

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
Martial Frindéthié, PhD

## **Nouri Bouzid** (1945-)

### **LIFE**

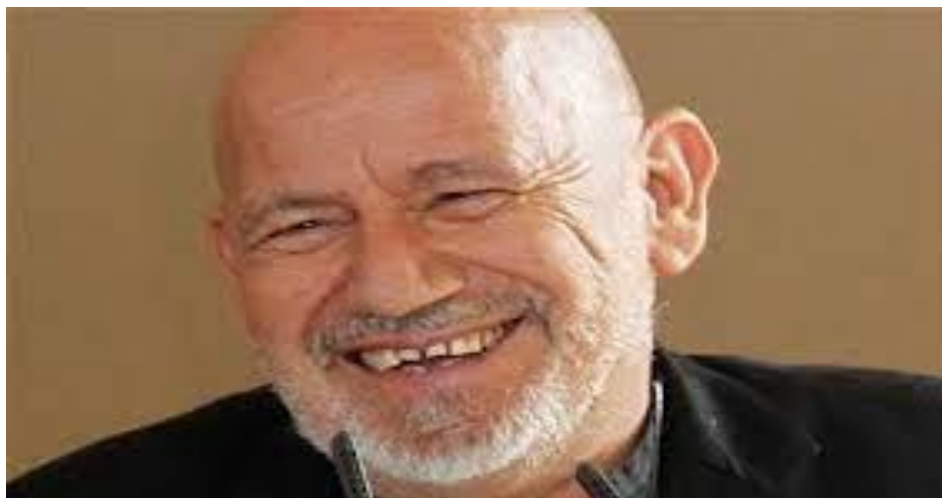
Nouri Bouzid was born in Tunisia, in the city of Sfax, which served as the setting for his first film, *Man of Ashes*. After high school, he had the opportunity to participate in an internship at the newly created Tunisian television. In 1966, he went to study cinema at the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques de Paris. He then went to the Institut National Supérieur des Arts du Spectacle et des Techniques de Diffusion (INSAS), in Brussels, in 1968. Bouzid's political activism in the communist movement "Perspectives" earned him prison and torture. His main character in *The Golden Horseshoes* is somewhat cast in his mold. He made this film after the success of his first film, *Man of Ashes*. Bouzid collaborated as co-director and writers in many Tunisian films.

### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

Bouzid's films have won him recognition and awards in the international film milieu. He won awards at the Venice Film Festival, Tribeca Film Festival, Taormina International Film Festival, Nantes Three Continents Festival, Namu International Festival of French Speaking Films, Montpellier Mediterranean Film Festival, Granada Film Festival Cines del Sur, Fribourg International Film Festival, Dubai International Film Festival, Cologne Mediterranean Film Festival, Cinefan-Festival of Asian and Arab Cinema, Chicago International Film Festival, Carthage Film Festival, and Cannes Film Festival. Furthermore, Bouzid has given lectures and seminars at universities all over the world.

### **FILMOGRAPHY**

*Man of Ashes* (1986)  
*Golden Horseshoes* (1989)  
*Bezness* (1992)  
*Bent Familia* (1997)  
*The Season of Men* (2000)  
*Clay Dolls* (2002)  
*The Making of* (2006)  
*Hidden Beauties* (2012)  
*The Scarecrows* (2019)



## THEMES by Films

### SOCIETY

**Introduction:** The recurring societal themes in Bouzid's films are those of religion and its weight on marriage, of the violence of Islamic fundamentalism, of the oppression of the female gender by patriarchy, and of the inequalities maintained in the disparity of social classes. Bouzid addresses these issues as obstacles to the furtherance of Tunisian modernism.

**Man of Ashes** In this film, Mustapha, the father of the main character, is a man obsessed with the purity of his lineage. Mustapha wants his son to marry a Muslim woman, who would give him good Muslim children to continue the family line in religious and cultural purity. He does not care if his son is ready. He does not care if his son loves his future wife. As he says himself, the men (he, the father of the bride-to-be, and Hachemi's uncles) have decided the wedding day. That is that. It is his honor that is at stake through this wedding for which he paid all the expenses, and for which he has invited two thousand people. Hachemi's nonchalance in helping to organize the wedding exasperated him. His reluctance to accept a marriage that his father offers him and a woman that he has chosen for him is insulting. And to make him pay for his insolence and his lack of gratitude, Mustapha whips his son, who dares to speak out against him, the fundamental father, guardian of the family identity.

**The Golden Horseshoes** This film challenges the narrow-mindedness of Islamic fundamentalism, which has difficulty accepting a society of equal rights without any gender-based discrimination. Abdallah, Youssef's younger brother, is a Muslim fundamentalist. He has a very clear idea of what the role and place of women in society should be, and he delivers it to us throughout the film by the judgments he passes on his brother's daughters. For him, a woman, from her young age, must be discreet, veiled, silent, pious, and virtuous. According to his standards, not only Youssef's daughters, whom he calls bitches he should have sent away from the family home, but also Adel, the boy, are lost souls. And no wonder, he says, because like father like son. He is particularly angry at Meriem for humiliating him by refusing to take money from him. In his conception of gender relations, it is the man who gives and the woman who receives. However, this conception of the gender relationship changes with the social status of the woman. In the relationship between Youssef and the bourgeois Zneb, it is rather Zneb who gives and Youssef who receives. It is in her house that Youssef, the unemployed man, lives, and it is she who feeds and clothes him, and goes out and comes back in whenever she wants, because, as she says to Youssef, she does not belong to anyone and does not need anyone's permission to live her life. This makes Abdallah see his brother as a failed man whose culture the world does not need to go round.

**Bezness** We see in this film a critique of the inconsistency of patriarchy, of its tendency to uphold tradition when it suits it, and to trample it when its interests are at stake. Driven by blind anger, Rufa, who already violates the rules of masculinity according to Tunisian society by prostituting himself with men and women, now comes to violate the rules governing spaces according to gender. When he learns that Khomsa has taken refuge in the temple of prayers, a place strictly reserved for women, he arrives there with his motorcycle, and enters the space forbidden to men, violently pushing the women who try to forbid him the entrance. Fred, too, is there, taking pictures, driven by his fascination for Khomsa and by his curiosity as an explorer. Fred, at least, can claim the ignorance of the outsider. He can apologize to the women for not knowing that their space is off limits to him. He does so by withdrawing, while still stealing a few images of the place by leaving his finger pressed down on his camera's shutter button. If Fred can claim the stranger's ignorance. Rufa cannot claim this defense because it is he who recovers the camera confiscated from Fred, asking him to respect the space of Tunisian women. Rufa's personal interests therefore had to be at stake for him to forget his good disposition towards Tunisian culture, of which he claims to be the guardian.

**Bent Familia** Patriarchy does not only consider women as inferior to men. Patriarchy even goes so far as to reduce women to the status of a thing, to objectify them. Amina's extended family has gathered at her parents' home for dinner. This is an occasion to discuss Amina's young brother Moez's choice of a future bride. Moez's fiancée does not seem to meet his entire family's agreement. His mother does not like her Bedouin ethnic origin and her flat chest. Majid's does not like her social (working-class) status. As for

Moez's father, he advises his son to choose carefully, for a woman is like a car. One must ensure that her body is impeccable, her engine in excellent condition, and most importantly that no one else has driven her before. The analogy Amina's father draws between a woman (a human being) and a car (an object) is telling. It reveals that for him, a wife is the husband's possession, just as are the furniture in his house and the cars in his garage. Consequently, the consideration that the husband accords to his wife is the same he would accord to any one of his possessions. Coming from Amina's father, in front of his daughter and his son-in-law, this indicates that this is also how he expects Majid to treat Amina. In fact, this is one of the complaints that Amina has against her husband, that he treats her like the furniture in the house or like a sex toy and has no warm feeling towards her. Aida's and Fatiha's disclosures of their own experiences with men suggest that, more than an isolated case, the objectification of women is rampant in north African societies

**Clay Dolls** Although not explicitly expressed, the life of the maids is governed by the laws of patriarchy. Omrane was himself a servant, and it would therefore be wrong to say that the servants are only girls. However, they are mostly, because traditional Tunisian society is a world that defines the role of the woman as that of servitude and the role of the man as that of dominance. Girls, by virtue of their gender, are raised from an early age to understand their role in the domestic space as that of caregivers, wives, and mothers. Feddah's nine little years do not shock those who intend to employ her. On the contrary, wealthy families prefer their servants to be young in order to mold them in their own way, as one would do with clay, as the film's title so appropriately implies. This distribution of roles between the female gender as subaltern and the male gender as powerful perpetuates the feminization of poverty and the masculinization of wealth. Omrane was able to emancipate himself from servant to independent entrepreneur providing maids to rich families. For these female children employed as laborers in total indifference, as Rebeh's and Aziza's experiences show, such an emancipation is improbable. Omrane can aspire to be like Old Jaafar, his old master. Rebeh can only aspire to tie herself to a man, in the best case a rich man from the Gulf.

**The Scarecrows** The book that Djo writes feverishly questions the hypocrisy of Muslim fundamentalists: Can rape be sanctioned by Islam? Is rape permissible under Islamic law? Indeed, fundamentalists, who claim Islamic purity, and who go to war to spread their pure version of Islam, are the same people who violate this law with the institution of sexual jihad and forced sexual relations before marriage. So, the question posed by Djo's book is relevant. Are the terrorists' rapes allowed, even blessed, by Islam? If so, are the results of those acts, the loss of virginity before marriage, the pregnancies that ensue, and the children that are born from rape, blessed by Islamic law? If so, why, then, the persecution of the women who return from these horrors? Why are they stigmatized as outcasts? Why do their children have no name, no identity, and no individual rights?

## **Patriarchy**

**Man of Ashes** Mustapha wants his son to marry a Muslim woman, who would give him good Muslim children to continue the family line in religious and cultural purity. He does not care if his son is ready. He does not care if his son loves his future wife. As he says himself, the men (he, the father of the bride-to-be, and Hachemi's uncles) have decided the wedding day. That is that. It is his honor that is at stake through this wedding for which he paid all the expenses, and for which he has invited two thousand people. Hachemi's nonchalance in helping to organize the wedding exasperated him. His reluctance to accept a marriage that his father offers him and a woman that he has chosen for him is insulting. And to make him pay for his insolence and his lack of gratitude, Mustapha whips his son, who dares to speak out against him, the fundamental father, guardian of the family identity.

