

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## The Season of Men (2000)

Moufida Tlatli

### Contents (Overview-Synopsis-Characters-Character Analysis-Themes-Scenes)

#### OVERVIEW

With *The Season of Men*, her second feature, Moufida Tlatli raises awareness on the condition of women trapped in the antiquarian system of patriarchy. Like the film that preceded it (*The Silences of the Palace*), *Season of Men* is not limited to the simple rumination on an unchangeable condition. The filmmaker projects women into a future of possibilities. Shot on location, the film did not meet the expectations set by Tlatli's previous film. However, it did garner some important recognition. Moufida Tlatli and Nouri Bouzid, who co-wrote the film, won the Best Screenplay Award at the 2001 Cologne Mediterranean Film Festival, Tlatli won the IMA Grand Prize at the 2000 Paris Biennial of Arab Cinema, and the film's main actress, Rabia Ben Abdallah, won the Golden Bayard for Best Actress and the ACCT Promotional Award for Best Actress of the South at the same festival.

#### SYNOPSIS

On the Tunisian Island of Djerba, most men leave their families for eleven months to go work in the souk of Tunis. For Aïcha, left in Djerba with her two daughters under the guard of a mischievous mother-in-law, her wish is to join her husband in Tunis. This, he says, will not happen until she gives him a male child. However, when years later she finally has a boy and reunites with her husband, life is not what she expects. Abandoned by her husband with an autistic child to care for, Aïcha decides to return to the island to heal her wounds and give her son a chance to live a fulfilling life.

#### MAIN CHARACTERS

<b>Aïcha</b>		Married to Saïd
<b>Saïd</b>		Aïcha's husband.
<b>Meriem</b>	:	Aïcha's older daughter
<b>Emna</b>		Aïcha's younger daughter
<b>Matriarch</b>		Saïd's mother
<b>Zeineb</b>		Aïcha's cousin and best friend

#### CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**AÏCHA** Conscientious (Dutiful – Defiant – Humiliated – Progressive – Supportive)

This mother has come to terms with the fact that the life she hoped to live by marrying Saïd is a delusion. For her children, however, Aïcha fights for a better life than the one she experienced in her marriage with Saïd and under the watchful eye of her mother-in-law. She believes in the transformative power of education to give her daughters options.

*Dutiful* Aïcha is an obedient wife to her husband and a docile daughter-in-law to Saïd's mother and father. She takes the matriarch's criticism and callousness in stride, without complaining. She hears her mother-in-law's comment that her carpet weaving activity is demeaning, but she ignores the criticism and forges ahead with her work. She sees the matriarch brush off her daughter Emna who brings her a flower to smell, but she feigns not to notice in order to keep the peace between her mother-in-law and herself.

*Defiant* The day after the attack on Meriem, the matriarch decrees that Meriem will no longer go to school. Her decision is more about the dishonor that the attack on the little girl brings to the family than anything else. Defying her mother-in-law's decision, Aïcha replies that no one will prevent her daughter from going to school. So, she personally accompanies her two daughters to meet their teacher, and she arranges for Meriem to have private lessons at the teacher's home. This is Aïcha's only moment of overt opposition to her mother-in-law's dictates. She will not allow anyone to cross the line with her children.

*Humiliated* Aïcha's decision to weave carpets to sell in her husband's store to facilitate their move to Tunis, as well as her opposition to her mother-in-law's desire to take her daughter out of school, earned her the matriarch's hatred. The matriarch complains to her son that Aïcha is disrespectful when he returns from Tunis, and the son subjects his wife to a humiliating reconciliation procedure with her mother-in-law. That night, Aïcha decides to sleep in her children's bed. And the matriarch, who, during her nightly rounds of the compound, finds Aïcha in the bed of her daughters, is convinced that this is the decision of her son to punish Aïcha for her impudence.

