil.] NARRATOR Sultan Issa is both a religious and traditional leader. Today the national government uses him as their intermediary with the local people.[sil.] The Minister of Interior, Mr Tchoungui, is here His name is associated with the entire history of Cameroon[sil.] It's the Minister of Interior! The boss has come Simon Pierre Tchoungui Good evening, Happy New Year[sil.] Simon Pierre Tchoungui Administrative Authorities of the Province of Adamawa... Commanders of the Northern Army... traditional Chiefs... elite of the people of Adamawa... this is your new Governor[sil.] Simon Pierre Tchoungui Governor Oumarou Koué... receive your command![sil.] Simon Pierre Tchoungui I am particularly pleased to be with you today... because this is my first visit... since my nomination as Minister of Interior... to this magnificent capital of the Province of

Adamawa You town harmoniously links the North and South...of our beautiful country and ensures the happiness...of people from different ethnic and religious groups[sil.][non-English song] Head of Public Security[non-English song] Simon Pierre Tchoungui You must ensure the activities of the traditional chiefs...conform to the policies of the Public Authorities The Administration of a developing country like ours...must constantly renew itself...and cut itself off...from customs and traditional practices...that are no longer satisfactory in a changing world This is the Minister of Magic's love potion God has given us strong magic to make all people love us This is not lies. By God! This is the truth It is a perfumed, magical powder for love Sultan Issa Maigari I never eat food prepared by women You might put magical powders in it to make me love you Someone could give you poison, saying it is love medicine Where could your wives get such magical powders? Sultan Issa Maigari They have many female visitors. We are afraid of our wives HADJA LARE THE SULTAN'S THIRD WIFE We can never go outside We must live inside the palace walls The Sultan married me three months after he was enthroned That makes about twenty years Sultan Issa Maigari We can't let our wives become too influential Women are resigned to their fate. They beat us there If I hear that my wife is going out with someone... it hurts me deeply and I react But we men can take another man's wife. We do it secretly[sil.] That's me Hadja Dada, Hadja Lare... Hadja Nenne and Hadja Bebbé We were all very young None of us had grown women's bodies then THE JUDGE

Here in Africa, Islam rules A man can have four wives...and about ten concubines, or more That is a woman's lot. God has given women patience They are patient but it hurts them! They remain patient...because they saw how their mothers and grandmothers lived That's why they put up with it How many children have you?

Sultan Issa Maigari Nineteen, but one died, so there are eighteen left I have about twenty children...but a few died That's not counting the little ones...who died less than a month old If I count them, I come to about thirty[sil.] Sultan Issa Maigari I also have some concubines Only one of them has a child by mels this child's life the same as your other children's? Sultan Issa Maigari No, a concubine's life is not regulated by Islamic Law- How many concubines have you?

Sultan Issa Maigari - About six NARRATOR The Sultan's father had more than a hundred concubines. Now, the royal budget imposes restraint.[sil.] I was only thirteen when I was brought here The difference between us concubines and the wives...is that they were properly married with a dowry...while we were brought here by our fathers The Sultan decides everything. We never buy magic love powder Is he not the Sultan? Doesn't a great man need many women? Can he remain alone with one small wife? It's unthinkable!

THE SULTAN'S SECRETARY I've discovered something You're entitled to Social Security Sultan Issa Maigari I've never received any money Someone in the Government office takes my money These things happen, you know. He takes my money...and gives it to his brothers[sil.] Because the Sultan has ruled for twenty years...the courtiers want a new ruler They have started their conspiracy When he is there they flatter him...and when he is away they speak with false tongues They want a new ruler who can give them new clothes...new women to marry and new horses But since independence the state takes all taxes...so the Sultan can't afford gifts for everyone as before Welcome, Oumarou Welcome, Sanda. May God give you long life! THE PRAISE-SINGER

Today everything has changed The old Sultan would not ask visitors for money He would tell you to pay the Horsemen, the Drum-players...and the Praise-singers It's we Praise-singers who are important But this Sultan profits on our backs. It's not fair! Our boss eats chicken but we don't even get beans![sil.] There are many hypocrites among us in our court THE MINISTER OF PROTOCOL We assemble in the Palace and if the