**Bezness** In *Bezness*, the institutionalized system of men's dominance over women survives thanks to the work of moral guardians, such as Rufa and his mother, who take turn monitoring the movements and thoughts of the women. Rufa and his mother keep an eye on the movements and actions of Khomsa and Fatma. The first thing Rufa does when he wakes up in the morning is to ask his mother where his sister is. His mother tells him that she has given Fatma permission to go out, but Rufa worries that she might engage in acts that defile the family honor. His mother tells him to leave to her to make sure that this does not happen. Rufa forbids his sister to smoke and he chases away the girls who come to visit her, especially Ghalia, whom he accuses of perverting his fiancée, Khomsa. Rufa becomes furious when he realizes that

his sister, who works as a maid, washes the underwear of her employers. He finds this indecent and shameful for his family. He wants to know if his sister uncovers her hair, too, when she is with her employers. Rufa keeps the women of the house under his tight supervision and confinement.

**Bent Familia** Majid and Slah are evidence that the preeminence of man is neither natural, nor permanent or real, only apparent. It is a constructed superiority that is based on a takeover of language by the masculine gender, and which sometimes escapes man's control. By codifying language (through grammar, glossary, and figures of speech) for the subjugation of woman, patriarchy, too, finds itself trapped in its own language game. For instance, Slah, the divorced man, confesses to Aida that the notion of a "divorced person" is as degrading for men as it is for women. For men, it connotes a state of "ex-ness," that is, ex-powerful, ex-potent, ex-respectable, and ex-man (in the patriarchal conception of the term). It is the fear of falling into this state of nothingness that leads Majid to take some drastic measures against Amina when she unexpectedly announces to him that she wants a divorce. Aida tells Amina that she should not have mentioned divorce, for it is a word that shakes men, causes them to become unhinged and enter a state of trance.

**Clay Dolls** Although not explicitly expressed, the life of the maids is governed by the laws of patriarchy. One of the questions that often come up in the Tunisian patriarchal society is the role attributed to women in safeguarding family honor. They must remain pious and virgin until marriage in order not to dishonor their family. Omrane is, therefore, aware of his responsibility to protect these girls that he throws so early into the immoral jungle of the big cities, and he swears to their parents to see to it. However, the men's determination to defile the maids is as great as Omrane's determination to protect them. The confrontation between Omrane and Riva the hustler who wants to pimp Rebeh is illustrative of this determination of both parties. This does not matter, because Rebeh is no longer a virgin. On top of that, she is pregnant, which devastates Omrane, who will have to explain to the village that Rebeh is lost, and with her is lost the honor of her family, the worst thing that can happen. But there is still a way to save the honor. It is to marry her to a man. To any man, which Omrane desperately tries to do, but without success. Maybe he will be that man, because between Rebeh and him there is a repressed attraction.

**Scarecrows** In *The Scarecrows*, Bouzid returns to one of his favorite themes, patriarchy, the power of the controlling father, who, by imposing his law on the woman, keeps her in a situation of physical as well as mental incarceration. Here, the role of the inflexible patriarch falls to Zina's father, who clings to a traditional ideal of honor and family pride to be preserved in the virtuous bodies of the women of the family. Zina's father has fought his daughter's unconventionality from her very adolescence. He has resented her carefree attitude until the day she left for Syria. Did he encourage her to go and cleanse herself in fundamentalism or perhaps did he agree to send her to Syria so he will not be looking at her depravity? His daughter's lover says that he knew about and even got paid for her going to Syria. In any case, the father saw Zina's return from Syria as the return of shame and dishonor. He was going to remedy it by way of an honor killing. As the father lures Zina into a remote area to execute her, she performs a gesture of ultimate humiliation. She hits her father with a stone and escapes from his control. From the confined space in which she found herself in Syria, in her mother's house, under the judgmental gaze of the neighbors, Zina kills the father, or at least his influence over her, and frees herself, taking her independence in the open space of the green prairies.

## Gender

**The Golden Horseshoes** Abdallah, Youssef's younger brother, is a Muslim fundamentalist. He has a very clear idea of what the role and place of women in society should be, and he delivers it to us throughout the film by the judgments he passes on his brother's daughters. His conception of gender roles and spaces is based on religion. For him, a woman, from her very tender age, must be discreet, veiled, silent, pious, and virtuous. He beats Meriem when she is about five, because she imitates her brother Adel and leaves the bathroom door open when she is on the toilet. He tells her that Adel is a boy, and she is a girl. There are, therefore, behaviors that are acceptable for him and not for her. He is angry at Meriem for humiliating him by refusing to take money from him. In his conception of gender relations, it is the man who gives and the woman who receives.

**Bezness** Driven by blind anger, Rufa, who already violates the rules of masculinity according to Tunisian society by prostituting himself with men and women, now comes to violate the rules governing spaces according to gender. When he learns that Khomsa has taken refuge in the temple of prayers, a place strictly reserved for women, he arrives there with his motorcycle, and enters the space forbidden to men, violently pushing the women who try to forbid him the entrance. Fred, too, is there, taking pictures, driven by his fascination for Khomsa and by his curiosity as an explorer. Fred, at least, can claim the ignorance of the outsider. He can apologize to the women for not knowing that their space is off limits to him. He does so by withdrawing, while still stealing a few images of the place by leaving his finger pressed down on his camera's shutter button. If Fred can claim the stranger's ignorance, Rufa cannot claim this defense because it is he who recovers the camera confiscated from Fred, asking him to respect the space of Tunisian women. Rufa's personal interests therefore had to be at stake for him to forget his good disposition towards Tunisian culture, of which he claims to be the guardian.

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**Scarecrows** The world of *The Scarecrows* is a curated dualism, where all the men are bad, and all the women are good. On the side of the bad people, we have Zina's lover (her illegal husband) who lures her into the trap of Syria, sells her to terrorists, and threatens to humiliate her when she reappears in Tunisia. There are also the fundamentalists, who imprisoned, beat, and raped Zina and Djo. The bad guys are also to be found among the men in Tunis who refuse Zina a place in society, among the sympathizers of the Islamic fundamentalists, including her father, and among the boys of the neighborhood. On the good side, there are all the women who do their best to help Djo and Zina overcome their ordeal. It is Nadia the lawyer who has made it her mission to defend them at all costs. It is Dorra the doctor who treats them. It is Saida, Zina's mother, who, despite her doubts, lodges them, comforts them, and comes running to the aid of her daughter when her father tries to kill her. On the good side, there is also Driss, the homosexual. If Driss is good, it is because, as Nadia suggests, he does not really figure as a man. He is, instead, the gentle side of men, their feminized and good side.

Bouzid's dichotomies developed along the gender axis in *The Scarecrows* are far too simplistic.

## Class

**Man of Ashes** *Identity* Identity is determined by family membership, which itself is shaped by religious beliefs. Thus, Hachemi's identity derives from his family, of whose morals the father is the guardian, and these morals are regulated by their Islamic faith. The father, thus, ensures the continuity of the family identity, which is only possible if the individual identity of each member conforms to the collective identity of the family. To ensure this, the father chooses the son's wife (as Mustapha does for Hachemi) or the daughter's husband, whose family background he knows. Here, the collective interest of the family takes precedence over personal interest and individual desires. The recalcitrant is brought to order by fumigation, exorcism sessions, pills, and whipping. These methods of coercion are not always effective in maintaining family order, as Hachemi shows us, who established some independence from the severe father.

**The Golden Horseshoes** The religious conception of the gender relationship so dear to Abdallah the fundamentalist can be subverted by women's social class. Zineb, Youssef's lover, is a bourgeois woman. She is a university professor, financially independent, and liberal. In the relationship between Youssef and the bourgeois Zineb, it is rather Zineb who gives and Youssef who receives. It is in her house that Youssef, the unemployed man, lives, and it is she who feeds and clothes him. She is free of her movements, goes out of the house and comes back in whenever she wants, because, as she says to Youssef, she does not belong to anyone and does not need anyone's permission to live her life. This upsets Youssef, who thinks that she objectifies him. It particularly makes Abdallah angry, who sees his brother as a failed man whose liberal culture the world does not need. Abdallah, thus, mocks Youssef, whom he calls a gigolo, a kept man, a whipped man.

**Clay Dolls** The distribution of roles between the female gender as subaltern and the male gender as powerful perpetuates the feminization of poverty and the masculinization of wealth. Omrane, once a servant himself, was able to emancipate himself from being a servant to become an independent entrepreneur who provides maids to rich families. For these female children employed as laborers in total indifference, as Rebeh's and Aziza's experiences show, such an emancipation is improbable. Omrane can aspire to be like Old Jaafar, his old master, while Rebeh can only aspire to tie herself to a man, in the best case, a rich man from the Gulf. And, thus, the class divide between men and women remains untouched. Even worse, the poor have no outlet for upward social mobility, whereas, the rich that exploit them a lower wage continue to improve their lives.

## Myth

**The Golden Horseshoes** The white horse outfitted with gold horseshoes in the film mythologizes the tragic hero. Young and dynamic, it is pampered and adulated because it carries on its back the aspirants of great adventures and great battles to prodigious distances, leading them from victories to victories. Old and ill, it is taken to the slaughterhouse and ruthlessly killed, while no honor is given to it for the great triumphs that men enjoyed thanks to its strength and bravery. The horse's sacrifice will only have served others. To the animal, not even a recognized retirement, only a premature death will be offered, so that it is no longer a burden. And, in a final gesture of ingratitude, its flesh will be consumed. Youssef compares his fate to that of the horse with golden horseshoes. Like the horse, he carried on his back the Tunisian people's aspirations for democracy, but when came the time to share the bounty of the gains that he has initiated, his name faded, and he became a burden. It is not he who kills himself at the end of the film. It is the ingrate Tunisian society that kills him. The Youssef of the Arab world are numerous. Today, the young Tunisian fruit vendor whose immolation started the Arab Spring, Tarek Bouzizi, has had his struggle appropriated by various interests while his name is barely remembered.

