

TESSALIT PRODUCTIONS & MIRAK FILMS PRESENT

# CHOUF

A FILM BY KARIM DRIDI



OFFICIAL SELECTION  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
special screening

# SYNOPSIS

**Chouf:** Means “look” in Arabic, but it is also the name and role of the watchmen in the drug cartels of Marseille. Sofiane is 20. Brilliant student, he comes back to spend his holiday in the Marseille ghetto where he was born. His brother, a dealer, gets shot before his eyes. Sofiane gives up on his studies and gets involved in the drug network, ready to avenge him. He quickly rises to the top and becomes, the boss’s right hand, Réda. Trapped by the system, Sofiane is dragged into a spiral of violence...



# INTERVIEW KARIM DRIDI

## How did this film adventure start?

*Chouf* is the last chapter of my Marseillaise trilogy. With the first film in the series, *Bye-Bye*, shot in 1995, I discovered Marseille cinematographically. Twelve years later I shot *Khamsa*. Coming back to Marseille was important for me, to see how the city had changed and how I had changed in relation to it. *Khamsa* allowed me to meet gypsy children and adolescents from the north districts. The filming experience was so strong, so enriching from a human standpoint, that seven years later I had to come back to Marseille to make *Chouf*.

## Why?

Because every day we hear about the macabre list of youth from Marseille's districts who have killed each other with Kalashnikovs; some of them I've known since the making of *Khamsa*. I told myself I had to return to Marseille and make contact with them, spend time with them, listen to them to better understand.

So I moved to Marseille, because I couldn't make a film in the very heart of this city in any depth, I couldn't film in these districts and the young people residing there, without living in the city myself. That was the first thing I did. The second was to observe in the field how the drug network operates, from the top of the organization to the bottom.

## How did you choose the actors?

I wanted to assign the roles to youth who live the life I describe in *Chouf* every single day. For a two-year period I led workshops on acting, on playing a role with them and wrote the film script at the same time. The casting came naturally with a group of young people. A film "troop". For the role of Sofiane, the hero, I saw 1000 kids, but finally I chose a young guy from Marseille who is enrolled at the city's theatre conservatory, Sofian Khammes. But this being said, the idea was not to attempt to make a naturalist film showing the

people of these districts as they are. The idea was to take them elsewhere, into the world of cinema, into a film. Otherwise I would have made a documentary.

## Without opting for a naturalistic approach, the film does reveal very detailed work on observing and imitating the gestures of these youth.

The idea was to be as authentic as possible, to follow them, respecting their gestures/behavior, their way of taking hold of one another, of touching each other, hitting each other, putting their arms around the necks of those they want to dominate, etc. The workshops helped me capture their physical violence, their language. I adapted myself to them and they adapted themselves to the camera, to the language of cinema. For me, this dimension was essential for the film.

## Where does the title come from and what does it mean?

It wasn't the title I had in the beginning. I had found a more conventional, a more generic title: *Caïds* (The Kingpins). And then Rachid Bouchareb, one of my producers, suggested *Chouf*, and I liked it immediately because *Chouf* has a double meaning. *Chouf* means "look" in Arab and also means "the one who looks, who spies", and therefore means "the spotter, the watchman, the sentinel". In the drug networks of Marseille, the police call these youth "the spotters". But before this word was used by the French police, it was used by French soldiers in Algeria, who called the "fellagas" who watched them, "choufs". So it's a word that entered the language of the French army and by extension spread to the French police. And what's funny is that even though it's an Arabic word, the youth in the north districts never use it because the police does. They found another word, a Quebecois Anglicism: "jobeur" from "jober", which can be translated by "do a job". In Marseille, the word "charbonneur" (marijuana seller) is used to refer to someone who works for the "charbon", i.e., the drug network.

With the word *Chouf*, we are also saying: “look at what’s going on in our districts. Look, I’m going to show you something you don’t see every day.”

**Is that why the film starts with a shot of the backs of the necks of the characters as they look down on their district from a viewpoint above it?**

The film starts with shots of spotters posted on rooftops. It’s a way of saying: “no one enters the projects with impunity”. The projects are an enclosed space; they’re a ghetto. These districts are a little like the antechamber of prison, places where thousands of people are packed together, a logical hotbed of criminality because they are a concentration of misery and intolerable injustice.

