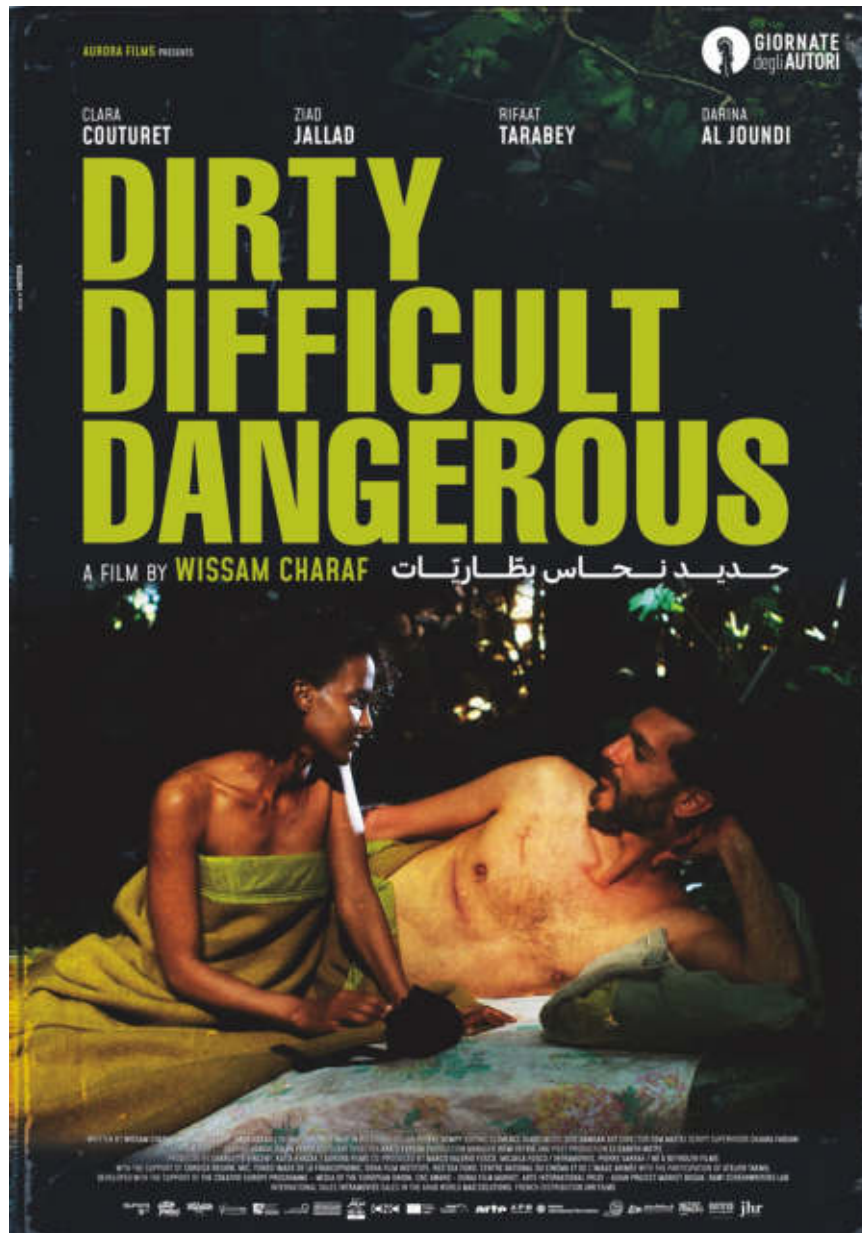


Aurora Films in co-production with *Intramovies* and *Né à Beyrouth Films* present



a film by Wissam Charaf

83' | Colour | Drama | FRANCE, ITALY, LEBANON, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA | 2022

2K | ratio: 1.33 Arabic, Amharic, Bengali, English 5.1

PRODUCTION
Aurora Films
9 rue Réaumur
75003 Paris France
contact@aurorafilms.fr
+33 1 47704301

CO-PRODUCTION
INTERNATIONAL SALES
Intramovies
Via E. Manfredi, 15
00197, Rome, Italy
sales@intramovies.com
festival@intramovies.com
+39 06 45777930

CO-PRODUCTION
Né à Beyrouth
George Haddad Str.
Nahad bldg
Beirut Central District
Lebanon
info@neabeyrouth.org
+961 1 587 850

