

CINÉTELEFILMS, TANIT FILMS AND JOURZFÊTE PRESENT



SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE
UN CERTAIN REGARD
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

BEAUTY AND THE DOGS

A FILM BY
KAOUTHER BEN HANIA



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present



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KAOUTHER BEN HANIA

With **Mariam Al Ferjani, Ghanem Zrelli, Noomane Hamda,
Mohamed Akkari, Chedly Arfaoui, Anissa Daoud, Mourad Gharsalli**

TUNISIA, FRANCE, SWEDEN, NORWAY, LEBANON, QATAR, SWITZERLAND

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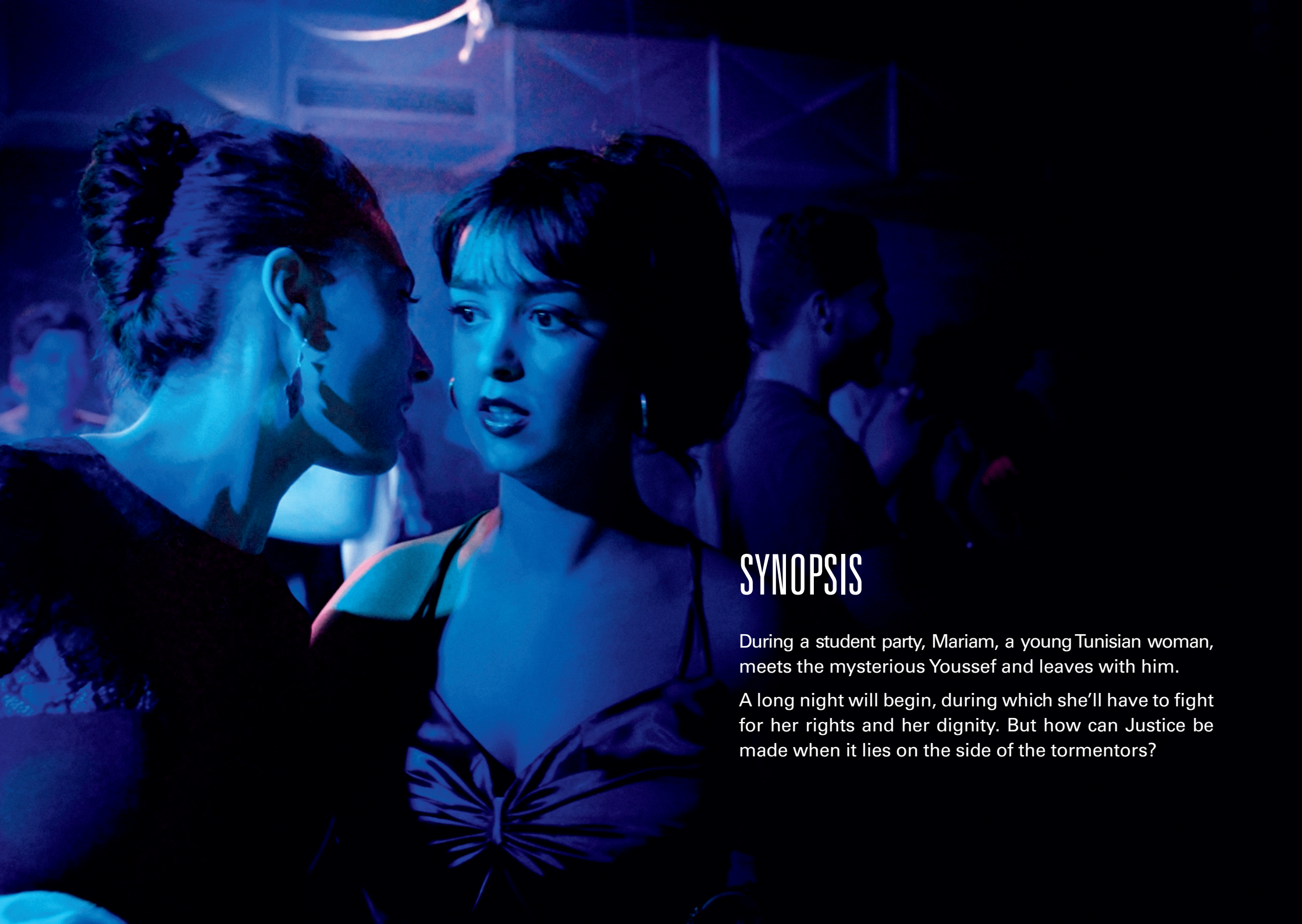
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SYNOPSIS

During a student party, Mariam, a young Tunisian woman, meets the mysterious Youssef and leaves with him.