Sultan does something bad...we just keep silent Our motive is greed Sultan Issa Maigari There's a certain story I have heard told They say there was a Sultan...who used to prepare food without gravy He would ask his courtiers to bring their own sauce People then said, "This Sultan is bad" "See how selfish he is!" When I came to power...I never let a feast go by...without giving generously to everybody But today people say that I am very selfish So everything I have done is forgotten I can tell you that no Sultan alive today...has spent so much on gifts This very year I spent a fortune on clothes But as I am told I am selfish I've kept the clothes [non-English narration] Sultan Issa Maigari I sit on them like a brooding hen on her eggs...releasing them only once in a while Before people blame me they should look at themselves I decided to give a feast but since you people complain...who can blame me for holding back? I've been at the top so long you people are fed up with me Your Honour, from tomorrow the others will notice I've changed I will bring my horse and show you respect, starting tomorrow! [sil.] Sultan Issa Maigari The Christians used to call us non-believers But everyone has his own faith deep in his heart If you are with God...your faith will never mislead you You have your religion, I have mine You practise yours, I practise mine [sil.] NARRATOR Sultan Issa is the Islamic leader of Adamawa. But to hold on to power, he needs to support the Christian president. Most of his subjects are Muslims and supporters of the opposition party. His courtiers and his people see the Sultan's actions as a betrayal of Islam. [sil.] NARRATOR Acquisitions of cowardice and more failure can now be heard within the royal court itself. [sil.] It's the duty of the Judge and the Imam to advise the Sultan...to fear God, not men They are responsible for this...because the Sultan asks them what to do...according to Islam and the will of the people... so that his rule is just But they say nothing They don't give any advice! The Prophet says, "Prayer is your sword" We must use prayers against their weapons THE JUDGE AND THE IMAM May the fundamentalists' evil plan miscarry We must tell our people to recite the special prayers Sultan Issa Maigari If the fundamentalists had demonstrated...the army would have killed many of them

Killed them? Sultan Issa Maigari The soldiers are looking for Muslim leaders You are the Imam

When the troubles break out you will be killed [sil.] NARRATOR Sultan Issa's ancestors were Fulani cattle herders from the North. Two hundred years ago they arrived here in Adamawa and imposed Islam on the Mboum peasants. [sil.] NARRATOR The Fulani still dominate the Sultan's court. The only concession they made was that the Sultan's mother would always be a Mboum. Any person to whom God grants religious knowledge...will gradually attract other people to him So when the Mboum surrendered...they gave their daughters to the Fulani...who took them as concubines...and had children by them The Mboum peasant people say the Fulani have tricked them The Fulani never gave them any real religious knowledge They ruled, and today they continue to rule ABDULLAHI THE MBOUM LEADER The Sultan is caught in a very embarrassing position...between the Fulani and the Mboum They each try to pull him to their side You must see him in this context The conservative Fulani pull him to their side The Mboum people, proud to see their son a Sultan...pull him to their side This results in constant conflict [non-English narration] Sultan Issa Maigari Our Ministers cannot keep things secret Yes, this must be kept secret [sil.] The Mboum peasants want to go to war against us MINISTER OF FULANI AFFAIRS

Sultan Issa Maigari I got another report yesterday They are getting their weapons ready The Mboum peasants want to attack us...as they did in Maiganga Town when they fought our people They are cutting sticks for bows! Mohammed is behind it Don't let the Government hear this Sultan Issa Maigari If we tell the Government...they'll open an enquiry and we'll have to reveal our sources

These are not just rumours Sultan Issa Maigari We must prepare ourselves [sil.] The Mboum courtiers insist it is an old Mboum custom...for them to have their own weapons This is from the Sultan of Galim, about your visit Sultan Issa Maigari I didn't know I was going on any visit I'm not going anywhere Well, Mamadou

Hamadina of Galim writes to you in joy He asks about your health and your family and dependants He is writing to tell you that the great feast...which brings all people together...will be held as usual...on January 25th

Sultan Issa Maigari Perhaps I will go...since it's on the 25th You and your entourage must leave Ngaoundéré...in times to arrive in Galim on the 24th [sil.] NARRATOR One of Sultan Issa's few remaining allies is the neighboring chief. [sil.] NARRATOR Issa has come to the festival to recruit causeries for a battle of magic against the Mboum peasants. Victory here will determine the outcome at the warhead. [sil.] Sultan Issa Maigari I'm going back home I have to work tomorrow Go in peace, Sultan of Adamawa! [sil.] Sultan Issa Maigari - Listen to that!

