



dans un film  
la maison  
de karima saïdi

**PRESS KIT**



# A WAY HOME

A FILM BY **KARIMA SAÏDI**

**BELGIAN RELEASE JUNE 23**

2020 - 90' - Belgium - France - Morocco - Qatar - Colour  
Languages French/Arab VOSTENG - DCP - 5.1 - HD - 16/9

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# SYNOPSIS

After years of separation, the filmmaker renews her relationship with her mother, Aïcha, now suffering from Alzheimer's. From Brussels to Tangiers, the odyssey of a family marked by exile is evoked through discretion and confession, pain, separation, grief, and joy.



# A WAY HOME

## MEMORIES OF WOMEN IN EXILE

« A Way Home » is an intimate film about a facet of the Moroccan immigration history in Belgium, told by a mother and her daughter meeting again after years of separation. But it is also a documentary about memory, memory fading away at the end of one's life, memory inverting the roles between parent and child, and eventually setting them free from a painful past.

Karima Saïdi gives us a glimpse of the history of Moroccan immigration to Belgium by retracing the personal journey of her mother, Aïcha, who left her native country in 1967 to settle in Brussels. From her life in an alleyway in Tangier to an apartment in Brussels, « A Way Home » gradually brings to light an existence torn between respect for tradition and fragile liberalism, where marriages, separations, and bereavements follow one another. The film uses subtle brushstrokes to paint the portrait of a strong-tempered mother.

Much of this story is conveyed in the film through the words that the filmmaker and her Alzheimer-afflicted mother exchange during the last weeks of Aïcha's life. Sometimes, the whispered words are barely audible; sometimes, they surface as if they had been withheld for too long. But with each sentence, they allow us to unravel the journey of a woman whose life choices, whether forced or deliberate, have taken her through multiple exiles. Indeed, « A Way Home » also accounts for inner exiles: deviations from oneself, deviations from the norms that a mother and her daughter have internalized before daring to confront them, each at their own pace. Aïcha's story is informed by the questions her daughter asks herself: how was it for a divorced woman to live in a Moroccan community in the 1960s? Why are women not allowed to bury their brothers? Does a woman know how to heal her husband? Can a daughter

protect her sick mother? In addressing all these questions, Karima Saïdi's documentary reaches beyond the mere historiographical vocation of a film about Moroccan immigration; it delves into the very heart of the "integration" issue, which underpins the life journeys of both the filmmaker and her mother. How is it possible to live in peace with yourself when you are torn apart by so many gender-based prohibitions enforced by religion, family, culture, and history?

In the film, Karima Saïdi also addresses this central question through radical aesthetic choices. For example, Aïcha's face appears for the first time only after five minutes, on an almost blurred photo: a choice reflecting the complexity of filming a sick mother without indecency. And it is only after an hour that the mother becomes a moving image, addressing us with a haggard camera-look that oscillates between the abyss and piercing lucidity, and speaks of an entire life and its impending end. Around the predominantly photographic portraits, the film displays a wide range of photos and videos from the family archives. In the course of their conversations, which operate as off-screen commentaries, Aïcha and Karima gradually reveal all the unspoken facts embedded in these mementos, all the things that the still images attempt to conceal and nevertheless betray: the separation between men and women, the smiles that "the exiled one", "the divorced one", "the widow" is no longer able to simulate. However, « A Way Home » never yields to melancholy. Karima Saïdi and her mother's words also highlight, little by little, the striking freedom of two women who have overcome cultural, religious, and social prohibitions. In doing so, the cinematic gesture underlying « A Way Home » is resolutely a liberating one. The very act of filming tracks down and thwarts all the norms that should have made this film impossible.

