

*Fatima (2015), directed by Philippe Faucon, is a portrait of an Algerian immigrant mother living in France, working tirelessly as a cleaning woman to provide a better future for her two teenage daughters, Nesrine and Souad. Her daily life is profoundly isolated and restricted by her limited French proficiency, which manifests as a constant source of vulnerability and social invisibility. In her jobs as a domestic cleaner, she is frequently patronized or treated as invisible by employers because she cannot easily speak up or defend herself. This language barrier also creates a painful generational divide inside her own home, where her rebellious younger daughter, Souad, is openly ashamed of her mother's lack of integration and uses French to distance herself. Basic administrative tasks, medical appointments, and school meetings become overwhelming hurdles for Fatima, who can understand much of what is said but cannot express her complex thoughts, frustrations, and deep love in fluent French, a trapped feeling that eventually drives her to write her private thoughts down in Arabic in a personal journal.*

*Because words fail her in the outside world and often spark conflict at home, Fatima turns to food and cooking as her primary vehicle for communication, maternal protection, and love. Preparing traditional meals becomes an unspoken bridge, allowing her to anchor her daughters to their identity while nurturing them through intense societal pressures. When words fail to soothe the tension between them, a carefully prepared dish speaks for her, acting as a direct extension of her daily sacrifice. Whether she is packing food to fuel Nesrine through the pressures of medical school or trying to appease a frustrated Souad, the act of serving food is her way of showing care and ensuring they are healthy and supported. Amid the cold, stressful realities of navigating a society where she feels marginalized, the kitchen remains the one space where Fatima holds complete agency, and the meals she prepares act as a tangible form of emotional shelter and stability for her daughters.*