## Religion

**Scarecrows** The book that Djo writes feverishly questions the hypocrisy of Muslim fundamentalists: Can rape be sanctioned by Islam? Is rape permissible under Islamic law? Indeed, fundamentalists, who claim Islamic purity, and who go to war to spread their pure version of Islam, are the same people who violate

this law with the institution of sexual jihad and forced sexual relations before marriage. So, the questions posed by Djo's book are relevant. Are the terrorists' rapes allowed, even blessed, by Islam? If so, are the results of those acts, the loss of virginity before marriage, the pregnancies that ensue, and the children who are born from rape, blessed by Islamic law? If so, why, then, the persecution of the women who return from these horrors? Why are they stigmatized as outcasts? Why do their children have no name, no identity, and no individual rights?

## RELATIONSHIPS

**Introduction:** The concepts of marriage, loyalty in friendship and in marriage, sexuality, desire, and attraction as well as the social and psychological restrictions that put them under cover are explored by Bouzid under the broad theme of relationships. Here, Bouzid touches on some of the taboo themes of Tunisian society.

**Man of Ashes** For Mustapha, his son Hachemi remains a child, and, therefore, punishable under his guardianship, as long as his sexuality has not developed. This day will come when he will have consummated his marriage, and not before. For Farfat, his sexuality will remain embryonic, because heterosexuality is the official state sexuality, especially since any other form of sexuality is punished by Tunisian law. Heterosexuality also seems to be the official sexuality of the Muslim religion. This makes Farfat's rumored homosexuality a breach of the religion. Although his friends tolerate Farfat's sexuality and worry, as does Touil the blacksmith, only about what his promiscuity might cost him, for Farfat's father, his son's homosexuality constitutes a disgrace to the family and a sin against God. So, he banishes his son and throws his belongings into the street for everyone to see, thereby cutting himself off from the damnation that Farfat embodies. Farfat's attempt to affirm his sexuality by sleeping with one of Sejra's daughters is useless in the eyes of his friend Hazaiez, who continues to chastise him, to call him a child, and to remind him of his rape by Ameer, the pedophile. For Farfat, therefore, the only alternative to reclaim his sexuality is to kill his demon, in the person of the one who molested him, Ameer. Farfat goes and fetches his knife, not to kill Hazaiez, the person who insulted him, but to kill Ameer, the person who made the insult possible.

**Golden Horseshoes** In this film, loyalty in friendship, marriage, and love seems to yield under the strain of political commitment and time. Youssef and Fatma's marriage was the first casualty of his political commitment. His wife could not stand his activism, who told him to his face that his father was right to say that he was a good-for-nothing. Youssef divorced Fatma and was taken in by Zineb, the bourgeois woman, his university colleague, who was fascinated by his intelligence and the aura he had with his students. She introduced him to friends who became followers of the "Tunisian Perspectives" movement, of which he was the initiator. However, when the repression of the power became hard, the left, as Youssef said so well, was no longer in fashion, and the Sunday disciples of "Tunisian Perspectives" faded away, some preferring to be on the side of the political power to benefit from advantages. Time also had its effect of eroding loyalty. After he spent six years in the jails of the regime, the Zineb that Youssef found upon his release was no longer the attentive lover he knew. She was now an arrogant, hard woman, disillusioned with his political struggle, who had lost all respect for him, and who no longer hesitated to tell him that he had failed in his pursuit of impossible dreams and failed in his life. If institutional relationship, such as marriage or friendship, is not worth its weight in love, then why not seek love and pleasure in the anti-institutional? For Youssef, there is no doubt about it. A stranger can offer as much love, and even more, than a known lover. Thus, on the night of Ashura, Youssef spent passionate moments with a stranger in a boat moored in a bay.

**Bezness** Bezness shows the hypocrisy of patriarchy. The most obvious saboteur of patriarchy is the Tunisian male prostitute who upsets all orthodox norms of masculinity in this predominantly Islamic and conservative society. Rufa and his recruits sleep with both men and women. The asserted homosexuality of Rufa and his colleagues undermines the concept of Tunisian masculinity based on an idea of the man as alpha male provider of the family. When Rufa's sister Fatma, in response to her brother calling her washing her employers' underwear indecent, tells him that he is not a paragon of decency and should refrain from moralizing her, it is to his degrading trade of prostitution that she refers. In fact, as far as Fatma is concerned, Rufa has failed twice as a man. He has not only prostituted his body, but beyond that, he has feminized it. And it is in silence that she thinks it, like so many other people in the Tunisian society. Rufa

dishonored the orthodox notion of Tunisian masculinity. This is what Khomsa's friend Ghalia also thinks, who tells Khomsa that she deserves better than Rufa, and who encourages her to go out with Fred. For Ghalia, if Tunisian men are failed men, there is no reason for women to respect the laws they enact. So, she tells Khomsa that if Fred had shown interest in her, she would not have hesitated to go out with him. Ghalia is even bolder. To Khomsa, who tells her that she thinks to have lost her virginity with Rufa, and that he might use it to blackmail her with staying with him, Ghalia advises that she leave Rufa and for thirty dinars undergo surgery for a virginity restoration through hymen reconstruction.

**Bent Familia** The fairytale stories that end with the line "and they lived happily ever after" seem to be an oddity in *Bent Familia*. Instead of being a moment of happiness, marriage in the film signifies women's loss of love, freedom, and happiness. If Majid and Amina are the representative couple of modern Tunisia, there is a case to be made about the unequal treatments that men and women receive in marriage in that north African country. The expectations that marriage puts on women are unrealistic. As both the fortuneteller and Amina's mother advise Amina, the norm for a wife is to greet her husband's infidelities and bursts of anger with smiles and acceptance. In this context, a woman's demand for explanation, exchange and communication is perceived as disrespect towards her husband. Here, a woman's request for reciprocal love and intimacy is perceived as shameful and indecent.

**The Season of Men** In this film, Patriarchy is a prison-guard keeping women physically and psychologically confined. 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.

**Clay Dolls** Friendship and marriage are conditioned by religious and social principles that neither attraction, nor love, nor desire can override. Omrane and Rebeh are attracted to each other. However, Rebeh's condition of a girl who has lost her virginity, coupled with the condition of a pregnant woman outside of marriage, makes their love impossible. Omrane almost flogs himself to avoid giving in to the temptation to love Rebeh. He tries to convince her to return to the village. He runs away from her to take refuge in the bar, in alcohol. He proposes her to the most despicable character he can find to convince himself that she is not worth it. He treats her as defective merchandise. And yet his body bubbles with the desire to love her, when in his delirium he asks her to sink her teeth into his flesh to punish him for his failures. Omrane could marry Rebeh to save her from dishonor, as he did with the maid whom old Baba Jâafar had impregnated. But that would be a forgery. What he wants is a true love with her, which the prospect of a marriage of convenience spoils. He prefers to torture himself than to satisfy the demands of his lust. But the filmmaker also tortures us when he leaves us hanging about the meaning of the last embrace that binds Ormane and Rebeh. Were they able to muster enough courage to overcome the religious and social prescriptions that in Tunisian society keep them apart even though they are so close?

**The Scarecrows** Must we see in *The Scarecrows* a gesture of the filmmaker which betrays Nouri Bouzid's confession to a tamed, unassuming sexuality? Everything in the experience of Zina suggests it. Of Zina, Driss tells Nadia that she is a tease. Her mother says that she is a provocateur, a girl with precocious and insatiable sexuality, who, as a teenager, already drove her father crazy by wearing tight dresses that made the neighborhood boys fantasize, and which frightened them at the same time. And it is Zina herself who tells us that she went to Syria to look for strong sensations, which in Tunisia ended too quickly, an allusion to pleasures that were too short. Zina is a woman whose excessive lust strikes a false note in the sanitized, ordered, and repressed orthodox sexuality of the Tunisian Islamic society. Her excess is *haram*, sinful. And this sin, she pays it with the high price of kidnapping, beating, incarceration, and rape. Zina is the example that should not be followed at the risk of ending up like her. Is that one of the lessons



that Bouzid, despite himself, but precisely because of the culture in which he bathed, wants us to draw from *The Scarecrows*?

## Friendship

**Man of Ashes** Relationships such as friendship and marriage are governed by religious and ethnic identity. For example, when Hachemi's mother noticed salt on her son's body while bathing him and reminded him that he was not allowed to bathe in the sea, the father immediately assumed that Hachemi was there with the Jewish boy Jacko. Mustapha ordered his son to stay away from Jacko, as each religious group should socialize only with its own. As a child, people in the neighborhood teased Hachemi that Jacko's sister, Rosa, would be his wife. Hachemi recalled this episode from his childhood to Mr. Levy, who laughed, noting that it was obviously only a jest. Mr. Levy continued, saying that though friendship between these adolescents was tolerated, the marriage between a Jew and a Muslim would be highly unlikely. Here, Mr. Levy agrees with Mustapha that at some point, each ethnic and religious group must stick together, separate from other groups, although Mustapha sees this separation much earlier, from early childhood.

**The Golden Horseshoes** After his divorce, Youssef is taken in by Zineb, a bourgeois woman and his university colleague. She is fascinated by his intelligence and the aura he has with his students. With Zineb, Youssef experiences another form of relationship, though not as formal as marriage, nonetheless, accepted under the nickname of engagement. She introduces him to friends who become followers of the "Perspectives Tunisiennes" movement, of which he is the initiator. However, when the repression of the regime becomes hard, the left, as Youssef says so well, is no longer in fashion, and the new disciples of "Perspectives Tunisiennes" fade away, some preferring to be on the side of the political power. Zineb, too, leaves Youssef. The magic of his glow had faded over the six years he spent in jail.

