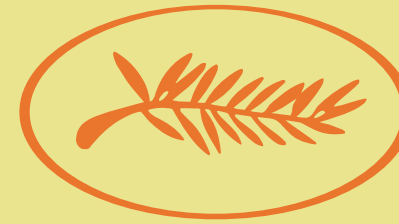


CHAZ PRODUCTIONS



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
COMPETITION
2023 OFFICIAL SELECTION

HOMECOMING

A FILM BY
CATHERINE CORSINI

SALES AGENT

PLAYTIME

13, SQUARE MÉRIMÉE - CANNES
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A photograph of three young Black women sitting at an outdoor cafe table. They are all looking intently at a tablet computer held by the woman in the middle. The woman on the left is leaning over her shoulder, pointing at the screen. The woman on the right is also leaning in, looking at the tablet. They are all smiling and appear to be enjoying their time together. The background shows a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a building. The word 'SYNOPSIS' is written in large, yellow, sans-serif capital letters in the upper right corner of the image.

SYNOPSIS

Khédidja works for a wealthy Parisian family who offered her to mind their children for a summer in Corsica. Bringing along her own two teenage daughters Jessica and Farah, it is an opportunity for them to go back to the island they left 15 years earlier, in tragic circumstances. While their mother grapples with her memories, the two girls indulge in all the summer temptations: unexpected encounters, mischief and first love experiences. Meanwhile, questions are surfacing about their distant past on the island, leading them to dig deeper into their mother's version of the family story.

INTERVIEW WITH CATHERINE CORSINI

In THE DIVIDE, Aïssatou Diallo Sagna, who is a nurse's aide in real life and whom you filmed for the first time, brought a touch of documentary realness to the fictional story. At the origins of HOMECOMING was there a desire to craft a story coming from her screen presence?

Absolutely. Several things contributed to my making this film, but the heart of this film started to beat once I decided that I was writing for Aïssatou. The experience of making THE DIVIDE, where we mixed professional and nonprofessional actors, allowed me to bring to life personalities that had enormously touched me on a personal level. Aïssatou won a César for her role. And yet, we know very well that in this profession someone can be greatly celebrated for a period of time and then suddenly everyone moves on to something else. It was really important to me to not forget her, and above all to bring her elsewhere: to the realm of stories and fiction. Aïssatou had also shared her life with me, her story. Moreover, her family came on the shoot. Thanks to her I discovered many things about the Guinean and Senegalese cultures, the relationship with one's native land, or more concrete things like women's hairstyles. Following up on the work we had begun together on THE DIVIDE was a truly wonderful experience for me.

How did you and your co-writer Naila Guiguet create this family unit made up of a mother and two teenage daughters?

Naila is a young, thirty-five year old screenwriter and FEMIS graduate, whose mother is from Senegal. I wrote this story with her because I felt that I was too far removed from the reality of these young people. She greatly helped me to widen my knowledge and flesh out the story. For example, we took her mother's

first name, Khédidja, for Aïssatou's character. I also used elements from my own background, which is rather a complicated story. I was raised in a family with a loyalty conflict. I have two sisters; a Corsican father who died in an accident when I was very young; and a mother who couldn't stand living in Corsica, where she felt like a caged bird. All these things create life paths and bring up questions about this complex region, like the feeling of being a stranger somewhere. I wanted to show how women, out of love, could subject themselves to such a place, and how two sisters could in reaction end up having completely different behaviors: one whose foundations are built on challenging and protesting the status quo and the other who has opted for integration. For a very longtime, I was like Farah, and I find aspects of myself in both characters.

This trio of women has essentially lived in silence. Finding the words to name all the things left unsaid eventually brings them to a reconciliation.

The more I worked on editing the film, the more Khédidja's character was built around this mysterious silence, which created a sense of romance and raises questions. Something gets ahead of Khédidja and unconsciously brings her to the point where she has to return to this place, where each one of them is going to be led forward through the construction of their personal identities. The three of them go through a kind of catharsis before this family comes to find a new balance, once the mother has finally spoken and shared her truths. I think that silence, like lying, only creates unhappiness and confusion. Women have often been told to keep quiet and not to share everything, and Khédidja silences herself even more because she is at the bottom of the social ladder.