*Progressive* To her mother, who wishes her to have a male child in order to be also one day an authoritarian mother-in-law like Saïd's mother, Aïcha answers that she does not envisage this prospect. Saïd's mother is not a model for her to emulate. Aïcha also finds her husband, mother-in-law, and mother's obsession with a male offspring indecent. For her, a girl is as good as a boy. Therefore, she protests her mother-in-law's desire to de-school Meriem in order to make her a wife with no other option than to tie herself to a man for her survival. Aïcha sees brighter prospects for her daughters than those she can envisage for herself, who had abandoned her studies for an unrewarding marriage.

*Supportive* It is not just her husband that Aïcha supports by taking care of their children and by weaving rugs for him to supply his shop in the Tunis souk. Through her domestic work in the villa of Djerba, Aïcha also supports Saïd's parents, especially his disabled father, who requires continuous assistance. The comfort that Aïcha brings to her cousin and best friend Zeineb is also priceless. If, at the end of the film, Zeineb finally finds in the person of Younès a therapy for her psychosomatic discomfort, which the doctors mistakenly diagnose as a purely physical illness, it is thanks to the compassion, complicity, and discretion of Aïcha.

**SAID** Unconscientious (Unreasonable – Insecure – Projecting – Partial)

Pure product of the patriarchy that confers on him privileges of a conqueror, Saïd seeks only to preserve the system which he inherited, even if it means subjecting his daughters to the defects of that system. To perpetuate the antiquated order of male domination, Saïd can count on his mother's loyalty.

*Unreasonable* Aïcha stopped her studies at the age of eighteen to marry Saïd. Wed early, she wants to join her husband in Tunis to be permanently close to him. But for this to happen, Saïd imposes a condition on Aïcha that is irrational. She must first give him a male child, as if she could, with a snap of her fingers, decide what gender her child would be. Saïd does not even realize that his request may never come to realization, and that, consequently, his wife may never join him in Tunis. In fact, she replies that she is not the Virgin Mary, and that for his wish to have a chance of materializing, they must at least live together and not be miles and months apart.

*Insecure* Saïd is an insecure man despite his projection of the contrary. He returns from Tunis after eleven months of absence, and his wife tells him very explicitly what she would like from him: "Saïd, cuddle me, caress me". Unexpectedly, his response is that of an offended man: "What? Who taught you that? Shut up!" Saïd cannot conceive that his wife experiences sensual feelings, unless she has learned them from someone, from another man; unless she cheated on him, which would be the collapse of his masculinity.

*Projecting* Saïd and his brother are womanizers. In Tunis, they do not deprive themselves of leisure outings or female companionships while their wives wait, confined, in Djerba for eleven long months, under the implacable guard of their mother. And yet, as soon as they return, a little is enough for them to accuse their wives of their own turpitudes, for them to project their own moral failings onto them.

Suspecting his wife of infidelity because she dares express her desires is evidence that Saïd accuses her of his own flaws.

*Partial* One sentence that best describes his character is: "I cannot oppose my mother." This means that when it comes to his mother's word against anyone else's, she will always be right in his judgment. Knowing the matriarch's mischievousness against her daughters-in-law, this admission by Saïd is concerning. It means that his respect for his mother clouds his judgment, that the matriarch will always be shielded by him to freely torment his wife. It means that Aïcha cannot count on the support of her husband as long as she resides in Djerba; thus, her insistence to go with him to Tunis.

**The matriarch** Disagreeable (Vindictive –Detached – Obsolete)

A product of an age-old patriarchal tradition that has victimized her, Saïd's mother seizes the opportunity offered by the marriage of her sons to perpetuate the subjugating system of patriarchy and to subject her young daughters-in-law to the suffering she endured as a young bride. Like a penitentiary guard, her implacable gaze never leaves her daughters-in-law, whose gestures and words she closely monitors. However, her victims do not always take her abuse in stride. In the villa of Djerba, where she keeps them confined, the women oppose her with small revolts, which little by little crumble the ramparts of her authority.

