

AURORA FILMS & SOCCO CHICO FILMS

PRESENT

SUR LA PLANCHE

A Film by Leïla Kilani



SCREENINGS

Thursday, May 12 at 10:00am at ARCADES 2 (Invitation Only)

Tuesday, May 17 at 2:00pm at ARCADES 2 (Invitation Only)

Thursday, May 19 at 2:00pm at THEATRE CROISSETTE (World Premiere)

Thursday, May 19 at 10:00pm at THEATRE CROISSETTE (Directors' Fortnight)

Friday, May 20 at 9:00am at LA LICORNE (Directors' Fortnight)

Saturday, May 21 at 10:30pm at CINEMA LES ARCADES SALLE 1 (Directors' Fortnight)

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TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

MOROCCO/ FRANCE/ GERMANY, 2011, 35MM, 110 MINUTES, ARABIC, DRAMA

CREW

Written & Directed by

Leïla Kilani

Produced by

Charlotte Vincent

Director of Photography

Eric Devin

Sound by

Philippe Lecoœur

Laurent Malan

Editing by

Tina Baz

Sound Editing and Sound Mix by

Myriam René

Music by

Wilkimix (Wilfried Blanchard)

Production Companies

Aurora Films & Socco Chico Films

Co-production Partners

DKB Productions (Emmanuel Barrault – France)

Ina (Gérald Collas – France)

Vandertastic (Hanneke Van der Tas – Germany)

CAST

SOUFIA ISSAMI as BADIA

MOUNA BAHMAD as IMANE

NOUZHA AKEL as NAWAL

SARA BETIOUI as ASMA

SYNOPSIS

In Tangiers' old town, two young Casablancon girls - BADIA and IMANE - live their lives amongst the army of workers who inhabit the city. Peeling shrimps by day in a spotless shrimp factory then turning tricks by night, the girls make extra money by fencing meagre goods stolen from their nocturnal 'clients'. Beyond Tangiers lies the "Free Zone", a symbol for global world sub-contracting. It is Europe on Moroccan land, on African land: close, tangible, yet accessible only to those with a work permit. One evening BADIA and IMANE encounter two other girls, ASMA and NAWAL who are slightly better off than them in that they work in the Free Zone which BADIA sees as a springboard into a more material world.

Strengthened by their new friendship they form what BADIA feels to be a girl power gang where they can conquer all: cosmopolitan cafes, upscale oceanfront houses, better paying jobs and luxury goods -- altogether more opportunities. The girls explore every corner of this new space and make it theirs from dusk to dawn; they never sleep and they don't stop moving. But they encounter other opportunists and gangsters who put even more temptation in BADIA's sights and they are certainly not afraid to give her a run for her money.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

FOR FORTY YEARS...

Tangiers a city with a legendary reputation as a highly exclusive place for more than forty years had turned it into a declining regional metropolis in total economic recession. And then the town began to sprawl. Tangiers, the forsaken town, discarded by the Royals took its revenge. The transit town became a place of transition, a bridge between two worlds.

The town is mutating and growing around the new harbour and the Free Zone. It is one of the biggest building sites of the 21st century, one of the Twelve Works of Hercules, for Morocco. It is Europe on Moroccan and African soil. A snare and a delusion whose alleged aim is to create 250,000 jobs by 2015 and turn the region into Europe's workshop

IN THE BEGINNING ...

During the winter of 2001, I shot my first documentary film, *THE BURNERS' DREAM*, about the illegal immigrants seeking to cross the Mediterranean Sea. I would follow them to the harbour at night. At the crack of dawn, just as they went to bed, the armies of working women would emerge, dense columns of them, closely packed, marching every single day through the town.

These are the hordes of "Inland Morocco", the women who settled down on the hills in the outskirts of the town and whose energy, drive and looks stood in stark contrast to the dreams and expectations of the burners.

At the crack of dawn, they set off and walked through this landscape looking like any other Moroccan city suburb: blocks of raw concrete walls, closed iron shutters, unfinished shacks which are an eyesore on the bare slopes of the hills. A landscape full of holes – muddy in winter and dusty in summer- over which the wind blows unabated and from which the sea is nowhere to be seen. A landscape in which you forget that the harbour opens onto the sea and the ocean and that you are in Tangiers.

This pattern is characteristic of the transformation of the town.