INTERNATIONAL PRESS
Rendez-Vous PR
Viviana Andriani
Aurélie Dard
viviana@rv-press.com
festival@rv-press.com
+33 6 80 16 81 39

CREDITS

DIRECTOR
Wissam Charaf

SCREENPLAY
Wissam Charaf
Marianne Désert
Hala Dabaji

PRODUCED BY
Charlotte Vincent

Katia Khazak
CO-PRODUCED BY
Marco Valerio Fusco

Micaela Fusco
Pierre Sarraf

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Martin Rit

SOUND
Pierre Bompuy

EDITING
Clémence Diard

ART DIRECTOR
Tom Mattei

COSTUMES
Thomas Marini

CASTING
Sandie Galan Perez – Arda

FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Anaïs Versini

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR
Chjara Fabiani

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Rémi Veyrié

ORIGINAL SCORE
Zeid Hamdan

CAST

Clara Couturet - Mehdia

Ziad Jallad - Ahmed

Rifaat Tarabey - Ibrahim

Darina Al Joundi - Leila



LOGLINE

Beirut, Lebanon. An impossible love story between an Ethiopian housemaid and a Syrian refugee whose body is witnessing mysterious changes.

SYNOPSIS

Beirut, Lebanon, nowadays.

Ahmed, a Syrian refugee, and Mehdia, an Ethiopian migrant domestic worker, are living an impossible love.

While Mehdia tries to free herself from her employers, Ahmed struggles to survive dealing in second-hand metal scraps, affected by a mysterious disease.

The two lovers have no future, but they have nothing to lose. One day, they take their chance and flee Beirut in a hopeful and desperate attempt to get away while Ahmed's physical condition gets worse, turning slowly his body into metal.



WISSAM CHARAF

Born in 1973, Wissam CHARAF is a Lebanese/French director, cameraman and editor. In 1998, he began to work with the French/German network ARTE, as a news cameraman, editor and journalist. He has since covered major conflict areas ranging from Lebanon and the Near East to Darfour, Afghanistan, Haiti or North Korea and worked with programs such as ARTE Info, ARTE Reportages, Tracks, Metropolis.

He directed 6 shorts: *Hizz Ya Wizz*, *A Hero Never Dies*, *An Army of Ants*, *After*, *Unforgettable Memory of a Friend* and *Don't Panic* as well as the documentary *It's All in Lebanon*. His first feature film, *Heaven Sent*, premiered at the ACID section of the 2016 Cannes Film Festival.

Dirty, Difficult, Dangerous, selected at Venice Days – 2022, is his second feature film. He's currently working on a new short film.

Filmography:

2022. **DIRTY, DIFFICULT, DANGEROUS** (Feature film): Giornate degli Autori: Venice days – Venice Film Festival

2021. **DON'T PANIC** (Short film): Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival, Cinémed Festival

2018. **UNFORGETTABLE MEMORY OF A FRIEND** (Short film): Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival, Côte-Court festival – Pantin, Lebanese Film Festival, Cinémed Festival – Montpellier, Travelling Film Festival – Rennes, Ciné-junior Festival, Un poing c'est court Festival, Hiroshima International Film Festival, Cinema Arab Film Festival – Amsterdam, Les Nuits Méditerranéennes Festival, My Youth Film Festival, Gabes Film Festival, Visions sociales – Cannes

Awards: Special Mention Jury – Clermont-Ferrand Festival; Great Prize – Rhode Island Film Festival; GNCR Award – Côte-Court, Jurys Award – Hiroshima Festival; College Award – Un poing c'est court festival; Great Prize – Lama Festival.

Pre-selected for the best short film Cesar 2020.

2016. **HEAVEN SENT** (Feature film): ACID – Cannes, International Film Festival of San Francisco, International Film Festival of Marrakech, Warsaw Film Festival, Torino Film Festival, Entrevues Film Festival of Belfort, Mediterranean Film Festival of Montpellier, Festival East-West, Film Festival of Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux, French Film Festival of Lisbon

Awards: Long Short Great prize at Tubingen Film Festival; Mise en scène Prize at War on Screen Festival.