Your characters have constructed their identities around an absence: Khédidja and her daughters but also Gaïa, who lost her mother, and Marc-Andria, who grew up without a father, like Farah and Jessica.

It's not something done entirely consciously on my part, yet what's certain is that my father's absence affected me in such a way that it comes through in all of my films. I remember having thought that the fact that certain people identified my mother with the word "widow" felt very oppressive. It also most likely fed my imagination. Growing older, we become more open to embracing personal subjects, or we are less afraid to delve into them, and to reveal ourselves through fiction.

Is HOMECOMING also about what is repressed? We feel that there are forces working beneath the surface, an underground pull that seems to link you to the depths of a territory, as in your own life.

Admittedly. In Corsica, there is something bitter and violent in the landscape, with the sea on one side but also the mountains on the other side. It's a harsh land, whose reality is quite far from the touristy depictions that are associated with it. There is something ancestral, immutable, linked to age-old forces. I knew that filming in Corsica was going to awaken something in me that would be very upsetting. It was very trying to return to my childhood home. Everything was emotionally charged. This scenery shook me to the core, as if suddenly everything that I had repressed over the years came rushing back to the surface. It wasn't comfortable, but I needed to place myself exactly in that spot to see if it was going to work.

Different cultures are confronted in this film. Was there a desire on your part to bring the subject matter further into the exploration of otherness?

Otherness entails shifting from oneself to the other. Indeed I wanted to rub shoulders with this youth that I idealized, but which was very unfamiliar to me, with cultures that I only knew superficially, and this Corsica that is both very near and remote. What I like in a movie, is being able to give a voice to others;

to enter into a place, into the head, into the skin of someone you don't know. To observe and understand. It is fascinating to delve into what is other than ourselves. I was very happy to be in a position to offer Aïssatou, Esther and Suzy complex fictional characters rather than characters that are reduced to archetypes to which they are often restricted. It seems to me that their characters represent something that is more universal, more elevated.

There is a very strong Corsican identity. And I always feel like an outsider and a foreigner there, because this land is not completely mine. This feeling of rejection as well as my aversion for social injustice both made me feel closer to Khédidja and understand how the efforts she deploys to fit into the community are fruitless.

During the altercation between Farah and Orso on the beach at the beginning of your film, you confront one of your heroines with racism, then you quickly move on to other problems.

Yes, this scene could lead you to think that the film is going to be about racism in Corsica, but it isn't so much about racism as about belonging to a place and the idea of protecting one's clan, culture and being able to align with what it means to be from Corsica. Orso is surprisingly more than what you may have expected from him. He defies stereotypes and preconceived ideas.

In Corsica, the other is always perceived as a foreigner and an outsider. Belonging to a Corsican community in any situation is a very difficult path to walk down. Khédidja also experiences racism from the upper middle class family and their well-intentioned paternalism. But the film goes beyond racism, to speak of questions concerning roots, origins and ways to make do with absence.



All of your films depict interactions between different social classes. In HOME-COMING, the upper middle class couple on holiday end up being both laughable and offensive with their condescending attitudes. Yet you film them with great respect.

Because for me they are people that are overwhelmed by their own children, and it's as if they are logged into outdated software. That's the direction I gave Virginie Ledoyen and Denis Podalydès. These upper middle class families who are trying to maintain their social ranking but are wavering; they're on vacation, but they can't relax. I think that the foreignness that Corsica inspires in me suffused the entire film, including these characters, who are completely out of touch. He claims to have leftist sensibilities but can't remember the name of the person who works for him. It's the type of behavior that is both funny and deplorable, and was inspired by Naila's mother's personal experience. They admire Jessica because she is an example of a possibility of success that proves the system works. This reassures the upper middle class about their own social status.

The low-angle shot where Jessica looks at her mother from the stately residence's upper floor reflects in itself your story's complexity.