**Bent Familia Friendship/Sisterhood** In *Bent Familia*, the women's act of "going out as women," which is synonymous with freedom and self-assertion, is already thwarted by the omnipresent masculine threat. Their entire conversation to and from the beach is taken over by their mourning of man in the absence of men (as they recall their first lovers) or by escaping man in the presence of men (as they maneuver their car to elude two harassing male motorists). This inescapable presence of the masculine figure undermines independent feminine existence. It sabotages the possibility of a female bond. In the film, the constant masculine intrusion into the female trip to the ocean almost leads to the breakdown of the women's unity. After they escape from the harassing motorists, the three women become hypersensitive; they get angry at each other. For a few seconds they stand on the beach a distance away from one another, facing different directions. However, as if to suggest that just as brotherhood is global and united in the subjugation of women, as Amina's father and husband have well indicated, sisterhood, too, should be united in the fight against patriarchy, the three women iron out their differences, and the beach on which they stand hugging becomes, once again, the space of reciprocity, of shared narratives, of mutual understanding. However, how long will these joint feminine efforts last before the lurking destabilizing force of masculinity comes blowing in, like a hurricane in a China shop? *Bent Familia* seems to suggest that in their fight against patriarchy women need to remain in a constant state of vigilance, in a permanent condition of self-consciousness, as patriarchy will not miss an opportunity to turn them against one another. The instability of feminine friendship tells a story: It is indicative of the extent to which, even in the absence of man, everything has been historically arranged so that, through the gift of culture, man's permanent preeminence is assured. Fatiha sums it up well when she asks: "Why did I grow up in a man's world?" That is, in a world constructed by men to guarantee the everlasting privileges of man.

## Marriage

**Man of Ashes** Thus, Jews, Muslims, and Christians stuck to their religious and ethnic groups when it came to dating and marriage, for marriage was done from the perspective of loyalty to and perpetuation of the group, whose factor of identification was religion. Even sexual attraction is regulated, as it can lead to inter-religious mixing. The parents are the matchmakers and take care to choose their children's partners so as not to allow deviations that would undermine loyalty to the social group. Here, love is secondary. Hachemi's future wife, about whom we learn nothing in the film, was chosen for him by his parents, and the

date of his wedding was set by both fathers. His opinion counts for little or nothing. And when he tells his father that he does not want this marriage, his father tries to persuade him with a whip.

**The Golden Horseshoes** The “until death do us apart” maxim did not come true for Youssef and his wife Fatma. Their marriage was the first casualty of his political commitment. His wife could not stand his activism, and she told him to his face that his father was right to say that he was a good-for-nothing. Unable to stand the constant humiliation of his wife who saw his intellectual work as unproductive, and whose lack of intellectual sophistication he, too, scorned, Youssef divorced Fatma. She fell ill and died. He did not go to her funeral for fear of confronting his children’s reproachful gazes.

**Bent Familia** The fairytale stories that end with the line “and they lived happily ever after” seem to be an oddity in *Bent Familia*. Instead of being a moment of happiness, marriage in the film signifies women’s loss of love, freedom, and happiness. If Majid and Amina are the representative couple of modern Tunisia, there is a case to be made about the unequal treatments that men and women receive in marriage in that north African country. The expectations that marriage puts on women are unrealistic. As both the fortuneteller and Amina’s mother advise Amina, the norm for a wife is to greet her husband’s infidelities and bursts of anger with smiles and acceptance. In this context, a woman’s demand for explanation, exchange and communication is perceived as disrespect towards her husband. Here, a woman’s request for reciprocal love and intimacy is perceived as shameful and indecent.

**Clay Dolls** Marriage is for the Tunisian woman an obligatory passage towards legal recognition. An unmarried woman is not yet a full-grown woman, and a woman who loses her virginity before marriage, or worse, who becomes pregnant outside of marriage, is considered an impure and lost woman. This is the situation of Rebeh, who gets pregnant before marriage, and who hopes that Omrane will marry her and save her from damnation. He had done it before for an old acquaintance and maybe he can do it for her, too. Indeed, when Omrane’s old boss, Baba Jâafar, impregnated one of his employees, Omrane married her in a sham marriage, not only to hide the employer’s infidelity, but especially to save the servant from disgrace. Once recognized by society as married, even for a day, her loss of virginity can be justified, and the maid can give birth to her child in honor, even if this marriage was dissolved in the following hours. The main thing would be to prove that she was married and that her pregnancy was not the result of an ungodly affair. And her child can have a legal status and an identity, and not be subjected to social shunning. Thus, when all seems lost for the woman who loses her virginity before marriage, a sham marriage can restore her to society.

**Scarecrows** Marriage is the Tunisian institution that assigns individual identity and rights. Zina had a child in Syria by her lover and illegal husband. Since this marriage has not been validated by the competent authorities, and no certification has been issued for it, the marriage is considered as if it had never taken place. Things could have stopped there. This fake marriage could have only affected the fake bride and groom. The worst is what Zina’s lawyer, Nadia, points out to her: that the child who was born of this sham marriage is a child without a name, without an identity, and without rights, that is to say, without the right to inheritance in Tunisian society. This child is like any other child born in Tunisia out of wedlock. If Zina is able to find her son, his life in Tunisia will still be one of social and professional shunning because he will have to bear his mother’s name in school and in his professional life as well as bear the discrimination that comes with his being a “bastard.”

## Love

**Clay Dolls** In this society where love is often put in the backburner in order to make room for the appearance of decency and respectability symbolized by marriage, too often loveless marriage, it is not uncommon to see people psychologically tortured and split between societal expectations and their innermost sentiment towards the other. Omrane can marry Rebeh to save her from dishonor. With Rebeh, however, this forgery sickens him. Omrane remains attached to the romantic idea of love as the coming together of two people who, on their freewill choose to look in the same direction, the idea of love as unstained by the pressure to rectify a mistake, to remove a social blemish. What Omrane wants from Rebeh is a true love, which a marriage of convenience would spoil. He prefers to torture himself rather than satisfy the demands of his heart. However, the filmmaker also tortures us when he leaves us hanging about the

meaning of the last embrace that binds Omrane and Rebeh. Were they able to muster enough courage to overcome the religious and social prescriptions that in Tunisian society keep them apart even though they are so close?

## **Sexuality**

**Man of Ashes** For Mustapha, Hachemi remains a child, and therefore punishable under his guardianship, as long as his sexuality has not developed. This day will come when he will have consummated his marriage, and not before. For Farfat, his sexuality will remain embryonic, because heterosexuality is the official state sexuality, especially since any other form of sexuality is punished by Tunisian law. Heterosexuality also seems to be the official sexuality of the Muslim religion. This makes Farfat's rumored homosexuality a breach of the religion. Although his friends tolerate Farfat's sexuality and worry, as does Touil the blacksmith, only about what his promiscuity might cost him, for Farfat's father, his son's homosexuality constitutes a disgrace to the family and a sin against God. So, he banishes his son and throws his belongings into the street for everyone to see, thereby cutting himself off from the damnation that Farfat embodies. Farfat's attempt to affirm his sexuality by sleeping with one of Sejra's daughters is useless in the eyes of his friend Hazaiez, who continues to chastise him, to call him a child, and to remind him of his rape by Ameer, the pedophile. For Farfat, therefore, the only alternative to reclaim his sexuality is to kill his demon, in the person of the one who molested him, Ameer. Farfat goes and fetches his knife, not to kill Hazaiez, the person who insulted him, but to kill Ameer, the person who made the insult possible.

**Bezness** The most obvious act of subversion is the Tunisian male prostitute who upsets all orthodox norms of masculinity in this predominantly Islamic and conservative society. Rufa and his recruits sleep with both men and women. The asserted homosexuality of Rufa and his colleagues undermines the concept of Tunisian masculinity based on an idea of the man as alpha male provider of the family. When Rufa's sister Fatma, in response to her brother calling her washing her employers' underwear indecent, tells him that he is not a paragon of decency and should refrain from moralizing her, it is to his degrading trade of prostitution that she refers. In fact, as far as Fatma is concerned, Rufa has failed twice as a man. He has not only prostituted his body, but beyond that, he has feminized it. And it is in silence that she thinks it, like so many other people in the Tunisian society. Rufa dishonored the orthodox notion of Tunisian masculinity. This is what Khomsa's friend Ghalia also thinks, who tells Khomsa that she deserves better than Rufa, and who encourages her to go out with Fred. For Ghalia, if Tunisian men are failed men, there is no reason for women to respect the laws they enact. So, she tells Khomsa that if Fred had shown interest in her, she would not have hesitated to go out with him. Ghalia is even bolder. To Khomsa, who tells her that she thinks to have lost her virginity with Rufa, and that he might use it to blackmail her with staying with him, Ghalia advises that she leave Rufa and for thirty dinars undergo surgery for a virginity restoration through hymen reconstruction.

**Scarecrows** Must we see in *The Scarecrows* a gesture which betrays Nouri Bouzid's confession to a tamed, unassuming sexuality? Everything in the experience of Zina suggests it. Of Zina, Driss tells Nadia that she is a tease. Her mother says that she is a provocateur, a girl with precocious and insatiable sexuality, who, as a teenager, already drove her father crazy by wearing tight dresses that made the neighborhood boys fantasize, and which frightened them at the same time. And it is Zina herself who tells us that she went to Syria to look for strong sensations, which in Tunisia ended too quickly, an allusion to pleasures that were too short. Zina is a woman whose excessive lust strikes a false note in the sanitized, ordered, and repressed orthodox sexuality of the Tunisian Islamic society. Her excess is *haram*, sinful. And she pays for this sin with the high price of kidnapping, beating, incarceration, and rape. Zina is the example that should not be followed at the risk of ending up like her. Is that one of the lessons that Bouzid, despite himself, but precisely because of the culture in which he bathed, wants us to draw from *The Scarecrows*?

## **Attraction**

**Clay Dolls** The attraction between Omrane and Rebeh is discernible. However, Rebeh's status, as a girl who has lost her virginity outside of marriage, makes their love impossible. Omrane almost flogs himself to avoid giving in to the temptation to love Rebeh. He tries to convince her to return to the village. He runs away from her to take refuge in the bar, in alcohol. He proposes her to the most despicable character he

can find in order to convince himself that she is not worth it. He treats her as defective merchandise. And yet his body bubbles with the desire to love her, when in his delirium he asks her to sink her teeth into his flesh to punish him for his failures.

