

YESTERDAY THE EYE DIDN'T SLEEP

A film by Rakan Mayasi
2026/100min/Poetic Drama
Arabic/Belgium, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia

Atata
Rakan Mayasi

present

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LOGLINE

In a valley veiled by fog and tribal codes, two sisters walk into the night not as daughters, but as offerings — where blood, memory, and silence attempt to keep the fire from spreading.

SYNOPSIS

In the quiet fog of the Bekaa Valley, on the border between Lebanon and Syria, someone sets fire to a truck, and with it a spark of trouble spreads through a tightly woven Bedouin community. The young Gamra is gone—maybe hiding, maybe running—and her cousin Yasser takes to the roads to find her. The deeper he looks, the more he runs into ghosts, old grudges and the slow, burning logic of revenge. Back home, his sisters, Jawaher and Rim, are chosen to make things right. They are not asked, they are offered. One is calm, the other resisting, but both know how quickly girls can be traded for peace. The days pass. Wood is cut. Wool is washed. Eyes are cast downward. And yet everything shifts beneath the surface: a secret song, a nervous goodbye, a lipstick smudge in the dark. This is a film about what happens in the quiet, between fields, behind curtains, inside vans. It is about women who carry too much, men who speak in codes and a land that holds its breath, waiting for something to end...or begin.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My late grandmother's story —being forced into marriage at fourteen —had stayed with me since childhood. It shaped, in a quiet and persistent way, my sense of injustice and my sensitivity to lives shaped by forces beyond one's control.

Creating *Trumpets in the Sky* in 2020 became a first step toward engaging with that memory. The short film, conceived as a tribute to her, opened a door for me —both emotionally and artistically —toward a more intimate and poetic form of storytelling. It revealed the possibility of a *cinema* where reality, fiction, and myth coexist, and where atmosphere and presence carry as much weight as narrative. This experience naturally led me to extend that exploration into a feature-length work.

I returned to the Bekaa Valley, where these traditions still lingered, not to confront them, but to observe them from within. Having grown up feeling at a distance from the patriarchal structures around me, I approached this film with a desire to understand rather than to oppose. What interested me was the space between belonging and estrangement, and the ways individuals move within systems that precede them.

Working with non-professional actors, immersed in their own environments, allowed the film to unfold with an intimate and unfiltered presence. Their gestures, silences, and hesitations carried a fragile authenticity that could not be constructed. Our role remained discreet, allowing reality to shape the film as much as any written direction.

Within this setting, I was drawn to the place of women in moments of tension and unspoken conflict. I found myself wondering how a woman navigates her fate within structures that often deny her voice, and what forms of agency can exist, however subtle or unseen.

The film gradually moved away from narrative certainty toward something more instinctive. Drama softened, giving way to duration, to landscape, to the quiet weight of time passing. The connection between bodies and their surroundings became central, as did the emotional undercurrents that resist language.

In the end, what emerges is less a story than an experience—one grounded in simplicity and attentiveness. The film settles into a space where emotion, presence, and the poetry of the image could exist on their own, without the need for resolution.

ABOUT THE BEKAA VALLEY AND BEDOUIN CULTURE

Bekaa Valley

The Bekaa Valley is a wide, fertile valley in eastern Lebanon, stretching roughly 120 km long and around 16 km wide, nestled between the Mount Lebanon Range to the west and the Anti-Lebanon Mountains to the east. Geographically it's part of the Great Rift Valley system and serves as one of Lebanon's primary agricultural regions, irrigated by rivers like the Litani and Orontes.

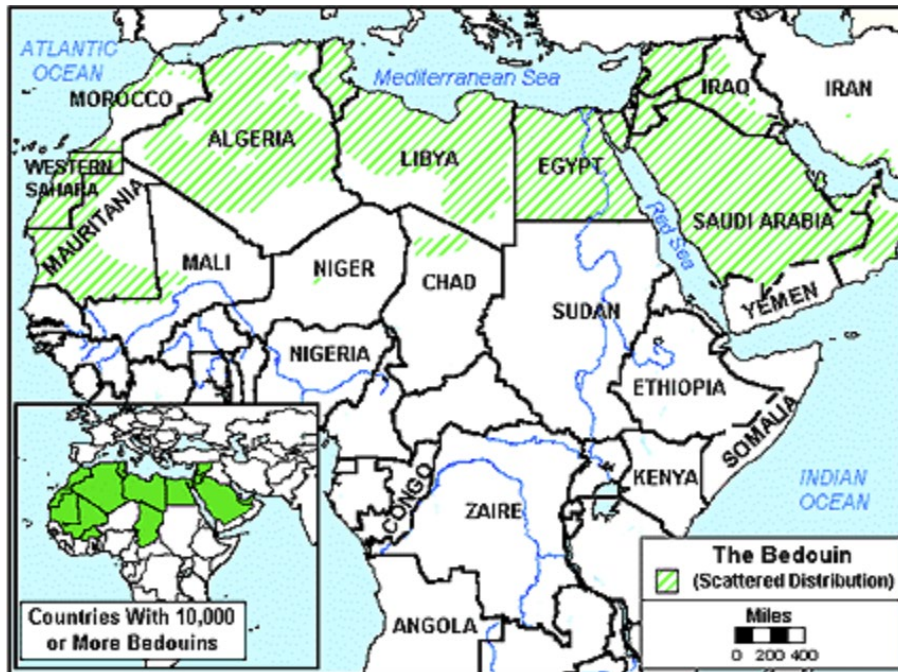
The valley borders Syria and because of this it's a crossroads of cultures and histories, with landscapes ranging from fertile plains to semi-arid grazing lands.