All the more so because it happens when the mother shares her feelings in a letter. Suddenly the mother and the daughter find themselves in two different social positions. It was important for me to keep this shot where they look at each other and we do not know what is going to happen. Jessica, at this specific moment, is pondering whether she is going to defect, cross over to become part of the ruling establishment that fascinates her and where her education in political sciences will most likely lead her. She is also conscious of being Gaïa's new toy and feels trapped. I believe at this moment she is thinking about her mother's life experience. This homecoming to the family is also a homecoming to their freedom as individuals and the assertion of who they are.

As for Farah, she doesn't hesitate to cross boundaries. She's a rebel who injects the story with comedic moments.

She's a character that is rather close to Naila's personality. We greatly enjoyed writing her scenes together.

Farah doesn't want to let herself get trapped and searches for an alternative way of succeeding. She is intelligent, clever and rebels against her mother in a different way than her sister. I immediately fell in love with the young actress who plays her, Esther Gohourou. She's phenomenal, quite a character, who can recite her dialogue all the while improvising with incredible talent. She has an amazing sense of timing. And what is very beautiful is that she is right at the crossroads of childhood and adolescence. When she acts, you can feel how much fun she is having, like with children. Esther is constantly able to invent things.

Farah has a tough side to her, because she never opens up entirely and suffers from an inferiority complex, but she also has a great deal of joy and humor, enhanced by everything that Esther has brought to her. A lot of the very lively dialogue is Naila's and hers.

How did you choose your young actresses and actors?

At first, I wanted to find actors through an open call casting process with my casting director Julie Allione, who is very talented at finding nonprofessionals. I wanted unknown faces on the screen. We put posters everywhere, but it was very difficult to attract young girls. I finally met with actresses who took screen tests. This is how I discovered Esther Gohourou, who had already played in CUTIES by Maimouna Doucouré. As for Suzy Bemba, she first auditioned to play the role of Khédidja's sister in a scene that I didn't keep. I saw that she was a very good actress and I asked her to replace another young nonprofessional actress who I first thought would be good for the role of Jessica, but sadly during the first rehearsals we realized that she wasn't the right person for this difficult role where one had to play a wide range of emotions and mental states.

For Gaïa, I wanted a young actress who could represent a certain social class. I chose Lomane de Dietrich, who was finishing up at the actor's Conservatory and didn't have a lot of experience. I liked the fact that she had a singularly natural, laid-back attitude, and a certain assurance.

What approach did you opt for so that your young actresses could be at their very best?

THE DIVIDE allowed me a great deal of freedom in shooting the film. Here too, I wanted to give the actors space, to shoot complete sequences, sometimes not cutting and picking up the scene from the same place, because I wanted to try and create something that resembled reality, filming with urgency so we couldn't give the actors time to think or be afraid to act. I wanted to shoot with a permanent energy, like in a boxing ring. I wanted to create a subtle alchemy that had time to simmer, to really feel the pulsating energy of family life, and everyday matters.

On a film set, I am very intense, which is something I am sometimes criticized for. When I'm on a film shoot I'm a ball of nerves, much like an actor who is about to walk on stage. I put myself into a state of tension, sometimes fear, which can make me sound curt. Perhaps I impose my anxieties on others. I'm questioning myself, because I understand that my harshness can sometimes be hurtful to others.

Two thirds of the department heads on this film were women. Did the fact of inverting the proportions make certain men feel less comfortable? I don't know. But I'm wondering. I'm a woman who is an engaged feminist and I'm not afraid to do some soul-searching and take a good look at myself. I do it with each film, and I will do it even more for the next one.

How did you work with Aïssatou Diallo Sagna this time?

We did readings, then I had her work to develop her acting range. She was flexible and wanted to learn. I tried to support her as best I could. She had a coach to help her work with her body language and find the right way to enter a scene, to feel freer. Like the first film we worked on together, it was an enriching experience for us both.

For the upper middle class couple you thought of Virginie Ledoyen and Denis Podalydès.

