

The Othrs and VICE/RYOT presents
in association with Quiet and Level Forward
a co-production of Hameda's Stories and Dartagnan and Willa Productions

*you
resemble
me*

YOU RESEMBLE ME
(TU ME RESSEMBLES)

A film by Dina Amer

Official Selection

VENICE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2021

Awards

33 festival awards to date

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LOGLINE

When two young sisters are torn apart, the eldest loses her identity and transforms into someone new in the name of belonging and resistance.

SYNOPSIS

Cultural and intergenerational trauma erupt in this story about two sisters on the outskirts of Paris. After the siblings are torn apart, the eldest, Hasna, struggles to find her identity, leading to a choice that shocks the world. Director Dina Amer takes on one of the darkest issues of our time and deconstructs it in an intimate story about family, love, sisterhood, and belonging.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As a Muslim Egyptian woman living in the West, I've struggled to reconcile pieces of my identity that feel contradictory. I am a woman who has spent the majority of my life praying discreetly in public spaces (airports are the hardest). And yet I don't look like what most of society envisions as a Muslim woman. I don't wear a hijab and I love Cardi B. Throughout my life I've lived through the shadow of how the failure to reconcile a Muslim Western identity with such clear contradictions can result in a haunting headline.

This film is a journey through layers of disassociation, from the personal and familial to the religious and colonial; a kaleidoscope of splintered identities and fractured dreams. *YOU RESEMBLE ME* explores the unexamined roots of trauma and the devastating decision that one woman made in the name of belonging. The mission of this film is not to excuse her choice but to examine how she arrived at that decision. The intention of this exploration is that it can help inform us as a society how to safeguard other individuals from falling into the same traps.

In the making of the film, I drew from my experience within underserved and marginalized communities; there are so many people who resemble the main character, Hasna. Many people desperately seek a sense of identity, family, direction, and love in all the wrong places, yet some — like Hasna — grab our attention in the worst way when their search goes wrong.

It was not until I spent six months with incarcerated men at Rikers Island prison during a cinema and theater exchange, that I realized I cannot define someone by their worst action, and that every human is worthy of redemption. In seeking to understand Hasna, I saw myself in her humanity and her family saw me in her. Hence, the title, *You Resemble Me*.

It was important for me to allow the audience an experience where they can put themselves in her shoes and experience her multiplicity and moments of disassociation. I believe at times we can all step outside of who we are and mutate into other versions of ourselves in order to gain a sense of belonging.

I also wanted to maintain the fact that Hasna is a real woman and we will never truly know who she was or how exactly she felt but the best we can do through a fictional lens is to allow

women who come from a similar identity as her to step into her shoes and feel the weight of her experience.

The script was written after recording over 300 hours of interviews with Hasna's real family and inner circle. As a "recovering" journalist, the discovery and writing process became my personal redemption. I had felt the weight of simplifying human lives into headlines to feed diminishing attention spans. But as I spent time with Hasna's family, Youssef, her brother, said to me: "Very simply, if you want to know why my sister made [the choices she made], it comes down to one thing: it's this woman's fault." And he pointed to his mother. I was stunned because I instantly understood there is a layer to this complicated story that's just about a dysfunctional family.

The film is an invitation to look before and behind the headlines, not for absolute truths or permanent answers, but an insistence on lifting the veils and beginning the conversations that conceal our shared humanity. There are no monsters to slay if we dare to search, discover and unleash the power and promise of sisterhood—the gift Hasna cherished and the only home she ever had.

- *Dina Amer*

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Dina Amer (Writer, Producer and Director)

Dina Amer is an award-winning filmmaker and journalist. She helped produce the Oscar nominated and Emmy award-winning documentary *The Square*, where the Egyptian Revolution was chronicled from the frontlines. Growing up between the US and Egypt, her work has focused on sharing nuanced, human stories with a global audience. Previous to her film work, Dina was a celebrated journalist. She was an on-air correspondent for VICE, including *The Black Market Series*, where she uncovered the human trafficking of Syrian refugees and explored the underground economy of illegal Egypt-Gaza tunnels. Her written work has been published in The New York Times, CNN and the Huffington Post. *You Resemble Me* is her directorial debut.

