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THE STOPOVER

(VOIR DU PAYS)

A FILM WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY
DELPHINE & MURIEL COULIN

102 min - DCP - 2.39

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS
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SYNOPSIS

At the end of their tour of duty in Afghanistan, two young military women, Aurore and Marine, are given three days of “decompression leave” with their unit, among tourists, at a five-star resort in Cyprus. But it’s not that easy to forget the war and leave violence behind.

DECOMPRESSION PROGRAM

Since 2008, every French soldier returning from a tour of duty goes through a “decompression period” (Canadians do the same thing - US soldiers too). They are taken to a five-star hotel for three days where they are supposed to forget about the war and relax among tourists enjoying their vacation. The program, devised by army psychologists, includes aqua-gym and relaxation classes, boat excursions and group meetings where everyone must tell the story of their individual experience during the six months spent in a war zone. This military therapy is more or less successful.

TWO POWERFUL WOMEN

Aurore and Marine are two young women with strong personalities. They've known each other since childhood, come from modest backgrounds and grew up in Lorient, an average town, where there aren't a lot of alternatives for young people to build a future. They decided to do what young men who want to find a way out often do: they joined the army. For the money and freedom that goes with it, but also because they wanted to prove that they have as many opportunities as men, that they are their equals. And, finally, because they wanted to see other countries: to see the world. They wanted to get a life - even if this meant putting it at risk and go to war.

We come from this military town, Lorient. There, as in Paris nowadays, every time we came across a woman soldier, we wondered about her motivations. The characters of Aurore and Marine allowed us to return to the issues that are at the heart of all our films: the factors contributing to becoming a woman in today's world, the particularities of women's bodies and the alternatives offering freedom and independence for young women today. These themes allow us to continue the work we started with *17 Girls [17 Filles]* from a different perspective: a cruder, more current and more political reality. Why does a woman go to war? Why do we continue to think that it is something new, out of the ordinary or strange? Why do we perceive violence as something reserved for men?



TWO ACTRESSES

To portray these roles, we wanted two young women who were powerful in life as well as on screen and we found them in Ariane Labeled and Soko. Ariane Labeled is a perfectionist. For instance, she did a true physical preparation for her role, and came to spend a few days with us in a military camp. For six months, she underwent physical training to prepare for the role. On the set, she is highly focused and she was constantly working on her character. Like Aurore, her character, she is well-balanced, has a great capacity for reflection and sticks to her commitments against all odds. Soko is more instinctive, more elusive, but her energy and strength are comparable to Ariane's. She has the sense of humor that we wanted for Marine, and her eccentricity. We needed two young women who had the same amount of strength, but in different ways. We chose them from the start of the project. We'd wanted to work with Ariane Labeled since we had seen her first film *Attenberg*, by Athina Rachel Tsangari. And we also very quickly chose Soko; her presence in *Augustine and In the Beginning [A l'origine]*, as well as the videos of her songs, is just magnetic. To play Aurore and Marine, we also needed two actresses who wouldn't be afraid of physically committing to the role. Ariane and Soko aren't afraid of anything.

A TROOP/TROUPE

We wanted our actresses to be part of an acting troop. Among them we chose five former soldiers, with an important role among them, Momo, played by Sylvain Loreau, who was a bomb tech in Afghanistan. The other roles were cast among young actors whose energy and presence won us over from our first meeting during this important stage in the casting process: Damien Bonnard (*Mercuriales*), Karim Leklou (*Heat Wave [Coup de chaud]*, *The Anarchists [Les Anarchistes]*), Alexis Manenti (*Orpheline*), Jérémie Laheurte (*Blue is the warmest color [La Vie d'Adèle]*), Robin Barde (*The Returned [Les Revenants]*), and Ginger Roman (*Les Bas-Fonds*). Everyone took part in military training with a coach who had participated in real "decompression periods" before leaving the army. We were looking for realism in body language and behavior, details in costumes and expressions, all of which we were able to construct thanks to this preparatory work. The film is highly scripted, everything was rehearsed beforehand and it also consists of this documentary work on the body, gestures and the physical presence of



these young women and men returning from combat. During rehearsals and physical training, they became a closely-knit group. It was something we were hoping for - it's something that characterizes acting troupes, as well as military troops.

Although our last film, *17 Girls [17 Filles]*, was planned with static shots to further enclose our adolescents in the restrictive framework they were trying to escape, here we were more interested in capturing the movement of these lost soldiers. Soldiers, who the night before were in Kabul, find it difficult to shift from the permanent tension of a war zone to a relaxed atmosphere, and so they have a need to be in constant activity: they go for walks, play sports and games to forget; our camera had to capture this energy. When the camera is static, their fidgeting can make you dizzy, like in the debriefing sequence where Jonathan (Alexis Manenti) occupies the entire frame with his ceaseless motion, practically knocking up against it, while he claims to be perfectly calm.