I've known Denis for a long time. I followed his theater and film career, notably in his films with his brother Bruno, who played a small role in SUMMERTIME. I admire his ability to read, write, his curiosity and his appetite for acting that has always remained intact. Around the time THE DIVIDE came out, which he very much liked, he let me know that he wanted to make a film with me. I took him at his word.

I've also known Virginie Ledoyen for a very long time. I was thrilled that she accepted the role of this character who isn't necessarily appealing, but who represents a certain social class and material success. She knew how to make this character exist in just a few scenes.

How did you choose your Corsican actors?

We held a casting call in Corsica, again with Julie Allione. During the screen tests, I found the actors very reserved. Once I started working with them it was the exact opposite: they were incredibly sweet and attentive to my direction. I loved the experience I had with them, actors and extras alike. During the period of the rumors and controversy, and following the temporary suspension of the film from competing at Cannes, they all wrote me extremely moving letters of support.

As for Harold Orsoni, he is Julie Allione's son and lives in Paris, but is Corsican, which explains his accent. I saw him work in his village's restaurant in northern Corsica. I wrote Orso's part with him in mind.

Your actors' voices bring a certain amount of sensuality: there are on the one hand those whose voices are very soft, such as Aïssatou and Suzy, and then others whose voices are very resonant and specific, like Virginie Ledoyen, Denis Podalydès, Cédric Appietto and Marie-Ange Geronimi, in the role of the grandmother.

I'm very sensitive to people's voices. And I love accents. I like everything that is different, that brings a different perspective, otherness. The Corsican accent makes my heart beat faster, there's a gentleness in its sing-song like nature.

There's a whole world that comes with it. It's important to Corsicans. Young Corsicans are very proud to be part of this land. This accent is a way of donning one's identity. There are many social codes in Corsica. Everyone knows which clan everyone else belongs to. It can be staggering at times.

What were your aesthetical choices for the staging? And how did you work with Jeanne Lapoirie your cinematographer with whom you have now made five films.

Jeanne Lapoirie and I scouted for locations together very early in pre-production. I brought her to my village, where I watched the reactions of everyone on the team. Jeanne was immediately enthusiastic; she likes the ruggedness of the mountains and the sun's relentless pounding. Some scenery, because of the changing light, required that we shoot relatively quickly. We climbed up on rocks to capture the best light. Jeanne and I were right in synch, and we didn't need to speak a lot about what we wanted to capture. We had a lot of fun shooting the party sequence.

I also work with a young production designer, Louise Le Bouc Berger, who was an assistant on my last two films, because I wanted to open my crew to the younger generation. Louise makes incredible mood and reference boards for each bit of scenery. She has an extraordinary gift for creating atmospheres.

In the final edit I kept shots we took as light tests to bring into the film the light of Corsica in summertime, which was a little different because we shot the film in early autumn. All of this preparation allowed us to anticipate the physical dimension of our scenery, which was very precious for Jeanne and me. I wanted the scenery to bring us this physical quality. I wanted it to tell the story of this land.

I also wanted to return to a more classical format. I used Cinemascope for my last three films, which tends to give the image a postcard aesthetic. So we opted for a more classical format – 1.66, which is what I used to use. This format better frames faces and creates a feeling of intensity.

In the scene where Jessica meets her grandmother for the first time, the emotion is intense, but you opted for medium and wide shots.

The editor Frédéric Baillehaiche, with whom I've worked on four films, and I decided to work this scene on several levels. Then, intuitively, we favored wider shots to avoid losing the scenery, but also because it created a distance, a modesty that is fitting for this meeting and will allow the confrontation to take place a little later. Above all, we streamlined the scenes to reach the heart of what was happening and to stay in the crux of the story.

How did you work on the visual treatment of the film and the light?

Jeanne is extremely talented for filming outside light. With her, the light practically becomes a character in the film that recounts both the ruggedness of Corsica and something more secretive. I also wanted us to feel the heat, the surrounding as sheer matter, like the boulders, and the stones that make up the houses' thick walls.

