

Croisement Gaza – Boulevard Saint-Germain

6 x 45'

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<https://www.saisonsdeculture.com/evenements/croisement-gaza-bd-saint-germain/>



Directed by Jacques Ouaniche
and co-written with Lise Barembaum

Produced by Noe Films (Laure Balzan), Blackpills, and OCS

https://www.canalplus.com/series/croisement-gaza-bd-saint-germain/h/22507002_50002

It was during the 2023 La Rochelle Fiction Festival that Saisons de Culture had the pleasure of meeting the entire team behind the series Croisement Gaza-Bd Saint Germain, the story of "love at first sight between two young Parisians, Yaël and Youssef. After falling in love and separating, they meet again a few years later on the border between Gaza and Israel, in a tunnel more than 8 meters underground, face to face, their weapons pointed at each other.

The initial idea for a series is the spark that gives birth to the story. For director Jacques Ouaniche, this spark came from the question: "How can we imagine that people who hate each other without knowing each other could love each other? (...) What would happen if, locked in a tunnel, you met the love of your life and you were supposed to hate them?"

Writing a series is also about how you look at a story. Croisement Gaza-BD Saint Germain is a four-handed collaboration with screenwriter Lise Barembaum, who brings her perspective as a French woman but also as an Israeli. Don't bother looking for famous names among the main actors; Jacques Ouaniche has opted for emerging talent, which brings a real freshness to the series.

To fully immerse ourselves in the world of this series, what better way than to ask the actors what touched them most about this story and their characters:

For Tess Boutmann, who plays the lead role of Yaël Mendes, "It's a character I understand very well. I haven't had her experiences, but (...). Ten years ago, half of my family immigrated to Israel (...). I have about ten cousins who have been there since they were 12/15 years old, and very quickly they did their military service. They disappeared for three years. I quickly developed a fear of this military service that they couldn't talk about. (...) In fact, they left for the same reasons as in the series, without necessarily having experienced it in the same way. They felt fear in their neighborhood and they left with it. I understood why they left, and it's also linked to my character. As a woman who was also starting boxing, I felt this need to reclaim my body, to become strong, to be aware of my own power and to be able to defend myself (...), it's something I understood deeply.

I thought this storyline was well written, it moved me and I really wanted to defend this character (...) There were even times when we discussed it among ourselves during rehearsals. For example, in the breakup scene, which is the only time the characters have a political conversation, we all found ourselves defending our characters (...) I have a lot of experience with this story of a Jewish-Muslim couple, it's a subject that interests me, and when I was cast, I was writing about it. "

Adib Cheikhi, alias Youssouff Daloud, Yaël's lover "(...) I studied international relations, so naturally, this is a fascinating subject for me. When we did the auditions, I didn't have any character descriptions, just the scene. So I started by introducing myself and telling my whole life story without making anything up. And when Jacques (Ouaniche) introduced me to the character, I suddenly saw my life! He was quite similar to me in that he was deeply empathetic and sincerely believed in the possibility of changing things, improving them, and also in his romantic relationship."

Jacques Ouaniche "(...) Of course it's fiction, but when you find actors who are similar to the characters you've imagined, it's really wonderful."

Victor Taieb, alias Yoni Cohen "Yoni is a bit racist and hot-headed, whereas I'm a fairly calm, friendly person and I don't think I'm racist, at least I haven't heard anything about it. So it was all the more enjoyable to play a character who is radically different from me and to discover emotions that weren't mine and that I had never experienced before. It was exciting. I had a lot of experiences thanks to this shoot. I thought the pitch was great, this love story between two enemy brothers. (...) It's cool that we're addressing this subject, that we're breaking the taboo around this war (...) The subject is so powerful and so close to our hearts, I think we all wanted to embrace it, to treat it with care and not take it lightly."

Noémie Bernstein, alias Kelly Roeznfeld "She is a young woman who is not physically involved in the military. For her, it's about defending a point of view, journalism. So she finds herself caught up in something that is completely beyond her imagination (...). Her character evolves. She discovers the strong woman within her, her journalistic spirit in her own life, which makes the role powerful (...). I am French-Israeli and I did my military service in the field, unlike my character. (...) We're used to seeing military series with more adult actors, so we can't imagine ourselves as young people, whereas here, it could be our life, it could happen to us (...) I was very lucky that Jacques trusted me because it's my first role (...) everything was very intense, like filming underground...

Laure Balzan "(...) We filmed in a World War I tunnel, discovered three months earlier in northern France, in Compiègne, in a secret location (...), where there were still remnants of tin cans, shoes... It was cleaned up and cleared of mines... (...) We set up a whole camp around this hole in the middle of the forest so that our actors and director could thrive in this tunnel that stretched as far as the eye could see (...). It put them in the right frame of mind (...)

Fannie Collette "I play Emma, who is a student at Sciences Po. I also studied at Sciences Po in Lille before becoming an actress. It was a pleasure to be able to film on the premises of my old school (...) We address the theme of social diversity in the grandes écoles, which is what my character, who is very snobbish and lives in her own bubble because she comes from a very privileged background, talks about. Having experienced this myself, I remember that my classes were not very socially diverse. It was an interesting topic to explore. "

Marine Jouhet, alias Marie Mendes "This is a role that particularly touched me. She is a mother who completely loses her footing after her daughter is assaulted. Her husband blames her, thinking it's her fault. She then takes refuge in the Jewish religion and finds a family in this community (...) To play this role, I immersed myself in the Jewish religion, which I knew nothing about. (...) It was also an incredible shoot in Lille and in Compiègne, the town where I grew up and where my mother lives. I go there every weekend. "

Carla Besnaïnou, alias Léa Mendes "I play Yaël Mendes' little sister. Basically, Léa is a cheerful young woman, full of life, who acts like a big sister to her older sister (...) and who, after a violent attack, finds herself in a wheelchair, lifeless and inanimate. It's a disaster that befalls the family. (...) I agree with what Tess said. I deeply believe in Jewish-Arab love. It's such an important subject that we don't talk about enough, or only touch on superficially (...)"

Jacques Ouaniche "Above all, it's a story about French people with French people, otherwise it makes no sense. They are children of the French Republic. One is Jewish, the other Muslim. Yaël joins the army after what happened to her sister, after discovering anti-Semitism. Being extremely privileged in her life, coming from a secular family, she didn't even know what anti-Semitism was, and neither did Youssouf. He lives in the beautiful neighborhoods of Paris (...) We also tried to break down clichés (...)"

Laure Balzan "These are contemporary issues affecting young people, a kaleidoscope of different perspectives on the world. What's also interesting about this project is that the OCS channel gave us artistic freedom in our choice of languages. (...) We still have four or five actors in the series who learned Palestinian Arabic to speak in the tunnel, (...) they worked hard, were coached, and this contributes to the authenticity of the series. (...) The director of photography was Anglo-Israeli, the technical team spoke English, the actors spoke Arabic, we had a Russian script, a Ukrainian camera assistant, another team in French... it was a real Tower of Babel! (...) And all this bubbling away together produced these powerful images and beautiful characters that burst forth under Jacques' direction. It was a real shake-up! (...)"

Adib Cheikhi "It even went beyond the series because afterwards, I stayed in Israel to discover the country and the Palestinian territories (...). And much of what Youssouf experienced happened to me later in life, as if filming had continued after the series (...)"