**Understand and get to know these young people: is that the raison d’être of your film?**

I made this film to speak of the social determinism that rules us all. Most of these youth were never allowed to study beyond the regulatory age, never took a vacation, never had parents who had any or took time for them, in short, never had the ordinary life of the average French person. These youth were born into an environment from which it is extremely complicated to extricate oneself, even when some reach a higher level of education. My hero is a young Frenchman of Maghreb origin who’s an outstanding student, who’s been lucky enough to have parents who spent time with him and helped him, and who attended business school, but who was born in a district that is called “difficult”. As soon as he goes home, he is brought back to his condition and it’s nearly impossible for him to escape it, to resist the fate that it implies.

**But you don’t look for social excuses for the actions of your hero. He bears his part of individual responsibility.**

We all do. In the film, it’s the women who say this to the hero: his sister, his mother, his fiancée. They urge him to take the train, to go back to school, to build a life elsewhere, like a voice saying to him: “don’t stay here, don’t go there, don’t follow that path”. The main character makes choices, with all the consequences they entail. His feeling of injustice is so strong that he is obliged to remain in his district to do justice himself.

**Would you call *Chouf* a genre film, somewhere between thriller and western, between social portrait and suspenseful intrigue?**

I am all for mixing cinematographic genres. The film is both a social statement and entertainment. I want the film to speak to everyone. It’s up to each individual to take what he/she wants from it... In speaking of genre, the film is a mixture of western and thriller. It’s for this reason that the film has been shot in cinemascope, one of the codes for the ample, Romanesque directing of a genre film.

**And Marseille is particularly suited for this?**

When you add up the Poitou-Charentes region of France and Djerba (the two places that I come from), you get Marseille. It’s the place in the world where from a civic, cultural and human standpoint I feel the most comfortable. But Marseille is far from perfect. I asked myself from what angle I should look at this city, the cradle of racial intermixing, and at this youth born of the immigration of which the city is composed. These wild, rebellious, delinquent, free youth who are somehow affiliated with Jean Genet, bent on transgressing the world. A youth that guns itself down every day in fratricidal murders for drugs. Thanks to my film, *Khamsa*, which these young people have seen, I had access to places where no one enters, I was allowed to listen to things that cannot be listened to because it’s impossible to enter a district without disturbing the drug supermarket, where thousands of euros change hands every day. To be tolerated in these districts, I didn’t go to the police, because the police would have done nothing for me; I worked to be accepted by specific persons who tolerated my presence in their territory. Without that, it would have been impossible to shoot a film like *Chouf*.

**Marseille is also synonymous with the sun. Is *Chouf* also a duel in the sun?**

I’m Mediterranean, I love the sun. For *Chouf*, I naturally thought of Greek tragedy. It’s for this reason that the locations where the murders are committed are among the most beautiful sites of Marseille and its heights. There’s a Hellenic and grandiose aspect in the decors, so that the powerful twists of Greek tragedy can take place. The decor of the film could not be situated only in the concrete core of the districts.

**The music, like the decor, participates in the film’s lyricism.**

For the opening credits there’s a rap by Casey, a song composed for the film called “*Quartier maître*” (key district\*). It enters the subject without any ambiguity. After that, we forget the rap. I wanted to avoid putting it everywhere. The original soundtrack of the film, composed by Chkrrr, distances itself from urban music and approaches melodies that are deliberately lyrical, and thus cinematographic to back the tragic frame of the film. A music that’s alive, that breathes, that is full-bodied, almost a requiem.

**Being at Cannes today: an end in itself, a victory?**

Being selected for the Cannes Festival is so very important because these youth are going to walk up those famous steps. The north districts of Marseille are storming the red carpet at Cannes! The message is very, very strong. These young people are going to show how talented they are and that their talent has brought them to the Croisette, to stardom! That’s the most important thing for me. They deserve it, they have earned it and I have the feeling that I’ve done what I had to do.

