

The background of the poster is a photograph of two women dancing at night. The woman in the foreground is seen from the side, her head tilted down with her eyes closed. The woman behind her has her arms raised, and her face is partially visible, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, and the background is filled with out-of-focus city lights in various colors like yellow, blue, and red.

The Daughters of Abraham

A FILM BY
HANAËL EL YOUSFI

OFFICIAL SELECTION

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A photograph of two young women riding a motorcycle along a coastal road. The woman in the driver's seat is wearing a red jacket and a black helmet, smiling. The passenger is wearing a green jacket and a black helmet. They are riding on a paved road with a metal railing, overlooking a blue sea under a clear sky. A red sign is visible in the background.

Synopsis



After several years of estrangement, Myriam, a young woman of Muslim culture growing up in Marseille, renews her friendship with Eva, from a Jewish family, during the summer holidays. Together, they experience their youth outside the frameworks imposed on them.

But this carefree summer begins to crack when a crisis disrupts the balance of their social and familial circle, and soon enough, their own destinies.



Interview with Hanaël El Yousfi



As early as 2021, your first short *Mazel Brouk* explored the connections between Jewish and Muslim environments. What was the gestation of your debut feature, *The Daughters of Abraham*?

It came out of a meeting I initiated between two girlfriends of mine, one Jewish, the other Muslim. I grew up and live between those two worlds, which are never looked at together, except to say that they are in conflict. I spend a lot of time with one group, Muslims, or the other, Jews, but rarely both together. Ten years ago, when I brought together my two friends, an epiphany occurred. They had the same cultural references and sense of humor, and similar childhood memories. I witnessed the birth of their friendship. I was so overcome by emotion that I thought, *“That’s what I want to do.”* Put them together in the same frame, highlight similarities rather than tired old tropes of political friction and animosity. I also wanted to counter the prevailing representation of two communities that I inhabit, as turning their backs on each other, even more so since October 7, 2023. When I was with Muslims, they spoke of Jews as an enemy culture. And when I was with

Jews, I observed a contempt and superiority complex combined with a love-hate relationship. Buffeted by these conflicting winds, I felt like crying out, *“Guys, actually, you are so like each other!”*

Where does the title *The Daughters of Abraham* come from? What does it mean to you?

Abraham is the patriarch shared by the three major monotheistic religions, and in my film more specifically, by the Muslims and Jews. Making my characters, Myriam, Eva and Shana daughters of Abraham brings to mind their genealogy and all that they have in common, in their customs, food and manner. And, paradoxically, in the anxieties and expectations that weigh on their shoulders in the name of their heritage.

Your film radiates lived experience. It feels like it comes from a place of necessity and intimacy.

I find it hard to respond to that since I turned to cinema precisely so



I could hide behind the characters. I'm quite a shy person. Nowadays, a person's identity is a real scourge in the sense that it goes everywhere ahead of them. Being a Jew or Arab colors people's opinion of you and your work. What connects me to those two worlds belongs to my own private sphere and I prefer to be judged on my own achievements. I can say that my film speaks about two communities I know well. I grew up in France with Moroccan parents. Since forever, my life has been celebrating Eid and going to the synagogue. Nothing you see on screen is fantasy or made up.

Are your heroines' characters inspired by women you have met? And if so, who?

There's a lot of me in my twenties in Myriam. There's also some of me in Shana and Eva. To be perfectly clear, what interested me was showing how far these women, who enjoy taking potshots at each other, can all relate to the others' quest for a place in their respective

communities. There is a form of forced withdrawal and imposed sense of honor. For example, an unmarried Jewish woman in her mid-thirties is considered a handicap in a traditional family. It takes on a collective dimension. To write this film, I combined autobiographical elements with tales I gathered together from Jewish and Muslim women who told me about their past and present experiences over two years. They all contained some aspect of patriarchal and non-practicing symmetry. Using my two friends as a starting point, they each put me in touch with a girlfriend of theirs, and so on. It just snowballed. I couldn't bring myself to stop because I kept realizing that I was not alone in experiencing certain things. Very early on, I wanted to meet men who would help me understand their motivations, so I could construct complex male characters. I would never dream of filming them as background figures. My greatest fear was that my characters would be living clichés. It was necessary to understand everyone's motivations, including the mothers who contribute to perpetuating outdated and patriarchal behaviors. This period of research helped me dodge the temptation to preach. My aim was to explain the inexplicable. And I think this film helped reconcile me with my loved ones.

The choice of the protagonist's name, Myriam, is far from a coincidence, isn't it? It works equally well for Jews as for Muslims.