MAIN CAST BIOGRAPHIES

Lorenza Grimaudo (Hasna) and Ilonna Grimaudo (Mariam)

Lorenza Grimaudo (14 years old) and Ilonna Grimaudo (10 years old), along with their brother Djino (15 years old), are true artists.

Originally from Marseille, it was in August 2017 that their mother, Nessrine Boukmiche, who sensed early on an artistic energy revolving around her children, decided to move the family to the Paris region. Djino paved the way for his little sisters — hip-hop dancer, child model and actor, he became a role model for Lorenza and Ilonna. However, in April of 2018, devastating news hit the family — their father had passed away at the age of 30. This ordeal would come to strengthen and solidify the bonds of the family. One year later, their mother sent her three children's applications in response to the casting call for *You Resemble Me*.

Dina Amer fell in love with Lorenza and Ilonna, two sisters who had obviously never taken acting lessons but who exuded such strength and closeness that the director wanted to see them again. Lorenza, Ilonna and Djino were cast in *You Resemble Me*, their first feature film, in which Lorenza and Ilonna have leading roles. The determination but also the values and fundamental principles deep within this family, now leads them to the Venice Film Festival. From an Algerian mother and a Spanish/Italian father, is it a star that watches over them that has led them to Italy?

Mouna Soualem (Hasna)

Mouna Soualem has been acting since the age of 11, having appeared in such films as: Steven Spielberg's *Munich* (2006), Amos Gitai's *Later You Will Understand* (2008), Hiam Abbass's *Inheritance* (2012), Hafsia Herzi's *You Deserve A Lover* (2019), and Boaz Yakin's *Aviva* (2020). Up next, she will play the female lead in the Disney+ series, *Oussekiné*, by French director Antoine Chevrollier.

Mouna earned a degree in cinema at the University of Paris 8, where she made her foray into theatre, starring in lead roles such as Nina in "The Seagull," directed by Hélène Babu. She was then accepted into the Gabriel Fauré Conservatory in Paris 5 and later moved to New York where she studied at the renowned Stella Adler Studio of Acting.

A multi-faceted artist, Mouna showcased a creative piece at the 2018 Avignon Festival Section OFF in France. In 2020, she was an artist-in-residence at The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. She recently wrapped rehearsals on a dance show, set to premiere in 2022, called "Broken Theater," directed by Bobbi Jene Smith and created at the La MaMa Experimental Theater Club in New York.

Sabrina Ouazani (Hasna)

Sabrina Ouazani started acting at age 13 in the film *L'Esquive*, for which she was nominated as Most Promising Young Actress at the 2002 César awards.

She performed in multiple TV productions in France before acting in auteur films such as *Adieu Gary* by Nassim Amaouch – winner of the International Critics' Week Grand Prize at the Cannes Film Festival – *Des hommes et des dieux* by Xavier Beauvois, *La Source des Femmes* by Radu Mihaileanu, and, last but not least, the award-winning Iranian film *Le Passé*, directed by Asghar Farhadi.

In 2013, Sabrina won the Jutra Award for Best Actress for the role of Rand in *Inch'Allah*, playing a young pregnant Palestinian who befriends a Quebec doctor named Chloe.

In 2014, she played the lead role of Nawel in Abd Al Malik's feature film *Qu'Allah bénisse la France*. Simultaneously, she acted in various French comedies – performing, with among others, Omar Sy, Éric Judor and Franck Gastambide in the hit comedy *Pattaya* – and in Christophe Barratier's thriller *L'Outsider*.

