

**CAMÉLIA
JORDANA**

**SOFIANE
ZERMANI**

**SOFIAN
KHAMMES**

**SONIA
FAIDI**

AFTER THE

A FILM BY
**MEHDI
FIKRI**

FILE

**LOUISE
COLDEFY**

**MAKITA
SAMBA**

**HAMMOU
GRAÏA**

**SAMIR
GUESMI**

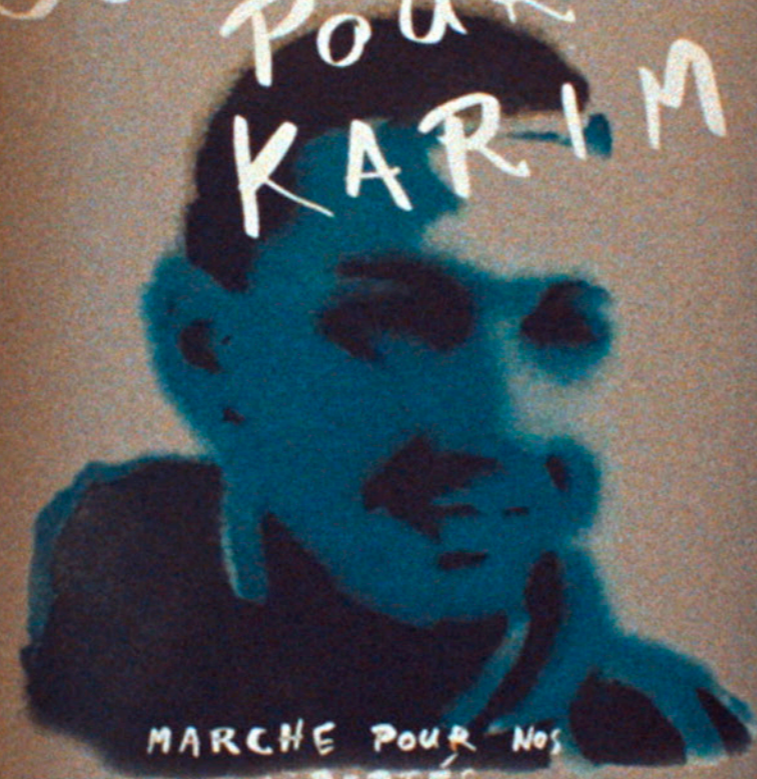
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TORONTO INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL 2023

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LIBERTES

48 AVENUE, TIME SQUARE, 468

TOPSHOT FILMS, THE FILM and BAC FILMS PRESENT

CAMÉLIA JORDANA SOFIANE ZERMANI SOFIAN KHAMMES SONIA FAIDI

AFTER THE FIRE

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TORONTO INTERNATIONAL
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WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF A FILM BY
LOUISE COLDEFY MAKITA SAMBA HAMMOU GRAIA SAMIR GUESMI MEHDI FIKRI

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SYNOPSIS

Following the death of her younger brother during a police intervention, Malika embarks on a legal battle to ensure a trial takes place. However, her quest for truth jeopardizes the stability of her family.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I grew up in a Moroccan family in Saint-Denis. On the frontline – as a resident and later as a journalist – I experienced the fight against police brutality. What struck me hardest was the human, domestic aspect of these events. After the death of a youngster, his family has only a few weeks to decide – to act or to mourn.

In this undecided, ambiguous period – when cars burn but it isn't yet a case, when families haven't yet decided to politicize their pain, when media discourse hasn't yet grown all-powerful – I was convinced that there was room for a truly cinematic story to be told.

It's through the lens of this exceptional event that the universal suffering of families in the banlieue – families like mine – can be addressed. It's in this period of obstructed mourning that the coming-of-age story I want to tell can be anchored.

To tear the project from its documentary base and anchor it firmly in cinematic soil, I considered that the script's central arc should be shaped through the following question: Out of what interior ruin does family conflict arise? A question that can be formulated like Sidney Lumet does in several movies: What is the cost of being able to tell yourself you're fighting for justice?