## **Desire**

**The Golden Horseshoes** For Youssef, desire no longer must be tied to institutional relationships. Indeed, after he spent six years in the jails of the regime, the Zineb that Youssef found upon his release was no longer the attentive lover he knew. She was now an arrogant, hard woman, disillusioned with his political struggle, who has lost all respect for him, and who no longer hesitates to tell him that he has failed in his pursuit of impossible dreams and botched his life. If institutional relationship, such as marriage or friendship, is not worth its weight in love and loyalty, then why not seek love and pleasure in the anti-institutional, ephemeral relationship? For Youssef, there is no doubt about it. A stranger can offer as much love, and even more, than a known lover. Thus, on the night of Ashura, Youssef spends passionate moments with a stranger in a boat moored in a bay.

**Bent Familia** Majid never showed tenderness to his wife. His relations with her were always mechanical. She never dared to tell him until the day when, for once, he asked her what she wanted, without really wanting to hear what she had to say. She told him that she wanted to be held in his arms, to feel loved, to go out with him to eat at restaurants. Majid then withdrew and asked, "where does all this strange talk come from?" He wanted to know from where she got this new way of talking, these new sensations. He wanted to know where she learned all this, for, as far as he was concerned, this was not womanly. Desire, and especially sexual desire, is the prerogative of the husband only, who comes to his wife whenever he needs to fulfill it. The husband, as is the case with Majid, expects his wife to always be available to him. Any refusal is tantamount to a sin before God. Here, the wife is a machine of reproduction whose yearning for pleasure is immoral and must be kept under lock and key. And for the wife's pleasure to be better wrapped up and controlled, her movements must be monitored or simply prevented through isolation from her friends and the outside world. Amina confesses that she lost all her friends the moment she got married to Majid. Instead of bringing her love and fulfillment, marriage became for Amina, as for many Tunisian women, a system of incarceration.

**Scarecrows** The realm of desire is thought of as an individual, selfish realm, unwilling to suffer social restrictions. Yet, desire is constantly under the threat of institutionalization and legislation as soon as one becomes a member of society. Thus, for example, Zina, as her mother Saida tells us, is a girl who, since her adolescence, has always wanted to make her body a display that attracts attention. Her father will fight her desire on ultraconservative religious bases because for him, the desires of Zina are a dishonor for the family and a sin before God. Similarly, Driss's desire, dictated by his homosexuality, does not fall within the framework of Tunisia's Islamic orthodoxy. Driss's desire is perceived as a force that erodes the machismo on which the identity of the Tunisian male is built. It is therefore fought. Zina and Driss have anti-societal, anti-familial desires. They disturb the Tunisian social order. They are the weeds in the beautiful garden of the Tunisian conscience that ought to be removed. Thus, one person in the crowd that gathers to protest Driss's presence at the courthouse shouts that Driss deserves to die. Thus, Zina's father tries to kill her.

## **PSYCHOLOGY**

**Introduction:** Bouzid is a great explorer of the psyche of Tunisians through his characters. He delivers characters haunted by anger, fear, doubt, sadness, regret, isolation, alienation, and psychosomatic ailments.

**Man of Ashes** This film shows some of the effects of the psychological trauma on the victims of pedophilia. Ameer, the master woodworker sexually abused two of his apprentices, Farfat and Hachemi, when they were younger. This experience developed in Farfat alcoholism, promiscuity, and anger. As for Hachemi, the main character, this experience has made him sink into chronic melancholy and doubt about his ability to live up to any sexual expectations. His self-doubt, fears, and melancholy are exacerbated by his impending marriage to a girl chosen by his father, whom he barely knows, and whom he is not sure he

loves. The two young people take their revenge on Ameer, whom Farfat, the angry one, stabs in the lower abdomen.

**Golden Horseshoes** Youssef is a sad, bitter, and physically and psychologically isolated man who has paid a high price for his commitment to democracy and now wonders if the sacrifices he has made and the losses he has suffered are really worth it. His struggle for political freedom, for freedom of expression, and for individual rights, such as the right to doubt, to be different, and to think differently, has cost him his marriage, has alienated him from his three children, has taken away his university position, and has deprived him of six years of his personal freedom. He leaves prison destitute and anonymous, while the fruits of his political struggle are consumed by others without him. He tells Zineb that the people she introduced him to are cowards who have abandoned the ideals for democracy the moment the struggle became hard. Youssef tries to save what he has lost, at least what is still salvageable, such as, his relationship with his children, running after them, asking that they all resume living in the same house. But it is too late, as Meriem tells him. The children have grown up and are no longer easy to live with. Adel and Raja are aspiring actors who feel comfortable among their fellow students. Meriem lives with her boyfriend, and all his children prefer to avoid him if they can. In these conditions of deep isolation, irremediable losses, and total alienation from the society whose living conditions he fought to improve, Youssef perceives only one solution, exit, suicide.

**Bezness** There is a conversation between Rufa and the chief of police in which the chief sardonically tells Rufa, who a few minutes before was harassing a tourist, that business seems to be going well for him. And Rufa replies that the body of the Tunisian male is an export product in high demand. Thirty years after the euphoria that accompanied the end of colonization in Tunisia and heralded the country's independence, Tunisia remains highly dependent on currency brought in by an international tourism that feeds on the bodies of the Tunisian youth. Both the Tunisians and the Western tourists are guilty of this commodification of the Tunisian body. Indeed, the idea of the colonized other triggers in some Westerners a strong inclination to associate the colonized person with sex, physical potency, bestiality, and sinfulness. Despite scientific evidence suggesting that, on average, the colonized or black or brown persons' penises are no larger and no smaller than those of their white counterparts, this idea has survived time and nourishes much of the sexual tourism in the world. Tourists who come to Tunisia for sex arrive with the idea that in this hot country, where men have huge penises and bestial sexuality, their strong currencies can purchase pleasures repressed at home at a lower cost. They are guilty of surfing on a debunked stereotype of the other.

**Season of Men** 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.

**Clay Dolls** For the maids who leave their village for Tunis, the change of environment comes as a shock. First, there is the wonder of discovering the Tunisian capital, its tall buildings, its wide avenues, and its market teeming supplies and with people. This wonder can be read in the eyes and words of Nejma and her younger sister Feddah when they enter Tunis in Omrane's tricycle. Then comes the sadness of confinement of the maids in the houses of the rich, where they live like caged birds, cut off from the wide, free spaces of their village, where neither laughter, nor childish mischief, nor splashing in the wet clay of the pottery factories are forbidden. On her very first night in the city, little Feddah, so excited at first to discover Tunis, regrets to have left her village. She confides in Rebeh that she misses her mother. Feddah tries to fill her lack by recreating dolls with the clay she brought in her bundle, or by covering her body and face with clay in the solitude of her room. Gradually, however, as in the case of Rebeh and all those maids who, once in Tunis, refuse to return to the village, lack gives way to habit, and alienation becomes total. Rebeh has no intention of seeing her mother or her village again, and she tells this to Omrane, who intends

to take her back there. As for little Feddah, she no longer cries for her mother. Instead, singing the song of "the girl of the air and the wind" that Rebeh taught her, she now walks the streets of Tunis, as if taking over from Rebeh. Indeed, except from Omrane, who travels between Tunis and the village in search of new girls, no one returns from Tunis, because the apprehensions and feelings of loss of the first days always end up giving way to total alienation, to total psychological rupture from village life.

**The Scarecrows** There is a therapy session between Zina and Driss that would be of interest to theorists of psychology and psychoanalysis. Lying in his hammock, Driss elicits from Zina, seated on a chair, answers that Nadia the lawyer could not get from her. Here, the positions, and therefore the roles, are reversed, because in psychoanalytical practice, it is the patient, the analysand, who is in the position of the couch, the position of vulnerability, and the analyst, who, seated in the chair, in the dominant position, makes the patient speak. So why this reversal of position, where it is Zina in the chair who speaks and Driss in the divan (the hammock) who listens? It is quite simple that Driss is Zina's analyst, at the same time as he is her analysand, and vice versa, because both are victims of society, and both are at the same time each other's therapists. By listening to each other, they recognize each other as suffering and support and heal each other. They both have something to bring to the other. And it is this dynamic of mutuality, sharing, entanglement of victimized and marginalized bodies, which we find in the scene where they wring out a sheet and turn it into a tent that unites them in a movement that borders on the sexual act.

### **Sadness**

**The Golden Horseshoes** Youssef is a sad, bitter, and physically and psychologically isolated man who has paid a high price for his commitment to democracy and now wonders if the sacrifices he has made and the losses he has suffered are really worth it. His struggle for political freedom, for freedom of expression, and for individual rights, such as the right to doubt, to be different, and to think differently, has cost him his marriage, has alienated him from his three children, has taken away his university position, and has deprived him of six years of his personal freedom. He leaves prison destitute and anonymous, while the fruits of his political struggle are consumed by others without him.

**Bezness** Rufa brings one of his customers, a Dutch woman, home and tries to sneak her in one of bedrooms. Khomsa finds out and they have a big quarrel. Rufa leaves with the Dutch woman and returns home the next day. His young brother Shuttle comes to him and asks him what makes him sad, who has angered him. Rufa affectionately pulls his brother towards him and asks him, "You want to be like me?" The boy nods, and Rufa proceeds to tell him the story of Soussa, of how a few years ago, when their father was still alive, this place was inhabited by only their family and Khomsa's family. There were no hotels then. "Not a single hotel?" inquires the child. "Not one," replies Rufa. What does this have to do with the child's initial questions, "Why are you sad? Who made you angry?" Considering Shuttle's age, ten to twelve years at most, Rufa is saying that ten years ago, there were no hotels in Soussa and the place had a low population density. Then came the hotels and the national and international crowds. What did the sprawling hotels and the international tourism bring to the local youths like Rufa, his sister Fatma, her friend Ghalia, Khomsa, and Khomsa's brother? Rufa and Khomsa's brother, along with many other young men, became prostitutes and hustlers. Some other young people got jobs as bartenders, hosts, servers, and entertainers at the hotels. Rufa's sister obtained a laundress job washing people's underwear, which Rufa finds indecent. This is what makes Rufa angry. This is what makes him sad.

