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رقية ROQIA

A FILM BY YANIS KOUSSIM

France, Algeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia | 2025 | 89'

World Premiere

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Logline

As violence intensifies in a city and the possessed speak in an unknown tongue, the disciple begins to fear the worst.

Short Synopsis

In 1993, after a car crash leaves Ahmed amnesiac, he returns to his village, where nothing feels familiar – neither his wife nor his children. Ahmed's youngest, frightened by his bandaged face, fears him deeply. Each night, strange visitors whisper litanies in an unknown tongue. Who are they? And why does his so-called friend, the neighbour, make him feel so uneasy?

In the present, an ageing Raqi battles Alzheimer's. As possessed people speak in foreign tongues and violence rises, Ahmed fears regaining his memory, while the disciple fears that his master's decline may unleash an ancient evil.



Synopsis

In 1993, after a car crash leaves Ahmed with amnesia, he returns to his village where nothing seems familiar – neither his wife nor his children. His youngest child, disturbed by Ahmed’s fully bandaged face, harbours a deep fear of him. Each night, mysterious visitors torment Ahmed, whispering litanies in an incomprehensible language. Who are these strange figures? And why does his so-called friend, the neighbour, make him feel so uneasy?

In the present day, an ageing Raqi (a Muslim exorcist) struggles with Alzheimer’s disease. His forgetfulness and erratic behaviour alarm his disciple. As violence intensifies in the city and the possessed speak in an unknown tongue, the disciple begins to fear the worst. While Ahmed, in the past, dreads regaining his memory, the disciple, in the present, fears that his master’s decline will unleash an ancient evil.

Director's Statement

As a child of the 1980s, I was fortunate to grow up in Sétif, a city that was relatively spared from the horrors of the civil war during the 1990s. But like many others in Algeria, my family was deeply affected by the violence. My great-uncle was kidnapped and released after being raped at the age of over 70. My another uncle was shot dead. Though years have passed, the trauma of Islamic terrorism still remains. It never left. Insidious, it lingers, seeping into our lives and casting a shadow over our existence.

While Algerians were being massacred daily in the 1990s, the question “Who is killing whom?” made headlines in some international media. But for us, it was clear who was killing whom. Terrorists were massacring Algerians, period. What kept us awake at night, though, was, “Who is who?” Who were these terrorists, and above all, why did they turn on us? And how do we deal with all this? Should we internalise it? Expel it? Make a film out of it?

To paraphrase Jean-Jacques Rousseau, man is fundamentally good, thus evil – whatever form it takes – does not come from him but from elsewhere. No truly ‘human’ being could commit the horrors that have been carried out throughout history: from Nero in antiquity to the inquisitors, slave traders, colonisers, Nazis... and more recently, the religious terrorists of the 1990s in Algeria or the Middle East. That is what I call the absolute evil.

I began imagining a film in which the story would be infiltrated by this ‘absolute evil’, a force that would turn human beings into monsters. While working on the script for *Roqia*, without initially intending to, I realised I was writing a horror film. The genre imposed itself on me, as it was the only way my imagination could attempt to make sense of such violence. These Islamist terrorists could only have been possessed by the absolute evil... the devil.

Director's Statement

The first question I asked myself when writing *Roqia* was: how to film violence? Victims of violence experience it head-on. So the answer came naturally: it had to be filmed head-on. In my view, it is only by confronting violence directly, and identifying its perpetrators, that we can hope to stop it. Filming violence as it is inflicted and endured means showing the truth. Only truth heals, repairs, opens a path toward a form of peace.

Roqia (the Arabic term for 'exorcism') explores a deep-rooted fear that runs through Algerian society: the persistence of violence among us, which has never been exorcised. The film opens with a massacre, the triumph of this absolute evil that spreads and invades the characters' lives. What was done – or left undone – in the past echoes through the present and threatens the future. In *Roqia*, if the future is uncertain, the past and present coexist in a tense duality, linking two timelines that grapple with memory: Ahmed desperately seeks to recover his past and discover who he is, while the disciple fears that his master-exorcist may lose his head... and his humanity!

Blood plays a key role in *Roqia* as the carrier of evil. Beyond the gore – which I intend to keep in the background – it is through blood that evil flows from one person to another. It is no longer life-giving but marked by terror and violence, and thus made fit to host evil. Following the trail of blood in *Roqia* is how we locate the evil and where it moves. The characters in *Roqia* will not face horned demons with fiery eyes and goat hooves. Furniture won't move on its own, and no one will levitate in the air. All of that is unnecessary, as terrorists are real... Even if we never see them clearly, they remain an invisible and insidious threat running through the entire film. The horror my characters experience will be amplified, by contrast, through a rigorously realistic mise-en-scène, one that is inherently grounded in reality, far from any stylisation.

Terrorism has spread across the globe. Whether it was the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in the 1990s, Al-Qaeda in the 2000s, or Daesh in the 2010s, no one really knows who these God-fearing fanatics are, or where they come from... But doubt always persists – or is even manipulated – regarding the role of certain governments. Between then and now, in Algeria and elsewhere, violence, terror, and doubt have only changed form and mutated, like a curse we cannot shake.



Yanis Koussim - Director

After training at La Fémis, Yanis Koussim directed several short films, including *Khouya* (awarded at Locarno and Amiens, and part of the Official Selection at Clermont-Ferrand) and *Khti*.

He later contributed to the documentary *A Summer in Algiers: the Night*, premiered at the Palais de Tokyo, and co-wrote the screenplays of *I Still Hide to Smoke* by R. Obermayer as well as *El Zahia*, the next feature of Adila Bendimerad and Damien Ounouri.

He is the founder of Plateau19, a collective of filmmakers advocating for independent cinema in Algeria.

Selected Filmography

2008	Khti (short)
2010	Khouya (short)
2025	Roqia (feature film)

Farès Ladjimi – Producer

Supernova Films

Born in 1976 in Tunisia, Farès Ladjimi has been producing films since 2007. Working through both his French and Tunisian production companies, he is committed to supporting unique emerging filmmakers in expressing their cinematic visions. He is particularly dedicated to discovering new voices from the MENA region.

To date, he has produced or co-produced more than 15 feature films. Farès is a member of the ACE network, and many of his films have premiered at internationally renowned festivals such as Cannes, Venice, Berlin, and Toronto.

Credits

Cast

Ali Namous	Ahmed
Akram Djeghim	Disciple
Mostefa Djadjam	Raqi
Hanaa Mansour	Waffa
Lydia Hanni	Selma
Abdelkrim Derradji	Abdelkrim

With the friendly participation of
Adila Bendimerad

Crew

Director / Screenplay	Yanis Koussim
Delegate Producer	Farès Ladjimi
Line Producer	Auréa Douis
Director of Photography	Jean-Marie Delorme
Sound Engineer	Régis Boussin
Costume Designer	Jean-Marie Miretè
Production Designer	Saad Ouled Bachir
Casting Director / 1st AD	Fouad Trifi
Editors	Sarah Zaanoun / Maxime Pozzi-Garcia
Sound Editor	Cyprien Vidal
Direct Sound Editor	Romain Huonnic
Mixer	Antoine Pradalet
Colourist	Marine Lepoutre

A Supernova Films production
In co-production with 19,
Mulholland Drive



Instagram

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