

GÉRARD
DEPARDIEU
JEAN-PIERRE
DARROUSSIN
CATHERINE
FROT

A FILM BY LUCAS BELVAUX

**HOME
FRONT**



YOANN
ZIMMER

FÉLIX
KYSYL

SYNECDOCHE presents



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
OFFICIAL SELECTION
2020

HOME FRONT

A FILM BY LUCAS BELVAUX

with

GÉRARD DEPARDIEU, CATHERINE FROT, JEAN-PIERRE DARROUSSIN,
YOANN ZIMMER, FÉLIX KYSYL, EDOUARD SULPICE

2020 - France - Belgium - Color - 101'

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Synopsis

They were called to Algeria during the “events” of 1960. Two years later, Bernard, Rabut, Février and others returned to France.

They kept silent, and lived their lives. But sometimes it takes almost nothing, a birthday, a gift in one’s pocket, to bring the past charging back, forty years later, into the lives of those who believed they could deny it.

Why did you choose to adapt Laurent Mauvignier's novel The Wound ?

I read *The Wound* when it first came out more than ten years ago. I found it outstanding, astonishing, moving, powerful. In fact, I wish I'd written it. There is the style, of course - the syncopated, halting writing that gives rise to the tragedy of the insignificant, the ordinary, of silence. Laurent Mauvignier is a great writer, but you can't adapt a style. You can, however, adapt a process.

Here, it's in the form of flashbacks, monologues, and non-chronological narration through thought. But beyond that, it's the developed themes that gripped me because they fall in line with questions that have haunted me for years: the clash of individual destinies and major moments in history, the memories, the guilt, the secret wounds and permanent scars that war leaves in people's minds.

Regarding the novel, Jérôme Garcin (French journalist) said that it was about the war after the war...

Yes. It's a film about recollection, memories, and scars. For those that came back, this war never ended because it was never named, never considered as such. As if they'd never fought. Like Fabrice at Waterloo, our characters only saw what they experienced – that is, fragments, moments. They did what they thought was their duty and realized, later, that they'd been cogs in a terrifying machine. Without necessarily having the words to talk about it, without being sure they were heard or understood. It's often said that veterans of Algeria never told their story; I think that, more than anything else, no one wanted to listen to them. They were condemned to the unspoken, to the silence that is the scar of the Algerian war. That's what I've wanted to bring to the screen ever since I read the book. At the time, the rights weren't available. Then, they were released and I found that the project came naturally after *This is our Land*, which dealt with the rise of the extreme right. The Rassemblement National (Far-Right Political Party) was built, in large part, upon the ashes of that war.

Interview with Lucas Belvaux



Is this a political film?

It's a political film, but not a militant film. Ideologically speaking, the question of colonization has been settled. The war has been over for more than sixty years. History has passed judgement.

On the other hand, the film is political in the sense that it questions the way in which this story is told, how it is handled, how it is passed on, how the different accounts are reconciled because, obviously, there are several ways of telling it. The Pieds-Noirs (European people born in Algeria during the period of French rule) were misunderstood and mistreated – both during and afterward. Still today, there is an anti-Pieds-Noirs racism that is unbearable. Incidentally, there isn't a single "Pieds-Noirs perspective" because, like every human society, it's a community preoccupied with politics and social issues. To use a fashionable term, we cannot "essentialize" the Pieds-Noirs any more than any other humans.

There are also the soldiers and, depending on whether they're conscripts or professionals, the story won't be the same. Each will tell his own inevitably singular, unique, and different version depending on the region where he served, or the year. Of course, there are the Algerian accounts in all their political diversities, whether FLN (National Liberation Front) or MNA (Algerian National Movement), ALN (National Liberation Army) fighters or Harkis (native Muslim Algerians who served as auxiliaries in the French Army during the Algerian War of Independence). We need to hear all of the stories - accept the expressions of all the different points of view, of all subjectivities, confront them and see not how we can reconcile them, but rather constitute a story that everyone will be able to hear because every voice will be found therein. That is the job that historians do when we let them do their work. It's pretty incredible to see how this war still "preoccupies" French society when more than half the population was born after it ended.



Was Gérard Depardieu in the role of Feu-de-Bois an obvious choice for you?