**Clay Dolls** After the moment of wonder comes the feeling of isolation and sadness and confinement. Just a few hours after arriving in Tunis, the big city her little nine-year-old imagination dreamed of, Feddah starts feeling cramped. Feddah is starting to feel cramped. The room in which Omrane installs her is far from the one she shared with her sister, and certainly her mother, in her village. There, there were gaps in the walls, which let filter the moonlight and the song of the crickets. Here, it is a closed and dark room that frightens her. And to reassure herself, the little Feddah takes out of her bundle a piece of clay that she brought from the village and shapes dolls that she destroys just after having formed them, to frantically start the process again, like a caged birds.

### **Otherness**

**Bezness** There is a conversation between Rufa and the chief of police in which the chief sardonically tells Rufa, who a few minutes before was harassing a tourist that business seems to be going well for him. And Rufa replies that the body of the Tunisian male is an export product in high demand. Thirty years after the euphoria that accompanied the end of colonization in Tunisia and heralded the country's independence, Tunisia remains highly dependent on currency brought in by an international tourism that feeds on the bodies of the Tunisian youth. Both the Tunisians and the Western tourists are guilty of this commodification of the Tunisian body. Indeed, the idea of the colonized other triggers in some Westerners a strong inclination to associate the colonized person with sex, physical potency, bestiality, and sinfulness. Despite scientific evidence suggesting that, on average, the colonized or black or brown persons' penises are no larger and no smaller than those of their white counterparts, this idea has survived time and nourishes much of the sexual tourism in the world. Tourists who come to Tunisia for sex arrive with the idea that in this hot country, where men have huge penises and bestial sexuality, their strong currencies can purchase pleasures repressed at home at a lower cost. They are guilty of surfing on a debunked stereotype of the other.

**Bent Familia** Amina has threatened her husband Majid with divorce. This is a word that shook him. A divorced person in the Tunisian society is the "other," the outcast, the marginalized. So, Majid seizes his wife's car and papers to prevent her from leaving him. By so doing, Majid hopes to reduce his wife to nothingness, to make her existence even more contingent upon his presence, before she can do the same to him. By repossessing Amina's car, he also hopes to take away her ability for motion. As Amina takes refuge at Aida's, she finds an ally in Slah, the "divorcee," who understands her rebellion, and who infuses some strength into her so that she can continue to fight for the right to exist. Slah has been on the other side. He, too, has been branded by the language of patriarchy as "other," as non-being, and he now seems to realize that the notions of manhood and womanhood are illegitimate. Slah is a man who has not seen it coming, has not seen the language of patriarchy turn against him. Now that, like Aida, Fatiha, and Amina, he is a victim of that language, he becomes a defender of the women's cause, an ally in their struggle for recognition.

**Bezness Self-deception** Tunisians, like Rufa and his colleagues, are guilty of perpetuating this stereotype of the exotic other. Rufa's letter, which he makes his victims read for him in order to excite them and induce them into a relationship with him, reproduces these stereotypes. Nothing says that the Tunisian is more endowed than the European. Perhaps Rufa and his colleagues, whose business it is to sexually satisfy their clients, are well-endowed, since that is one of the attributes required for the job they do. However, one thing is certain: with the holiday atmosphere, the distance from Europe and the feeling of breaking a taboo (an evanescent and ephemeral love with a total stranger), the Western tourists in Tunisia will return home bathing in their own construction delusion and fantasies, seeing Tunisia and Tunisians the way they want to see them rather than the way they are actually, deceiving themselves that in Tunisia the sexes are bigger than in Europe; thus, perpetuating the stereotype that guarantees jobs in sex tourism in Tunisia.

## **Confinement**

**Bent Familia** The interplay of inside and outside in *Bent Familia* is that of closure and openness, closure being the absence of freedom of expression and movement, and openness being the expression of feelings and mobility. It is no coincidence that the female characters choose outside as the site of their freedom. Aziza, Amina's youngest sister, threatens her parents with leaving the family home and renting an apartment of her own, from where she can be free to come and go without being indexed as a disgrace to the family. At home, within the walls of the family residence, speech and movement are held hostage by the patriarchal hierarchy. When Amina tries to offer her opinion about her younger sister's marital prospects, her father disapproves, and her husband shuts her up. Similarly, at home, within the walls of Majid's residence, Amina's movements are controlled by her husband, and her words are drawn from the vocabulary that Majid imposes on her as clean and worthy of women. Despite her appearance as a free woman, Aida is also aware that what she does in the privacy of her apartment is spied on, gauged, and judged by her neighbors and even by her son. The inside, thus, becomes the space of restriction of speech and constriction of movement.

**Bezness** Indeed, in addition to the physical restrictions by which the man wants to make sure that the woman's movements are reduced to their strict minimum in order to give them the least possible temptation to sully the honor of the family, there are psychological restrictions implanted in the memory of women from their youngest age, and which function as filters of their acts and their movements in the absence of the man. Psychologically there is the look of the others, the judgement on the woman that keeps her in a stupor and limits her initiatives. Thus, Khomsa is attracted to Fred, but she is afraid to let her feelings flow. On the first day of their meeting, she gives Ghaliya a thread of wool, which Ghaliya ties to Fred's wrist. She looks at him with interest and wonder. She offers herself to his camera. And when, through Fatma and Ghaliya, she finds herself at Fred's house, she admits aloud in Arabic that she would gladly give herself to him if she didn't feel judged by other people's eyes, if she didn't have all those social rules running through her head. And as soon as she says it, she curses herself for having thought it and said it and thanks God that no one had heard her, and that Fred does not understand Arabic. The ramparts of the psychological prison of the Tunisian woman are stronger than those of her physical prison. With Fred, Khomsa went further in expressing her feelings than she ever did. However, her conditioning was stronger than her desire and prevented her from following through with her impulse. Instead, she ran from Fred to wash away her "bad" thoughts and actions at the prayer shrine.

## Freedom

**Bent Familia** By contrast to the close space, the open air offers the possibility of liberated speech and movement beyond the Tunisian societal straitjacket, the straitjacket of patriarchy. The outside is liberating, and the quintessence of the outside is the beach, the most open place, where speech and movement can be expressed from the earth to the sky, from the beach to the horizon, without any physical barrier. In *Bent Familia*, it is at the beach, more than anywhere else, that the three friends confide in each other, share their sorrows, their joys, and their hopes. It is at the beach that Amina encourages Aida to remind her of the happy moments of their childhood. It is at the beach that Amina's smile lights up. It is also at the beach that conflicts between the three friends are resolved, when their confessions become painful and their words towards the other hurtful. The beach is the place of disclosure of sentiments, reconciliation, synthesis, and rebirth. It is upon their return from the beach that Amina's catharsis takes place and makes her say to her friends, "I do not want to go home."

## Longing

**Bent Familia** *Bent Familia* features three women with various degrees of attachment to men and share the same tragic reality: Their lives are put on hold by men's tacit or manifest desire for supremacy. Aida is the single mother of two children, a young boy and a little girl. She has been divorced for seven years. Her ex-husband refuses to pay her any alimony, lest she should be independent enough to start dating other men. So, Aida is trying to raise her children the best she can by earning a living outside the home. Aida's unorthodox lifestyle, the fact that she is both a divorcee and a woman working outside the home, makes her the subject of wicked gossip by women and constant harassment by men. However, despite the neighbors' speculations that she is a woman of little virtue, Aida has been waiting for only one man, her Palestinian lover, Mahmed, held hostage in Gaza by a protracted peace negotiation between Palestinians and Israelis. For that man, Aida has gently rejected the advances of Slah, a good-natured divorced man who has been courting her for some time. Mahmed's constantly deferred arrival delays Aida's enjoyment of life as well.

Unlike her sister Aida, Meriem is still married. She has given two little girls to her husband, and although she claims that one should "accept everything the Lord gives," and that her daughters have brought good luck to her husband, Meriem, like her sister, is still waiting to experience her own happiness. She has a sense of incompleteness because she has not been able to give her husband the male child he desires. So, to disrupt the bad luck which somehow seems to make her a botched woman by causing her to give birth to girls only, to be a "true woman" who can give her husband his "mini him," she asks her sister Aida to take her to a fortuneteller and maker of wonders. By making it possible for her to give her husband a male child, the fortuneteller will, at the same time, make her a complete woman, a living woman.



It is on their visit to the oracle that Aida comes across an old friend, Amina. She, too, has come to see the fortuneteller, because she is afraid that her husband is deserting her for other women: He eats outside, comes home late, laden with the scents of other women. Amina is convinced that her husband is having an affair. However, the old oracle's advice to Amina is that she should neither listen to the voices of jealous people who tell lies nor spy on her husband. Instead, she should make herself attractive, remain submissive and be grateful that her husband returns to her every night.

Thus, despite their seemingly individual concerns, Aida, Meriem and Amina all long for the same thing: the figure of a male character: Aida longs for Mahmed, Meriem desires a male child, and Amina wants to retain her husband on her own terms. Until their desires are satisfied, their own existences will be held hostage. In all three cases, they seek an absent man.

## **Shock**

**Clay Dolls** For the maids who leave their village for Tunis, the change of environment comes as a shock. First, there is the wonder of discovering the Tunisian capital, its tall buildings, its wide avenues, and its market teeming with supplies and people. This wonder can be read in the eyes and words of Nejma and her younger sister, Feddah, when they enter Tunis on Omrane's tricycle. The following morning of her arrival in Tunis, Little Feddah stands on her toes on the balcony to investigate this new environment. She captures the smell of fish from the fish market below and registers it as the smell of Omrane's address.