*Vindictive* Saïd's mother had an unhappy marriage under the authority of her mother-in-law, who, according to Aïcha's mother, ran her household with an iron fist. Now a mother-in-law herself, she decides to take her revenge by making her daughters-in-law suffer the miseries imposed on her by her mother-in-law. Therefore, she enforces a regime of confinement, chores, and control of expression, movements, and feelings. And when one of her daughters-in-law opposes her irrational decisions, as was the case when Aïcha went against her determination to stop Meriem's studies, she insists that her sons sanction her contradictor to restore her bruised pride.

*Detached* For a grandmother, the matriarch is very distant with her grandchildren. We never see her once take them in her arms and play with them. In fact, she hates their presence by her side. For example, when Emna approaches her and invites her to smell a flower she has just picked, the grandmother tells her to go away. The only moment in the film where we see her hugging one of her grandchildren is when, having forced an examination of Meriem's hymen after her attack to ensure that the child has not lost her innocence, she hugs her, relieved that the honor of the family has been preserved, only to push the child away the next second. Indeed, the matriarch has always hated Aïcha's girls for their gender. Her son wanted a boy, and so did she.

*Obsolete* In a Tunisia in full transition, as the individual experiences of Meriem, Sami, and Emna show us, the antiquarian world of the matriarch is becoming a relic of the past. Moreover, this world is already being put to the test by the rebellions of Aïcha, Zeineb, and Younès, who have chosen to destroy the shibboleth of patriarchy by refusing to partake in its maintenance and continuance.

## THEMES

**SOCIETY** (Patriarchy – Tradition – Transition – Modernity)

*Patriarchy* Life in Djerba is governed by the law of patriarchy, which is represented by Saïd. In Saïd's absence, that law is curated by matriarchs like his mother and his mother-in-law, who make sure that Aïcha does not sidestep man's authority and soil man's honor. And these matriarch-guardians of man's honor play their roles with loyal zeal. Saïd's mother keeps her own daughter and her daughters-in-law in a state of quasi-incarceration. She forbids them to make themselves attractive, to speak to men, to dream and talk of love, to laugh, and to go out without permission. Their daily penitence must be work and wait. Even her daughter Zeineb, whose husband has left her for France the day after their marriage and has given no news of himself for seven years, must remain devoted to her absent husband and wait. When Aïcha complains to her mother of the mistreatment she gets from her aunt, her mother advises her to be patient and get in line, for she has a reward coming at the end of her suffering, the reward of

becoming a mother-in-law one day, who will relieve herself of her burdens, by passing it onto her own daughters-in-law.

One of Moufida Tlatli's favorite themes is the tension between tradition and modernism. In this film, the tension articulates through the protagonists. Saïd, his mother, and Aïcha's mother are the custodians and transmitters of a reactionary tradition under the threat of a modernism represented by Aïcha's daughters. Between these two diametrically opposed poles is a transitional generation represented by people like Aïcha, Zora, Zeineb, and Younès.

*Tradition* The world represented by Saïd, his mother, and Aïcha's mother is that of a radical Manicheanism of two irreconcilable and incompatible realities. These two realities are constituted, on the one hand, by the space and role of man, by his natural and indisputable preeminence, and, on the other hand, by the space and role of woman and by her natural and indisputable inferiority. Saïd, or any other man, is the transcendental leader of this Manichean world. His gesture is divine, and his word has the force of law. When Aïcha, unhappy that he has abandoned her in Djerba to her mischievous mother-in-law, reminds him that she gave up her studies for a miserable life, Saïd insists her that in lieu of her studies, she won the jackpot, a husband. As far as Saïd is concerned, a woman can lose everything so long as she gains a man, she has won more than she lost because having a man is the way to her completeness; a completeness that will come when she gives her man a child in his likeness, a male child. Saïd, thus, sees his marriage to Aïcha as a huge favor to her, of which she must be grateful to him, for he is her only path to salvation, to complete womanhood, especially on this island of Djerba, where divorce is not permitted.