Yes. I thought about him all throughout the writing of the adaptation. The farther along I got, the more he needed to play this character who is both silent and explosive. But it's a double character. We see him at two different times in his life that are more than forty years apart.

When he arrives in Algeria, he's twenty years old and his name is Bernard. He'll discover the beauty of the world and love, but also the horror that humanity is capable of - and he will never get over it. Gérard is passionate about the history of Algeria and knows it very well. He's too young to have been in the war but as a child and as an adolescent, he knew men that were conscripted and saw them come back broken. Plus, he's a provincial. It's easy to imagine him knowing Feu-de-Bois. He didn't need to create him - he was able to simply use his memories and talent!

And then Catherine Frot and Jean-Pierre Darroussin...

From the very beginning, Catherine was the obvious choice to play Solange, Feu-de-Bois' sister. I heard her voice as I was reading the novel, and I wrote with her in mind. Incidentally, she was the first person I asked to read the script in its first version. And her reading was particularly important because the questions she asked me were central to the rewrite. She's a very sharp reader. Nothing gets past her, but she is extremely considerate. With Catherine, you're immediately in the work. You go straight to the essential. For the character Rabut, the search was a little more complicated. Where Feu-de-Bois is larger-than-life, contrasting, explosive, Rabut is restrained. He listens, watches, and rarely comments. His downward spiral is slow, almost imperceptible. It's a very tenuous, delicate role that has to be maintained (restrained) throughout the entire film. Highly complex, made up of back-and-forths and paradoxes. You have to be absolutely rigorous and confident in the work, and unable to tell yourself, "I'll make up for it in the next scene". You have to "be there" at all times, at every moment, and Jean-Pierre is a champion in that respect. It's extremely exciting to work with actors like them. You feel inspired. The exchange is ongoing. They bring so much. They give. I'm talking about them, but all of the actors – even those who only came for two or three days – were keenly involved and focused. The rest of the team, too, in fact – probably because it's a French story that concerns every individual, every family.

Bernard, a.k.a Feu-de-Bois, and Rabut are called upon to serve at the age of twenty in Algeria. They're played by Yohann Zimmer and Edouard Sulpice...

Yohann and Edouard are very young. They belong to a generation of young French (or Belgian!) people that (thankfully) have never known war, never served in the military and whose lives are light years away from those

of Rabut and Bernard. They had to play young men who'd never left their home towns, never taken a boat or a plane. It was enthralling to watch them discover that reality through the work. They needed to understand that this was a young person's life at the time, and internalize that. That was true for all of the actors in this part of the film. One of the pleasures of filming was discovering a generation of actors. Very astonishing, very talented people with strong, unique personalities... Félix Kysyl (Février), Jean-Baptiste Le Vaillant (Chatel), Simon Parmentier (Poiret), Yannick Morzelle (Kastendeuch), and Ahmed Hamoud who plays Idir. A magnificent Moroccan actor. And Fleur Fitoussi, of course, the only woman in that part. They're fairly unknown actors, some of whom we've never seen, that form a magnificent generation.



One of the film's major themes is silence. Paradoxically, you use a lot of voice-overs that reinforce the polyphonic narrative...

The book was already in voice-over! At least, that's the impression I had. I didn't try to systematically transform each of the individual stories into images. I sometimes kept them for what they were, accounts, stories that are told with the sheer power of words, the imagination they inspire in those that hear them. That's why I kept the flashback structure – it's the only one that, through its constant back-and-forths between past and present, is capable of showing a man's view, as he enters old age, onto what he was at twenty.

The flashbacks and voice-overs are at the heart of the project. They're a means of taking distance. And it's an interesting paradox to see that it's this distance that enables profound introspection, that makes it possible to transcend eras. So that the past and present exchange, talk to one another, question one another, and respond. Voice-overs enable a character to whisper into the spectators' ears in a uniquely intimate relationship; but it's also a way for a character to talk to himself, question himself, and ponder his condition - what he was, what he is, and what he does. And

it allows the present-day character to talk with the man he was forty years ago. Like the novel, the film talks about memory(ies), so about different periods of time recounted in a non-chronological way, because memory doesn't care about the agreement of tenses. We had to find the discontinuous functioning of memories, the word-chain dimension, and their "overwhelming" nature as well, like in the sequence where the voices of the present talk with those from the past, and the individual narratives, monologues or dialogues mix with archive sounds (and images), gradually bringing the individual stories into the shared History until we reach an extremely high sound density before slowly returning to the intimacy of the "soloist". A bit like counterpoint in music where distinct melodic lines are superimposed. They can come together, intersect, respond to each other, and in all cases, enrich each other. I tried to apply that to cinema, to have the voices, narratives, and stories of each character be told on different lines, drawing closer to each other before returning to the intimacy of the soloist.