Jeremy Hamers (November 2020)

## INTERVIEW WITH **KARIMA SAÏDI**

**Jeremy Hamers: What first struck me in your film « A Way Home » is that unlike many documentaries that tell the story of immigration through a family experience, your film never puts History above the trajectory of your mother, the film's main character. We always stay as close as possible to one person, Aïcha. She is, of course, a witness and an agent of Moroccan immigration in Belgium. But she is above all a mother, a woman who lived her life freely and whose memories are the guiding thread of your film. These memories are much more than mere pretexts to evoke History. Yet the project began precisely at the moment when you became aware of your mother's loss of memory...**

**Karima Saïdi :** Aïcha, my mother, fell ill at a time when I rarely saw her. When the diagnosis of Alzheimer's was confirmed, I quickly realized that I would have to take care of her. That was the starting point for a renewed encounter. I found myself thrown into a role that I hadn't

wanted to take on since I had left home, at least not as Mediterranean families see it: I would have to take care of her. So I started spending a lot more time with her. I literally got to know her and started protecting her. And we found ourselves in opposite roles. I, the daughter, symbolically became the mother. I was very moved by that experience. I was suddenly confronted with her fragility. In other words, she could no longer play the role of a very powerful and strong woman. And it all came down to me just as I was starting a career as a script girl on fiction movies, and had to go abroad. At the time, I read Annie Ernaux's book, « I Remain in Darkness », a diary about her mother who also suffers from Alzheimer's. Reading this book was a turning point for me. I started keeping my own diary. And for a year, I observed what was going on. And then the choice to make a film became obvious at that moment; I realized that I was the only one who could make this film. So I started recording her voice, our conversations, and taking pictures.





**JH : The film is the recording in images and sounds of a new meeting between a mother and her daughter. But « A Way Home » also gives the impression that this renewed encounter will reach far beyond the private or intimate sphere. For you, this meeting is the starting point for a process of cultural emancipation.**

**KS :** When I made this film, I experienced something very striking. I would never have allowed myself to make such an intimate film in the place where I come from. That would have been impossible for me. My education, my codes, my values forbid it. Besides, I am also an editor, which means that I always work on the films of others. I am the midwife of other people's films. So, when I started making this documentary, I went through a completely new experience. I was confronted with many questions, simple but fundamental ones. How do you make a film? But also, how do you film your mother? How do you film a sick mother? An aging mother? I have to face all these questions, and yet my education is based on the sacralization of the mother, whom nobody has the right to bring down from her pedestal, all the less so when she is ill. Now, these questions were going to be quite crucial for me since they would also allow me to free myself from the injunction, from a series of prohibitions. And

then I realized that if I told the story of my family, no one would have the right to blame me for anything. It is our story, hers and mine. And so, the prohibitions that initially made this film impossible were, in fact, our own prohibitions. Overcoming them reconciled me with my culture of origin. Therefore, this film is about my family history. But, inevitably, it is also a film about Moroccan immigration, about the experience of exile, about a woman who went away to live without a man, and who was therefore considered by her culture of origin as an exposed woman.

**JH : If the film is the result of several stages of emancipation made possible by the disease, it is quite striking that we have to wait five minutes before seeing Aïcha's face on the screen. And when the viewer can finally place a face on the voice he has been hearing all along, it is through a photograph. Then, other photos follow this first portrait. Through a quick montage of still images, the main character seems as if she were about to start moving. But she never becomes a moving image herself. It is as if something was resisting Aïcha's transition to film. Not everything can become a film.**

**KS :** I tried to film my mother. I have footage on which you



can see her. But it's too much. Because what I'm filming during that moment is private, it's not the film. The still image reveals a sort of imbalance. In these images that are not quite in motion, the body is a presence, but one that undergoes a temporal disruption. By superimposing a few still images, I'm looking for a way to reanimate her, to put Aïcha in motion, at a time when everything was coming to a standstill. In the end, I preferred to work on these series of still images, these jerky cuts, because they induce a sense of gap. I couldn't make this film by capturing my mother in a reality recorded at 25 frames per second. It wouldn't have worked. It would have been another story. And this way of proceeding is much richer for the voice. You can hear her better. Her voice is always off-screen. Can't everything become a film? Putting things in motion is bringing them into a narrative, bringing them back to life, making a film. But I would add: what could be more intimate than a mother's voice? I didn't know how I would tell the story based on what I had recorded. When you're at the same time the director, the mother, and the daughter, you work a lot by instinct. As a daughter, I was still trying to record images and sounds of my mother. And at the same time, the director in me wondered about what was necessary for the film. All the filmmakers I met during the shooting, all those with whom I talked about the shooting process, advised me to film my mother. And

I told them it was impossible for me. But they couldn't understand. In some way, it was easier for the daughter to take photos of her mother than for the filmmaker to film her.