2016. **AFTER** (Short film): Cote-Court Film festival in Pantin, Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival, Brive Film Festival, Beirut Cinema days, Mediterranean nights Film Festival
Awards: Press Jury and Bande à Part at Coté-Court Film Festival; Ciné + Prize at Brive Film Festival; Titrafilms Prize at Mediterranean nights Film Festival.

2012. **IT'S ALL IN LEBANON** (Documentary): Vision du Réel, Carthage Film festival, Middle East Film Festival, MEDIMED, Online Film Festival Culture Unplugged, London International Documentary Festival, Al Jazeera Documentary Film, Doha Film Festival, Cine Martil Film Festival, Jacob Film Center de NYC (Contemporary Arab Cinema Programm), Arab film festival in Berlin, Bagdad International Film Festival, Dubai...
Awards: Bronze Tanit for Best documentary - Carthage Festival 2012.

2007. **AN ARMY OF ANTS** (Short film): Locarno Film Festival, Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival, Premiers plans d'Angers, Dubai Film Festival, Entrevues de Belfort, Amsterdam Film Festival...
Awards: Jury prize – Festival of Mediterranean Cinema in Lunel.

2006. **A HERO NEVER DIES** (Short film): Paris Cinema, Kort (Norway), Amsterdam Shorts (Netherlands).

2004. **HIZZ YA WIZZ** (Short film): Festival de Clermont-Ferrand 2004, Premiers plans d'Angers, Entrevues de Belfort, Côté court Film festival.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"In today's Lebanon, two fallen angels, Ahmed and Mehdi, cross paths, two outcasts of the society come together only to have to face danger and racism. In this melodrama where cruelty, comedy and tenderness imbricate, we are offering an intimate vision of today's Lebanese society. The project describes the tragedy of three populations in only one country: the racism towards the domestic workers, the misery of the Syrian refugees and the moral decadence of the Lebanese people that harbor and employ them.

Even though I'm inspiring myself from a cruel reality, I don't want my work to be about pathos and misery. I want to create a light offset, shift toward the tale and redesign the reality... In this sweet and sour mix, the dramatic tone is often defused by incongruous situations in order to create a comic detachment in the scenes' composition. It aims at putting forward, by contrast, the absurdity of some situations instead of only representing the ordeal of the characters."

Wissam Charaf

ACTORS' BIO

Clara Couturet is a French actress that starred in several short films such as *Punch It* by Olivier Perrier and *Mehret va à l'Est* by Cécile Chaignot. *Dirty, Difficult, Dangerous* is her first feature film.

Ziad Jallad is a British actor, based in France. He appears in TV series (*Hanna* by Eva Husson, Amazon prime), shorts and long features, as *Skies of Lebanon* by Chloé Mazlo, selected at Cannes – Critics' week 2020, *Mascarade* by Nicolas Bedos, among others. In *Dirty, Difficult, Dangerous*, he plays his first leading role.



PRODUCTION COMPANY BIO

Aurora Films, a production company based in Paris and founded in 2002, is specialized in French and international co-productions, and has produced about fifty films (shorts, documentaries and feature films). The company defends an arthouse cinema, with directors that have a singular vision, esthetic and identity.

6 feature films produced by the company were selected at Cannes, including *Return to Seoul* by Davy Chou selected at Un Certain Regard – Cannes 2022.

Among recent productions, *Angry Annie* by Blandine Lenoir selected in Locarno's Piazza Grande this year, *Dirty, Difficult, Dangerous* premiering in Venice days also this year, *Petite Solange* by Axelle Ropert, selected at the official competition of Locarno Film Festival 2021, *Diamond Island* by Davy Chou, which received the SACD prize at the Critic's Week in Cannes 2016 and *Heaven Sent* by Wissam Charaf, selected at ACID in Cannes 2016.

Aurora Films is currently working on the post-production of the new feature films by Patric Chiha and is in the preparation of the first feature film of Lkhagvadulam Purev-Ochir, Ze.

INTERVIEW WISSAM CHARAF

How did you approach writing DDD?