*Transition* Aïcha does not see things this way. She has no intention of accepting all the incongruities of the father's law, of which the matriarch is only the guardian, nor of making another woman suffer the wickedness she suffered, even less of preparing her daughters for a life of anguish under the guardianship of a dogmatic husband. She steals moments of freedom from the matriarch under the cloak of lies and drags Zeineb along, who needs it so much. She rebels against her mother-in-law's attempts to prepare her daughters for a life of submission to an authoritarian husband by taking them out of school. Her daughters will not make the mistake she made, that of quitting school for a man. So, she takes offense and shouts her indignation: "No one will stop my daughters from going to school." For Zeineb, who suffers from a loneliness even more oppressive than hers, Aïcha arranges, by way of a suitable detour, an intimate meeting with Younès, a man in whose eyes one can detect understanding, empathy, and gentleness; a man quite the opposite of Saïd and his brother, a man, who, like Aïcha, Zeineb, and even Zora, who once advised Zeineb to make herself attractive and put an end to her long wait, constitutes a transition from the dogmatic and oppressive regime of Saïd, his brother, his mother and his aunt (Aïcha's mother).

*Modernism* By keeping her daughters in school, by encouraging them to finish their studies, Aïcha passes on to them the baton of the change that she has inaugurated. She gives them the opportunity to have options, to freely choose the paths that they perceive as the ones to their happiness, instead of being allowed only one path, that of patriarchy. Education allows Meriem and Emna to understand that their mother's situation is not the fate of women, and that women have the right to, and can, aspire to other lifestyles. Her mother's experience disgusted Emna concerning marriage but did not instill in her a hatred of men. She desires for herself a life of partnership with a man, which does not necessarily require attachment through marriage. As for Meriem, her mother's experience did not make her hate marriage. She married a man of remarkable tenderness, patience, and understanding. However, her lived experience, her father's psychological abuse of her mother, and the assault she suffered as a child on her way home from school, created a blockage that prevents her from consummating her marriage. This blockage is overcome thanks to the support of her mother and the extraordinary empathy of Sami, her husband, a husband not like Saïd, but a partner who, with her, opens the way to a new era, sounds the death toll of patriarchy, and announces the rising of a new Tunisia.

## **PSYCHOLOGY** (Confinement – Longing – Sadness – Psychosis - Phobia)

*Confinement* During the eleven long months that their husbands are away from Djerba, the women are under the watch of their mother-in-law, who practically holds them prisoner in the villa. They cannot go out of their own volition, nor are they allowed to take care of their bodies, nor to express affection to their children. Aïcha sings and plays with her daughters in her lap, but they quickly scurry to stop their singing and talking as soon as they hear the matriarch coming. The women wax and make themselves beautiful in secret, but they freeze as soon as the matriarch enters the room, for they are forbidden to make themselves beautiful, lest they should attract the gaze of men in the absence of their husbands. Any movement outside the villa's walls must be approved by Saïd's mother. She forbids Zeineb to approach the fishmonger, for fear that her status as a neglected wife should tempt him and pervert her. The matriarch even tries to control the movements of her granddaughters by decreeing the unschooling of Meriem. When Aïcha asks permission to visit her mother, the matriarch demands that she be accompanied by Zeineb, to ensure that Aïcha does not wander off. The irony here is that the matriarch's propensity to control Aïcha's movements by flanking her with Zeineb as a chaperone allows the latter to meet Younès and to undermine her mother's desire that she remain, for the honor of the family, a faithful wife to an absent husband.