Another question fascinated me, one disrupting any overly “programmatic” aspect of the political discourse: the question of loyalty. The character of Malika carries within herself a great disgrace: in fighting for her dead brother she ignores the torments of the living (her father, her husband, even her own child).

Her mortifying choice is both relevant and profoundly human, but if we look closely, it's not altogether correct, not altogether sound.

Her certainty, her uncompromising pride and her solitude, render her a heroine worthy of Sophocles. Her battle sets the logic of the State against that of the family, ethical superego against conjugal love, irrational idealism against fatalistic pragmatism, the stubborn choice of the dead over the living.

Of course, by killing a youth, the police have overturned the natural order of things. But in her turn Malika also disrupts this order by refusing to bury her brother. Insofar as what interests me is this twilight zone, this ambiguity, I resolutely steered clear of the “biopic” in order to preserve an absolute freedom to depict the rifts torn open in my protagonist – particularly in her marriage – without having to worry about preserving the public image of a real-life militant. Inventing a family allowed me to talk about every family in the shadows, and to attain a sort of universality.

In art, the banlieue is often represented as a place ruled by Fate where the young are crushed by their environment in a logic of Tragedy – and French society thus takes on the attributes of implacable Destiny.

With *AFTER THE FIRE* I'd like to move in another direction and show a film not only against police brutality but also for a defining of shared values. The site of positive construction from which we can all grow together.

Director/Writer Mehdi Fikri



INTERVIEW WITH MEHDI FIKRI

What is your background?

I am 43 years old, I come from a working class neighbourhood. I was born and bred in Seine-Saint-Denis and I still live there, I'm a child of this suburb. I have always been a political activist and paid great attention to the issue of police violence. **AFTER THE FIRE** is my first feature film, but I have already directed two shorts, and worked on series, notably as co-writer of **HIPPOCRATES** Season 2. Cinema is a second life for me; I studied journalism and worked as a journalist for ten years. I worked for L' **Humanité**, writing about social conflicts and

struggles in the working-class neighbourhoods. This is also the origin of my desire to talk about political culture as it is transmitted in the suburbs.

For your first film you're not afraid to tackle a charged topic.

I wrote about what I know. Films about the suburbs are often tragedies, in the classic sense: powerless characters end up broken by an environment stronger than them. With this film I wanted to show the journey to liberation of a woman who takes

control of her environment. Malika learns how to name the tragedy that happens to her and does something with it, and that's politics. To answer your question: no, I wasn't afraid. In fact, the real difficulty was to write about a big family where each character must have its narrative arc.

The film resonates hugely with what is happening in France: the death of Nahel, Hedi being severely beaten by the police...

Police brutality has become the beating heart of French political life. This question encompasses everything: the denial of post-colonial malaise, the management of law and order of the neighbourhoods, the refusal of social dialogue in a time of economic crisis – and the violence that results from all this. I wanted to talk about it from the inside, from the intimacy of a French family.

Still, your film is a work of reconciliation.

The film evokes the possibility of collective construction – painful, difficult, but positive construction. It tells of the emergence of a voice that demands justice; it follows characters who fix their misfortune by giving it a social meaning. In this sense, it's optimistic, yes, and I hope universal.

You show a family of Arab origin that goes beyond the usual representation in French cinema.

Social worlds are actually porous. I wanted to show within an Arab family someone like Malika, who runs her own business, her brother and his partner who are special needs teachers, the younger brother, who was a dealer. This is the reality of our families: some live on the streets and others are doing better. I was also keen to show a happy Arab couple, far from the usual clichés: Malika is a “normal” woman, with a husband who is crazy about her, and a two-and-a-half-year-old son.

How did the shoot go?

We shot for six weeks in the suburbs of Strasbourg. The film is about a battle, and it was also a battle to complete it successfully. For the last scene I needed about a hundred young demonstrators in a courthouse... it didn't quite happen like that! But I loved every minute of this experience.

How were you able to put together such prestigious cast?

Because of the screenplay. On set, everyone knew why they were there. We were all driven by the

obvious urgency of the subject. Everyone was very motivated, even if shooting in winter, sometimes in minus-zero temperatures, wasn't easy.

