

REVIEW: 'Dirty Difficult Dangerous' tells a poignant love story in Beirut



VENICE: French Lebanese director and journalist Wissam Charaf's latest outing at the Venice Film Festival "Dirty Difficult Dangerous" falls somewhere between comedy and tragedy.



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The director weaves an intimate but hopeless romance between an Ethiopian migrant housekeeper, Mehdiya (played with wonderful conviction by Clara Couture), and a Syrian scrap metal collector, Ahmed (an interesting Ziad Jallad). They indeed lead a

dirty and difficult life in a Beirut wracked by bloody strife. It is perhaps this setting that gives a novel twist to their story with both discovering solace and beauty in each other amid the violence.



Clara Couturet stars as an Ethiopian working as a housekeeper for an elderly couple. (giornatedegliautori.com)

Ahmed's life has been hellish — hit by a shrapnel from a bomb in Syria, he flees to Beirut where things are no better. Mehdia lives in the midst of people who are not too pleasant. The mistress of the house where Mehdia works, Madame Leila who is essayed by the divine Darina Al-Joundi, is not exactly evil, but she is suffocatingly strict. It is an environment that makes the maid's life torturous. Leila's husband is a retired army colonel suffering from dementia while the couple's son, Fadi (an impressive cameo by the director himself), employs another domestic worker, a sweet Bengali girl who does not speak a word of Arabic.

It is a motley group indeed. While Mehdi's existence is uneasy because of the restrictive household, Ahmed has his own demons to grapple with. His life is slowly turning into a lifeless prison of iron and steel. Martin Rit's photography work elevates the script to an ethereal high. Written imaginatively by Charaf along with Mariette Desert and Hala Dabaji, the story is one of moving humanism, of how two individuals who live in a particularly difficult scenario yet create their own little paradise that gives them joy and hope. A wondrous score with the right blend of traditional Levantine music and Ethiopian chanting gives the movie the right kind of mood to let it fly above the squalor of its setting and transform into an unforgettable love story.