- He's too talkative They say this Praise-singer scares people away...because he's a sorcerer with bad influence

Sultan Issa Maigari Is he really a sorcerer? He's got red eyes!

Sultan Issa Maigari That's true And he talks like a sorcerer [sil.] Sultan Issa Maigari My children and grandchildren now amount to forty-eight That's a very good line of descendants! The saying goes, "He who has many children will ascend to power" But you already have power! [sil.] Sultan Issa's granddaughter May she grow up to be happy woman! [sil.] NARRATOR Another thorn in the side of the Sultan is the problem of his father's numerous wives. [sil.] NARRATOR According to tradition, they cannot leave the palace, and as Mboum women they are sympathetic to the peasant uprising. If there's a dance, it's our job to make up and dance The Sultan gives us pieces of loincloth...and lays on the food It's not really a question of slavery...but we are only here as ornaments for the Sultan The White man is recording us to take us to his home Our town is becoming famous

They come from the country of the Mboum ancestors On the other side of Mecca Their trade must be good since they can come here! Sultan Issa Maigari The old women in the palace were my father's wives Even though he is dead they can't leave They're old but why should I throw them out? This is their home My father and grandfather were royal Princes of Mboum Kings THE SULTAN'S MOTHER Did your father give you to the Sultan? No, the old Sultan sent for me We have worked so hard... to keep Mboum traditions in the palace Do we have to give that up now? The future matters, not the past Are we Mboum slaves going to start this revolution? God does not want it We can only struggle on We're old and oppressed. Aren't we supposed to have a life? This palace used to be full of life Now there is only poverty and sickness The former glory is coming to an end Our religious teacher has put a spell on us to keep us quiet People blame us for the decay [sil.] Sultan Issa Maigari We must discuss the problem of your son Tell him to see me any day Except Friday Sultan, the child needs your blessing

Sultan Issa Maigari If he wants a blessing, give it to him yourself [sil.] Great Elephant, set your feet down in peace! Walk slowly, Great Lion! [sil.] TRADITIONAL COURTS Solitary Big Elephant! Crowned with dignity!

NARRATOR Three mornings a week, the Sultan tries cases at the traditional court. Today a blind leper accuses a young man of seducing his niece and he could not afford to marry her or keep her as his mistress. [sil.] Did you buy her food, soap and perfume? How are you related to this woman?

I am related to her father's uncle Very well. And what would her mother call you? You mean the woman's mother? She is my wife My elder brother married her mother It's getting complicated

Sultan Issa Maigari This goes backwards and forward but it will be settled here What about the money he spent on her?

Vanished The boy came with a small payment on her We then agreed that they could live together The boy also bought a radio How long were they together without being married? Five months- Did the woman sleep in his house?

- No, she didn't Did he take her virginity? She didn't sleep in his house. But it is a case of seduction Let us hear the woman's version When I came here I had never lived with a boyfriend He was the first man to ask me to live with him [non-English narration] When you arrived, were you a virgin or a mature woman? It was after I came here my breasts started growing He kept me for two years He said he loved me and would marry me You have acted wrongly I would certainly flog you but your customs are different You are not Muslims. Perhaps you go to the Church Mission? Yes!

Then you are Christians Islamic law is different We lock you up if you sleep with an unmarried woman

So, you were her lover then! - No, by God, no!

- Swear by the Bible! I will touch the Bible, God is my witness

And you, young woman, were you his mistress or not? Swear on the Mission Book! Sultan Issa Maigari Make up your mind He gave me money because I was his mistress!