The eastern edge near Syria has historically been a zone of movement, trade, and, in recent decades, displacement and insecurity linked to regional conflicts — including spillover from the Syrian war and its associated population movements.

Who are the Bedouin?

Bedouin are a primarily nomadic Arab, pastoralist population inhabiting desert regions across the Middle East and North Africa, originating from the Arabian Peninsula. Known as "desert dwellers," they traditionally live in extended patriarchal families, specializing in camel, goat, or sheep herding, though many have transitioned to settled life. This community has inhabited the valley for hundreds of years, even before the borders of these countries were drawn.

Bedouin are spread out



Bedouin in Lebanon often face social exclusion and political marginalization — many lack full citizenship and access to state services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure, making them invisible in national governance structures. Their villages frequently aren't recognized on official maps, and their traditional customary systems exist alongside (and sometimes outside) formal state institutions.

Tribal and Kinship Structures

Tribal ties and extended kinship are foundational in Bedouin communities and can shape social obligations, disputes, and conflict resolution. These norms often intersect with modern legal systems in complex ways. Understanding local clan or family affiliations is crucial for grasping why actions by one individual (like the story of Gamra) ripple through the whole community — in tightly woven tribal contexts, a single offense can trigger larger processes of honor-based responses.

Conflict, Honor, and Reconciliation

In many tribal and rural societies across the Levant, honor, reputation, and retaliation play key roles in social order. What one person does can affect the honor of entire families or clans. Practices of compensation or reconciliation through marriage, negotiation, or social mediation are traditional ways of “setting things right,” even if in modern contexts this can clash with formal law. *(Note: while detailed scholarship specifically on honor and feuds among Bekaa Valley Bedouin is limited, this is a well-recognized theme across tribal societies in the region.)*

Honor is a central value in Bedouin culture, and it is often connected to family reputation. Family members, especially women, are expected to uphold this honor, and violations can lead to serious consequences, including blood feuds. The honor of a woman, her chastity, and her role in the family are considered particularly important.

Patriarchy

Bedouin society is traditionally patriarchal, with men holding most leadership positions, while women's roles are primarily centered around family, household, and community. However, women can be seen as powerful figures within their households. As a woman ages, her status in the community increases; for instance, a grandmother is highly respected, with the men of the village kissing her hand to receive her blessing.

Women are respected for their roles as mothers and caretakers but are often subjected to traditional gender roles. Yet, many women, especially in modern times, have challenged these roles, contributing to the family's livelihood, especially in rural settings.

Marriages are often influenced by family decisions, serving to strengthen social and tribal bonds. While the practice of bride prices has become less common, it may still occur in some cases, with families sometimes offering daughters as part of resolving conflicts or reinforcing alliances. In some Bedouin traditions, women can be "offered" as a form of settlement to end a dispute or resolve a conflict (as seen in *Yesterday The Eye Didn't Sleep*). However, this remains exceptional and rare today.

The Mountains

Mountains are essential to the life, culture, and survival of the Bedouin tribes in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon. These highlands provide critical grazing lands for livestock, especially during the dry summer months when the lower valleys become arid. The Bedouins engage with both the Mount Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountain ranges, using the high altitudes for their herds. Historically, the mountains have also offered refuge, protecting tribes from external authorities and allowing them to preserve their independence. In this way, the mountains have always been both a practical and protective space for the Bedouin way of life.

The seasonal movement between the plains and mountains also serves an important ecological function, with the Bedouins' herds helping to fertilize the land. These mountains are not only significant for their resources but also hold deep cultural, spiritual, and religious value. Sacred sites like Jabal El Sheikh (Mount Hermon) are integral to the Bedouins' identity and heritage. Though some groups have become more settled, the mountains remain central to their pastoral and cultural practices.