## **Alienation**

**Clay Dolls** On her very first night in the city, little Feddah, so excited at first to discover Tunis, regrets having left her village and its wide, free spaces, where neither laughter, nor childish mischief, nor splashing in the wet clay of the pottery factories are forbidden. She confides in Rebeh that she misses her mother. Gradually, however, as in the case of Rebeh and all those maids who, once in Tunis, refuse to return to the village, lack gives way to habit, and alienation becomes total. Rebeh has no intention of seeing her mother or her village again, and she tells this to Omrane, who intends to take her back there. As for little Feddah, she no longer cries for her mother. Instead, singing the song of "the girl of the air and the wind" that Rebeh taught her, she now walks the streets of Tunis, as if taking over from Rebeh. Indeed, except for Omrane, who travels between Tunis and the village in search of new girls, no one returns from Tunis, because the apprehensions and feelings of loss on the first days always end up giving way to total alienation, to total psychological rupture from village life.

**The Golden Horseshoes** Youssef tells Zineb that the people she introduced him to are cowards who have abandoned the ideals for democracy the moment the struggle became hard. Youssef tries to save what he has lost, at least what is still salvageable, such as, his relationship with his children, running after them, asking that they all resume living in the same house. But it is too late, as his daughter Meriem tells him. The children have grown up and are no longer easy to live with. Adel and Raja are aspiring actors who feel comfortable among their fellow students. Meriem lives with her boyfriend, and all his children prefer to avoid him if they can. In these conditions of deep isolation, irremediable losses, and total alienation from the society whose living conditions he fought to improve, Youssef perceives only one solution, exit by suicide.

**Scarecrows** The Syrian experience of Zina and Djo, their incarceration, beating, and rape by the fundamentalists, which resulted in Djo's unwanted pregnancy and Zina's child being taken away from her, caused both women a deep trauma, an alienation from society. For Djo, this alienation manifests itself as confinement into aphasia and into her nervous writings about permissible rape. Djo never finds her place in society and commits suicide. For Zina, this alienation takes the form of running away, refusing to open up to those who want to help her, whom she suspects of insincerity because they stigmatize her as a terrorist and a willing party in her ordeal.

## **Isolation**

**Scarecrows** When Zina wears the conspicuous full veil, which the young women in jeans see as outdated, is Zina seeking to end her isolation or is she on an investigative mission to find her child? The world to which Zina has returned, that of her mother, her lawyer, her neighbors, and her judges, does not

seem to make any genuine room for her. It is a world that suspects her of collusion with her captors. Her mother confides to her lawyer that she is a little angry with her daughter. Her lawyer asks Zina if she really intends to help her in her investigation or if she is leading her on. Driss asks her if she was orgasming under the assaults of her kidnappers, and her neighbors, including the youngest men, order her to leave the neighborhood. Isolated, could it be that by taking up the full veil, Zina is trying to reconnect with the terrorists? In any case, in Syria as in Tunisia, Zina is an isolated, suspected, and stigmatized character, who is seeking her balance. Zina's instability or difficulty to make a place for herself in one or the other of these two worlds translates into a cinematic metaphor dear to Bouzid: a subject trying to balance themselves on the narrow track of a railroad, as seen with Farfat in *Man of Ashes*.

### **Otherness**

**Scarecrows** Zina, Djo, and Driss are marginalized characters whose otherness is celebrated in the film. Nonetheless, one should be careful not to make their torments the identity of their difference. The character of Driss, banned from all universities in Tunisia, though fictional, is taken from a real-life event, where, in 2015, six Tunisian students were sentenced to three years in prison and banned from their city of Kairouan. And the lawyer, Mrs. Karkni, who passionately defended them, is a woman of Nadia's determination. At a time when the fear of difference stiffens us *The Scarecrows* allows us to see a very humanized Driss, approachable and full of compassion, who invites us to shed our anxieties about our family values, which too often are reduced to the value of genitals. It is this societal and familial obsession with the body, and specifically, with genitalia, that marginalizes Zina, who tells us that for her father all parts of her body are sexual, while she sees sex only as a part of her body.

### **QUEST**

**Introduction:** The quest for a furtive moment of importance in the past, as in *The Golden Horseshoes*, the quest for exoticism as in *Bezness*, the quest for independence as in *Bent Familia*, or the quest for love as in *Season of Men* are all quests that pepper Bouzid's films. Tunisia is a country of great aspirations. And these aspirations are reflected in the characters in search of a better life.

**The Golden Horseshoes** On the night of Ashura, Youssef was on a quest for life. With his friend Sghaier by his side, he was in the pursuit of a life still worth living in the Tunisian open-air prison of repressed desires. That night, he surveyed the city, from its main avenues to its most forgotten places. He confronted his fears, his hesitations, his misplaced prides, and his repressed desires. He made himself humble and sought the love of his children. He made himself brave and took out his old proscribed writings. He became lustful and made love like a maniac. He became a sinner, a free thinker, and walked in the opposite direction of the crowd mentality of Ashura. The next day, when he confronted his brother Abdallah the butcher in his slaughterhouse, he realized that life as he conceived it, the life of free will, would be unlivable in a Tunisian society taken hostage by what the morality police called "decency." For Youssef, life not governed by volition was not worth living. Youssef's suicide at the end of the film is a gesture of love for freedom of life.

**Bezness** The Orient has always titillated the Western imaginary as the mysterious, exotic other and invited all sorts of fanciful tales. In the film, Fred confesses that he has decided to prolong his stay in Tunisia because the more he knows about the country, the more there is to discover. He compares the veil that Tunisian women wear to a seal hiding mysteries, and he says that behind every face, behind every door there certainly lies a treasure in wait to be uncovered. His camera becomes the key to open these mysteries, and Fred photographs everything he sees so as not to miss a trace to the Tunisian treasure. This gets him in trouble twice as people confiscate his camera, and Rufa is called to his rescue. Fred's desire to uncover a meaning in every event turns obsessional and voyeuristic. It is a voyeurism that dates from the first encounters of the West with the Orient, and which has given a lot of material to Western literatures. Fred does with his camera what the French painter De Lacroix did with his brush. He captures an eroticized and fantasized idea of the Orient. Fred pursues his erotic Tunisia in the person of Khomsa. For him, to possess Khomsa is to penetrate Tunisia, to understand and arrest its mystery. It is not coincidental that the filmmaker stops Fred at the edge of that penetration that Khomsa flees before she is possessed by Fred. By so doing, Nouri Bouzid avoids the totalization of a multifaceted country. He avoids painting a multicultural country with one brushstroke, or shall we say in one picture. Fred will never boast of knowing Tunisia just for having slept with one of its eight million inhabitants.

**Season of Man** Quest for love 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.

## FLAWS

**Introduction:** Bouzid's films deal with the flaws of the human race, such as, excessive pride that hinders sharing and love, or the fear that freezes us in our relationship with the other and alienates us from that other. The filmmaker thus invites us to go beyond our anxieties for an effective connection to the other.

**Clay Doll** Omrane is a man of pastoral pride. His conception of masculinity comes from his rural upbringing, which places great importance on a man's virility, on his ability to control his wife/wives, so that they do not humiliate him by their fickle understanding. When Riva, who covets Rebeh, calls Omrane a cuckolded man of dubious virility, we see Omrane at his most violent. First he throws in Riva's face, and in front of all the bar's customers, a truth that he was secretly protecting because he knew Riva's mother: that Riva is a bastard child, which creates a violent reaction in Riva, to which Omrane also responds by throwing himself on him. When he returns home after this altercation with Riva, it is an intoxicated Omrane, depressed, more neglected than ever, who complains to Rebeh that he has been humiliated and assaulted because of her, who asks to be punished for having disappointed the ideal of masculinity, and who falls asleep delirious and calling his mother for help. In a masculinist society such as the Tunisian, the insults that Omrane and Riva hurl at each other trigger panic, the fear of being blacklisted as non-men. Both a child born of no recognizable father, a bastard child, more likely from an unvirtuous mother, and a man dishonored by an unvirtuous woman, a cuckolded man, are not worthy of society's respect.

**The Scarecrows** The Arabic title of *The Scarecrows* is "The Dolls of Fear." These little scarecrows that Zina's mother makes are a reflection of Tunisians' fear of anything that does not fit into their notion of "normal." Driss is a scarecrow. He frightens people with his sexuality which feminizes Tunisian masculinity. Zina is a scarecrow who sullies the name of the father by her overflowing desires and by the fact that she had a child outside the framework prescribed by religion, that of marriage. Zina's father would have wanted her to stay in Syria, out of sight of the community, as many unmarried mothers do, who choose exile to save their family from shame. Djo, to whom Saida gives a pregnant doll, is also a scarecrow. Her pregnancy is the protuberant proof that she has violated the holy law prohibiting premarital sex. She cannot go home for fear that her brothers will kill her. All these scarecrows are disturbing evidence of the failure of the Tunisian family and state institutions, evidence that must be eliminated.

## CRIME

**The Golden Horseshoes** *Violation* Youssef is accused of at least two violations, and for each of these two crimes, he suffers the decreed punishment. his first crime is the one he commits against the political power by leading a leftist movement that demands the restauration of people's fundamental rights repressed by the state, such as the right to think differently, the right to individual freedoms, and the right to political freedom, in particular, the right for a multiparty system. Youssef's second crime is the one he commits against the institution to which, ironically, his struggle has allowed freedom of expression and emergence, fundamentalism. This religious extremism, hitherto repressed by an intolerant political power

champion of the single party system, finds, with the freedom of expression won thanks to Youssef's struggle, a power that it intends to institutionalize as state power. Thus, the fundamentalists want to gag any secular thoughts.

**The Golden Horseshoes *Punishment*** For his offense against the state, Youssef is hunted down, arrested, tortured, and imprisoned for six years, thereby, losing his job and being alienated from his children. For his crime against religion, Youssef is chastised by his brother Abdallah. During Youssef's absence, Abdallah takes revenge on his children, tormenting them, imposing an ultra-conservative upbringing on them, and alienating them from their father and his social ideals. During the confrontation that Youssef has with his brother in the slaughterhouse, Abdallah suggests that Youssef will be better dead than alive, for he has defiled the idea of manhood and the honor of the family. He even claims that his brother is dangerous to society, no better than the animals he slaughters every day in his job as a butcher.

