



KARAAJ FILMS PRESENTS

# قمة الشدة UNDERDOWN

A FILM BY SARAH KASKAS

WRITER & DIRECTOR SARAH KASKAS PRODUCER LILIANE RAHAL | KARAAJ FILMS CO-PRODUCER INES MEIER | LICHTUNG  
EDITORS SIMON EL HABRE & SARAH KASKAS CINEMATOGRAPHER JOE SAADE SOUND DESIGNER JAWAD CHAABAN SOUND  
RECORDIST RAYAN AL OBEIDYINE POST-PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR LILIANE HANBALI RE-RECORDING MIXER FLORENT  
LAVALLÉE | DB STUDIOS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH HAL ORIGINAL MUSIC COMPOSER SARAH KASKAS



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PRESS KIT

# UNDERDOWN

(Lebanon/Qatar/Germany, 2018, 72min)

A film by Sarah Kaskas



Supported by

مؤسسة الدوحة للأفلام  
DOHA FILM INSTITUTE



World Premiere at IDFA - International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam 2018





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## LOGLINE

Moving to Beirut's anarchic rhythm, "Underdown" follows the struggles of a Palestinian cab driver who lives in his car, a homeless Syrian kid and a Lebanese woman and her family. Through a pulsating journey filled with harsh realities and an unbreakable sense of humor, they convey glimmers of hope in the darkest of places.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

Under Beirut's umbrella of corruption and chaos, Palestinian taxi driver Abu Hussam strives to reconnect with the love of his life and dreams of a permanent shelter. The runaway Syrian boy Ali survives on the streets, waiting for the return of a missing friend and Lebanese woman Samya is racing to provide for her mother's surgery who is going blind from glaucoma. „Underdown" follows them on a pulsating journey through their daily struggles living with poverty. Stuck in dark loops of violence, social injustice and alcohol abuse, they connect in their search for hope, freedom and happiness.