Interview by Nicolas Jacobs.



Family Secrets

A discussion between Lucas Belvaux and Benjamin Stora

(Historian, University Professor, Algerian War Expert)



Lucas Belvaux: When I began casting the film, I met with a lot of young, 20-year-old actors and almost every time, they would tell me about a member of their family – a grandfather, or a great uncle, who fought in the Algerian War. They brought along family souvenirs from that period: photos, diaries, sometimes objects like, for example, a knife taken from the body of a fellagha. But they all told me the same thing: “He never talked about it; we pieced his story together after his death.”

Benjamin Stora: That is absolutely representative. What’s interesting in the film is its reading of this conflict as a family secret. And we know that a family secret is a muted, very dark, buried violence... that inevitably comes out at some point. The mechanisms for forgetting were put in place from the outset of the war. On the French side, it was the denial of the war itself, the refusal to acknowledge the violence, the tortures, and the summary executions. And on the Algerian side, the cruelty of the secret war between the FLN and the MNA, and the mass slaughter of the Harkis in 1962.

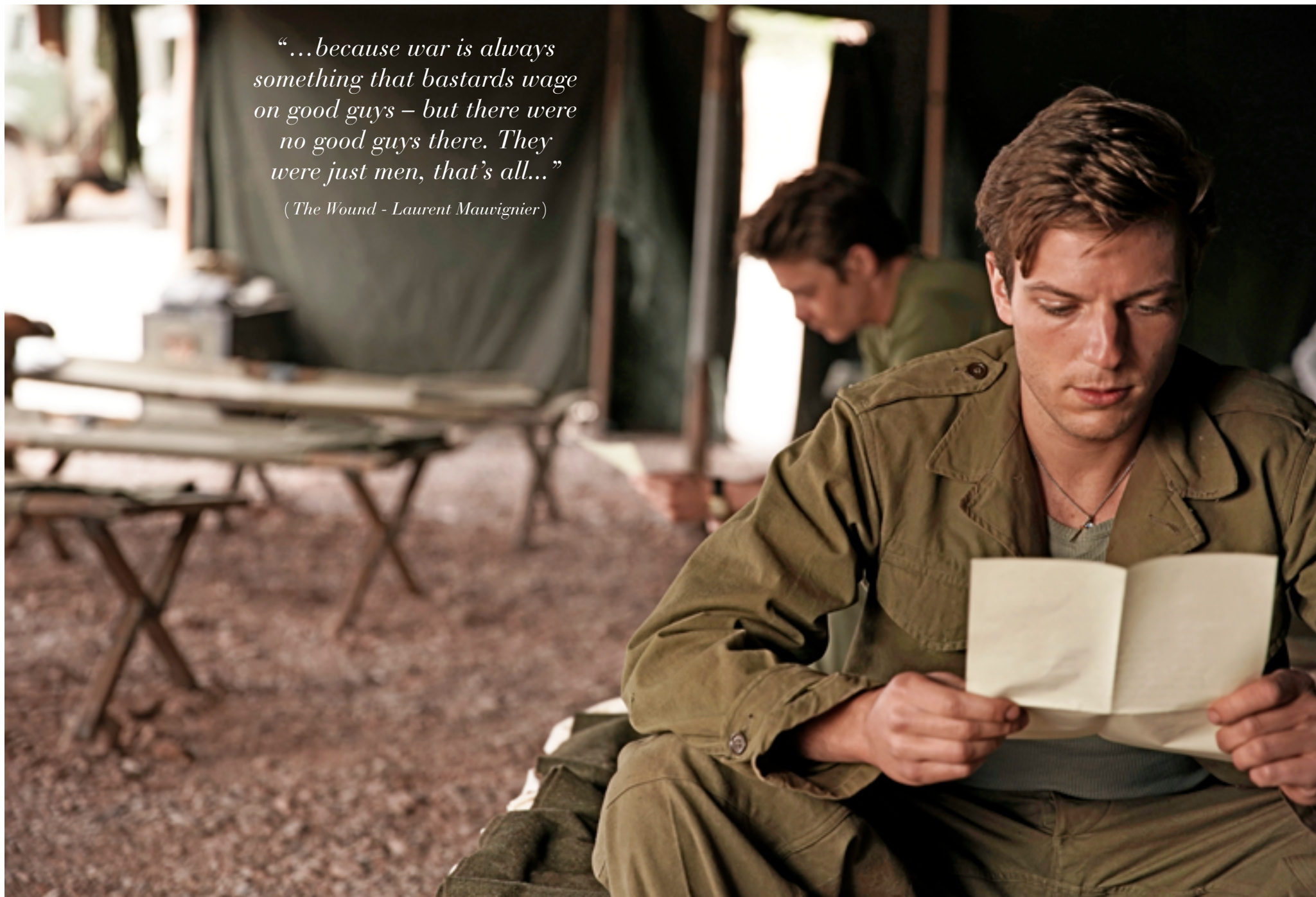
The film does a good job of expressing what this conflict was: a terrible rupture between people who thought that they were part of the same family. And this was compounded by the abduction on the French side. These were young men between the ages of 18 and 20 that were called upon to serve in Algeria as part of their 18-month military service, which was extended to 30 months. They had no choice. They had to leave their families, their fiancées, their studies, and their jobs.