We very much enjoyed filming the actresses. We asked ourselves how to reveal the family's secrets through their faces. The night scenes are where they reveal their deepest selves. I found each one of them to be powerful in their own way, both strong and fragile. I was captivated by their acting; I saw states of grace in them. Jeanne and I took great care to magnify all of that.

And the film's rhythm?

Frédéric Baillehaiche and I always search for the film's ultimate direction and its structure. We then remove anything that doesn't serve this end goal. I wanted the film to lead us towards this final shot where the three women become one. That the narrative moves forward like a rolling stone that finds no obstacles and keeps rolling along.



CATHERINE CORSINI

DIRECTOR

Catherine Corsini became known to the general public with her film *THE NEW EVE* in 1999, which was presented at the Berlin Film Festival. *REPLAY* was selected for the Official Competition in Cannes 2001. Her seventh film, *LEAVING*, was highly successful at the box office in France and around the world and was also honored at the Toronto Film Festival. She returned to Cannes in 2013 with *THREE WORLDS*, presented in the Un Certain Regard section, then in Toronto. *SUMMERTIME*, which won the Variety Prize of the Piazza Grande in Locarno was nominated in two categories at the 2016 César awards. With *AN IMPOSSIBLE LOVE*, adapted from Christine Angot's eponymous novel, Catherine Corsini received the SACD Prize, as well as the Henri Langlois and Alice Guy awards. The film was nominated in four categories at the 2019 César awards. Two years later, *THE DIVIDE* was nominated six times for the César awards. Catherine Corsini is back in Competition at the 2023 Cannes Films Festival with *HOMECOMING*.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2023 **HOMECOMING** (LE RETOUR)
- 2021 **THE DIVIDE** (LA FRACTURE)
Festival de Cannes 2021 – Official Selection – In Competition
César award for Best Actrice in a Supporting Role (Aïssatou Diallo Sagna)
Queer Palm 2021
- 2018 **AN IMPOSSIBLE LOVE** (UN AMOUR IMPOSSIBLE)
- 2015 **SUMMERTIME** (LA BELLE SAISON)
- 2012 **THREE WORLDS** (TROIS MONDES)
- 2009 **LEAVING** (PARTIR)
- 2007 **AMBITIOUS** (LES AMBITIEUX)
- 2003 **THE VERY MERRY WIDOWS** (MARIÉES MAIS PAS TROP)
- 2001 **REPLAY** (LA RÉPÉTITION)
- 1999 **THE NEW EVE** (LA NOUVELLE ÈVE)
- 1996 **JEUNESSE SANS DIEU** (Arte)
- 1994 **LES AMOUREUX**
- 1992 **INTERDIT D'AMOUR** (France 3)
- 1988 **POKER**

CAST

AÏSSATOU DIALLO SAGNA	Khédidja
SUZY BEMBA	Jessica
ESTHER GOHOUROU	Farah
LOMANE DE DIETRICH	Gaïa
CÉDRIC APPIETTO	Marc-Andria
HAROLD ORSONI	Orso
MARIE-ANGE GERONIMI	Michelle
VIRGINIE LEDOYEN	Sylvia
DENIS PODALYDÈS	Marc

CREW

Direction CATHERINE CORSINI
Screenplay NAÏLA GUIGUET AND CATHERINE CORSINI

Cinematography JEANNE LAPOIRIE
Editing FRÉDÉRIC BAILLEHAICHE
Sound FRANÇOIS ABDELNOUR
FANNY MARTIN
JEANNE DELPLANCQ
OLIVIER GOINARD

Set Design LOUISE LE BOUC BERGER
Costume Design VIRGINIE MONTEL
Assistant Director JULIE RICHARD
Casting JULIE ALLIONE
Script BÉNÉDICTE DARBLAY
Production Manager CLAIRE TRINQUET
Post-production
and Production Assistant ALEXIS GENAUZEAU

Producer ELISABETH PEREZ
Co-producer ANNE-LAURE LABADIE
JEAN LABADIE

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International Sales PLAYTIME

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