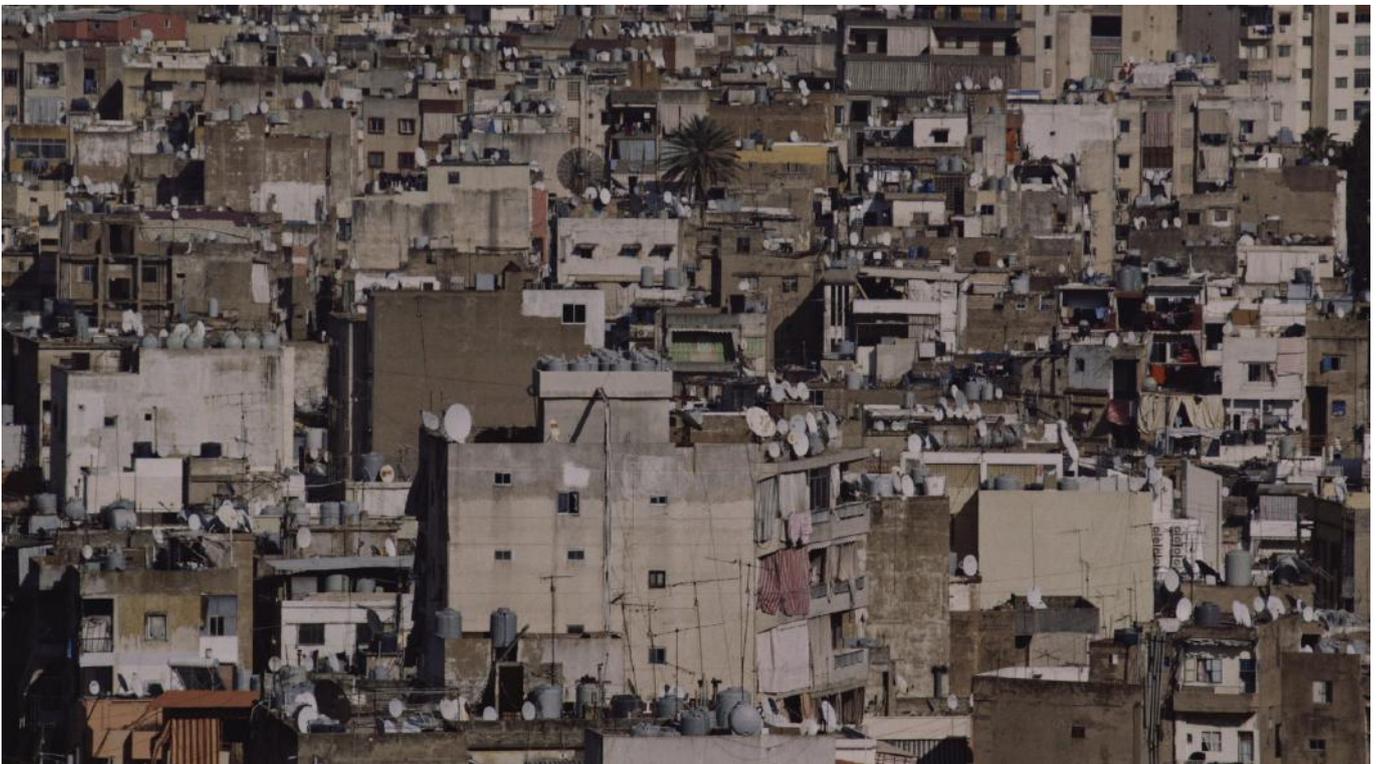
## LONG SYNOPSIS

In the concrete jungle that is Beirut, people suffer at the hand of what's dubbed to be the most corrupt government in the Middle East. Decades of wars have left the tiny city with a crumbling infrastructure, inflation, the poverty line is rising and the conflicts in neighboring Syria have forced over 1.5M refugees to flee into the country.

Abu Hussam is an elderly Palestinian taxi driver who works and sleeps in his car, drinking araq and cracking witty jokes at the city outside his window. He abandoned his family to live alone knowing they're better off without him. Heartbroken from a recent loss of a lover, he struggles to focus on his goal of buying his own car, a shelter for his future.

Eleven year old Syrian refugee Ali has chosen to live alone on the streets, calling them his freedom. He loves the sea and his friend Azzam, who has gone missing, and is constantly waiting for his return. The unmarried Lebanese woman Samya lives with her family in a tiny room. Struggling to make ends meet, Samya tries to care for her mother, who is going blind from glaucoma.

Under Beirut's umbrella of corruption and chaos, "Underdown" follows the three resilient characters on a pulsating journey through their daily struggles living with poverty. Stuck in dark loops of violence, social injustice and alcohol abuse, they connect in their search for hope, freedom and happiness.



## QUOTES FROM THE FILM

### Abu Hussam

They say those who do not work, do not eat. It's true. But no one really dies of hunger. Even an ant finds its food. But it's a hellish life. It's hard, I've tried it. I lived on the streets. One day felt like a month.

I always thank God that I am better off than others by far. Some people are on dialysis twice a week, some have had their arms amputated or legs. So, I consider myself a king even though I'm "underdown", lower than low.

85% of the people in Lebanon, they are sick. And I feel sorry for them. And I am very happy that I am not one of them. Because I know how to live and I am satisfied with myself. And that's how to be happy.

### Ali

I was about 5 years old when I came to Lebanon. We came here by bus and car, my family and I. I have 4 sisters and 2 brothers. My father is dead. I don't remember their names, honestly.

It was me and Azzam. We used to work, eat, swim, drink... and have fun together. But ever since Azzam left, I haven't been happy. I'm still sad. That's why I'm not smiling.

I don't like to live at home. I like to sleep alone and be alone. Here, I can go wherever I want. No one talks to me. But, at night, men shoo me away. They yell at me, they hit me. Yesterday, two guys told me to get into the car with them.

### Samya

My sister in law died young. So you can't blame Elie for doing what he does. He's doing this out of sadness. It's not a normal life. She died... sickness... cancer, sickness, heart, she died. So this guy is drinking out of despair. You can't judge someone because of how they drink.

I take care of myself and my mother. I took her for a checkup. What can I do? It's my responsibility to pay for her surgery. If I have to beg on the streets, I'll get her that surgery.

I'm going to have everything under control. The medicine, the house and everything. I want to change the house, us, everything. God willing, it's part of my plan.