*Longing* What the women of Djerba miss during the eleven long months of absence of their husbands, it is not only the embraces in the bed. It is also and above all the possibility to be their wives in full, to share with them long hours of conversations, to cook them their preferred meals, and do their laundry. Zora confesses that she misses her husband's shouting. This lack is so strong in Aïcha that when she accompanies Meriem and Emna for private lessons at their schoolmaster's and waits for them in his studio, she cannot help putting some order in his things, folding his clothes, and making his bed. She even proposes to come and wash his clothes the next time. Her daughter Meriem, who understands her mother's position of emotional vulnerability, intervenes to tell her that next time her father will be home, meaning "wait one more week." Unfortunately, when Saïd arrives, arguments and resentment beset the expectations and dash all hopes of intimacy.

*Sadness* Isolation, waiting and dashed hopes cause sadness in the women. Young Fatma's husband will not be coming to Djerba this year. This means that she and her newborn baby will have to go without him for another year. The idea of her husband's long absence plunges her into a depression that takes away all desire to get out of bed, to feed herself, and even to feed her baby. When Aïcha asks her where she feels pain, she tells her that she can't feel her whole body. Aïcha understands Fatma's pain, which she explains so well to Zeineb who does not understand why a single year of waiting would put Fatma in such a state when she has been waiting for seven years for a spectral face. "She is young," replies Aïcha, as if to say that Fatma understands that the wait will be long, and that it has only just begun.

*Psychosis* Isolation causes psychosis in the women of Djerba. Zeineb has dizziness, headaches, and fatigue. This is because she is desperate for her husband, who left her the day after their wedding for France and never sent news of himself. In the tradition of Djerba, which forbids divorce, Zeineb's life is tied to that of a stranger because, as she says herself, out of timidity, she never dared to look up at her husband on the night of their wedding, and thus never got to see the face of the man to whom she was married. Zeineb spends her days in a deep melancholy, which is only broken by the moments of furtive joy that her friendship with Aïcha and the few hours they both spend weaving carpets for Saïd provide. While Zeineb's body and soul are dwindling in isolation and waiting, her mother can only offer her the solution of spreading her trousseau in the sun, which is getting moldy, forgetting that it is rather the body and soul of her daughter whom she keeps locked up that need a little human warmth, a little bit of masculine warmth.

*Phobia* Meriem, the daughter of chauvinistic Saïd, who would have preferred a boy in her place, and who left his family full of resentment to build another family in Tunis, dragged the symptoms of her isolation and the consequences of being almost raped as a child into her marriage in the form of phobia of sexual reallition. Married for six months, she panics each time her husband tries to be intimate with her. The images she keeps of men are awful. They are those of her violent attacker, of her unempathetic grandfather, who on the day she escaped rape slapped rather than comforted her, and of her absent

father who was never at her side to soothe her fears. Beginning just after her assault with episodes of nightmares and generalized pains, the symptoms of Meriem's discomfort increased with age, jeopardizing her married life. Both her doctor husband and her therapist consider her illness to be more psychological than physical. With the patient support of her husband and mother, and with the help of time, Meriem is able to overcome her demons and have a fulfilled married life.

## **RELATIONSHIP** (Love/Attraction – Domination - Complicity)

*Love/attraction* If divorce is not allowed in Djerba, if the women of Djerba are obliged to tie their lives to evanescent partners, at least they can relieve themselves, heal their bruises with small escapades, small deceptions, even if only subliminally. Thus, Zora flirts with the fishmonger, who was Zeineb's target before her mother, suspicious, called her to order. Thus, Zora suggests to Zeineb to wax and make herself beautiful because you never know, a man could be interested in her, which would make her forget all the restraints of a good girl. Thus, Aïcha asks her mother-in-law to let her visit her mother. And at this escape, where she takes Zeineb with her, Aïcha finds comforting words from her mother and Zeineb finds them from a man. Aïcha has sensed an attraction between Younès and Zeineb. So, on their way back home, where Younès is driving them, Aïcha asks him to make a detour for her to see the tip of Djerba and the ferry she has not seen for a while. This detour she requests is for her cousin Zeineb and Younès to be alone together for a few moments. And so much the worse for the old shrew who waits for them on the threshold of the door that they finally cross at a late hour. The matriarch will never know that Aïcha has facilitated Zeineb's meeting with Younès on the journey back from visiting Aïcha's mother. Nevertheless, as if fate wanted to punish them for affording themselves a little joy, Aïcha and Zeineb return home to discover that on her way home from school, Meriem was almost raped.