SEEING

What do you see when you go to war? Nothing. First of all, because the moments of inaction at the camp are numerous. Secondly, because when the fighting actually happens you don't see a thing - you fight for your life. Finally because, as in anything that occurs in life, everyone sees what happened from their own perspective, which is in fact a partial view of reality. During the three days of the decompression period, Aurore and Marine participate in debriefing sessions that are going to make them think differently about what they saw.

The psychologists use virtual reality video tools. Thanks to video game software, the computer scientists recreate images in real time that correspond to the soldiers' narrative. The goal is for the soldiers to distance themselves from their painful memories through words and images. The video simulation tools are the same ones used to train soldiers going into combat. The soldiers are very familiar with these tools, moreover, because they are young, and often play actual video games during their downtime. Even more so than the book from which the screenplay is adapted, film is the perfect medium to address these questions, because it allows you to show these different visual sources: simulators, video games, news clips. The "Seeing" from the French title ("See the World") is ironic: not only did Aurore not see anything at all of the foreign country she went to, but all these multiple sources of images that she's exposed to don't help her to better "see" what is essential. And as our characters get closer to the truth of what happened during their mission in Afghanistan, the film for its part goes from the solar mood of the beginning and their arrival at the hotel, to a dark night sensation, and the cold light of the end, as if it were increasingly difficult for them to see things clearly. It questions what "seeing" is: this is what we expect from cinema.

AN IMAGE

Can we show war? Are video-game images more or less real than those seen on the evening news, to which we have become so accustomed that we can watch them having dinner? Do these images really help the soldiers to heal, or as Marine suggests, do the army general staff use these tools to ensure that the soldiers own memories are replaced by cleaner images from which only one reality emerges: the official version? How can we distinguish memories from fiction?

Sometimes collective debriefing sessions are useful. They help another image to emerge: traumatic images. It is presently known that trauma is often embodied in an image that has printed itself on the retina and can no longer be removed. It remains interposed between reality and the person. Sometimes one image can prevent someone from living their life. When these traumatic images resurface, some people cannot bear it; they are overwhelmed by this violence that they cannot control.



WAR AND FORGETTING

There is a certain type of violence in making young people believe that joining the military means they are going to have a life full of adventure, a desirable situation and that they're going to see the world without suffering in any way from the war. These soldiers don't really expect what is actually waiting for them on the front lines – the trauma is thus that much more violent. Once back home, when they realize that they don't receive a hero's welcome, the vehement emotions bottled up inside them are very close to resurfacing: the accumulated stress, having to be constantly on alert, and bad memories don't allow them to return to a calm life. Soldiers can't forget the war – especially not in just three days' time.

And right there with them, the tourists who dance by the pool side forget that less than 100 miles away a war is taking place. In Europe we have been so protected until now that our sense of reality is compromised. We have forgotten Afghanistan, almost forgotten Iraq, just as we would like to forget Syria. But these wars cannot be waged without consequences. It is impossible - and perhaps not really desirable – to forget war, these wars, whether we have participated from near or afar. We are reminded of this every day. *The Stopover* addresses this issue: how can we manage to live despite having experienced such a violent episode?



A EUROPEAN TRAGEDY

The decompression program takes places in Cyprus. This island, which belonged to one of the greatest incarnations of democracy, Ancient Greece, is today a symbol, among many, of the political and economic crisis in Europe. What a strange idea to send soldiers who have lost a war (or in any case, haven't won it) to a territory that is synonymous with failure. A weakened Europe failed to conclude an important stage at the end of the war in Afghanistan and we are paying the price today. Wars are spreading and multiplying everywhere. The inhabitants of countries at war are seeking asylum, passing through Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus. There is a link between these wars that we have waged and our current situation, which we refuse to see.