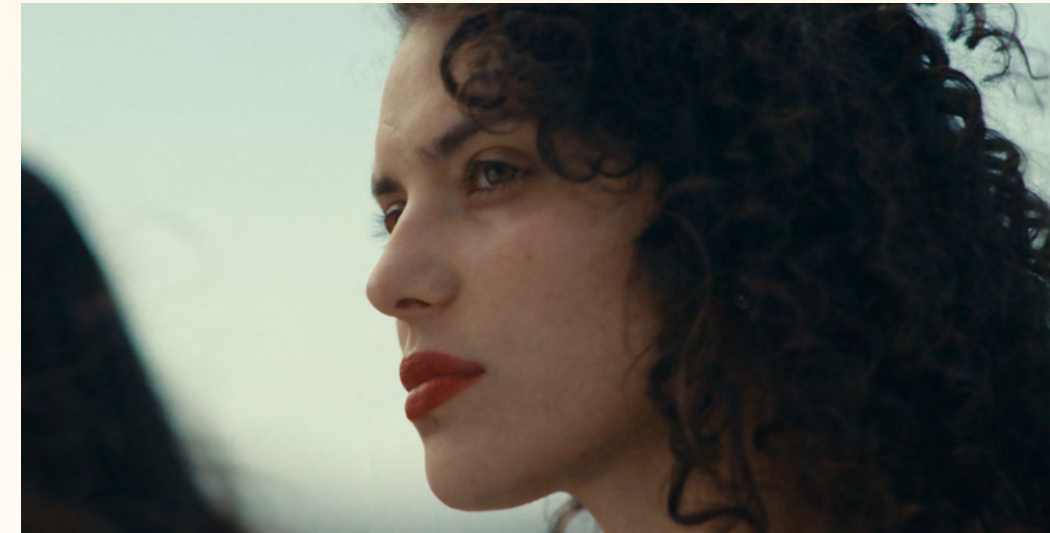
For me, that name encapsulates the story of the film. In the Bible, Miriam is Moses's sister. And Maryam is the only woman named in the Quran. Making Myriam the daughter of Abraham emphasized the film's message that meant she could be both Jewish and Muslim. Just like, in my mind, dancing, which features prominently in the film and is an



important aspect of our Judeo-Arab cultures. In the Bible specifically, Miriam is the prophetess who accompanied the Exodus and led the Israelites in a celebratory dance after their escape from Egypt. Mélissa Guers, who plays Myriam, caught my eye because she possesses a natural sensuality and dances like a prophetess. It's kind of an honor to give her character a name that navigates between both traditions.

Speaking of Mélissa Guers, what prompted you to cast her as Myriam? Did you see her in Stéphane Demoustier's *The Girl with a bracelet*?

When we met, I hadn't even seen *The Girl with a bracelet*. I cast her two weeks before I started shooting my short *Mazel Brouk*, in which she co-stars. For Myriam, I needed to believe and for the audience to believe. I was looking for a truth to jump out. My script supervisor at the time mentioned Mélissa to me. I picked up the phone and called her. After she answered, I knew, within thirty seconds and without even seeing her that it was her. She's an extremely genuine, engaging person, and she doesn't cheat. Behind or in front of the camera, something always happens in her presence. Her own story is very close to mine, and her telling of it was very nonchalant and offhand. It so happens that the film deliberately adopts Myriam's perspective: taking a lighthearted approach to sometimes dramatic events as a means of self-defense. For the character as much as the performer, irony, straight-talking and nonchalance are arms to combat difficulties. Mélissa and I speak the same language. She acts with such truthfulness, forgetting everything around her. After working together on my short, it was just obvious that we'd go again together on a feature. I have absolute faith in her.



And Ava Baya as Eva?

After people started talking to me about her, I checked out her Instagram, and the first thing I saw was a red mouth, piercing eyes and depth in her expression. From the get-go, it was clear the camera loved her. However you film her, she captures the light. When she came in for a screen test, after five minutes chatting, I thought, *"This girl's a one-of-a-kind. She sings, fights, performs stunts... She's a one-woman talent show."* Filming her is pure pleasure because she exudes an unconventional ambivalence in a society that formats people. So, we worked together on *Mazel Brouk*, then I wrote the part in *The Daughters of Abraham* for her, showcasing her uniqueness. Eva rides a motorcycle, for example. She sings. With her, we're on the upper slopes of freedom, with a young woman who blazes her trail with no concern for family legacies and differences that people point their fingers at. She transcends conventions, which have zero impact on her. I like to think of her as a model for a lot of women who have not yet freed themselves of behavioral norms.

The film quotes the words of Aristotle, "Our happiness depends upon ourselves". The line captures the notion of a quest for freedom and refusal to compromise that drives the women in your story.