The mise-en-scene is meticulous, very controlled, there's even is a split-screen, several sequence shots...

I feel that the representation of suburbia and non-white characters calls for a certain lyricism in the mise-en-scene, something flamboyant. That's what I wanted, anyway. As for the sequence shot, it interests me insofar as it creates a tension between naturalistic immersion and stylistic distancing.

During the final credits, we see news images showing the struggle against police violence since the 90s, with many families of victims.

I chose to direct a fictional family in order to go right to the heart of things and talk about the dark sides of my characters without fear of hurting anyone. But since my script was clearly inspired by real events, it was extremely important to pay a direct tribute to the families who are fighting these battles. Besides, I love archive images! Spike Lee used them in *BLACKKKLANSMAN* and *MALCOLM X*. I find archives very moving.

Can cinema change things, or at least our point of view?

Cinema conveys feelings, ideas: the whole experience of a report presented to the world. In this way, it can teach powerful lessons. But can it change things? I don't know. I hope so. I'm very curious to see what will become of the film, what people will say about it.

MEHDI FIKRI - Director/Writer

Mehdi Fikri worked for years as a journalist, during which time he made several investigations into police brutality, working-class neighbourhoods and social movements.

In 2012, he directed a Mediapart web documentary, “*Chronique d'une (r)évolution manquée*”, his first step into the audiovisual world. He went on to work as a screenwriter on TV series (*HIPPOCRATE* by Thomas Lilti, and *MISKINA* by Melha Bedia), and directed two shorts, one of which, *DESCENTE 4AM*, screened at the 2021 Venice International Film Festival. *AFTER THE FIRE* is his feature film debut.

A close-up profile shot of a woman with dark curly hair, looking out towards the right. She is wearing a dark jacket with a visible zipper and a large hoop earring. The background is dark with out-of-focus blue and white lights, creating a bokeh effect. The overall mood is contemplative and cinematic.

INTERVIEW
WITH CAMÉLIA JORDANA

What appealed to you about this project?

For a first film it has to be the script. And Mehdi's was beautiful. Everyone felt compelled to make an immediate commitment. The story is tough, as were the shooting conditions, but there was great chemistry with the whole team, something very generous, and a closeness between us all on set. Perhaps because we were all there for a good reason.

You are committed and have on several occasions taken a stand against police violence. Is this film in keeping with your commitment?

Police violence is a subject particularly close to my heart, I even talk about it in my song "**Freddie Gray**" (Lost - CD 2018). My choice was profoundly artistic. I like that my character embraces a destiny she didn't choose from the start, that she will embody. It's mythological. I really like that Mehdi chose to tell his story through the prism of the family. The investigation is secondary. I hope that the film will touch the audiences who will see it. It is a film of reconciliation and transmission, with the speech of Malika's younger sister. My choice was profoundly artistic.

What do you think of the representation of the family of Algerian origin?

It was great to see a couple of Algerian origin who love each other, who kiss. We rarely see that in cinema. It is a nice change from the gangland stories, the drug dealers... Here we see people working on street markets, a couple and their baby, we're a long way from the usual stereotypes and fantasies. It's a lovely thing.

Can you say a few words about the shoot in Strasbourg...

The film is very close to the screenplay. There were wonderful mise en scene ideas, the team designed extraordinary shots. The director was very attentive to the crew and the cast. We were free to propose ideas that he was often interested in. As for the cold, it was pretty horrible, and we didn't have suitable costumes. To tell you the truth, we were absolutely frozen!

There are two singers in the credits: Fianso and you.

In fact, there's a third. The actor who plays Karim, the murdered younger brother, he's also a rapper. And Sonia sings beautifully, but she'll never admit to it! (laughs). Fianso is now like a brother to me. We had absolute trust in each other, which allowed us to really let go. For our scenes together, we tried lots of things. As musicians, we understand each other, we talk to each other in music. On a take, I could say, "Why don't you try this note". And it worked both ways. It was a lot of fun. Since then we have even played a couple in **Reine Mère**, the new film by Manele Labidi.

Can a movie or a song change awareness?