**JH : There is one particular sequence that induces a break in tone. That sequence shows children holding the Belgian flag or laying wreaths of flowers in front of the Unknown Soldier monument in Brussels on the morning of November 11th. The vast majority of these children are from immigrant backgrounds. This passage in the film is ambiguous. On the one hand, it seemed ironic to me because it denounces, in a tongue-in-cheek way, the fact that children are often artificially associated with an official story that is not their own. On the other hand, one can also consider that this sequence offers an image of « integration ».**

**KS :** To me, this sequence is about integration. It answers the question: why did we become Belgians? When, as a child, I had to carry a wreath of flowers on November 11th, I felt very proud. When, as a child, I took part in the November 11th ceremonies, it meant to me that I was part of this society. I don't see this as artificial assimilation. These are new rituals that are



becoming part of the way of life. And making room for immigrant children in that ceremony is fundamental. I attached great importance to this sequence, despite the momentary rupture it creates in the film. Belgium, as a country, has given me a lot. I think you have to be an immigrant to realize that. Had I lived in Morocco, coming from a less well-off social background, my story would have been very different. I was able to study at the National Institute of Dramatic Arts. That would have been totally impossible in Morocco, mostly for financial reasons. Living in a country where you have rights is an incredible opportunity for me. Of course, issues of social determinism are topical in Belgium. And they are constantly on my mind. But I am also aware of everything Belgium has given me. The art studies, the academies, it's extraordinary. Of course, I feel a growing need to tackle the issues of contemporary feminism, the body as a political object, etc. The status of women in Morocco remains problematic. Had my mother stayed alone in Morocco with her three children, nothing would have been possible. I would have liked to talk about it with her. I know that, as a single mother, she wasn't protected at all in Morocco. So I also feel grateful to a country that has given me the tools of criticism. The November 11th sequence goes hand in hand with one of my mother's statements in the film: « Westerners are more respectful.

Moroccans always find something to complain about. » But when I ask her if she prefers to be with Westerners or Moroccans, she chooses the latter. And that is how she lived, in paradoxes.

Brussels, November 2020.



# BIO-FILMO

## KARIMA SAÏDI

Karima Saïdi lives in Belgium, where she was born into a family of Moroccan origin. She holds a degree from INSAS in film editing and script continuity as well as a Master's degree in screenwriting and analysis from ULB.

She has worked as an editor for Belgian television (RTBF) since 1997 while also developing a career as a documentary editor (« Femme taxi à Sidi Bellabes » by Hadjaj Belkacem, « Les damnés de la mer » by Jawad Raleb, « Cheveux rouges et café noir », by Milena Bochet), and a continuity supervisor for feature films (« Le cochon de Gaza » by Sylvain Etsibal, « À perdre la raison » by Joachim Lafosse, « Adios Carmen » by M. A. Benamraoui).

In 2013, she created « Murmures et 10 voix » a series of sound portraits of Moroccan immigrants in Brussels. In 2016, she directed a short documentary, « Aïcha », an evocation of her mother's death, a prelude to « A Way Home », her first feature-length documentary.

She is a lecturer in the film departments of INSAS in Brussels and ESAV in Marrakech.





# TECHNICAL DETAILS

2020 - 90' - Belgium - France - Morocco - Qatar - Colour  
Laguages French/ArabVOSTENG - DCP - 5.1 - HD - 16/9

**DIRECTION** Karima Saïdi

**IMAGE** Caroline Guimbal, Ridha Ben Hmouda, Karima Saïdi

**EDITING** Frédéric Fichet

**SOUND** Quentin Jacques, Mohamed Bounouar, Lionel Halfants, Karima Saïdi

**SOUND EDITING** Sara Kaddouri

**MIXING** Thomas Besson

**COLOUR GRADING** Olivier Dassonville

**A PRODUCTION** Dérives - Julie Freres, Haut Les Mains Productions & Waq Waq Studio - Karim Aitouna **IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH** WIP - Wallonie Image Production, RTBF - Unité documentaire, TV2M Maroc **IN ASSOCIATION WITH** ARTE France - La Lucarne **WITH THE SUPPORT OF** Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles **AND** Le Fonds Image de la Francophonie, Doha Film Institute, La Wallonie, Brouillon d'un rêve de la Scam et La Culture avec la Copie Privée, La Région Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes **WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF** CNC.

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