The range of mountains that stretches between Syria and Lebanon further illustrates the Bedouins' relationship with this landscape. These mountains form a natural route, allowing Bedouins to travel freely between the two countries, often without the presence of state authority. In Bedouin culture, borders hold little significance: they are European historical and contextual constructions that do not align with the Bedouins' worldview. This perspective reflects their ongoing use of the mountains as unimpeded pathways, crossing back and forth between Lebanon and Syria without regard for the divisions created by modern state borders.

DIRECTOR'S INTERVIEW

Q: YESTERDAY THE EYE DIDN'T SLEEP, your first feature, closely follows in the footsteps of your 2021 short film TRUMPETS IN THE SKY, particularly in its style and themes. Could you talk about how you developed the feature, and what your personal connection is to the story and the community it portrays?

The film grew very organically from *Trumpets in the Sky*. That short was, in many ways, a first gesture—a way of approaching something deeply personal without fully articulating it. My grandmother's story had always been present in me, not as a narrative I wanted to recount, but as a quiet weight that shaped how I look at the world.

Returning to the Bekaa Valley felt less like a decision and more like a continuation. I wasn't trying to build a story around the community, but to spend time within it, to observe what emerges when you don't impose too much. The feature became an extension of that process—more patient, more open, allowing the film to find its own rhythm.

My connection is both intimate and distant. I come from this world, but I've also always felt slightly outside of it. That distance allowed me to approach it not with judgment, but with a kind of attentiveness—trying to understand how people inhabit these inherited structures, rather than explain them.

Q: The Bedouin community in the film reflects an awareness of traditional gender roles, while also engaging with contemporary questions around marriage and courtship. How did you approach balancing these cultural traditions with more modern perspectives?

I didn't approach it as a balance to construct. It was already there, within the community itself. What interested me was precisely that coexistence—the way different temporalities overlap without necessarily any resolving.

Tradition is not static, and modernity doesn't arrive as a clean break. They exist in gestures, in conversations, in hesitations. Rather than framing them in opposition, I tried to remain close to how they are lived—often quietly, sometimes contradictorily.

The film doesn't seek to position itself. It observes how individuals move within these currents, how they negotiate space for themselves, even in very subtle ways.

Q: You trained with renowned Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami and most recently with the late Hungarian master Béla Tarr. How has their work influenced yours? Are there other filmmakers that inspire you?

What I carry from both is less a style than an attitude toward cinema.

From Abbas Kiarostami, I was deeply affected by his way of trusting reality —his ability to create space for ambiguity, and to allow the viewer to participate in the film rather than be guided through it. There's a lightness in his work that holds something very profound.

With Béla Tarr, I encountered a different relationship to time. His films insist on duration, on staying with an image long enough for something else to emerge — something that can't be scripted.

Both of them, in very different ways, taught me to step back. To resist the urge to control meaning.

'The Tree of Wooden Clogs' by Ermanno Olmi has been an important reference while conceiving the film and studying the way it was made was such an important insight.

There are other filmmakers I feel close to—Chantal Akerman, for her attention to space and interiority, or Bahman Ghobadi, for the way he allows the visible and invisible to coexist, and his working with non-professionals. And Hou-Hsiao Hsien, for his intelligent film language and naturalistic performances. But these influences remain quiet—they're more like companions than references.

Q: The visual poetry of the film feels like a cinematic language, with landscapes taking on a presence almost like characters themselves. Can you talk about your approach to storytelling?

For me, storytelling begins with presence rather than plot.

I'm interested in what exists before something is named —before it becomes narrative. Landscapes, bodies, silences... they all carry meaning, but not in a way that needs to be translated into words.

The landscape, especially, is not a backdrop. It holds memory, time, and a kind of permanence that contrasts with the fragility of human experience. Filming it is a way of listening.

So the film gradually moved away from telling something, toward allowing something to be felt. It became less about progression and more about immersion.

Q: Can you talk about your experience working with non-professional actors and without a script? Choosing this approach, what do you think comes out of the performances and the filmmaking?

There is a vulnerability in that process, for everyone involved.

Without a script, we are all slightly exposed—we don't fully know what will happen. But that uncertainty creates a different kind of attention. The actors are not performing something external; they are drawing from their own rhythms, their own silences.

What emerges is often very fragile. A hesitation, a glance, the way someone occupies space—these are things that can't be constructed. They can only be received.

Our role as filmmakers becomes more about creating the conditions for something to appear, and then recognizing it when it does.