It's the first time that I've told other people's stories, rather than my personal story or the story of my country and what has directly influenced me. It's also the story of two major causes that don't personally concern me: Syrian refugees and domestic workers. Why did I specifically wish to talk about those topics? Probably because the war was going on in Syria because we were constantly seeing refugees, because I was continually reporting on their condition, and therefore saw how things were for them when they came into the towns. They'd hang out at the foot of our cosy buildings begging for metal to try and recycle it. They were young people with nothing to do, who had only their hands to work with, and who were destitute. And at the same time, the domestic workers' cause was drawing attention. We see these women in our families and the homes of those around us, and I realised to what extent their lives were completely different to ours. There are a lot of things in Lebanon that are impossible, but a love story between a Syrian refugee and a domestic worker, two social outcasts, really seemed to me to exemplify that. That's what the title "Dirty Difficult Dangerous" means: dirty, difficult, dangerous love. Because, with everyday racism in Lebanon, people don't imagine that these social outcasts could love each other or even have the right to a love life.

So, I was assuming a certain responsibility, particularly as I'm only a simple observer of the two categories. I don't belong to either and have no real legitimacy. I mainly based the film on what I've seen and heard myself, on what people have told me, and on what I've read about how domestic workers are treated. The idea was to link the two causes, to put this couple in an unbearable situation, and yet to introduce poetic and absurd elements in order to avoid it being a simple film about society. I needed to introduce some form of divergence.

In Lebanon, there's an entire system, called kafala, which deals with these domestic workers.

It's a rather horrible system that enslaves these people. It exists in lots of Arab countries, in particular in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. Under this system, domestic workers' passports are systematically confiscated and they have very few rights. In Lebanon, they hope to become rich because they are paid in dollars - well, that was before the crisis, but that's the period the film talks about. They arrive via bureaux or agencies, which make them seem legal, as the government doesn't hinder this practice. It's like a legal straight-jacket, which has a rather devastating effect.

In the same way, the situation Syrian refugees are in has continually worsened since the film was made.

Lebanon is still the country that takes in the most refugees in the world, per capita. Lots of those refugees have gone abroad or have returned to Syria. Lebanese society is increasingly critical of their presence whereas, at the time, they were welcomed more or less empathetically. Today, the Lebanese have become so poor that, sometimes, they even complain that they are poorer still than the refugees who receive UN aid whereas they, the Lebanese, no longer receive anything. The shoe is now on the other foot. And in fact, that reversal of roles is what's playing out in the film. The Ethiopian woman goes to the Syrians who throw her out and the Syrian goes to the Ethiopian women who throw him out. Everyone throws everyone out. I try to continually reverse the roles and systematically create distortion.

Like the opening scene of your film *Heaven Sent* (where we see a man up to his knees in snow), the opening scene of *Dirty Difficult Dangerous* (where we see women of African origin singing religious songs) can unsettle the viewer who expects to see a film taking place in Beirut. Do you systematically feel this desire to start with a transitional scene, to shake up preconceived ideas?

Absolutely. I wanted to make a film that would, at least in the beginning, make the viewer feel disorientated, and shake up what he might expect from a film on Syrian refugees (because it has to be said there are a lot of films on the topic). So, I wanted to make a Lebanese film where the main characters weren't Lebanese, and I think that gave the film potential. It's a film that also aims to talk about Passion. Not just the amorous passion of a couple, but the Passion, in the religious sense, of this girl. Mehdia is like a saint who carries the weight of the world on her shoulders. With that in mind, I wanted to start with something coming from above, in a church, and then get closer to her to show that she'll be the focal point. Mehdia and Ahmed, together, are like a modern-day Atlas or Sisyphus. Their activity is carrying. Mehdia carries the old man all day – even when he physically aggresses her, she has to fend him off yet still bear his weight. Ahmed carries metal objects. And at the end, he's transformed into a metal object and is reduced to carrying his own arm. I wanted to touch on something that would be akin to a legend, something intangible in this film where most of the issues are very down-to-earth.

Ahmed is in total contrast with the type of character you usually favour. Is he not the antithesis of the Lebanese heroes of your previous films? Also, in this film, there's none of your usual pronounced dry humour – or in any case, it's more understated. Is that because the topic didn't allow it?

