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FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DU FILM  
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2016

capricci PRESENTS

A FILM BY RACHIDA BRAKNI

# VISITING OURS



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A FILM BY

**RACHIDA BRAKNI**

FRANCE / 2016 / RUNNING TIME: 82 MIN / FORMAT: DCP / COLOR

INTERNATIONAL SALES — WILD BUNCH

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Photos & press kit can be downloaded from:  
<http://www.wildbunch.biz/movie/visiting-ours/>

FESTIVALS — CAPRICCI FILMS

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## SYNOPSIS

Every month, women go to a prison on the outskirts of Paris to visit their loved ones: sons, fathers, brothers, partners. It's the middle of August. Fatma and her daughter Nora, Judith and Lola, Hourla, her friends and others wait uncomfortably in the sweltering summer heat. Shy or extrovert, accomplices or enemies, all must pass through the many stages that separate them from the visiting room.

**As they move from security check to security check, relationships are made and broken, tongues loosen, tension mounts... until finally a riot erupts behind the bars.**



INTERVIEW

# RACHIDA BRAKNI

## What made you want to direct your feature debut?

At first I had no intention of becoming a director. The film comes from my desire to tell a personal story. For years I visited someone close to me in Fleury-Mérogis prison. What struck me right away was the lack of men among those visiting a men's prison. Where were the fathers and brothers? I also discovered that prison is one of the last symbols of the Republic: the social and cultural mix you find there has no equal with what schools, hospitals have become. Women from opposite social backgrounds who would never come across each other anywhere else end up becoming close and developing a certain solidarity. Because they're locked up together...

## Do you mean that the women find themselves in the position of inmates?

What you have to understand first off is that anyone with a loved one in prison also feels punished: it's called an indirect sentence. There's a kind of transfer of responsibility from the prisoner to his family. A mother whose son is incarce-

rated feels guilty at having failed in her child's upbringing. A woman whose husband was sentenced to prison questions her relationship with a man who has committed a crime. One way or another, once she enters a prison, the prison visitor feels herself incarcerated. All the more so since from the moment she arrives until she reaches the visiting room it can take between one-and-a-half and two-and-a-half hours... it's a nerve-wracking experience. Finally, the nature of penal institutions is such that the minute you find yourself inside you somehow start to feel a little less innocent.

«Anyone with a loved one in prison also feels punished»

In the film, each woman seems to have her own strategy for "resistance".

The confrontation of the sexes is brought directly into play: women on one side, men on the other. The men have the authority on their side and exert some kind of domination. Inevitably, manipulative relationships are established. Some women have an interest in gaining favour with the guards so they can "pass stuff on". And some guards may want to make their task a little more pleasant... But



who is using whom? Who is manipulating whom? The answer is never black or white. In the film, Meriem Serbah's character dresses to turn on one of the guards. At the time I found this type of behaviour despicable but I came to understand that everyone just does what she can.

## Beyond any morality?

Once the airlock door closes, each visitor is alone. There are no longer any guards: the situation becomes one of survival. The airlock is like a "lawless" bubble. Visitors are permanently confronted with the question of limits: the limit of legality, but above all, cultural and moral limits. There is no unique morality between these walls. No good method, no truth. Each group will have its own dynamic - some leaders, some passive - but this dynamic isn't stable: it evolves from airlock to airlock. The bonds between people are fragile and reconfigured constantly. A visiting day is always a special day. Generally, you don't talk about

it again. Even though it's a day from which no one ever emerges unchanged. Something rises up in each person, something you didn't suspect you had in you.

The character of the screw you paint is a big contrast with what we're used to seeing in prison movies.

«What struck me right away was the lack of men among those visiting a men's prison»

During my first visits I was just like Nora's character. I thought all screws were assholes. When I started working on the screenplay I met several and came to understand that they too were prisoners, subject to the same violence as the inmates. A prison is cut off from the world; everything contributes to the isolation. There's nothing for miles around apart from one bus stop and a few mini-estates for the guards and their families. Their windows overlook the prison grounds. They

often come across inmates' relatives in their neighbourhood, and are confronted with the visitors' suffering and anger on a daily basis.

This demands great psychological strength from each individual, and an ability to adapt. Not to mention the fact that the environment is incredibly noisy: buzzers, the clanging of locks and doors, create a continuous wall of sound... The guards are very badly paid. Alcoholism, absenteeism, and suicide rates are high, and life expectancy is much lower than average.

### What were the challenges of directing a film that is both a huis-clos and an ensemble movie?

Our main challenge was to create both the heat and the atmosphere of the airlocks. The story takes place during one day during a heat wave; I was inspired by the 2003 heat wave that triggered a mutiny at Fleury-Mérogis prison. The inmates had broken a great number of windows so they could breathe, so they could have air. Some had even set fire to mattresses... It was a question of capturing this tense climate

without explaining it and without showing the prisoners. The challenge was to show how the women are affected by this place's unreal, distressing, almost fantastical situation, how they are imperceptibly altered by this state of confinement until they themselves erupt into a sort of herd mentality. We shot with two cameras, which was the only way that would allow for improvisation and leave room for the actors.

