

## **Incendies: Fictional, yet Powerful and Realistic Story**

What role do women play in war movies? Taking place in a Middle Eastern country, the movie *Incendies* by Denis Villeneuve goes back in time to tell the story of a woman called Nawal Marwan (Lubna Azabal) from her youth to her death. Without taking the side of any camp during the war, *Incendies* tells a touching story filled with surprises and illustrates the amazing thrive of a strong woman whose goal is to be free one day.

After being stroked by the play of Wajdi Mouawad, Denis Villeneuve left the theatre with the conviction that he should make a movie out of it, according to Thomas Dawson. Yet, the filmmaker preferred to focus more on the story itself than on the war during which it takes place. In fact, he confessed that “it was really what the play was saying about family that attracted [him] so much.” (Jenkins). That also explains why the country in which the protagonist’s story takes place is not mentioned. However, according to Mark Jenkins, it is easily identified as Lebanon because of the civil war that took place in it from 1975 to 1990. Moreover, the violence shown throughout the movie was not meant to represent Lebanon’s civil war and its context. Instead, according to G.S. Perno, violence was used as a way to bring realism to the story, which is something Denis Villeneuve often does in his movies, especially through car crashes. For example, in *Incendies*, he uses a bus explosion as an illustration of the atrocities that Nawal witnessed as a person who lived under a civil war. Through his exceptional artistic style, Denis Villeneuve was able to bring an incredible masterpiece to Quebec’s cinema.

Firstly, “Incendies” presents to its viewers an astonishing story that does not leave them indifferent. It makes them feel strong emotions of sadness and shock. After finishing her studies

and escaping a bus explosion, Nawal starts working as a private teacher for one of the war's leaders. At first, she seems completely normal. It even gives the audience the impression that after all what she went through, she is finally starting to have a normal life. Yet, it did not take a long time before everything gets twisted. The audience discovers that she was in fact working there because she had as a mission to kill the leader. Furthermore, near the end of the movie, a completely unexpected thing happens. While she is at the pool with her two kids, Nawal sees the three dots that were tattooed on her first son that she had to abandon just after his birth. This tattoo was meant to make it easier for the protagonist to find her son later. At that moment, the viewer may think that Nawal is finally going to be reunited with her son. Instead, the story takes an amazing, unexpected turn. When she looks at the face of the man, Nawal sees nobody else but the one who turned her life into a nightmare. In fact, she sees "Abou Tarek", her rapist. Thus, the brother and the father that Nawal's kids, Simon and Jeanne, were told to find are the exact same person. All though this plot twist is extremely sad and shocking, it cannot be denied that it was extraordinarily done. Throughout the movie, the events often take an unexpected turn that makes the viewer more interested in knowing what will happen next.

Secondly, Nawal is shown as a strong woman who went through a lot of suffering during her life. Her ability to adapt to every situation she goes through is beautifully illustrated throughout the movie. At the beginning of the movie, she makes the choice to give her son to an unknown woman right after his birth with the hope that she will find him one day. As a single mother who was pregnant from a man who is considered an enemy and without being married, she knew that keeping her baby with her will bring her and him problems, because what she did was considered shameful at that time. Moreover, her extremely great patience is shown when she is put in prison. She was known as "the woman who sings". Her singing was a way for her to stay strong and handle all the suffering. On top of that, after being raped in prison and becoming pregnant, she

could have abandoned. She could have starved herself into death or find a way to kill herself to stop all the suffering, especially that she knew that her kids will be born in that awful place and that their survival and their future was uncertain. Instead, she decided to continue fighting. This was not the first time that a strong woman is depicted in one of Villeneuve's movies, and according to Sam Fraser, this concept is completely part of the director's style.

In conclusion, as a result of society standards and misogyny, women are often put aside or considered weak in war movies. Yet, Denis Villeneuve was able to show the opposite through the impactful story of a woman, and her courage during times of chaos. Through raw images that perfectly depict Nawal's suffering, Denis Villeneuve succeeded in giving an idea of what people go through during a war even when they are not soldiers. Denis Villeneuve was also able to present the story through different perspectives; one of someone who went through the civil war and one of people who grew up in Canada (the protagonist's kids). Nevertheless, what was his intentions behind this choice?

## Bibliography:

- Dawson Thomas. "Blood lines: Denis Villeneuve on *Incendies*." *bfi.org*, <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/interviews/blood-lines-denis-villeneuve-incendies>. Accessed on April 2021.
- Fraser, Sam. "5 Traits of Denis Villeneuve's Signature Filmmaking Style." *tasteofcinema*, <http://www.tasteofcinema.com/2018/5-traits-of-denis-villeneuves-signature-filmmaking-style/>. Accessed on April 2021.
- Jenkins, Mark. "Incendies' filmmaker takes on war in a fictional, but very real, Middle East." *washingtonpost*, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/incendies-filmmaker-takes-on-war-in-a-fictional-but-very-real-middle-east/2011/04/18/AFGPco3G\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/incendies-filmmaker-takes-on-war-in-a-fictional-but-very-real-middle-east/2011/04/18/AFGPco3G_story.html). Accessed on April 2021.
- Perno, "G.S. Directors' Trademarks: Denis Villeneuve." *cineline*, <https://www.cineline.com/movie-news/movie-stuff/directors-trademarks-denis-villeneuve/>. Accessed on April 2021.
- Scott. A.O. "Scavenger Hunt for Family Secrets Across Time and Geography." *nytimes*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/22/movies/incendies-based-on-wajdi-mouawad-play-review.html>. Accessed on April 2021.