



*Viva Laldjerie*

*A film by Nadir Mocknèche*



Running Time: 113 min.

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## **SYNOPSIS**

Highlighting issues from age disparities and love to the growing civil conflict of war, this film follows the lives of three women, living in the middle of a terrorist infested city, who struggle to survive despite the limitations on their lives. The film deals with conflict between mother and daughter as well as the tensions between traditional and modern society.

Beautiful Goucem (Lubna Azabal) works at the counter of a local Algiers photo shop. Goucem and her extravagantly bold widowed mother, Mrs. Sandjak (Biyouna), a former exotic dancer, have been living together in a low-rent residential hotel, hiding out from terrorists who are set on killing Sandjak (known as "Papicha" to her many adoring fans). Fifi (Nadia Kaci), the women's neighbor at the hotel, is an energetic prostitute who keeps herself busy with men twenty-four hours a day.

Encouraged to re-enter into the realm of performance, despite the threats to her life, Papicha decides to get back out into the community to perform. Her actions are inspired by the young daughter of the concierge, Tiziri (Lynda Harchaoui), who looks up to Papicha. When the two discover that a coveted cabaret is being closed to make room for a new mosque, Papicha decides she can no longer sit idly by.

Goucem has been leading a double life between traditional and modern society, in constant conflict with her mother's worries of her finding a husband. Goucem becomes interested in a local married doctor, Annis (Lounes Tazairt), expecting him to leave his wife for her. But when Annis announces he is going to be out of town, tending to the victims of terrorism, Goucem lets loose on the city—partying all night and taking home many different men.

## **PRODUCTION NOTES**

Algerians have a tricky relationship with images, their image. They started by seeing themselves through the colonial eye, a mass of undifferentiated people, then when independence came, as social realist archetypes: the Combatant, the Farmer, the Worker. Never as individuals with their own personality. During the filming of "Viva Laldjérie" (in January 2003), we set the camera up all over the city: on the main roads, in popular places like Martyr's square, the Kasbah, and were never forced to leave. People came up to me say hello, to tell me that they were proud to see a young Algerian director coming back with a professional crew to film, to "camera" them as they say in "Aldjérian". Their obsession was to show to the world that they are "normal", that Algiers is neither Kabul nor Tehran. Their relationship with their image had changed. I get the feeling people are starting to love themselves, maybe accepting to look at themselves. Since its Independence, Algiers has practically not been depicted, a city always lacking contemporary images of itself. The reference self-portrait remains colonial or folkloric. I had to open a guide book in a Parisian library to experience the shock of Algiers entirely mapped out. For the first time in my life, I saw a map of my city. Something that didn't exist there at the time of regime's Soviet paranoia. It is a deeply Mediterranean city, and like many cities in Spain or the Balkans, there is both European and Muslim (Arabic or Turkish) architecture. The winter light, relics of the

war, the green countryside, the motorway, the unfinished buildings, the Olympic city (a copy of the one in Budapest) remind you of Eastern Europe. That's modern-day Algiers.

## **INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR NADIR MOKNECHE ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

Excerpts from an interview between Benjamin Stora (Born in Constantine in Algeria, he is now a history professor at the INALCO) and Nadir Moknèche:

Benjamin Stora:

Everything is shown, everything said, and that's the primary strength of "Viva Laldjérie". Young women who work or prostitute themselves, embarrassed important people, a wonderful, captivating old dancer, young "hittistes" weighed down with nothing to do, thieves and the jobless. In short, Nadir Moknèche, you attack society from the margins and touch the heart of it. The heart of "Laldjérie". What is the origin of the title "Viva Laldjérie"?

Nadir Moknèche:

"One, two, three, Viva Laldjérie" is one of the many slogans chanted by supporters in the stadiums, the "hittistes"; a term composed of the Arabic word "hit" (wall) and the French suffix "iste". These jobless people, personified in the film by Samir the flirt, who spends his time leaning against the walls of Algeria, illiterate in both languages (classical Arabic/French), the avatars of forced arabisation, created this term "Laldjérie". Mixing the French word "Algerie" with the Arabic word "El Djazair" to create a new word, like many others which are introduced each year into spoken Algerian.