That's rubbish! [sil.] Sultan Issa Maigari He's given up. He lost his temper The court didn't back him How could the court back him if he was wrong? Sultan Issa Maigari We are for the truth here [sil.] Sultan Issa Maigari The Prince of Turwa has got chubby cheeks [sil.] Sultan Issa Maigari Do you want to get down? Son, your ears stick out like a White man's I'm tired We have been waiting for a long time

Sultan Issa Maigari I've presided over a court case I'm off to my building site

How many millions have you spent? Sultan Issa Maigari For my building... I need thirty corrugated-iron sheets Sultan Issa Maigari No comment! I feel very hot My whole body is aching Sultan Issa Maigari Just drink a lot of water Is that our piglet laughing? Your father will beat you Sultan Issa Maigari Bring me the stick There are fourteen in hospital from the riot... when the army killed our child Since then the people accuse me of supporting the President The Government tells me to be patient I waited years for the throne. I know what patience is We'll have to be very careful The Sultan says there is a problem at the palace He has ordered all the courtiers to come Sultan Issa Maigari The peasants are preparing to fight us We need strong magic to make them fight among themselves Whisper that to the Imam Those black Mboum peasants want to fight against us May God let their evil plan backfire on them Sultan Issa Maigari Tell the Imam to do magic He's never stopped doing it I have heard that the peasants are buying weapons Mohamma is buying and distributing them Sultan Issa Maigari Mohamma is not trustworthy Mohamma bought bows for his people They'll do to us what our grandfathers did to theirs God will never accept such a thing He has given Islam to this land [sil.] Clean your sword so you can get it out easily

NARRATOR The Mboum peasants have warned that they will demonstrate against the Sultan, and he has ordered his courtiers to prepare their weapons. [sil.] Good morning, Elephant! Good morning, Big Pillar of the world! Good morning, Papa! Good morning, Father of the Medicine against Crying! [sil.] NARRATOR The Sultan forces his subjects to show elegance to him by range of display of traditional royal skills. The show

isinterrupted when the palace guards arrest a peasant who had rushed at the Sultan with the dagger.
[sil.]ABDULLAHI People said we'd reconquer the land of our ancestors. This is untrueWhy should we try to do this today?In the past we had a chance to go to war...but we preferred to live peacefully with our Fulani brothersSultan Issa Maigari Abdullahi, the Mboum leader...has been sent to the North to be killedIf any of my people try to cast a spell on me...it will have no effect because my body is armouredI have lots of magical amulets on my bodyGod will punish anyone who tries to harm meThe Minister of Magic also protects melf you try to stab me, your sword will not hurt meNARRATOR For the moment the peasants revolthas been quelled. But the Sultan knowsthat he has only won the first of many battles in a long war.[sil.]Sultan Issa Maigari Party officials have accused me of telling people...not to vote for the government partyBut we already agreed... that I should only back candidates...loyal to President BiyaWe must keep our heads clear in this situationNasty rumours about me are circulating in the townThe Perfect told me...I'm supporting the oppositionI told him to mind his own businessWe are all men of power and importance here...and we are putting our power behind President BiyaHello? Mr President, how are you?I want my courtiers to meet the Prime Minister at the airportWe'll be leaving soon... Yes, we are all hereBut I have no car![sil.]Sultan Issa Maigari White people are magicians We also have magicBut our African magic is not as powerful as White people's magic[sil.]We are waiting for the Prime Minister My best wishes to your familySultan Issa, ruler of Adamawa!NARRATOR By allowing himself for thenational government, the Sultan has alienated his Muslim subjects.He now badly needs the Prime Minister's support.But at the airport, government officials keep him waiting for five hours.[sil.]NARRATOR When the Prime Minister finally arrives, there is no meeting.The authorities order filming to stop,and the Sultan returns home empty handed and exhausted.[sil.]Sultan Issa Maigari I've had a tough day. I've met a lot of strangers[sil.]Sultan Issa Maigari I've been on the throne since 1973If I don't carry out my duties, I will be dethronedHere in Ngaoundéré nobody helps me any moreI'm alone with this sufferingI'd like to go to your country Your people will give me the respect I don't get hereThat's itPHOTOGRAPHY JON JERSTAD SOUND ALASTAIR KENNEIL ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY ENRICA COLUSSO ADDITIONAL SOUND LISBET HOLTEDAHL FILM EDITOR PIP HEYWOOD LICIA BRONZIN WITH THANKS TO MOHAMMADOU ELDRIDGE MAHMADOU DJINGUI OUSMANOU BABAWA NDUUDI OUMARO FADIMATOU DIDDI PRODUCER DENIS WHYTE DIRECTORS JON JERSTAD WITH LISBET HOLTEDAHL A DENIS WHYTE FILMS PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH NORTHERN LIGHTS FILM PRODUCTIONS FOR NRK, DRI AND BBC[non-English song][sil.]

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