I was directly concerned by the topic of my last film *Heaven Sent*, so I could make fun of myself, my people, my present and my past, but this is something more serious and more distant. I'm talking about people who are suffering now, today, whereas *Heaven Sent* talked about past suffering. I didn't want to depict suffering the way it's often shown – I'm not interested in blatantly showing people suffering –, I wanted to express that in a more roundabout way. At the end of the day, however you choose to express it, the suffering remains the same. I show two people who are constantly faced with very violent situations

– sometimes it's physical violence, but not only. So you have to modulate that violence, play on other nuances, other subtleties so that it's less monotonous and explicit. The result of that was a less directly humorous blend. There's a person who cries in my film. It's the first ever time. A woman who cries, set to music, too. Clearly, there aren't the same references in this film as in my previous films. Apart from the film by Ulrich Seidl, whilst I was writing, I watched lots of films by Rainer Werner Fassbinder (*Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, among others) and it has to be said that, strictly speaking, it isn't burlesque.

From the very beginning, Ahmed is represented by metal, as he walks around crying out "iron, copper, batteries". It made me think of Jean-Luc Godard's words, "War is simple: it's just sticking a piece of iron into a piece of flesh."

The idea of Ahmed searching for metal comes from the streets. It's something I have seen. But the idea of the metal in Ahmed's flesh is also something that happened to me. The explosion of an Israeli grenade injured me when I was nine years old, during the war. My body is still full of metal parts that move and sometimes come up to the surface. I have pieces of shrapnel inside me. I have a piece in my head, behind my eye, and nobody knows if it won't kill me one day. The idea was to reuse this personal experience and show how a body can be transformed into metal, and how the war can taint and corrode its victims, even those who weren't a party to any fighting. For me, that was an element I could use to give an unpredictable feel to the film: someone's body being transformed improbably. Ahmed seems detached from reality, and not very expressive, but at the same time, he has great symbolic significance.

After the magical interlude at the hotel, which is the contest prize, the film setting changes, moving to a refugee camp. Where did you shoot those scenes?

We shot them in a real refugee camp on the Syrian border. We went back to the place where, as a journalist, I had filmed the camps – in this case, a village called Qaa. The extras we employed actually lived in the camp. It feels like Syria, it's so close. We dropped our actors into that and they were stunned. Rami Rkab, one of the actors (the one who plays the one-legged man), who is Syrian and lives in Strasbourg, discovered what a refugee camp was and was distraught to see what his people had become. The scenes in the apartment and hospital were a reproduction but this was real life. I really think that's palpable. Everything is coarser. It's almost like another film. I really wanted to shift gears and tone. We went from tribe to tribe, nobody likes anyone, and there's always someone who thinks he's better than you. And there's also always someone further down the social ladder than you.

Beirut is never in the foreground. In the rare moments when we travel around the city, it is shown as empty and drained.

Public Beirut is. Now, life goes on behind closed doors. Public spaces, the streets... They no longer belong to the Lebanese. They no longer like to show the city because it's become ugly and dirty, nobody looks after it anymore. The only things they still have any control over are their homes. The streets are filthy but the homes are extremely clean. The streets have become a playground for dropouts. These lovers have no shared language and even less a shared place for their love. Everywhere they go, they are rejected or grudgingly tolerated. All that against the backdrop of a constant class struggle. All that to fuel these three words, *Dirty Difficult Dangerous*.

You've remained faithful to the 1.33 format.

Yes, and without being able to justify it, this time. I really think it's more beautiful. At the time of *Heaven Sent*, I could have argued that the format was consistent with an idea I had of the past. Now it's a purely aesthetic reaction. The way I do things is simple: I take a 50 mm lens in 1.33, put it on the camera and try to fit everything in. Instead of doing the opposite. I think that gives the film a visual identity.

For the first time, you've welcomed on board some new actors who, apart from Darina Al Joundi, weren't part of your troupe. To what extent did that impact the way you directed the film?

That changed a lot of things. I'm used to filming Raed Yassin, who is very imposing, and this time I had two twigs, she is very small, and he is very tall. I had to use quite a few tricks to make up for their height difference. Clara Couturet, the actress, had to learn Arabic, phonetically, with an Ethiopian accent – which was quite a job. Both speak a language that isn't their mother tongue. And both of these actors are really handsome. It was almost a political statement to attest that it's not because you're a domestic worker or because you're a refugee that you are ugly. I wanted to play on that beauty almost insolently. The social aspect of the film is also putting that beauty where you don't expect to find it.

Paris-Beirut, July 2022.