I started to talk with these girls. Their obsession is to get a stable job with a fixed contract in a factory and to hold on to this status, whatever the cost. Their fear is to work at a stall, be hired on a day to day basis, be like the others, picked by an employer to carry out one particular chore.

They talk of the Free Zone as if it were Europe, endorsing the official rhetoric. In this respect, they differ from the men – they will not burn. They don't believe in burning. In their view, the Free Zone is clean, made of glass, a real technopole which they describe with great visual force. When I first came back I looked at it as they did.

OF SHRIMP AND TEXTILE GIRLS

The working women break down into two categories: the "textile girls" and the "shrimp girls." The textile girls are easier to approach. Being a shrimp girl is, in their view, worse than damnation. It's not a matter of money – a shrimp girl can make more money than a textile girl.

It's a question of status. The shrimp girls are paid by the piece. They still belong to ancient days – the days of alienation. Self-assertion and independence come with hourly wages. But the worst thing is the smell. It's unbelievable to hear them describe how the shrimp girls smell. "When they walk along the harbour, their smell is stronger than that of the trucks!" Which is totally untrue. But it's true that the unbearable smell lingers on. They say that when they stop working, it takes six months to get rid of the stench. They don't have a shower at home. They live in very tiny, often windowless places. Their home is often very pretty and very tidy. But the smell is pervasive.

The shrimp girls are punk-like. You end up being a shrimp girl when you have been kicked out of everywhere else. But mind you, the shrimp factory is also the first place that welcomes you when you first get to Tangiers. "Don't ever remain more than three months there, otherwise you're screwed. When you start pulling through, when you learn how to really peel the shrimp and when you become good at it, you're screwed," they say.

This goes for everything: when you make 100 dirhams a day, which is a small fortune, you're screwed. This is absolute subversion. The money will kill you.

THEY ARE YOUNG GIRLS...

For me, not only do these girls symbolize Morocco's transformation but a much wider, global change. These young girls change the city when they get there. They relate to space, to themselves and to time in a new and completely different way. Their self-assertion is totally new, but not ideological.

These waves of people drawn to Tangiers are reminiscent of California in the 30s and 40s, against a backdrop of the recession hitting the whole of Africa.

... BUT FREE-SPIRITED

They get there without their relatives, full of incredible energy and drive. They rely on their instinct and intelligence to get by. They are actually free but they don't make a song and dance about it. The others may think that they behave in a contradictory fashion. But everything makes sense for them. They want to enjoy life even if it comes at a cost.

They take hold of new spaces. No place is off-limits. Some of them are waitresses, although this job was a male preserve only a short while ago. As a matter of fact, they don't regard their relationships with men as prostitution. For them, it comes down to "wangling."

They're called "wangers." A wangler is an amazing human being created by seventy years of Moroccan history hustling to get by, living from hand to mouth, walking a thin line, carrying on being resilient, assertive and full of fighting spirit. They proclaim, "We're here." The four girls of the film, Badia, Asma, Nawal and Imane, are little "wangers." They struggle for survival. They're just

working girls and quite on the level. "Working" involves scrambling for money, transforming everyday materials, cashing in on opportunities, dedicating themselves to the others and getting paid for it.

They go from one place to another, change clothes and don't give up on anything. These girls challenge all the Orientalist representations of Arab women that are so overbearing: the Oriental woman at best oozing sexuality because she must do belly-dancing and at worst living in submission.

LANGUAGE

They speak a very peculiar Moroccan language – the language of the streets of today's Morocco. It's a variegated language because although the grammar is Moroccan, it is mixed up with all the dialects spoken in the country, with made-up languages, with Berber, French, English, Spanish... It is a constantly changing language based on poetry and on the ability to consider the world in metaphorical terms. More than a language, it is a lifestyle, a stance that gives them away as city dwellers and emancipated people. It is a bit like a certain kind of slang, which may be very coded when spoken in city projects but less so when it spreads to other neighbourhoods. People there are very good at chit-chatting.

To prepare for the role, I asked Soufia to listen to rap music, to Quran poetry, to the rhythm of traditional storytellers, to the sound texture of Morocco's ancient oral lore... To echo the language of the film, it was like a flow of slam poetry – a kind of hotchpotch of various references.