I'm an artist, I make music, theatre, cinema. Art is the rawest way through which I express myself. I am convinced that art can elevate us and awaken consciences. I would love people who do not share my opinions to want to go and see the film, from them not to just stop at the trailers – which I love, by the way. Look at what happened in Avignon with Rebecca Chaillon's show **Carte noire nommée désir**, which was criticized by people who hadn't seen it. It's surreal! It's interesting to look at works that disturb us, to try to understand the point of view of the other.



INTERVIEW WITH SOFIAN KHAMMES

You have a reputation for being very selective in your choice of films. What appealed to you in the script?

I hesitated a long time, I had just finished shooting the series BRI, I was planning to take a break in Thailand. But meeting Mehdi changed everything. His knowledge of the subject, his determination, his script, absolutely free from all the usual clichés, made me want to go on an adventure with him.

There is a real gulf between BRI and this film...

To say the least! But I feel legitimate in both, as an actor and as a citizen.

Is police violence something you've known personally?

I was born in Paris and grew up in Marseille. For the teenager that I was, this violence was part of my daily life. There's the physical violence, but also the harassment. I don't want to systematise, or put everyone in one same basket, but that's the reality. Things are a whole lot better for me now, maybe because I play an elite cop in BRI.

So the script must have really resonated with you?

Absolutely.

Can a film change people's ways of thinking?

I would like that audiences on seeing it might understand the mechanisms that are put in place during such events.

INTERVIEW WITH SONIA FAIDI

What is your background?

I'm 22 years old; I have been doing theatre since the age of seven; I enrolled in the Cours Florent 'Class Libre' in 2021. **AFTER THE FIRE** is my first feature film. Initially I auditioned for the part of Karim's girlfriend. Mehdi liked it and gave me another audition for the part of Nour, the younger sister.

What did he see in you?

He wanted a little sister; I'm a little sister.

What appealed to you in the script?

I really liked the gentleness with which Mehdi treated the subject, an important subject, and one that has to be addressed.

How was the shooting?

I put a lot of pressure on myself, but it was a real pleasure to act opposite actors I admire like Camélia, Sofiane, Samir, Louise... They turned out to be absolutely great people, most of whom have become friends.



A photograph of Louise Coldefy, a woman with long dark hair and blue eyes, smiling warmly. She is wearing a dark red button-down shirt. The background is a dimly lit bar with shelves of bottles and a warm, ambient light.

INTERVIEW WITH LOUISE COLDEFY

What appealed to you in the screenplay?

The subject, for sure. I was thrilled by this politically committed subject, and I believe that there is no real work without commitment or daring. In addition, I work on a lot of first films, because I like to accompany the first steps of a director.

You often play eccentrics in comedies. Is this a change for you?

Yes and no. In cinema, for sure, so I was delighted and honoured to be trusted. On the stage though, I don't just act in comedies, I was in a Chekhov play last year.

How was the shoot?

I had about ten days, and it was mighty cold. It was so cold that the make-up froze, and the make-up artist had to try to warm it up before applying it. Despite the temperature there was a common fervour to defend this story. We lived beautiful, poignant moments, sometimes with the extras. I felt carried by the other actors, it was amazing. I let myself glide along...

Is it a film about reconciliation?

I saw a lot of sensitivity because the film is a story of mourning. It's an emotional journey.

The film resonates sadly with current events.

The film reflects perfectly what is happening now. And it's terrible. That's why this film is necessary, because cinema can help beliefs to evolve and raise awareness.

You have made nearly 150 films. What appealed to you about this one?

Is that so? (laughs). I was touched by the theme of injustice, and police violence. The script was well constructed, clever in the depiction of the intimacy, the mourning of this family. I wanted to support this film and its strong political will; it gives meaning to my work.

Can you say a few words about the director?

Mehdi knows what he's talking about, he's not interested in clichés or easy options. He is extremely concerned and highly politicized. I learnt a lot from him.

How did you feel during the shoot?

It was lovely to work with Fianso and Camélia . . . We all spoke through the same megaphone, it felt as if we were all in a demo together. I'd say that we were like a family on set.