I don't know if it's innate or if it emerges at some juncture in our lives. The idea of not trying to fit in, of emancipating yourself. Listening to people's stories during my research, I noticed that the women who have reached the light are those who refused a life laid out for them. When I was seventeen, I ran away from home after a dramatic event, and now I think that I was very lucky in my misfortune. Even though it was



very painful at the time, I did it, and that's the reason I am where I am today. If I hadn't left my native Vaucluse region, I would have embraced the fate of all the women I meet when I go back. A very different fate, normative and not so free. It's something I can honestly say to other young women: leaping into the unknown made me much freer.

Without beating around the bush, you show the weight of the community as an obstacle to personal fulfillment.

It's not always so, but it's fair to say that the community can constitute an obstacle. It weighs heavily on our destiny. Especially when we're young, we all want and need to be liked. We are very dependent on the love of our parents, loved ones and friends. And in the communities I live in, there is the issue of *what will people say?* The constant burden of other people watching and judging. Everything is settled behind closed doors, within the family. That explains the two-handed structure of the film: the Jewish household and the Muslim household, and an

incident that connects the two. I would like audiences to sense the family plotting—both the Benkemouns and the Achours—with incidents being dealt with in-house. You mustn't make waves or stain the family's honor, even if it means sinking into hypocrisy. The writer Leïla Slimani often says in her books, and in reference to Morocco, "*You can do what you want as long as no one finds out.*" It's a paradox that I built into the story.

The scene that creates so much discord takes place in Marrakech. It's an important moment but a pretext for something else, the shakedown that crystallizes community frictions and engenders violence and hypocrisy on all sides. You clearly set out to spare neither Jews nor Muslims. You roast everyone.

It was very important for me to bring as much balance as possible to filming two communities that are steeped in clichés and spend all their time comparing themselves to each other. I witnessed it throughout the casting process, which spanned two years with four different casting directors. Everybody said, "*We get it worse than they do.*" The symmetrical structure was in response to potential tensions. I made sure that each scene in one community responded to a scene in the other. Fatima's kitchen mirrors Martine's kitchen. Mohamed's Muslim wedding segues into Shabbat at the Benkemouns' house, and so on. I wanted situations and characters to balance out. Getting away from stereotypes became a leitmotif. I made a list of clichés to stay away from, as far away as possible: drugs, stealing, politics, prostitution. At the same time, as I said earlier, I emphasized similarities: family values and bonds, a love of parties and celebrations... Things the communities





have in common, of which I reveal the good and the bad. That pretty much sums up the film. In both environments, the family is poison and love. Constantly showing that, often in long scenes where I let everybody express themselves, was a personal touchstone.

In a society increasingly founded on identity politics, and in a world where conflicts add to the hatred and confusion, how can this story be salutary?

The film opens with a dance that is hijacked in Marrakech and concludes with a dance reclaimed in Berlin. In all modesty, it is in that progression that the film might be salutary. These young women who connect and disconnect, who are subjected to very similar pressures from their families, resist anything and any man that attempts to break them, and overcome every invalidating prejudice. The story ends in Berlin, which acts as a horizon. I didn't choose that location by chance. It's a city that has faced up to its past, looked it in the eye, and does not confine its young women to their community of origin. Each time I watch the final scene, with these two girls taking each other in their arms, a shiver runs down my spine because they have conquered community tensions. Ending my film in that sorority is a message that there is a genuine possibility to get along together whatever we are made of.

In our partisan world, Wajdi Mouwad points out in his texts the compulsion to choose sides, as if a soccer match were being played out. But there is room for nuance and for healthy inter-community relationships. To have succeeded in keeping politics off camera, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, makes me proud. Just as bringing Jews and Muslims together on set does, in the current



incendiary climate. Actually, many people refused to work together. At one point, there were frictions. People wanted to jump ship because positions were adopted that diverged from their positions. Eventually, everything fell back into place after we began a mediation process within the production company with the help of a non-profit named *Nous Réconcilier (Reconcile Us)*. That helped us to make people understand that what brings them together is stronger than what sets them apart.

Myriam is constantly surrounded by people, rarely alone, stifled. Was that your way of showing the weight of the group? More broadly, how do you even begin to film and capture things that are often invisible to the naked eye?

I had a clear direction of travel in mind: doing all I could to make tragedy flirt constantly with comedy. It's something that works very well in Deniz Gamze-Ergüven's *Mustang* and in Maiwenn's movies. I like rollercoaster rides between comedy and tragedy. That involved

shooting very long scenes, even if it meant the film only gradually gathers speed. That was the way I found to occasionally fold in the polymorphous violence of daily life. Not so much in its essence, but in the aftermath of it.