A long night will begin, during which she'll have to fight for her rights and her dignity. But how can Justice be made when it lies on the side of the tormentors?

INTERVIEW OF KAOUTHER BEN HANIA

Whether documentaries or works of fiction, your films always maintain close ties with social reality.

I started with documentaries because, to me, fiction was something that was extremely difficult. Fiction is created from multiple “misleading elements,” and yet, out of a lie must come a certain authenticity. Filming what is real through a documentary allowed me to rethink this notion and develop the tools necessary to take on fiction. In this sense, *Challat of Tunis* is a transition piece, because I was approaching fiction with the tools and the stylistics of a documentary. When I first dealt with reality starting with *Imams Go to School* and in my subsequent films, I learned how to structure scenes the way you do in fiction, but with fragments of reality. So, when I was filming, I was thinking about the kind of editing that obviously doesn’t correspond to reality as it is because that was a reshuffling of reality made with the tools used in fiction. For me, making documentaries was a true learning process, particularly in my work with the actors. In *Challat of Tunis*, I was dealing with amateur actors and I couldn’t figure out how to direct an actor in order to obtain something as authentic as what you get in a documentary. Documentary filmmaking not only taught me to direct actors, but also to construct characters in their ambiguities and complexities, far from all the clichés.

How does one go about directing actors in long shots, which can be seen as ‘fragments of reality’, as you did for *Beauty and the Dogs*?

It’s a considerable formal constraint. But the film needs it, because a long shot has the benefit of plunging us into real-time - into life.

Using a long shot allows us to create an element of tension and to immerse



the audience in the sensation of real time, even if the film is made up of 9 fragments. The challenge was to establish consistency between the acting and this notion of a fragment of reality. Everything was prepared in advance in a configuration very similar that of the theatre. Multiple rehearsals were necessary to coordinate the actors’ performances with the camera’s movement. For a long time, during the filming process, I asked myself that frightening question: were the rehearsals going to wear the actors out, making their performances more automatic and therefore less emotional? If so, I risked losing spontaneity. But the numerous rehearsals didn’t wear out the actors – on the contrary, it gave them more to work with. It also allowed me to explore a character’s different facets and the actors were better equipped during filming.

Using a real life event, the piece explores the codes of genre cinema, namely thrillers and horror films, through the nightmare experienced by its main character in the space of one night.

I really like genre cinema, particularly horror films, which I find truly fascinating. This isn’t a horror film – in fact, it’s much closer to a nightmare; but that doesn’t prevent me from incorporating several nods to the kinds of film I love. From the moment I started working with the actors and writing the screenplay, I had





works, the solidarity within the police force, or understaffing in hospitals. It's a kind of operating logic in which anyone could potentially find him or herself - whether it's little acts of cowardice or those that are more reprehensible. You can easily and unwittingly lose your humanity by multiplying compromises.

The tension in the film is built on a reverse countdown that ends not with an explosion - that of the main character - but rather with her construction.

If Mariam doesn't lose her grip, it's because the much stronger characters surrounding her don't expect her reaction. From the beginning, I wanted to build the character of a young woman who was completely normal, with normal fears, who tells little white lies, and who can be a goody two-shoes. She ends up discovering herself because she is faced with exceptional situations. So she shows an instinct for survival that she didn't know she had. At first, she's lost, and I needed Youssef's character to support her, even if she is led to doubt him. We never know if he really is interested in her or if his behavior is simply the expression of the militant that he embodies for himself as measured by others. When Youssef is no longer at her side, Mariam finds herself alone against the "dogs", and she has to get through it on her own. From there, she topples an

order that everyone knows and accepts.

those references in mind. I really enjoy tension in films: the idea was also to maintain a kind of tension that was realistic (administration can lead to exactly this kind of Kafkaesque nightmare) while still making references to the genre. For me, horror films are extremely realistic. Incidentally, Youssef's character compares his life to a zombie movie. Those films can indeed evoke very real emotions from everyday life.

In *Beauty and the Dogs*, the reference to horror films brings to the forefront the question of the characters' humanity in a social order where human dignity is no longer respected.

From Mariam's perspective, the story is cruel, but at the same time – paradoxically – it is trivial from that of the hospitals and the police. For them, it's just another day at work. They see victims like Mariam every night. The difference between these two attitudes, that of personal tragedy and the insensitivity of institutions, defines the tone of the film.

The various secondary characters in the film justify their horrible behavior with the numerous constraints of their functions, whether it's how the administration

Does Mariam represent the youth that firmly believes in a constitutional state resulting from the new order that came after the end of Tunisia's Ben Ali regime?