In 2017, she was the female lead in the film *Ouvert la Nuit* by Edouard Baer, co-starring Edouard Baer and Audrey Tautou, and dubbed the voice of Alexandra in the animated movie *Sahara* by Pierre Coré. A year later, she had the lead role in the feature film *Break*, directed by Marc Fouchard, and also in *Enchantées* by Safia Azzedine. On TV, she co-starred with Kevin Azaïs in *Illétré* by Jean-Pierre Améris.

The same year, Sabrina directed her first short film, *On va Manquer*, for the 2018 Talent Cannes Adami. Later, she performed in Mohamed Hamidi's film *Jusqu'ici tout va bien* co-starring Gilles Lellouche and Malik Bentalha.

In 2019, she acted in Mohamed Hamidi's feature *Une belle équipe* and the French Netflix series *Plan Coeur* season 2. In addition, Sabrina acted in Ismaël Ferroukhi's feature *Mica* and the French series *Prière d'enquêter*. She also performed on stage in the play *Les Justes*, a musical tragedy staged by Abd Al Malik and adapted from Albert Camus's original play.

Following her stage work, Sabrina dubbed the voice of Shenzi in *The Lion King*.

In 2020, she was awarded the lead role in the film *Kung Fu Zohra* of Mabrouk El Mechri. She also played an important character in *Validé*, a successful Canal Plus TV series.

Most recently, in 2021, Sabrina played the main role in Jean Pierre Ameris' latest film, *Les Folies Fermières*, alongside Alban Ivanov.

Q&A WITH DIRECTOR DINA AMER

How did the making of YOU RESEMBLE ME begin?

I came to France while working for VICE as a journalist on Nov. 14, 2015, a day after the Paris attacks. They were the deadliest attacks to happen on French soil in modern history. The city was in a state of panic and trauma, the devastation and fear pulsing through it. At the time, the mastermind of the attacks was thought to be in Syria. Then suddenly, we were alerted by the media that he was in fact not in Syria, but in Saint-Denis, a working class neighborhood outside of Paris. As I rushed there, a bomb went off.

I reported on air for VICE News, along with every other news outlet, that Hasna was the first female suicide bomber in Europe.

Hasna's profile didn't match that of a typical jihadist. She was known as the "cowgirl of the 'hood" — remembered as frolicking around, sometimes dealing drugs, living a free lifestyle... Within 10 months, this woman transformed from the cowgirl, to a niqab-wearing "suicide bomber" who was willing to die for ISIS.

I remember the anxiety of veiled women throughout Paris — they felt like Hasna had swooped in, and without really understanding Islam, had committed this horrendous act that would threaten their position in France as visibly Muslim French women. That position is already incredibly difficult — if you wear a headscarf, you get different employment opportunities; if you go to pick up your child at school, you are seen by some as imposing your beliefs.

Shortly after that November day, a cell phone video of the explosion surfaced and went viral. Hasna could be heard screaming at the top of her lungs from the balcony: "Please help! Let me jump! I want to leave!" And suddenly the story shifted; her role in the attacks became blurred. She was no longer the first female suicide bomber in Europe. She was a woman who had wanted out at the final moment, but it was too late.

Hasna's desperate cries for help haunted me. I knew I had to find her family and understand the truth of who she was and how she had arrived there. I eventually found myself knocking on Hasna's mother's door. A man opened it. There was a familiar glint in his eyes — we broke into Egyptian dialect. I told him I was looking for Hasna's mom. He said she was his girlfriend.

Hasna's mother kept me waiting at that door for more than 30 minutes. She eventually let me in and told me that I reminded her of Hasna. She showed me a picture of her daughter as a child. It broke my heart. The sensationalized headline that I was a part of creating was actually about this woman, who was once this innocent girl.

I wanted to understand how that little girl became "Europe's first female suicide bomber."

Tell us more about your interactions with Hasna's family and how they played into the development of the story.

I think Hasna's mother saw my sincerity in wanting to understand, outside of a place of immediate judgment. I believe she saw that I was a practicing Muslim and had respect for the religion. I wasn't coming in to vilify Islam; I was coming in to understand what might have led someone to go down such a destructive path.