### The location is impressive. Where did you shoot?

Filming in prison is impossible. We shot in Maison Blanche, a disused psychiatric hospital for women. I learned that the same architects often design prisons and psychiatric hospitals, which helps to explain why the security airlocks generate alienation, hysteria or violent outbursts like those in the film. Maison Blanche is a huge, labyrinthine enclosure with very narrow corridors. The place is laid out so that you can feel the slightest gaze in every



room; privacy is impossible, as in a panopticon. The windows are opaque: you can see silhouettes passing by. On the lower ground floor you can see the feet of people walking above your head. It is this same feeling of being observed that you get in prison airlocks.

### Why did you choose to film in Scope?

In fact, the music was obvious very quickly, before we chose the format: the song Johnny Guitar, a woman's lament to her man, seemed to me totally in keeping with the world of the film. Piece by piece, the relationship with the western took shape: characters overwhelmed by heat, rivalries, the sheriff's jail, the relationship between men and women... Besides, since the feeling of suffocation is the driving force of the story, I wanted to ensure we wouldn't feel any air around the characters, hence the tight frame, crushing them.

### What were your visual pointers for framing and shaping the prison world?

My references are mostly photographic. Jane Evelyn Atwood's work on women in prison and brothels made a big impression on me. The sequence shot at the end, with mother and daughter sitting on a bench facing the entrance to the visiting rooms, comes from a photo by Grégoire Korganow. I also had in mind Raymond Depardon's representation of the world of prison: the guards, the metal gates, the doors...

### There's a real synergy between the actors. How did you choose them?

Their cohesion is due in my opinion to the lack of distinction between professionals and

non-professionals. There was no hierarchy on set. We operated like a theatre company. I met Souad Flissi in the bar she owns. I found Mbaye Samb in the KFC at Chateau-Rouge; he lives in a hostel in the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. Zita Hanrot and Simon Bourgade I discovered at the Conservatoire. I first saw Samira Brahmia on The Voice, singing in Arabic and accompanying herself on guitar. Even if there's a bit of me in each of the female characters, I chose all of them for who they are. You see them on-screen as they are; they were the raw material from which the characters evolved.

**«Once the airlock door closes, each visitor is alone. There are no longer any guards: the situation becomes one of survival»**

### The film is very stylized. Did you want to move away from the conventions of social realism?

I find that life is generally a lot richer, more joyous and wilder than social realist cinema portrays it. The drab and the dreary are just codes by which to portray "reality". As if the visual and aesthetic world had to erase itself before the subject... With my characters, there's no pathos - there's life, energy, desire. The canary yellow of Fabienne Babe's handbag, the claret red of the lockers and Meriem's top, the petrol blue of Zita's nail varnish are not an aesthetic approach: this is the world I experienced while I

was visiting prison. I claim the right to make neither documentary films nor socio-political fiction. I shape the cinematic language and dramatic composition to create emotion. Mathieu Pernot's photographs of "the howlers" (gypsies who shout to communicate with people in prison) was probably an unconscious source of inspiration, these photos are so very alive.

Interview conducted April 2016



## RACHIDA BRAKNI

After completing a degree in history, Rachida Brakni decided to devote herself to her passion for the theatre and enrolled in Jean-Louis Martin Barbaz's drama studio. She later joined the National Conservatory of Dramatic Arts and then, in 2000, the Comédie Française.

In 2001 she appeared in André Techiné's *Far*; her performance in Coline Serreau's *Chaos*, for which she won the Most Promising Actress César Award in 2004, truly established her name. The same year, she was awarded the Molière Award for Best Female Newcomer for her performance in *Ruy Blas* at the Comédie Française. For Yasmine Kassari's *L'enfant endormi*, which screened in official selection at the Venice Film Festival in 2004, she received the Best Actress Prize at the Angers Premiers Plans Festival. In 2006 she met Hervé P. Gustave (aka HPG) and appeared in his *We Should Not Exist* (Directors' Fortnight, Cannes). She would work with him again in 2012 in *Hip Moves*, selected at the Locarno International Film Festival. Rachida Brakni has appeared in films by Claire Simon, Régis Wargnier, Francis Giraud, Arthur Joffé, Hannes Stöhr, Salem Brahimi and Philippe Haïm, as well as Gabriel-Julien Lafférière's comedy *Neuilly sa mère*.