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT SARAH KASKAS

I'm not alone when it comes to feeling both love and hate towards Beirut and its beautiful mess. With the current uproar against a corrupt government and a crumbling infrastructure, it becomes difficult to be grateful for what little we may have. Inequality is not a novel in Lebanon, but the number of people living under the poverty line in Lebanon has risen by 66% since the Syrian conflict.

The protagonists in *Underdown* are living in poverty and are facing conflicts most of us are lucky to never experience. To the outsider, they are pariahs, cast aside as “drunks”, “beggars” or “dirty people”. Overlooked is their resilience, humor and overwhelming hope that drives them forward. Their individual struggles include discrimination, family and identity issues, unemployment, homelessness and alcohol abuse. Capturing the essence of these characters requires trust, respect and honesty. With a sensitive eye level approach and a striking visual language that is inspired by the characters themselves, *Underdown* explores the similarities of these stories, rooted in Lebanon's corrupted government and decades of war.

As a Lebanese filmmaker, I believe the amount of stories at our disposal are limitless but stories of hope are essential. The sarcastic humor the Arab Region is famous for is not only a way of coping with relentless social realities. Humor is also the most relatable way of telling stories that are hard to listen to but need to be heard – and therefore a compelling cinematic strategy of taking back control over our own stories.

## BIOGRAPHIES & FILMOGRAPHIES

### Sarah Kaskas (Director & Editor)

is an award winning filmmaker whose work centers around themes of identity and social issues using dynamic imagery and sounds. She received her MFA in Cinematic Arts in 2011. Her thesis short film, **Fugue** (2011), toured several festivals before being sold to BBC Arabic's 'Alternative Cinema'. In 2013, her animated short film **Wanderland** won an award at the Co-Production Forum at the Stuttgart International Animation Festival and was nominated for the Robert Bosch Film Prize in 2014. In 2016, Sarah co-directed **Bread and Tea**, which opened Iran's Cinéma Vérité festival and also won Best Short Documentary. In 2018, Sarah released her first feature documentary **Underdown** which will have its world premiere at IDFA. **Underdown** won several supporting grants including Doha Film Institute, Rosa Luxemburg and CineGouna Springboard. Sarah currently resides in Beirut and is an Assistant Professor of Film at the Lebanese American University.

### Joe Saade (Director of photography)

is a cinematographer first and foremost. His love of street photography, light and composition informs his work as a Director of photography and filmmaker. Saade enjoys fluctuating between working on big sets and with minimal crews. He loves to collaborate with directors and crews that are passionate about the work they are doing. In his hometown of Beirut, he maintains strong connections with a community of talented filmmakers and producers for independent creative projects.

Saade is currently based in Beirut. He has travelled to the Brazilian Amazon, Egypt, Turkey, Kenya, Oman, the UK and Germany for shoots on documentaries that have ranged from architecture to workers' rights (Adam Sobel's feature documentary **The Workers Cup**), and fictional genres from comedy to drama.

He is highly experienced in all forms of film from TVC and corporate videos to narrative fiction and documentary. His work on short films (including Cyril Aris' **The President's Visit** and Mounia Akl's **Submarine**) has won at regional festivals as well as being selected in international festivals.

### Simon El Habre (Editor)

Born in Beirut in 1975, he obtained his Diploma in Audiovisual Directing from the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (ALBA) in 1998 and graduated from Femis (Paris) in Film and Video Editing in 2000. Since 2001, he has been teaching film and video editing and documentary film-making at ALBA and at Lebanese University. He is also a member of the cultural association for the development of Arab cinema, Beirut DC. Simon El Habre has built a strong reputation in Lebanon and the Middle East as an editor and director. He has edited award winning short and feature fictions and documentary films. In 2008, he wrote, produced and directed a full-length documentary, **The One Man Village**. The movie was highly acclaimed by festivals, press and audiences internationally. It was screened at more than 30 festivals, including Berlinale, the Edinburgh International Film Festival, the Jeonju International Film Festival and Vision du Réel. The film also received the Best International Feature award at HotDocs 2009 and the Special Jury Award at the Dubai International Film Festival 2008. In 2011, he directed his second full-length documentary, **Gate #5**. The movie also participated in many Arab and international film festival.