The next week, Hasna's mother invited me to accompany her to the morgue and see Hasna's body. It's crazy, but I actually did meet Hasna albeit in death.

I remember when we were waiting to see the body. The coroner — a white French woman dripping in diamonds — was describing to us what we were about to witness. She said that due to the impact of this explosion, Hasna's body was not fully intact. We were all speechless, soaking in the gravity of what we were about to see. Hasna's mother was there, as was Hasna's sister Mariam, and a few of Hasna's friends — girls from the 'hood who were wearing ripped jeans, had their nails done, with weaves in their hair. And they were tough. They were most definitely not the image of typical Muslim women.

The room was dead silent. Suddenly Mariam interjected, asking where the body of her cousin and mastermind of the attacks, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, was. "I would like you to find his body and feed it to pigs," she said, "because he is a monster who killed 130 people and brainwashed my sister." She took out her iPhone, swiping through photos of Hasna with her cowboy hat on — "this is my sister."

The morgue was filled with bodies of people who were killed at the hands of this very family. The coroner politely responded: "We don't judge here; we treat all bodies with respect." We went to see Hasna. She was enclosed behind glass, as if she was a mummy at the Louvre — or evidence.

Mariam was up against the glass, crying hysterically. Hasna's mother kept a distance and was making loud incantations of prayer in Arabic. The coroner was in a state of shock, probably asking herself: "are we even in France right now?" Hasna's friends were helping Mariam down the stairs. She was completely knocked out by the sight of her sister.

Hasna's mother turned around and grabbed Mariam's hand and said: "You know you really shouldn't wear nail polish — it's from the devil." Mariam stopped crying and looked at her mother. In a moment of what appeared to be clarity in the midst of such a surreal experience, she said, "There was nothing wrong with Hasna. The only thing that was wrong with her is that she was born into this fucked up family. You are fucked up and I want to stay as far away from you as possible."

I rode on the Metro with the mother back to her apartment. Youssef, Hasna's brother, came home from his job at Starbucks and said: "very simply, if you want to know why my sister made this horrible choice, it comes down to one thing: it's this woman's fault," and he pointed to his mother.

I was stunned, because I instantly understood — this is not a story about terrorism. This is a story about a dysfunctional family. That is a universal lens that I think a lot of people could relate to.

Then to hear Hasna's mother's response: "All parents beat their kids, no? At least I wasn't like your cousin's mother, (the mother of Abaaoud, the mastermind of the attacks) "... his mother used to beat him so hard that he couldn't go to school, because the bruises would show."

It became clear to me that this was all rooted in traumatic childhoods — broken children who are not attended to will grab our attention down the line as broken adults in the worst way possible.

How did you know you had to write a fictional script based on a true narrative to tell Hasna's story?

I understood that this was a story about sisterhood — at one point in their lives, Hasna felt they were the same, that they were like twins. And everything was fractured around them growing up. Their mother was mentally ill, they were living in extreme poverty, they had to beg on the street for food. And yet they had each other. So there was some joy. But when they were separated, even though they begged to stay together, I felt that's when their identities were fragmented. They lost themselves. They were overloaded with mixed messages — of what is civilized and what is sinful.

And for me, I just fell in love with them as children — and the stories Mariam would tell me. I felt such empathy for them that I knew the pain of their separation was going to be more deeply felt by the audience through a dramatic film versus a documentary.

Most of all, the reason that I made a narrative film was I wanted the audience to feel what it feels like to be in Hasna's skin.

I also felt it needed to be narrative because we have previously humanized the villains of our times through fiction filmmaking — Hitler, sociopaths of different sorts, etc., and yet here I felt like there was some kind of red line imposed. You couldn't humanize a brown "terrorist" — that was too insensitive.

And I was thinking, no, I've covered this story through the accepted medium of the news and it feels surface level and like it's actually inspiring people to commit more attacks. I'd rather talk about the deeper issues, the roots of why someone gets enchanted by an organization like ISIS, through a medium like film that allows us as an audience to explore this story through a complex, nuanced and human lens.