Q: You favor wide shots, long takes and moments of silence. Emotions are conveyed not with words but through facial expressions. The celebratory scene of the wedding party is energetic and joyful in contrast. Can you talk more about the scene?

That scene came almost as a release.

Throughout the film, there is a certain restraint—emotions circulate, but they rarely find expression. The wedding creates a moment where something collective takes over. The energy shifts, bodies move differently, voices become louder.

But even within that joy, there are undercurrents. It's not a rupture from the rest of the film, but another layer of it. Celebration and tension coexist.

I was interested in that ambiguity—the way a moment can be both luminous and heavy at the same time.

Q: YESTERDAY THE EYE DIDN'T SLEEP is selected as part of Un Certain Regard in Cannes, this is quite an honor and a triumph for a debut feature - what do you hope audiences will take away from the film?

With Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival, of course there is gratitude.

The film doesn't offer conclusions, so I don't expect a single response.

If anything, I hope it creates a space—however brief—where viewers can slow down, and perhaps connect with something that is difficult to articulate. A feeling, a memory, a question.

Something that stays, quietly, after the film ends.

BIOGRAPHIES + HEADSHOTS

RAKAN MAYASI - DIRECTOR



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Rakan Mayasi is an independent filmmaker (Director, Screenwriter & Producer) from Palestine, born in Germany and currently based in Brussels. He studied Cinema and Psychology in Lebanon and then received film training with Abbas Kiarostami in South Korea at the Asian Film Academy. He has an MA in Filmmaking from LUCA School of Arts in Belgium. He has made several short films. His previous film ROUBAMA was an official selection at the Locarno Film Festival in 2012. His short film BONBONÉ tackles the phenomenon of Palestinian sperm smuggling from Israeli jails and has world premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2017 - it is the recipient of 35 Best Short Awards. Rakan recently underwent film training with Béla Tarr in Budapest.

TRUMPETS IN THE SKY is a short film exploring Cinema in visual poetry, metaphor and mythology. It won the honorable mention for Best International Short Film at TIFF 2021. His last short film is a political fantasy-thriller entitled THE KEY that is centred around the

Palestinian right of return. It world premiered at SXSW. Rakan just wrapped his first feature film YESTERDAY THE EYE DIDN'T SLEEP. Shot entirely with non-professional actors and without a script, it will make its World Premiere in Cannes' Un Certain Regard in May.

FILMOGRAPHY

SEA SONATA (2010)

ROUBAMA (Poetic Drama, 2012)
Locarno Film Festival (2012)

BONBONÉ (Political Erotic Drama, 2017)
Toronto International Film Festival (2017)

TRUMPETS IN THE SKY (Poetic Drama, Fiction/Non -Fiction, 2021)
Toronto International Film Festival (2017)

THE KEY (Political Fantasy Thriller, 2023)
SXSW (2023)

JENNIFER RITTER, ATATA



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Atata is a Belgian production company committed to films that explore poetic and experimental forms of storytelling. We focus on stories at the intersection of fiction and reality, bringing to life singular worlds and bold, sensitive characters.

Atata was founded and is led by Jennifer Ritter, who holds a degree in Arabic and German literature. She speaks five languages and has extensive knowledge of the Middle East and South America, bringing an intercultural sensibility that shapes the company's artistic vision.

In addition to producing Atata's films, she also collaborates with Belgian and international partners as a co-producer, executive producer, and line producer. Her recent partners include renowned production companies such as Wrong Men, Kwassa Films, and Sequel Prod.

Atata's first feature film as lead producer, *Yesterday the Eye Didn't Sleep* by Rakan Mayasi (debut feature), will premiere in the Official Selection of the Cannes Film Festival 2026, in the Un Certain Regard section.

Supported by the Light Production Fund of the Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, the film was entirely shot in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, in spring 2025.

FILM SPECS

Title: YESTERDAY THE EYE DIDN'T SLEEP

Year: 2026

Country: Belgium, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia

Language: Arabic

Runtime: 100min

CAST

Rim Al Mawlah

Jawaher Al Mawlah

Yasser Al Mawlah

CREW

Written & Directed by

Director of Photography

Editor

Art Director & Wardrobe

Sound Recordist

Sound Designer

Re-recording Mixer

Colorist

Composers

Co-writers

Rakan Mayasi

Pôl Seif

Louis De Schrijver

Lea Chammas

Bassam Lebbos

Lama Sawaya

Philippe Charbonnel

Loup Brenta

Abed Kobeissy & Ted Regklis

Wahid Ajmi & Pôl Seif

Producers

Atata, Rakan Mayasi