A TRUE STORY

The film is based on a true story. In 2005, I enjoyed reading the Moroccan tabloids. There was a lot of hype about a new phenomenon - the growing number of female criminals. A group of four girls who allegedly worked in a factory – although this remained unclear – spotted guys in cafés and robbed them. A murder occurred. This inspired me to write a project and then I asked Hafed Benotman – a crime novel writer who's also robbed a few banks – to join forces with me. I didn't exactly choose to write a film-noir movie – it was an all too obvious option.

A FILM NOIR CITY

I've always thought of Tangiers as a film noir city. It unquestionably has to do with how you relate to the city. It has to do with the literary tradition, with the quality of the visual unity, with the role of violence... This city conjures up imaginary mafia figures and glamorous heroes. The particular relationship with time you feel when you're there creates a state of constant strain. It is a shady city with dingy neighbourhoods. There's something over-the-top and profoundly romantic about this city. But then again, I wanted to use the fact that it is very difficult to get into the Free Zone, that it is like a checkpoint, a barricaded stronghold. For me, this is as a very forceful film-noir motif. I enjoy watching film noir movies. It helps you to let off steam and be playful.

CASTING

I met 320 girls in Tangiers. We passed around flyers on beaches, in cafés, in market stalls. We aired announcements on the radio, we created a Facebook page and we posted things online... Just everybody in Morocco came by – people from all walks of life. Girls came with their parents, which would have been unthinkable twenty years ago. Taboos have disappeared – you can feel the influence of the Fame Academy show. No actress was chosen just for her own sake. What mattered

was the four girls together. The girls we picked all relied on intuition in their approach to work, without overdoing it.

PREPRODUCTION

We did screen tests, we had a long preproduction process in Tangiers, I showed the girls movies so that they could understand what I liked. I began with Barbara Loden's *WANDA* because it's a free-spirited piece of work and because it features a totally subversive character. It's extremely skilled and yet it has this gritty, inventive quality that I like so much, with an amazing sense of space and time. I know that most people disagree with me on this, but I find *WANDA* very funny.

Actors had to be focused and deliver their lines on cue to match the frantic pace of the film – which is highly choreographed. To stick to the constant movements – which define the film – we did a lot of work on the actors' understated performances, on their voice range, on their phrasing, on their movements, on their physique.

We trained them to be actresses even off-screen, to count their steps without anyone else noticing it, to catch the light, to speak on cue, depending on the environment and the noises all around...

SHOOTING IN THE CITY, WITH THE CITY

Ever since Matt Damon came to Tangiers to film *THE BOURNE IDENTITY*, you can't shoot freely in this city. We couldn't afford it and anyway what I found interesting was to let the girls loose on the market. To begin with, the people from the souk got all worked up. I told them I was from Tangiers and that they couldn't keep a hometown girl from shooting in the streets of Tangiers. They started laughing and they liked the idea of a Tangiers girl filming them. I gave the phone salesman five minutes to learn his lines and we did the scene with him. This is how movies from the early 70s were made in New York City and the same goes for neo-realist films. I felt like I was trying to pump out the energy from the city by unleashing the girls there.

BEFORE THE REVOLUTIONS

The Arab revolutions didn't take place over one spring season. This generation is my generation. You can find behaviour patterns, and the same desire to put an end to the individual alienation we've suffered from for forty years. Illegal immigration is just the tip of the iceberg – and probably the least glamorous and most obvious one. This is nothing but the self-assertion of people saying, "We can't take it anymore because we cannot live in those conditions and we cannot have a decent life in this particular environment." In Tunisia, or in Egypt, entrepreneurs and lawyers didn't come to the fore, but they played a key role. These are people who just want to do business and who say that they cannot carry on working with corrupted systems. In the same way, our generation can no longer take the profoundly black-and-white view of Oriental countries locked in dictatorship – as if we were naturally bound to become despotic. "Kefaya!" "Enough!" is the most heard phrase in the Arab world.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Born in Casablanca in 1970, Leïla Kilani has always dreamt of becoming a clown. She shares her time today between Paris and Tangiers. She started out making acclaimed documentaries in 2000 including *TANGIERS*, *THE BURNERS' DREAM* and *OUR FORBIDDEN PLACES*.

SUR LA PLANCHE is her first feature film.

"I don't steal – I get my money back.

I don't rob – I get my stuff back.

I don't deal – I do business.

I don't prostitute myself – I invite myself.

I don't lie: I'm already what I will be. I'm just ahead of the truth – my truth."

(Badia, the film protagonist)