Her stage credits include Henning Mankell's *Ténèbres* and Ingmar Bergman's *Autumn Sonata*. In 2009 she made her theatrical directing debut at the Marigny Theatre with *Face au Paradis*. She has collaborated a number of times with musician Rodolphe Burger, for her first album as well as concerts based around *The Songs of Songs* and the poetry of Mahmoud Darwich.

*Visiting Ours*, co-written with Raphaël Clairefond in 2014, is her first film as director.



SELECTED FILMOGRAPHIES



**ZITA HANROT**  
NORA

- 2016 — **VISITING OURS**  
by Rachida BRAKNI
- 2016 — **LE GANG DES ANTILLAIS**  
by Jean-Claude BARNY
- 2015 — **FATIMA**  
by Philippe FAUCON  
(Winner - César Awards: Most Promising Actress)
- 2014 — **EDEN**  
by Mia HANSEN-LOVE
- 2013 — **THE NEW GIRLFRIEND**  
by François OZON
- 2012 — **RADIOSTARS**  
by Romain LEVY



**MERIEM SERBAH**  
SONIA

- 2016 — **MAMAN À TORT**  
by Marc FITOUSSI
- 2016 — **VISITING OURS**  
by Rachida BRAKNI
- 2016 — **L'ANNONCE**  
by Julie LOPES-CURVAL
- 2016 — **VICKY**  
by Denis IMBERT
- 2015 — **THE BOSS'S DAUGHTER**  
by Olivier LOUSTAU
- 2014 — **VOYOUCRATIE**  
by Fabrice GARCON and Kevin OSSONA
- 2013 — **PARIS FOLLIES**  
by Marc FITOUSSI
- 2011 — **COOKIE**  
by Léa FAZER
- 2010 — **THE STRAIGHT LINE**  
by Régis WARGNIER
- 2005 — **I DO**  
by Éric LARTIGAU
- 2005 — **BACK HOME**  
by Rabah AMEUR-ZAÏMECHE
- 2003 — **GAMES OF LOVE AND CHANCE**  
by Abdellatif KECHICHE
- 2000 — **POETICAL REFUGEE**  
by Abdellatif KECHICHE



**FABIENNE BABE**  
MARLÈNE

- 2016 — **VISITING OURS**  
by Rachida BRAKNI
- 2013 — **YOU AND THE NIGHT**  
by Yann GONZALEZ
- 2005 — **I SAW BEN BARKA GET KILLED**  
by Serge LE PERON
- 1995 — **THIEVES**  
by André TECHINE
- 1994 — **LE GARCU**  
by Maurice PIALAT
- 1993 — **WONDERBOY**  
by Paul VECCHIALI
- 1992 — **JE PENSE À VOUS**  
by Luc and Jean-Pierre DARDENNE
- 1992 — **LE DERNIER PLONGEON**  
by Joao Cesar MONTEIRO
- 1991 — **BAR DES RAILS**  
by Cédric KAHN
- 1991 — **FERDYDURKE**  
by Jerzy SKOLIMOWSKI
- 1987 — **SOUND AND FURY**  
by Jean-Claude BRISSEAU
- 1985 — **SINGING THE BLUES IN RED**  
by Ken LOACH
- 1984 — **WUTHERING HEIGHTS**  
by Jacques RIVETTE



**JUDITH CAEN**  
JUDITH



**SAMIRA BRAHMIA**  
FATMA



**SQUAD FLISSI**  
HOURIA



**SALMA LAHMER**  
NAWELL



**DJAMILA LEMOUDA**  
FARIDA

# CAST

Zita HANROT — Nora  
Samira BRAHMIA — Fatma  
Judith CAEN — Judith  
Fabienne BABE — Marlène  
Lorette-Sixtine — Lola  
Souad FLISSI — Houria  
Meriem SERBAH — Sonia  
Salma LAHMER — Nawell  
Djamila LEMOUDA — Farida  
Boubacar SAMB — Mr. Diakaré  
Simon BOURGADE — Éric  
Luc ANTONI — Anthony  
Serge BIAVAN — Chief Warden  
Sacha BOURDO — Jim

# CREW

Directed by **Rachida BRAKNI**  
Screenplay — **Rachida BRAKNI** and **Raphaël CLAIREFOND**

DP — **Katell DJIAN**  
Sound — **David RIT**  
Costume Designer — **Nina AVRAMOVIC**  
Hair & Make-up — **Cécile PELLERIN**  
Production Designer — **Daniel BEVAN**  
Editor — **Yorgos LAMPRINOS**  
Sound editor — **Séverine RATIER**  
Color grading — **Gadiel BENDALEC**  
Original music — **Mehdi HADDAB** and **SMADJ**  
**Gaëtan ROUSSEL** and **Rachida BRAKNI**  
**Sharon VAUGHN** and **Jeff SILBAR**  
Mix — **Julien PEREZ**

Producer — **Thierry LOUNAS**  
**Capricci Production**

Distribution — **Capricci Films**

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