### Liliane Rahal (Producer, Lebanon)

is a Lebanese producer who has more than 10 years of experience in film production in Beirut and the region. Her work includes award winning TVCs, Corporate films and Documentaries. Liliane pursued her love for photography by teaching a year-long workshop to incarcerated women in Lebanon. This workshop was produced by "Zakira Image Festival" in 2013. Liliane produced and co-directed **Bread and Tea**, a short film revolving around the life of a Syrian child in a refugee camp, which won best short documentary at the Cinema Verite 2016 in Iran. Liliane has recently executed the production of a sci-fi web series **Arabs in space** produced by Cinemoz, which is a first of its genre in the region.

### Ines Meier (Co-Producer, Germany)

worked as a journalist and editor after her studies of Visual Arts in Braunschweig, Germany, and Paris, France. In 2013 she started working as a freelance producer for the Berlin based documentary production companies Perfect Shot Films and Pong Films that both produce documentaries for cinema and television. Their films have been shown at numerous international film festivals including IDFA and Berlinale and have won various awards, including the Grimme Preis 2015 for **We were Rebels** (Perfect Shot Films) and the German Competition at International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, the First Film Award at FID Marseille and the German Film Critics Award for **Schicht/Shift** (Pong Films). Together with Sarah Kaskas and Liliane Rahal Ines Meier was nominated for the Film Prize of the Robert Bosch Stiftung 2017. In 2018, she won the Film Prize of the Robert Bosch Stiftung in 2018 for the Syrian feature documentary **Purple Sea** by Amel Alzakout and Khaled Abdulwahed. With producer Inka Dewitz she recently founded the production platform and collective Lichtung.



## FACT SHEET

### Fact Sheet

English Title	Underdown
Original Title	Tahet El Tahet
Shooting Location	Lebanon
Shooting Format	HD / 16:9
Screening Format	DCP
Sound	Dolby 5.1
Original Language	Arabic, English
Subtitles Version	English
Production Company	Karaaj Films
Co-Production Company	Lichtung
Country, Year	Lebanon/Qatar/Germany, 2018

World Premiere (Netherlands): IDFA – International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam 2018



## CREDITS

Director	Sarah Kaskas
Director of Photography	Joe Saade
Editors	Simon El Habre, Sarah Kaskas
Producer (Lebanon)	Liliane Rahal, Karaaj Films
Co-Producer (Germany)	Ines Meier, Lichtung
Post Production Supervisor	Liliane Hanbali, Wahm Productions
Sound Designer	Jawad Chaaban, One Hertz Studios
Re-recording Mixer	Florent Lavallée, DB Studios in partnership with Hal
Colorist	Belal Hibri, Lucid
Post-Producer at Lucid	Aya Ghosn
Assistant Editor at Lucid	Rita Mounzer
Original Music Composer	Sarah Kaskas
Additional Camera	Bachar Khattar, Elsy Hajjar, Pauline Maroun, Elias Daaboul
Sound Recordist	Rayan Al Obeidyine
Additional Sound Recordists	Sandra Sayej, Bassam Lebbos, Johnny Farah
Location Permits	Julien Atallah, Picture House
Assistant Editor	Samer Beyhum
Key Grip	Rawad Hmymes
Assistant Key Grip	Hadi Hmymes
Production Assistants	Ghenwa Mroue, Pamela Syriani, Ayad Al Cheikh
Translator	Pascale Khoury
Graphic Designer	Rawane Khalil
Camera & Lighting equipment	Platform Studios, Lebanese American University (LAU)

Recipient of a production grant from

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In the context of the Syrian Civil War, MISEREOR is supporting ten projects. These projects contribute towards improving the living conditions of thousands of refugees and disadvantaged inhabitants in Lebanon.



Platforms participated in

"Winner of a post-production award at Beirut Cinema Platform"



## PRESS PICTURES

### Samya



1



2



3

### Ali



4



5



6

### Abu Hussam



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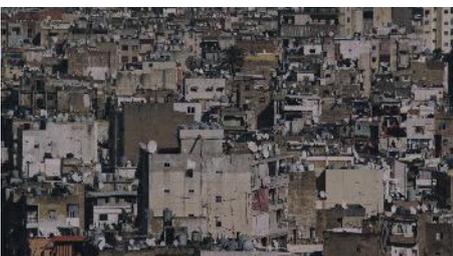


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### Beirut



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For Press Pictures, Screener, Trailer and Interview Requests please contact:



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