Actually, I didn't want to give her a militant past. That's why I presented her as a naïve character when she lies to the cop. Youssef is much more politicized – he's the one who talks about the Revolution. When you're confronted with injustice, you automatically become a militant as a means for survival. Mariam needs for the men who raped her to go to prison. If we talk about a process of revenge under the guise of management by the civil justice system, we are not in any way talking about militancy. But it starts to surface in the confrontation with a social system that completely denies the respect of a citizen's basic rights. Mariam pursues a journey wherein all she wants is justice and reparation for what she's been put through by requesting a hearing. She becomes militant the moment she realizes that this is impossible.

Opposite her, the "dogs" become violent, not because of what Mariam represents,



but because she dares to file a complaint. The police will do everything they can to demean her by drawing from a collective concept of disdain for anything provincial. This manifestation of denigration and contempt for the other constitutes a psychological weapon in the context of a war with two opposing groups.

Mariam is also fighting against the ‘normalization of evil’ when the people she encounters treat rape with contempt and indifference.

In this respect, the film is an acknowledgement of this “normalization of evil” – not just in Tunisia, but all over the world. In this context, I make a reference to the documentary entitled *The Hunting Ground* (Kirby Dick, 2015), which deals with rape cases in prestigious American universities (Columbia, Harvard, etc.) where the female victims are not granted justice by campus administrations. These universities are, in fact, companies in a hypercompetitive system and don’t want to have their reputations tarnished. Also, the administrations push rape victims to keep quiet - all the more so when the accused are well-loved champions on the football team, a big money business. *Beauty and the Dogs* is more a film about the diktat of institutions than one about rape. That’s why the rape is committed by police officers – in other words, those who embody the monopoly of symbolic violence in society. Modern societies are actually built on this idea where individuals are protected by civil servants.

One of the tactics used by the cop who tries to silence Mariam consists of playing up the notion of a society under construction that needs the police force and therefore can’t be tarnished.

It’s the kind of blackmail we’re all familiar with that consists of pitting security against liberty, as if having both together were impossible. In this context, in order to have a strong police force, you have to give it absolute power and look the other way when it commits crimes. This began in the United States following September 11 and we find it in France and elsewhere in the form of “emergency laws.” With this kind of blackmail, it’s better to shut your mouth with regard to police abuses if you want to avoid civil war and the threat of terrorism.

Though the film’s context is local, in the sense that it’s a post-2011 portrait of Tunisia, it goes far beyond those borders. How did you go about creating a dialogue between local and global when developing the film?

You always need context to make a film. I know the Tunisian context well, and I find it fascinating because it’s abundant; it calls everything into question. All of my films were conceived with this possibility of being able to dialogue with any audience, no matter their country of origin. I also realize that, since there are

very few images that come out of Tunisia, a complete commitment to the few images communicated to the outside world takes shape. To a director coming from a more productive film industry, you wouldn’t ask the same questions about the preconceived notions associated with a country.

This film is based on a real life event: what liberties were taken with respect to the reality of the facts from the case?*

I took a lot of liberties. It’s a news story that really had an impact on me at the time and that got a lot of attention and a lot of demonstrations of support for the victim. I used the event that sparked it all, which was the rape. But the characters in the film in no way resemble the real people. None of the events that take place in the screenplay take place as they did in reality: hence, the rape victim runs into her tormentors on the same night, but not for the same reasons that I chose in the screenplay. I didn’t want to meet the real-life rape victim and author of the book, the rights to which the production team bought so that I could maintain my right to interpretation. The meeting did take place, however, and the reading of the script didn’t particularly please her, which I can easily understand: when you’ve gone through a traumatic experience, you can feel betrayed when you see a rendering of that experience that isn’t faithful. And yet, what I wanted, more than to faithfully adapt an actual news story, was to use fiction to talk about the courage of countless women who struggle to have their rights respected. Behind the courage she demonstrated in testifying in court and through her book, I also wanted to talk about all of the women’s voices that weren’t being heard.

Would it have been possible to make this film a few years ago?

Clearly, this film couldn’t have been made in Tunisia before 2011. Though it doesn’t paint a flattering portrait of the guardians of law and order in Tunisia, the Ministry of Culture supports the film. For me, this is a powerful symbol of support at a time when general pessimism reigns over Tunisia. It’s a sign that things in the country are changing. Like the film’s main character, nothing can ever again be like before. Most importantly, the film is saying to all those people still functioning as they did under the Ben Ali regime, that the social order can no longer be the same.