*Domination* Saïd's mother is merely the authorized guardian of her sons, who controls their wives' movements for them when they are in Tunis. One scene in the film reveals this well, when late in the evening Meriem and Emna come back from school after having been assaulted. Their grandmother greets them harshly and immediately leads them to their grandfather to punish them. And as the patriarch hesitates to correct Meriem, it is the matriarch who, seizing her husband's hand, slaps Meriem. This is a symbolic gesture of what the woman says to the man the moment she performs her act: "The correction that I inflict on this little girl, it is in your name that I inflict it on her. It is with your weapon that I submit her. It is your authority that I preserve." Aïcha knows that her mother-in-law's authority is only superficial. Behind her, it is her husband who pulls the strings. It is for him that the matriarch works. So, she complains to Saïd about the bad treatment of his mother. When Saïd asks his mother to be less harsh with his wife, she tells him that Aïcha must understand that as long as she is alive, she is the one who gives orders in the house. Thus, the matriarch grants herself, by virtue of her status as mother-in-law, a position of superiority. However, it is a fact that the superiority complex actually hides feelings of inferiority and failure. In modern Tunisia, Saïd's mother's desire to live with her daughters-in-law and to give them a hard life is obsolete and can only hide her failure.

*Complicity* During a visit to her mother, Aïcha tells her about the mistreatment she suffers at the hands of her mother-in-law, her own sister. Her mother explains to her that her sister was herself a victim of an authoritarian mother-in-law, who managed the household with a stick in her hand. Having experienced a difficult marriage run by a wicked mother-in-law, Saïd's mother transferred all her pain to her daughters-in-law when her turn came to oversee her son's household. Thus, instead of breaking the cycle of abuse in which they have been caught for generations, women contribute, on the contrary, to perpetuating it, either by habituation or by displacement, projecting their past frustrations on their daughters-in-law, those easy targets. The sad thing about this is that by doing so, these women become accomplices of patriarchy. Aïcha refuses to partake in the collusion with patriarchy and contribute to the maintenance and continuance of the cycle of women's victimization. Indeed, to console her daughter for the suffering she is undergoing at the hands of Saïd's mother, Aïcha's mother wishes her daughter to have a boy who will bring her respect and later make her a fierce mother-in-law like Saïd's mother. Aïcha refuses her mother's invitation to be a collaborator in victimizing women. She tells her mother that she has had enough with the clamoring for a boy. She wishes neither to have another child after her two girls nor to emulate her mother-in-law.

## SCENES

### LONELINESS OF THE WIVES IN THE SMALL TOWN

**Aïcha wants to go to Tunis** At the age of eighteen, Aïcha is married to her cousin Saïd, a carpet salesman. Like most men of Djerba, Saïd will be going to Tunis for eleven months to earn a living in the souk. Aïcha wants to go with him. She will weave some carpets for him to sell. Saïd does not like the idea of Aïcha working. He believes that as the man he should be the provider. In Djerba, Aïcha lives with her parents-in-law and her sisters-in-law while Saïd is in Tunis. Her overbearing mother-in-law disapproves of her carpet-weaving activities. However, Zeineb, her cousin (who is also her sister-in-law and best friend) enjoys working with her.



### **Aïcha and Zeineb are unhappy**

Zeineb's mother reproaches her with being too close to Aïcha and weaving carpets with her, an activity that is beneath their family. The matriarch advises her daughter, instead, to spread her trousseau in the sun before it gets moldy. Zeineb replies that she has no more hope of seeing her husband, who left her for France seven years ago. On Saïd's first homecoming, Aïcha complains to her husband of the way her mother-in-law treats her. She insists on going with him to Tunis. He reminds her of his condition: she first must give him a male child. Saïd tries to reason with his mother to be less strict with Aïcha, to no avail.