BS:

Your film is a hymn to women making their way through a terribly masculine world, a denunciation of male cowardliness. One thinks of Kateb Yacine, a rebel till the last. May we say that your childhood is behind this hymn to the beauty and strength of women?

NM:

Maybe. One thing is sure, my characters are people who I've met at least once. Apart from traditional research work, the Algerian song, an essential form of popular expression, is an important source for me. Amongst others, Raï music, whose primary meaning is "judgment and personal look", is the music of marginals. Sung and recorded on cassettes in cabarets and sold all over the country, Raï music has become a national music, unlike the other forms of music that remain regional. The singer Cheb Abdou is making a killing with "*I love a policeman, but his heart is for a prisoner*", or the female singer Cheba Djenet with "*I don't work for pimps*".

BS:

In the space of a year, the whole conception of the world died. Less than two years later the Berlin wall fell and the Soviet empire collapsed. So we can say that now, we're going to tell a "true" story about Algerian society. "Viva Laldjérie" starts like a documentary with men and women walking through the streets of Algiers, and the film ends with young people playing in the Oscar Niemeyer Olympic City. Is that a symbol of a socialist

past? It reminds one of neo-realism, post-war Italy, a puritanical, provincial Mediterranean society closed in on itself. A society which strangely resembles Algerian society today. A society emerging from the ruins of war. Don't you fear that people will criticise you for not showing the massacres, the thousands of victims of terrorism?

NM:

Everybody knows there were barbaric massacres in Algeria. We've all seen TV images of children with their throats slit. Begin to explain it? Show evil people killing and kind people crying? Making a film today about terrorism, when we've just perhaps put it behind us, remains an idea. A film remains a realm of sensibility, at least for me. Like any society which endures such trials, it firstly wants to forget, it wants to live. You spoke about the post-war Italian neo-realists and Almodovar, the post-Franco film-maker. Those film-makers showed a desire to live, revealed the rich, multiple and deep humanity of the Italians and the Spanish. Why not reveal that side of the Algerian people?

## **CAST**

Goucem	<u>Lubna Azabal</u>
Papicha	<u>Biyouna</u>
Fifi	<u>Nadia Kaci</u>
Samir	<u>Jalil Naciri</u>
Chouchou	<u>Abbes Zahmani</u>
La voyante	<u>Florence Giorgetti</u>
Docteur Aniss Sassi	<u>Lounès Tazairt</u>
Yacine Sassi	<u>Akim Isker</u>
Le planton du cadastre (as Faouzi Saichi)	<u>Fawzi B. Saichi</u>
Monsieur Fares	<u>Serge Avedikian</u>

## **CREW**

Director/Screenwriter	Nadir Moknèche
Producers	Sunday Morning Productions
Co-producers	Arte France Cinema
	Need Productions (Denis Delcampe)
	BL Prod (Lotfi Bouchouchi)
	Gimages Films
Director of Photography	Jean-Clause Larrieu
Original Music	Pierre Bastaroli
Editing	Ludo Trcoh
Sound Engineering	Daniel Ollivier
Production Designer	Pierre Bastaroli

## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

**Nadir Moknèche** writer/director

"Viva Laldjérie" is the second film by Nadir Moknèche. His first film, "the Harem of Madame Osmane", was released in cinemas in France in July 2000 and was screened at numerous international festivals. Born in 1965, he spent his childhood and teenage years in Algiers where he went to the Saint Joseph school until it was nationalised in 1976, then a public secondary school and lycée until 1984, when he passed his baccalauréat in France. After two years studying law, he left for London and started travelling. When he returned to Paris, he followed drama lessons from 1989 to 1993 at the Chaillot National Theatre and with Ariane Mnouchkine at the Théâtre du Soleil. It was during this apprenticeship that he discovered the cinema, bought a super-8 camera and shot several short films. Between 1993 and 1995, he attended film lessons at the New School for Social Research in New York and made two short films, "Jardin" and "Hanifa", the winner of the first prize at the university festival.

## FESTIVAL HISTORY

Washington, D.C. International Film Festival  
Lincoln Center Film Society "Arab Film Series"  
2004 Cinemayaat Opening Night Film  
Arab Film Festival Goethe Institute

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