Lucas Belvaux: They discovered the beauty of the world and the horror of war at the same time...

Benjamin Stora: These young men went to war blindly, without being told what they were going to see and do there. Many came back walled up, transformed. Some were “broken” for life. In any case, all of them saw their bearings completely destroyed. The challenge for the film was to stay on the level of these men, and I think it does that well.

*“...because war is always
something that bastards wage
on good guys – but there were
no good guys there. They
were just men, that’s all...”*

(The Wound - Laurent Mauvignier)



Lucas Belvaux: The sociological origin of the conscripts is very important. There were those coming from the countryside that had, more often than not, never left their home towns. And then there were the city dwellers coming from labor or faith-based youth movements who were already politically aware. There again, there were ruptures.

Benjamin Stora: The classic lines of confrontation were completely blurred. When you look more closely, you don't necessarily see the pattern of the left liberating the people and the right defending colonialism. For example, in 1955, François Mauriac spoke out against the tortures and, in 1957, Raymond Aron wrote an opinion piece in *Le Figaro* in favor of the independence while the left, which was in power at the time, was carrying out a policy of repression in Algeria.

Added to the blurring of ideological boundaries was the savagery of civil war. It wasn't a conventional war. What the film depicts is a double, even triple, civil war. Between the Algerians and the French, the Algerians among themselves, and the French among themselves. It could only ever be a "dirty" war.

Lucas Belvaux: It took place less than 15 years after the Second World War. In it were the sons of war veterans and Resistance fighters. They experienced the Occupation as children...

Benjamin Stora: That's the power of the sequence where a young man makes a reference to Oradour-sur-Glane (village destroyed by the German-Waffen-SS company during World War II) when describing the bloody behavior of some of his platoon mates during a raid on a "mechta", a small farming village. Personally, over the course of my research, I gathered a lot of testimonials regarding the "firewood-gathering chores", the summary executions carried out by the French Army. How could they talk about such horrors after that, even if they didn't directly take part in them? That is the tragedy.

Lucas Belvaux: It's the indescribable. "You can't say it. There are no words."



says Feu-de-Bois in the film.

Benjamin Stora: That's where the work of writers and directors is important. In recreating a firmly understood imaginary world that helps historians make headway with a very complicated history. I've always written that they help historians to progress. Films are important because the mass number of books written on the Algerian War have never managed to break the consensus on silence. Only films have that power.

Lucas Belvaux: Fiction allows us to mix collective History with individual accounts. Telling individual stories, even if they're fictional, lets us multiply the perspectives onto History. Because fiction needs confrontations, opposing views, dialectics to create interest... and this multiplication of perspectives allows the spectator (or reader) to broaden his or her horizon, to form his or her own idea. The other major interest of fiction is being able to tell the personal side, to explore

it, to dig into the dark matter buried within each individual that sometimes helps us understand the inexplicable.