Was everything there on the page, or how did the production phase refine your vision?

I wrote the whole film, but I had the support of a script consultant, Raphaël Chevènement, who wrote the TV series *The Bureau (Le Bureau des Légendes)*. That also helped me get a better grasp of the disarray of youth. I'm southern Mediterranean from the south of France (*laughs*). I don't do restraint, I do excess and passion. My no-holds-barred approach was tempered by Raphaël's structured, and constructive, processes. He contributed to bringing realism into a taut narrative. This is a film that, until the very last moment, until ADR, was in flux. Nothing in the production process was ever locked in. For example, I might make a last-minute decision to skip a very talkative scene in favor of a silent moment. I work on instinct. Likewise, until a few months before the shoot, I wanted the main scene of violence to be shown in its unvarnished reality. In the end, I walked back that idea.

A word on the cinematography. What were your aims and approach?

I worked with Fabien Faure, who also shot my short film. My aesthetic approach is hybrid. The references I gave him were, naturally, *Mektoub My Love*, to exalt the Mediterranean bodies, *Sheherazade*, for its grainy, gritty Marseille, and even music videos, such as *Territory* by The Blaze and *Leila* by Acid Arab. I even produced a comprehensive storyboard

with more than a thousand frames that I had also drawn on. The opening scene, for example, is conceived around a seminal work in French art, Delacroix's *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*. That painting has obsessed me for years for its magnificent representation of Oriental women. I reappropriated it and made my protagonists honorable women who make their own decisions, who laugh and deflect, who are not submissive, and who embody a sensual and dignified Orientalism. All despite the misogyny, sexism and fantasies.

What made you choose Marseille as the backdrop for your story?

I grew up an hour's drive from Marseille, in the Vaucluse region. I spent all my weekends there with my four older brothers. We'd go to Le Vélodrome to see Marseille play. To be honest, no other French city could tell this story because, to my mind, Marseille is now the major city in France where North African Jews and Muslims have lived side by side for generations, eating the same dishes, living in the same buildings, going to the same schools and even falling in love.

Does cinema make people free?

I believe cinema makes people free because it holds up a reflection of ourselves that we can relate to, so we go down roads we might have ignored otherwise. Cinema saved my life. It allowed me to stand on my own two feet. To tell stories and overcome ordeals, all with role models of resilience. ■

Paris, August 2026







Cast

Myriam Achour — **MÉLISSA GUERS** • Eva Benkemoun — **AVA BAYA** • Shana Benkemoun — **GABRIELLE COHEN**
Sofiane Achour — **BILEL CHEGRANI** • Mohammed Achour — **SYRUS SHAHIDI** • Fatima Achour — **JALILA TALEMSI**
Abdel Achour — **YOUNÈS BOUAB** • Nawal Achour — **HIBA BENNANI** • Jordan — **BRYAN STORA** • Martine
Benkemoun — **VANESSA LIAUTEY** • Michel Benkemoun — **MICHEL MIMRAN**

Crew

Director **HANAËL EL YOUSFI** • Screenplay **HANAËL EL YOUSFI** with **RAPHAËL CHEVÈNEMENT** and **MIA GRACE BROWN** • Cinematography **FABIEN FAURE** • Editing **JULIEN LACHERAY** • Sound **PAUL LE BORGNE CUEFF, OLIVIER VOISIN, ELIAS BOUGHEDIR, FRANÇOIS MAUREL** • Sound Mixing **THIBAUT MACQUART** • Production Design **JONATHAN ISRAEL (ADC)** • Costumes **PAULINE BERLAND** • Music **THYLACINE & BRAVINSAN** • Post-production Supervisor **JONATHAN LESTER** • Producer **CHARLES GILLIBERT** • Production companies **CG CINÉMA, FRANCE 2 CINÉMA** • With the participation of **CANAL+, CINÉ+ OCS, FRANCE TÉLÉVISIONS** • With the support of **LES FILMS DU LOSANGE, RÉGION PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D'AZUR, MÉTROPOLE AIX-MARSEILLE-PROVENCE** Executive Production **RIF FILM** (Morocco), **VOLTE** (Germany)

Hanaël El Yousfi



Born in Provence in a family of Moroccan heritage, and the only daughter among five siblings, Hanaël El Yousfi initially studied law before making a self-taught transition into filmmaking. In 2021, her first short film, *Mazel Brouk*, which already explored the connections between the Jewish and Muslim communities, was selected and awarded at several international film festivals, from Nazareth to Toronto. Her debut feature, *The Daughters of Abraham*, continues this exploration, portraying two young women – one Jewish, the other from a Muslim cultural background – and the forces around them that seek to keep them apart. ■



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