

Ama Gloria [12]

2023 France 83 mins

UK released	14 June 2024
Director	Marie Amachoukeli-Barsacq
Screenplay	Marie Amachoukeli-Barsacq; Pauline Guéna
Cinematography	Inès Tabarin
Music	Fanny Martin
Cast	Louise Mauroy-Panzani (Cléo) ; Ilça Moreno (Gloria) ; Arnaud Rebotini (Arnaud, the father); Abnara Gomes Varela (Fernanda) ; Fredy Gomes Tavares (César); Domingos Borges Almeida (Joachim)

The wisdom and emotional reach of a six-year-old girl trying to make sense of the world and her place within it is explored with rigour and sensitivity by writer and director Marie Amachoukeli.

It's one of the most moving portraits of childhood seen recently on the screen, bringing to mind Celine Sciamma's equally affecting *Petite Maman* which covered some similar territory with a more fantastical style.

In a narrative that contains autobiographical elements Amachoukeli examines the intimate bond between Cape Verdean nanny Gloria (played by newcomer Ilça Moreno Zego) and her charge Cleo (Louise Mauroy-Panzani) whose mother has died of cancer. The youngster is being raised in the family flat in Paris by her struggling father (Arnaud Rebotini).

When her mother passes away Gloria decides to return to Cape Verde, leaving with the promise that Cleo, feeling painfully abandoned, can join her for the holidays. The reunion presents Cleo with a whole new set of emotional conundrums to navigate: Gloria's son Cesar (Fredy Gomes Tavares) looks on Cleo as a rival for his mother's affections while her daughter Fernanda (Abnara Gomes Varela) makes Gloria a grandmother by giving birth to a baby boy whom Cleo rejects.

The turmoil of confronting all these conflicting emotions takes its toll on the previously established nanny-child relationship in a setting so far removed from Cleo's Parisian existence. Amachoukeli takes the viewpoint of the six-year-old protagonist through whom we experience the realities of growing up without her "real" mother. The performance of Mauroy-Panzani is remarkable, displaying without a false note the vulnerability and confusion the child has to experience.

Amachoukeli delicately uses hand-painted animations to portray Cleo's early memories, a device that eases inside the child's world of imagination and gives the narrative a lighter perspective and a change from the fairly relentless close-ups of the actors (most of whom are non-professionals). Shot over a tightly reined running time of just 84 minutes, Ama Gloria describes volatile emotional situations without resorting to histrionics or any tendency to mawkish sentimentality. Amachoukeli emerges as a film-maker of originality and rare perception.

Richard Mowe, *Eye for Film*, 10 June 2024

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