Benjamin Stora: It was a complex war that foreshadowed modern conflicts: wars with no fronts and no names, invisible wars to which only writers and filmmakers can give bodies and souls. The Algerian War was the transistor, the radio, where Vietnam was the arrival of the televised image. That's very important because the imaginations of the war in Algeria were built on noise and sound, meaning on the non-visible and non-representable. But the Vietnam War refers to an imagination comprising powerful images that were accentuated and intensified by American film. Why is that?

Lucas Belvaux: Because it was less painful for the Americans. It was a distant war that affected foreign populations. It wasn't a family affair. The American population had no attachment to Vietnam.

Benjamin Stora: Whereas in Algeria, it was a war between relatives. A war between people who knew each other. The film shows this very well, in addition to the irreparable damage done to those who took part in it.



CAST

Feu-de-Bois	Gérard DEPARDIEU
Solange	Catherine FROT
Rabut	Jean-Pierre DARROUSSIN
Bernard	Yoann ZIMMER
Février	Félix KYSYL
Rabut at 20	Edouard SULPICE
Mireille	Fleur FITOUSSI
Idir	Ahmed HAMOUD
Nicole	Clotilde MOLLET
Mrs. Chefraoui	Amelle CHAHBI
Idir's grandfather	Mohemmed ELFAKI
Saïd	Farid LARBI
The Doctor	Michem FERRACCI
Mireille's father	Jérôme ROBERT
Evelyne	Catherine CHEVALLIER
Marie-Jeanne	Sophie PINCEMAILLE
La Chouette	Brigitte DE VILLEPOIX
The mayor	François FEROLETO
Roland	François SAINT POL
Officer Millet	Bertrand CONSTANT
Patou	Charlotte TALPAERT
Kastendeuch	Yannick MORZELLE
Poiret	Simon PARMENTIER
Chatel	Jean-Baptiste LE VAILLANT
Brénière	Lilian DUGOIS
The lieutenant	Antoine DE FOUCAULD
Bergonnier	Félix LAUDIERE
Abdelmalik	Kamal HAIMOUD
Warrant officer	Charles BESNARD
Military doctor	Sylvain HAWAWINI
Fatiha	Safaa KHATAMI
Young female assault victim	Rim FETHI
Bernard's mother	Eve ARBEZ
Reine	Gaïa WARNANT
Solange as a child	Coréane MARCHAND
Jean-Marc	Léo MISSET

Bourlem	Naïm BAHA
Saïd's son	Yascine DAHMANI
Saïd's daughter	Ines BAHA
The engineer	Hatim SADIQI
Idir's grandmother	Touria EL ATAOU
Military judge	Eric CUVELIER
Cell warrant officer	Alexis LOGIE
Jean-Jacques	Alain BOUCHET
Lopez	Anthony SONIGO
Segura	Mikaël HALIMI
Nicole at 30	Julie ROUX



CREW

Director **Lucas BELVAUX**
 Screenplay **Lucas BELVAUX**
 Based on the novel by **Laurent MAUVIGNIER**
 Published by **Editions de Minuit**
 Cinematography **Guillaume DEFFONTAINES**
 Set design **Frédérique BELVAUX**
 Editing **Ludo TROCH**
 Costume Design **Dorothée GUIRAUD**
 Sound **Nicolas WASCHKOWSKI**
Béatrice WICK
Agnès RAVEZ
Luc THOMAS
 Production Management **Claire LANGMANN**
 Post-production Management **Christina CRASSARIS**
 Executive Production (Morocco) **Saïd HAMICH** (MONT FLEURI PRODUCTION)
 Producers **David FRENKEL**
Patrick QUINET

Production **SYNECDOCHE**
ARTEMIS PRODUCTIONS
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FRANCE TÉLÉVISIONS
AD VITAM
 In association with **LA BANQUE POSTALE IMAGE 13**
MANON 10, SOFITVCINÉ 7
CINÉAXE
 French distribution **AD VITAM**
 International Sales **THE PARTY FILM SALES**
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