Delphine and Muriel Coulin

DELPHINE & MURIEL COULIN

FILMOGRAPHY

Feature Films

- 2016 **THE STOPOVER [VOIR DU PAYS]**
Un Certain Regard, Cannes 2016
- 2011 **17 GIRLS [17 FILLES]**
*Cannes Film Festival International Critic's Week 2011,
Michel d'Ornano Prize at the Deauville American
Film Festival Deauville 2011*

Short Films

- 2009 **Seydou**
Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival
- 2002 **Germain**
Collection "Young Talents Cannes", BFI Film Festival, London
- 2002 **Roue libre**
*Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival, La Rochelle
The Prix Italia 2002, Prix Europa Special Mention 2002*
- 2000 **Souffle**
*Cannes Film Festival International Critic's Week 2001
Pantin Festival, Beaumarchais Award for Best Screenplay
Brest Film Festival, Special Jury Prize and French Critics Prize*
- 1997 **Sisyphus [Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux]**
Best Drama Award - Los Angeles Film Festival

Additionally, Delphine Coulin writes novels and Muriel Coulin directs documentaries.

SOKO

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 2016 **THE STOPOVER [VOIR DU PAYS]** by Delphine and Muriel Coulin
THE DANCER [LA DANSEUSE] by Stéphanie Di Giusto
- 2013 **FRIENDS FROM FRANCE [LES INTERDITS]**
by Philippe Kotlarski and Anne Weil
- 2012 **AUGUSTINE** by Alice Winocour
BYE BYE BLONDIE by Virginie Despentes
- 2009 **IN THE BEGINNING [A L'ORIGINE]** by Xavier Giannoli
- 2007 **ON THE ROPES [DANS LES CORDES]**
by Magaly Richard-Serrano
**IT HAD TO BE YOU [MA VIE N'EST PAS
UNE COMÉDIE ROMANTIQUE]** by Marc Gibaja
- 2006 **GIRLFRIENDS [MES COPINES]** by Sylvie Ayme
LES IRRÉDUCTIBLES by Renaud Bertrand

DISCOGRAPHY

- 2015 **MY DREAMS DICTATE MY REALITY**
2012 **I THOUGHT I WAS AN ALIEN**
2007 **NOT SOKUTE**

ARIANE LABED

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 2016 **THE STOPOVER [VOIR DU PAYS]**
by Delphine and Muriel Coulin
ASSASSIN'S CREED by Justin Kurzel
MALGRÉ LA NUIT by Philippe Grandrieux
PRÉJUDICE by Antoine Cuypers
- 2015 **THE LOBSTER** by Yorgos Lanthimos
THE FORBIDDEN ROOM by Guy Maddin
- 2014 **FIDELIO: ALICE'S JOURNEY** by Lucie Borleteau
Best Actress Award, Locarno 2014
LOVE ISLAND by Jasmila Zbanic
MAGIC MEN by Guy Nattiv and Erez Tadmor
- 2013 **BEFORE MIDNIGHT** by Richard Linklater
A PLACE ON EARTH [UNE PLACE SUR LA TERRE]
by Fabienne Godet
- 2011 **ALPS [ALPEIS]** by Yorgos Lanthimos
- 2010 **ATTENBERG** by Athina Rachel Tsangari
Best Actress Award, Venice 2010

CAST

Marine	Soko
Aurore	Ariane Labeled
Fanny	Ginger Roman
Max	Karim Leklou
Chrystos	Andreas Konstantinou
Harry	Makis Papadimitriou
Jonathan	Alexis Manenti
Toni	Robin Barde
Momo	Sylvain Loreau
Ness	Jérémie Laheurte
The Lieutenant	Damien Bonnard
The Lieutenant-Colonel	Jean-Yves Jouannais
The psychologist	Pierre Deverines

CREW

A film written & directed by **Delphine and Muriel Coulin**
*Adapted from **Voir du Pays**
written by Delphine Coulin (Grasset)*

Cinematography **Jean-Louis Vialard (a.f.c)**
Camera **Benoit Dervaux**
Sound **Antoine-Basile Mercier**
First Assistant Director **Mathieu Vaillant**
Head Editor **Laurence Briaud**
Head Sound Editor **Nicolas Becker**
Mixer **Cyril Holtz**
Costumes **Isabelle Pannetier**
Script supervisor **Élodie Van Beuren**
Casting directors **Leila Fournier**
Sarah Teper
Aude Cathelin
Fenia Cossovitsa
Denis Freyd

Production manager
Coproducer Greece
Produced by

An **Archipel 35** coproduction with **Blonde Audiovisual Productions(Greece)**, **ARTEFranceCinéma**, with the participation of **Canal +**, **Ciné+**, **ARTE France** and the **Centre National du Cinéma et de l'image animée (Advance on receipts, French-Greek coproduction assistance, support for New Technologies in Production)** and the **Greek Film Center** in association with **La Banque Postale Image 9**, **Soficinéma 11** and **Soficinéma 12** with the support of **Programme Europe Créative Media of the European Union** - International sales **Films Distribution Distribution Diaphana Distribution**