\**Quartier maître* also means *Quartermaster*



# FILMOGRAPHY

## KARIM DRIDI

2016 **CHOUF**  
Official Selection, Special Screening, Cannes 2016

2014 **QUATUOR GALILLE** 52 min  
Premier prix du Festival MediMed 2014

2009 **LE DERNIER VOL**  
Festival of São Paulo - Festival of Carthage 2009

2008 **KHAMSA**  
Festival of Locarno 2008 - Festival of Toronto 2008

2003 **FUREUR**  
Festival of Berlin 2003

1998 **HORS JEU**  
Prix d'interprétation au festival de Locarno pour Rossy de Palma  
Directors' Fortnight, Cannes 2000

1996 **CITIZEN KEN (KEN LOACH)** 58mn - Arte

1995 **BYE-BYE**  
Official Selection, Un Certain Regard, Cannes 1995  
Prix Gervais, Prix de la jeunesse

1994 **PIGALLE**  
Official Selection, Venise 1994  
Prix Michel Simon pour Véra Briole et Francis Renaud



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| MORTS VIVANTS | 4.90€ |
| FROMAGE       | 4.90€ |
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# CAST

|                     |                                     |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Sofiane             | <b>SOFIAN KHAMMES</b>               |
| Reda                | <b>FOUED NABBA</b>                  |
| Rachid              | <b>OUSSAMA ABDUL AAL</b>            |
| Marteau             | <b>ZINE DARAR</b>                   |
| Najette             | <b>NAILIA HARZOUNE</b>              |
| Gatô                | <b>FOZIWA MOHAMED</b>               |
| Le blond            | <b>MOHAMED ALI MOHAMED ABDALLAH</b> |
| Kevin               | <b>TONY FOURMANN</b>                |
| Slim                | <b>MOURAD TAHAR BOUSSATHA</b>       |
| La mère             | <b>HATIKA KARAOUI</b>               |
| Le père             | <b>SLIMANE DAZI</b>                 |
| Le libanais         | <b>SIMON ABKARIAN</b>               |
| Leïla               | <b>MYRIAM SCHAETSAERT</b>           |
| Inès                | <b>CELYA ZELMAT</b>                 |
| La mère de Marteau  | <b>JAMILA FARAH</b>                 |
| Le frère de Marteau | <b>RYADE BERRACHED</b>              |
| Crac-Crac           | <b>TAREK KHALDAOUI</b>              |
| Youness             | <b>KAMEL GHERNAIA</b>               |
| Farouk              | <b>SID AHMED MOKDADI</b>            |
| Rodolphe            | <b>CHRISTIAN MAZZUCHINI</b>         |
| L'arménien          | <b>REMI PEDEVILLA</b>               |



# Crew

Script **KARIM DRIDI**  
Director **KARIM DRIDI**  
Line Producers **JEAN BREHAT, RACHID BOUCHAREB ET KARIM DRIDI**  
Productrice exécutive & associée **MURIEL MERLIN**  
Directeur of the photography **PATRICK GHIRINGHELLI**  
Editor **MONIQUE DARTONNE**  
Original Score **CHKRRR - JEROME BENSOUSSAN**  
**CASEY**  
**KOFS**  
Mixing **JEAN GARGONNE**  
Sound editor **CHRISTOPHE VINGTRINIER**  
Sound Engineer **PIERRE ARMAND**  
1<sup>st</sup> director's assistant **LUIS BERTOLO**  
Cast **EMMA SOISSON, CORALIE AMADEO**

Set designer **YANN MERCIER**  
Costume designer **KARINE SERRANO**  
Director of production **JACQUES REBOUD**  
Régisseur général **ERIC VEDRINE**  
Chargée de production **LUCIE BOUILLERET**  
Directeur de post-production **CEDRIC ETTOUATI**

A production  
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DOC & FILM INTERNATIONAL  
**IN CANNES: BOOTH RIVIERA H2**

13 rue Portefoin  
75003 Paris, France  
Tel: +33(0)1 42 77 56 87  
Fax: +33(0)1 42 77 36 56  
sales@docandfilm.com  
**www.docandfilm.com**

DANIELA ELSTNER:  
+33 6 82 54 66 85  
d.elstner@docandfilm.com

HANNAH HORNER:  
+33 7 88 63 82 26  
h.horner@docandfilm.com

EMMANUEL PISARRA:  
+33 6 77 91 37 97  
e.pisarra@docandfilm.com

GORKA GALLIER:  
+33 6 30 99 72 06  
g.gallier@docandfilm.com

SUZANNE NODALE:  
+33 6 81 70 18 90  
s.nodale@docandfilm.com

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