



MACHTAT

A FILM BY SONIA BEN SLAMA

SYNOPSIS

Fatma and her two daughters, Najeh and Waffeh, are machtat, wedding musicians in Mahdia, a small city in Tunisia. The sisters follow opposite paths: while Najeh, divorced, try to remarry to escape the authority of her brothers, Waffeh wishes to divorce her violent husband. And Fatma navigates between the two, praying that things will go better one day.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

A few years ago, I directed my first film during the wedding of a cousin in Tunisia. I was surrounded by women: my aunts, cousins, father's cousins, all crushed by their destinies and the weight of traditions. This became in fact a central question in the film.

For this wedding, the family hired "Fatma and Najeh", a traditional music band to accompany all the young bride's ceremonies. Right away, I found them intriguing, different from the other women here. They seemed more comfortable with their bodies and with themselves. I watched them as they were setting up, nodding at known faces. They had an assertive gaze, precise movements, a strong presence. After the blessings, they began to sing a deep and beautiful song, a long and sad poem.

From the frail and snappy body of Fatma, the leader, comes an imposing voice, charged with hope and sadness. The turmoil is still abstract; it is only the first out of seven days the wedding counts. When the five women play, that first evening, their singing echoes the surrounding sadness. It tells the leap into the unknown, the fear, the doubt, the pain to leave ones parents, the smallness of married life, and the end of dreams of freedom. The intensity in Fatma's voice carries all these feelings, those that young girls can't express.

I see "Fatma and Najeh" again, at other weddings. No matter the wedding, the guests, the place, they enter the stage with the same confidence, in matching long flowery dresses and headscarves, hands clenching their instruments.

They handle money and seem under the authority of no man. And their singing is always very deep.

Spending lot of time with them and getting to know them through the years, I realized that Fatma, Najeh and Waffeh are marginalised in their community. Because they work during the summer for long hours, are exposed to everyone's look, because they earn extra money with weddings, because people think they do some witchcraft around the brides-to-be, they are feared and raze jealousy at the same time. No one see them as artists, they are just part of tradition. With this film, their music and their voices have a central space.

With this film project, I wanted to capture the contours of these women's existence and their contradictions. They are constantly torn between their duties as women and their desires as musicians, between the freedom of summer and the monotony of winter, between their financial independence and the authority of men surrounding them.

The trust that we built between us gave me access to every aspect of their life and they speak openly about what's in their mind. They use the camera as a tool: because we film, they are heard, their words and their pain exist. Slowly, the film became ours and not only mine.

Sonia Ben Slama



BIOGRAPHY OF SONIA BEN SLAMA

Sonia Ben Slama is a French-Tunisian documentary filmmaker. She grew up in Paris where she studied art and cinema at the University Sorbonne-Nouvelle.

In 2015, she directed in Tunisia her first feature documentary *Maktoub*. The film tells the story of her grandmother's marriage 70 years ago in a small Tunisian town and her cousin's wedding nowadays in the very same place.

Machtat, her second film, is in the continuity of *Maktoub* and explores similar themes from a different angle. From the point of view of three female wedding singers, the film raises the issue of marriages and rules for women in a patriarchal society. The film is premiering in the International Competition at Visions du Réel Film Festival 2023. It's also part of the ACID Cannes 2023 program.

Sonia is currently developing a new feature-length documentary project, *316 North Main Street*, shot in the United States.



BIOGRAPHIES OF THE PRODUCERS

TANIA EL KHOURY // KHAMSIN FILMS

After filmmaking and psychology studies in Beirut, Tania El Khoury moved to Paris in 2002 where she finished her master's degree in cinema. She then joined the well-established independent production company Moby Dick Films, with which she worked as legal and financial manager until 2019.

In 2017, she founded the production company Khamsin Films in Beirut and in 2020 she founded the Paris-based production company Les Films de l'Altaï. She produced recently the latest feature fiction of filmmaker Ghassan Salhab, *The River* (International Competition, Locarno 2021) and Sonia Ben Slama's newest feature documentary *Machtat* (International competition Visions du Réel, ACID Cannes 2023).

CÉCILE LESTRADE, ÉLISE HUG // ALTER EGO PRODUCTION

Alter ego production is a company created in 2001 in Orleans, France. Since 2010, the producers Cécile Lestrade and then Elise Hug have been producing documentary films by directors who express a strong, sharp and personal point of view and they have produced about twenty films. Alter ego is successfully involved in the co-production of feature films by co-producing *Samouni Road* by Stefano Savona, selected in 2018 at La Quinzaine des réalisateurs, or *Sans frapper* by Alexe Poukine, selected in more than 40 festivals around the world since 2019; and most recently *Machtat* by Sonia Ben Slama - premiere at Visions du Réel and part of the ACID selection in 2023.



CREDITS

CAST

Fatma Khayat

Najeh Ghared

Waffeh Ghared

CREW

Written and directed by **Sonia Ben Slama**

Director of photography // **Evgenia Alexandrova**

Sound // **Soussen Tatah**

Editing // **Young-Sun Noh**

Sound design // **Rana Eid**

Mixing // **Lama Sawaya**

Color grading // **Alexandra Pocquet**

Producers // **Khamsin Films – Tania El Khoury // Alter Ego Production – Cécile Lestrade & Elise Hug**

Coproducer // **Lyon Capital TV**

PARTNERS

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SALES & FESTIVALS

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INFOS

Lebanon, Tunisia, France, Qatar – Color – 82 min – 1:85 – 5.1

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