What was the process like for you in making this film?

It was important for me to film with Mariam, Hasna's family, and everyone who knew Hasna that I could get access to, so I could get a fuller picture of who Hasna was. With over 360 hours of interview footage, I wrote our script with my incredibly talented co-writer Omar Mullick. We watched hours of my footage and sculpted a script that felt true to all of my research materials. The authenticity of the storytelling was supremely important to me because I knew how sensitive this story was and that is why it took six years to get right.

We were always close to Hasna somehow in the making of this film. We had people show up to the casting, not knowing exactly what the film was about, who were thrown when told it was about Hasna, because they knew her from the neighborhood. The fact that they were going to now act in a fictional film about her was both haunting and meaningful to them.

We filmed in the neighborhood she grew up in — the girls were living out her childhood, running through the very same streets the real Mariam and Hasna would chase each other down and play in. We were deeply entrenched in her imprint on this earth while filming.

What is the essence of the filmmaking style utilized in the making of YOU RESEMBLE ME?

We wanted to capture something that felt as intimate and real as possible. Omar and I spent a lot of time discussing and crafting how the camera could really allow the audience to almost become a part of Mariam and Hasna and how it could be used as an extension of their energy and freedom. I wanted the camera to be so close to Hasna that the audience could truly put themselves in her shoes and see the world through her eyes.

How did you go about casting for the different roles in the film?

The casting process was pretty wild; we primarily utilized street casting. I remember a French producer saying to me that it was going to take months to find the right child actors, that it was going to be incredibly difficult. Thankfully I found our incredible young actresses, Lorenza and Ilonna Grimaudo, on the very first day of the casting. They were the last to show up and I knew instantly they were my girls. The fact that they were really sisters and were wild, free and untrained was perfect.

Our rehearsal process was crucial to the film. We spent weeks rehearsing scenes, at times on location, and I think that really helped the girls embody the characters more fully. Since they are sisters who are Muslim and French, I recognized in them some of the same themes and struggles that are prevalent in the film around identity and belonging. They are immensely talented and yet struggled to get acting work in Paris because agencies were looking for blonde white girls, which is maddening to me. They lost their father a year or so before we started filming and I feel a lot of the vulnerability and power of their performance comes from that loss.

Their mother, Nessrine, took a real chance on me and trusted me to protect their girls in this film. It was a huge act of faith for her to allow her daughters to step into the shoes of Hasna and Mariam. Many French producers refused to work with me because they thought it was too politically sensitive to portray Hasna as a child, claiming it would elicit too much sympathy. Justifying her actions has never been my intention. My intention has always been to experience her complicated humanity — we have no choice but to really try and understand it because this issue of radicalization must be dealt with at a root level.

Can you share your thoughts on the choice to present three adult Hasna's versus just using one actress?

As a former journalist, I had also contributed to the media machine that falsely reported Hasna as the the first female suicide bomber in Europe. Also, at different points in the wake of the explosion, three different French Muslim women were identified in the media as the bomber. When I discovered that there was misinformation spreading across all the main media outlets reporting Hasna's identity at various times as three different women, I decided to flip their error and allow three different women to step into Hasna's shoes. Each gives us a glimpse into the women she had tried to become. Even more so, I felt that this was not a story about terrorism, but a story about Hasna being a multi-faceted woman ultimately looking for something we all seek: to feel a sense of belonging and home. The choice of casting three women to portray Hasna took on a deeper resonance when I learned just how fragmented the real Hasna was. I really wanted this film to communicate that disassociation and how we as adults can leave our bodies and shapeshift to survive when there is an overwhelming amount of trauma that is imprinted on us as children.

I knew Mouna Soualem from when I was doing research after the Charlie Hebdo attacks. She was still in acting school at the time. We reconnected years later in New York in a chance

meeting. I literally ran into her on my block and I noticed in her an undeniable talent and vulnerability that would make her perfect to bring Hasna to life.