### **Disappointment**

Aïcha gives birth to a girl. There is no joy in the house. Her mother-in-law and her husband are disappointed. Saïd longs for a male child. Aïcha's second child is also a girl. Aïcha loves her daughters and plays with them. Saïd's mother does not love her granddaughters. She is distant and brutal with them. Aïcha finally gives birth to a boy and joins her husband in Tunis, as agreed. However, the boy is not the heir Saïd and his mother have hoped for. Azziz is autistic. Saïd hates him and wants to commit him to an institution, and when his wife opposes him, Saïd abandons his family.





## SEASON OF MEN: LONGING AND ANTICIPATION

**The women wait anxiously for their husbands** Zeineb is depressed and sick because her husband has disappeared and has given no news of himself for the last seven years. The men will soon be returning from Tunis. Fatma, one of the matriarch's daughters-in-law, is sick because her husband has postponed his homecoming to Djerba. She lost her will to get up, feed herself, and breastfeed her baby. Aïcha's girls, too, long for their father. The lonely women of Djerba take interest in the local men under the reproachful eyes of Saïd's mother. Zora, another one of the matriarch's daughters-in-law, tells her sisters-in-laws that she can already smell the odor of men in the air. Zora suggests to Zeineb that she make herself beautiful and available, just in case a man takes interest in her. The women wax their faces and legs, put henna in their hair and on their hands and go to the sea to rinse themselves.



**AZZIZ** Azziz is autistic. Saïd hates him and wants to commit him to an institution, and when his wife opposes him, Saïd abandons his family. Aicha decides to return to Djerba, the small island.



## BACK TO DJERBA

### **Aïcha decides to return to Djerba**

Aïcha's husband has abandoned his family because his wife refuses to put their autistic son Azziz in an institution. Aïcha decides to take Azziz back to the island of Djerba, to a more serene environment. Emna, Aïcha's youngest daughter, goes to her father's store to fetch the keys to the Djerba villa. Saïd complains to his daughter that he is lonely. Emna reminds him that it is he who left the family. Meriem, too, has decided to follow her mother to Djerba. Meriem believes that the distance will help her husband Sami and her put things in perspective. They have been married for six months and she is afraid of intimate relations with her husband. She suffers from frequent headaches and has nightmares because she was almost raped as a child. Aïcha, her son Azziz, her sister-in-law Zeineb, and her two daughters Meriem and Emna arrive in Djerba.



**Meriem leaves** The stay in Djerba is therapeutic for all those who decide to return. To the joy of Aïcha, Azziz's fears and temper tantrums have subsided. He is calmer and has become a little weaver in his own right. Emna, who has been dating an older and married man, her music instructor, has a frank conversation with him, and although it does not lead to the outcome she has wished for, his divorce from his wife, she has come to terms with the fact that her relationship could only lead to a cul-de-sac. She is ready to move on with her life. Meriem's talks with her mother have helped her confront her fears. She now has a fulfilling relationship with her patient husband. As for Zeineb, there is no doubt that her relationship started with Younès, an inhabitant of Djerba, will continue to grow and bring her much-needed comfort and joy.



## Questions

1. The filmmaker uses a series of flashbacks to recall old memories. Why is remembering so important?
2. Can you cite a few cases in the film where remembering is transformative?
3. The mother-in-law's collusion with patriarchy seems evident in the film. However, one can also say that patriarchy gained an unsuspected ally in Emna. Explain.
4. As a child, Meriem is almost raped on her way home from school. When she gets home instead of being consoled by her grandparents, she is punished for it. What cultural logic can explain this double victimization of the little girl?
5. In anticipation of the men's homecoming, Zora exclaims that she can smell the odor of men, and that she misses her husband's shouting. Should this be interpreted as Zora's embrace of patriarchy's strict authority? Is another interpretation possible?