*COUPABLE D’AVOIR ÉTÉ VIOLÉE by Meriem Ben Mohamed with Ava Djamshidi. Published by Michel Lafon



KAOUTHER BEN HANIA

A director and screenwriter, Kaouther Ben Hania was born in Sidi Bouzid (Tunisia). Following film studies at the Ecole des Arts et du Cinéma in Tunis, she studied scriptwriting at La Fémis in Paris. She has a Research Masters in Film and Audiovisual Studies from the Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3.

F I L M O G R A P H Y

Feature-films

- 2014 **CHALLAT OF TUNIS**: Selected in the ACID program at the Cannes Film Festival.
Winner of the Bayard d'Or for Best Debut Film at the francophone Festival de Namur.
- 2017 **BEAUTY AND THE DOGS**: Selected for Un Certain Regard at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival.

Documentaries

- 2010 **IMAMS GO TO SCHOOL**: Premiered in the official competition at IDFA.
- 2016 **ZAINEB HATES THE SNOW**: winner of the Tanit d'Or JCC and the Prix Ulysse at the Cinemed festival, Montpellier.

Short-films

- 2006 **MOI, MA SŒUR ET LA CHOSE**
- 2013 **PEAU DE COLLE** (Wooden Hand): winner of the Tanit d'Or JCC.

She is currently filming her third documentary entitled OLFA AND HER DAUGHTERS and is developing her next feature-length film: THE MAN WHO SOLD HIS SKIN.



MARIAM AL FERJANI



GHANEM ZRELLI

Mariam Al Ferjani was born in Béjà (Tunisia) in 1989 and currently lives between Tunis and Milan (Italy). She graduated from the directing department of the Scuola Civica di Cinema Luchino Visconti in Milan in 2015. She was nominated for Arab Stars of Tomorrow, at the 2016 Dubai International Film Festival.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2010 **SOUBRESAULTS**, a short film by Leyla Bouzid.
JOURNAL D'UNE FEMME IMPORTANTE by Alaeddine Slim.
SHATWI ET AL EDIAA, based on the poems of Youssef Rakha, experimental short films.
- 2016 **BEAUTY AND THE DOGS** by Kaouther Ben Hania, Lead female role, Official Selection - Un Certain Regard, 2017 Cannes Film Festival.

EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 Photographer and performer for the exhibition "Where did we meet before?" (self portrait project taken over 5 years).

A native of Tunisia, Ghanem Zrelli graduated from the Institut Supérieur d'Art Dramatique in 2009.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2007 **THALATHOUN** by Fadhel Jaziri
- 2011 **BLACK GOLD** by Jean-Jacques Annaud
- 2014 **LE VENT SOUFFLE OÙ IL VEUT** (short film) by Lyes Bessrouer
MÉLODIES (short film) by Marwa Rekik
- 2015 **NARCISSE** by Sonia Chamkhi
THALA MY LOVE by Mehdi Hmili
- 2009 **NJOUM ELLIL** (season 1) by Madih Belaïd
- 2012 **OMAR** by Hatem Ali
- 2016 **BOLICE 2.0** by Majdi Smiri
FLASHBACK by Mourad Ben Cheikh
BEAUTY AND THE DOGS by Kaouther Ben Hania, male lead, Official Selection - Un Certain Regard at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival.



CAST

Mariam Al Ferjani - Mariam

Ghanem Zrelli - Youssef

Noomane Hamda - Chedli

Mohamed Akkari - Lamjed

Chedly Arfaoui - Mounir

Anissa Daoud - Faiza

Mourad Gharsalli - Lassaad

CREW

Written and directed by

Kaouther Ben Hania

Produced by

Habib Attia and **Nadim Cheikhrouha**

Coproduced by

**Georges Schoucair, Nefise Ozkal Lorentzen, Jorgen Lorentzen,
Andreas Rocksen, Tomas Eskilsson, Jon Mankell**

Cinematographer

Johan Holmquist

Steadycam operator

Nestor Salazar

Editing

Nadia Ben Rachid

Original soundtrack

Amine Bouhafa

Sound

Moez Cheikh, Raphaël Sohier, Florent Denizot, Thierry Delor

Set design

Moncef Hakouna

First assistant-director

Mehdi M. Barsaoui

Production manager

Khaled Walid Barsaoui

Make up artist

Hajer Bouhawala

Costume designer

Nedra Gribaa

Produced by

Cinetelefilms and **Tanit Films**

In coproduction with

Laika Film & Television

Film l'Vast

Schortcut Films

Integral Film & Literature

Chimney

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