For me, Sabrina Ouazani represents an aspect of Hasna that Hasna's friends call "Le Vache Qui Rit," or the Laughing Cow, a beloved mascot from a famous French cheese commercial. She is a big personality with a bombastic laugh who instantly takes over any room with her infectious energy. She is the Hasna who is effortlessly charming, can lie through her teeth, and will hustle her way through anything to survive.

Sabrina grew up in similar neighborhoods as Hasna and understood so many of the forces that Hasna had to contend with. During long, intense shoots, she would say things like "we are doing this for Hasna so people can understand how this happens and so we can heal as a community." I was always so moved by her sense of duty in the process.

As for my acting role in the film, my journey with Hasna's real family was rooted in my resemblance to Hasna. I felt a very strong connection to her, especially in her idealism and desire to be good through Islam. I understood that desire deeply and felt I needed to embody that aspect of her which was really the birthing ground for the title *You Resemble Me*.

Everyone who was cast in this film acted from a place of deep courage and duty. It was not an easy thing to find someone to play Abdelhamid Abbaoud, Hasna's cousin and the mastermind of the attacks.

Just about every actor we approached backed out in fear it would destroy their career and put them in personal danger. Alexandre Gonin is one of the finest actors I came across in Paris. I was fortunate to witness his talent on the stage while he was performing theater and I instantly knew his seductive charm and intensity was perfect for the role.

How did Deepfake technology serve as a tool to illustrate Hasna's dissociation and identity fracture?

This technology became the perfect tool to allow the audience to witness Hasna's fractured personality and struggle with her identity.

It also became a commentary on how we present ourselves differently on social media and can present ourselves as someone else to be liked or fit in.

And, finally, it reflected that this film is about a real woman and, even with six years of research, we will never truly know who she fully was or what was in her heart. A mystery of who she is must always remain — and in that sense she resembles us collectively because she could be any woman and any person.

For me, her fractured personality was the essential reason for why she became an ISIS fan girl; she was thirsting for someone to come and unify her trauma-fueled multiplicity and give her a singular direction and identity. Our incredible deepfake artist, Fernando, allowed us to witness her instability and dissociative tendencies through his artistry.

CREDITS

Main Crew

Director	Dina Amer
Producers	Dina Amer Karim Amer Elizabeth Woodward
Screenwriters	Dina Amer Omar Mullick
Cinematography	Omar Mullick
Editing	Keiko Deguchi, A.C.E. Jake Roberts, A.C.E.
Sound	Carolina Santana Nicolas Becker Tom Paul
Music	Saunder Jurriaans Danny Bensi
Executive Producers	Spike Lee Spike Jonze Alma Har'el Riz Ahmed Natalie Farrey Suroosh Alvi Danny Gabai Abigail E. Disney Angie Wang Hala Mnaymneh Marni Grossman Jamie Wolf Géralyn Dreyfous Charles de Rosen Regina K. Scully Karim Amer
Co-Executive Producers	Crystal Moselle Sean Glass

Main Cast

Child Hasna	Lorenza Grimaudo
Child Mariam	Ilonna Grimaudo
Adult Hasna 1	Mouna Soualem
Adult Hasna 2	Sabrina Ouazani
Adult Hasna 3	Dina Amer
Amina	Sana Sri
Abdelhamid	Alexandre Gonin

With the participation of

Grégoire Colin

Zinedine Soualem

Technical Details:

Original title: TU ME RESSEMBLES

International title: YOU RESEMBLE ME

Duration: 90 min.

Aspect Ratio: 16:9

Format: 4k

Sound: 5.1

Year: 2021

Original languages: French, Arabic

Countries of production: France, Egypt, USA

Production Companies: The Othrs, VICE/RYOT

In association with: Level Forward, Quiet

Co-production Companies: Hameda's Stories, Dartagnan, Willa Productions