You were in Nos Frangins about Malik Oussekine and now in After the Fire. Have things really changed in France in the last 40 years?

What has changed is the media coverage, we are more aware of what is happening now. But when we watch the news, we realize that regularly, this still goes on. The only thing I can do as an actor, is to continue to be a witness with my films. I'm not a politician, but I want to believe that films can resonate and awaken if only one conscience. . .



**INTERVIEW
WITH SAMIR GUESMI**

PRODUCTION COMPANY

TOPSHOT FILMS

Topshot Films is a production company founded by Bastien Daret, Arthur Goisset and Robin Robles while they were still students of the Fémis. They have since produced around thirty short films. Stories that willingly navigate between comedy (romantic, musical, absurd...) and drama (psychological, social...). These films have been widely screened at festivals in France and abroad (Venice Film Festival, Sundance, Tampere, Locarno, Clermont-Ferrand...). The company has also just produced its first two feature films.

THE FILM

The Film was created in 2004 by Michael Gentile, a former radio executive (Nova and OUI FM). The Film is a film production company that eclectically favors movies and filmmakers with distinct universes. To date, they have produced over twenty films, most of which have been selected at major festivals (such as Cannes, Venice, Toronto, San Sebastian etc.). Among them, *CALVAIRE* by Fabrice du Welz, *SPY(IES)* by Nicolas Saada, *THE TIME THAT REMAINS* by Elia Suleiman, *THE PATIENCE STONE* by Atiq Rahimi, as well as several films by Julie Delpy (*SKYLAB*, *LOLO*, and her latest film *LES BARBARES*, currently in post-production).



CAST

Malika
Driss
Adel
Nour
Estelle
Harchi
Mohamed
Slim

CAMÉLIA JORDANA
SOFIANE ZERMANI
SOFIAN KHAMMES
SONIA FAIDI
LOUISE COLDEFY
MAKITA SAMBA
HAMMOU GRAIA
SAMIR GUESMI

CREW

A film by
Production company

Produced by

Screenplay by
in collaboration with

Director of photography

Editing

Score

Production design

Sound

Script supervisor

MEHDI FIKRI
TOPSHOT FILMS
THE FILM
BAC FILMS
MICHAEL GENTILE
BASTIEN DARET
ROBIN ROBLES
ARTHUR GOISSET
GARANCE BOULET
MEHDI FIKRI
CLAUDE LE PAPE
AUDE THURIES
ROMAIN CARCANADE
BÉATRICE HERMINIE
ANDREA BOCCADORO
LAURE SATGÉ
CÉDRIC BERGER
PHILIPPE DESCHAMPS
MARC-OLIVIER BRULLÉ
XAVIER THIEULIN
MARIE DE CHASSEY

Casting

Assistant director

Costume design

Make-up

Line producer

Production manager

Post production supervisor

Music supervisor

in co-production with

in co-production with

with the participation of

with the support of the **RÉGION GRAND EST, EUROMÉTROPOLE DE STRASBOURG,**

COLMAR AGGLOMÉRATION (RÉSEAU PLATO)

in association with the

in association with

with the participation of the

with the support of the

French distribution

International sales

SOPHIE LAINÉ DIODOVIC

BASILE JULLIEN

ANNIE MELZA TIBURCE

STÉPHANIE CARON

DIMITRI LYKAVIERIS

ARMEL ADOU KOUASSI

GAËL BLONDET

MATTHIEU SIBONY

BAC FILMS PRODUCTION - DAVID GRUMBACH

FRANCE 3 CINÉMA

OCS, NETFLIX, FRANCE TÉLÉVISIONS

RÉGION GRAND EST, EUROMÉTROPOLE DE STRASBOURG,

COLMAR AGGLOMÉRATION (RÉSEAU PLATO)

CNC

COFINOVA 19

LA BANQUE POSTALE IMAGE 16, INDÉFILMS 11

FONDS IMAGES DE LA DIVERSITÉ

AGENCE NATIONALE DE LA COHÉSION DES TERRITOIRES

CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE

BAC FILMS DISTRIBUTION

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