**The Golden Horseshoes *Revenge*** Youssef takes Abdallah at his word in an ultimate gesture of revenge: He sullies Abdallah's religious pride with an indelible stain. Youssef commits suicide, soiling his brother and all his morality with Islam's cardinal sin of suicide. How is this a revenge, one might ask. By taking his own life, Youssef subverts the power of Allah, who is the divine decision-maker, and who has the right of life and death on every one of his creators. By so doing, Youssef has hurt Abdallah in what is his innermost conviction and his priceless pride, his faith. It is not just himself whom Youssef kills. He also kills his brother's standing in his religious community. Youssef stains Abdallah for life.

**Clay Dolls *Injustice*** *Clay Dolls* is a film about a great social injustice, the exploitation of children, a heinous crime with disastrous personal and national consequences. Feddah is only nine years old. Her mother, who struggles to take care of her and her older sister, entrusts them to Omrane to work as maids in the rich families of Tunis, which, as Rebeh's case shows, often throws them into situations of abuse and psychological instability. Rebeh, who is the victim of this, and who herself arrived in Tunis at a very young age, blames Omrane for wanting to place a child as young as Feddah. And Omrane confronts her with a big dilemma: either she becomes a maid, or she starves in the village. Child labor, which poor families see as a solution to their poverty, feeds the spiral of hardship more than it solves the problem of poverty.

**Clay Dolls *Responsibility*** The Tunisian government has dropped the ball with regard to its responsibility in child protection and education as well as in the development of rural areas. When one leaves the big city and travels inland, the contrast is striking. The rural area where the girls Omrane places in the city come from is an area completely forgotten by the government's development programs. There is no infrastructure, no schools, and the people are left to fend for themselves. This means that in a society that already affords very few rights to women, female children become the bread winners of the family. We see the fathers of the family collecting the money they get from the enslavement of their daughters, who should be sitting on school benches and playing with their classmates on school playgrounds. Here, the main victimizers are not so much the parents as the governments that lack the vision to improve conditions in rural areas. As the huge contrast between Tunis and the village of the maids illustrates, these governments confine development to the cities, leaving the countryside to shrink, thus, sacrificing much of the national human capital and creating a class of citizen materially and psychologically unfit for the state's aspiration of development. This situation of neglect of the rural population is typical of African rulers, who in their majority fight for power, even go to war for power, and who, once they have this power, do not understand their responsibilities towards the people.

## PAST

**Introduction:** The journey into the past is another of Bouzid's favorite themes. His characters often return to the past through memory to try to unravel the messes of their troubled present. And this past is painful. It is often a past of physical abuse and moral trauma.

**Man of Ashes** The past is a bitter-sweet memory when Hachemi and Farfat evoke it. First, with the past come back their childhood memories, a playful, carefree time, where they used to stay for long days on the beaches watching the gulls gliding or wading in the water of the low tide, collecting crabs and seashells with Jacko. However, the past is also hurtful. Farfat and Hachemi look at an old photo of them and Jacko from when they were much younger. They reminisce about the happy times they spent together smoking,

sunglasses on their noses, pretending to be big boys. But very quickly they remember the aggression suffered at the hands of Ameer, which spoils these moments of happiness. In the same way, standing on a pier, Hachemi sees himself years before with his small friends, playing naked in the water, comparing the scars of their circumcisions. As soon as the image of the naked body appears to Hachemi, so comes, too, the image of his aggressor, Ameer the pedophile, locking him in the workshop to have his way with him. The realm of childhood, which for many people is a place of refuge when the present becomes difficult to bear, is for Farfat and Hachemi a torture chamber. Ameer has made it intolerable.

**The Season of Men** 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.

**Clay Dolls** In *Clay dolls*, memory is a source of healing. It's the moment people return to when life becomes oppressive. For Rebeh, it is the songs of the village that she sings in her confinement, that she sings with Aziza to give herself hope when the horizon seems gloomy, or that she advises little Feddah to hum when she misses her mother. Memory for Rebeh is also a time, when, in the village, Omrane was beautiful and clean and triggered in her sentiment of love and wish of leaving with him for Tunis. For little Feddah, this memory is the clay that takes her back to her village and to her mother, clay that her little feet knead, that her little hands mold into beautiful dolls, clay that covers her body and her face in the wide rural spaces where work is more play than toil. And this clay, this memory, she brought some in her bundle, of which she covers her body and face when isolation weighs too heavily on her fragile nine-year-old shoulders.

**APPEARANCE** (dishonesty, betrayal, secrecy)

**Man of Ashes Dishonesty** Under a false air of honesty, Ameer is in fact dishonest. He is the opposite of what people think of him. For Hachemi's father, Ameer is an honorable man who made his son what he is today, a successful woodworker. So, he invited Ameer's whole family to his son's wedding and doesn't understand why Hachemi objects. He sees this opposition from Hachemi as pure ingratitude. Mr. Levy also has a high regard for Ameer, whom he considers an honest worker, and to whom he offered his workshop when he retired. Of course, Mr. Levy is far from imagining that Ameer does not always pay his employees, that Farfat, to whom Ameer owes money for work, has been to Ameer's shop on several occasions to ask for his money and never got paid. Mr. Levy and Hachemi's father are far from imagining that Ameer is a pedophile who abuses his apprentices and not the honorable man they think he is. The irony for Mustapha is that he is also far from imagining how right he is: Ameer has made Hachemi the person he is today but not in the sense that the father thinks. He has made Hachemi a chronic melancholic.

**Man of Ashes Betrayal** It seems that all those who were responsible for training Hachemi betrayed him. Unintentionally, Mr. Levy betrayed Hachemi by placing him under the supervision of a pedophile in the person of his foreman, Ameer, who molested Hachemi and Farfat. Ameer thus betrayed the trust placed in him by Mr. Levy, but above all, he failed in his role as trainer by scarring for life the children who were entrusted to him, making them tormented subjects: Farfat became a drunkard and a brawler, and Hachemi became a chronic melancholic and a skeptic about his ability to sexually perform in bed. Hachemi's father, too, guided by an authoritarian patriarchy, has pushed his son further into the depths of depression with his whip and insults, making it impossible for his son to communicate openly with him about the past that is eating away at him. It is to Mr. Levy that Hachemi turns for this, Mr. Levy, who, in a final act of betrayal, falls asleep under the effects of wine while the young man starts to tell him of his ordeal, and dies the day Hachemi returns to his place hoping to find him in better condition to listen to him.

**Bezness Betrayal** Like most of the young people of Soussa, Rufa feels let down, betrayed, by Tunisia, and he sees no other solution than to his situation than exile. Rufa is sad to have to humiliate himself and his family to survive. He is angry that the promise of a better life with the coming of international tourism in Soussa never materialized. On the contrary, the post-independence tendency to attract foreign currency with tourism has a hypocritical underbelly. It encourages the desecration of cultural values and the pauperization of local populations. Cultural deviations, like prostitution, against which the authorities (like the police chief) feign to speak, but which they tolerate and encourage, stimulate international tourism. In fact, while the authorities might officially speak against prostitution's damage to cultural values, on the sly their support it as an incentive to tourism. The hospitality infrastructures are built to make prostitution possible and available: The architecture of the hotels on the beaches with their niches, their dark and intimate bars, are designed for this purpose. They are intended to encourage prostitution and to make the local youth the provider of the commerce of the body and of the entertainment that pushes them into exile. This is the life that Rufa's little brother, who wants to emulate him, is left with. This is what makes Rufa sad and angry. For, under the veneer of beauty and paradise, poverty is rampant. The local populations are expected to serve the rich tourists and starve in their slums.

**Man of Ashes Secrecy** Hachemi's father entrusted his son to Mr. Levy, the Jewish master woodworker, to make a man out of him. Mr. Levy promised that father to make Hachemi a good woodworker, but as for making him a man, the responsibility falls to him, the father. And Mr. Levy in turn entrusted Hachemi to his best worker, Ameur. However, all these father figures betrayed Hachemi one way or another, and the young man bore the secret of their betrayal as a burden. Above all, it is a family and societal pride couched in religious fanaticism that betrays Hachemi and Farfat the most. That misplaced pride made the Farfat and Hachemi's ordeal a sin to be kept secret, and it protected the victimizer by presenting the victims as unworthy of family and societal life and, therefore, subject to banishment. Thus, Farfat's father banishes his son when this secret comes out as graffiti on a wall. There is no doubt that Hachemi's father, with his distorted loyalty to family honor and religion, would also have banished his son if Hachemi's name were mentioned along Farfat's on that wall. Was this secret really a secret? Hazaiez says that all Sfax knows about the "Ameur affair". Were Mustapha and Mr. Levy unaware of it? Did they, too, cover Ameur to protect family honor? Did Mr. Levy really fall asleep or did he pretend to sleep in order not to be officially privy to this not-so-secret secret of which nobody wanted to talk?

## **POLITICS (Leadership)**

### **Leadership**

**The Golden Horseshoes** Sghaier and Youssef compare themselves to the white horse, which by its strength, sacrifice, and courage, carries people to freedom. Sghaier has a bullet still lodged in his abdomen as a testimony to the sacrifice he made in the Indochina war. Today, he lives in cellar, cut off from daylight and electric power, and forgotten by those for whom he fought. As for Youssef, the former head of a revolutionary leftist movement, *Perspectives Tunisiennes*, which fought for rights that other people enjoy today without him, and sometime at his expense, while he wasted his life in the jails and torture chambers of the reactionary and brutal power, his name is barely mentioned. He finds himself a lonely man, cut off from his children, dumped by his lover, and mocked by his brother. He is no longer the leader admired by his students and his colleagues. He decides to put an end to his humiliation by taking his own life.

## **CHARACTERS**

### **Contents**

*Open vs Closed*

*Agreeable vs Disagreeable*

*Conscientious vs Unconscientious*

*Rational vs Emotional*

#### 1. Open

- a. **Mr. Levy (Man of Ashes)** Mr. Levy is a nostalgic but open character. Although he is proud of his children, Jacko and Rosa, he does not expect them to be the cause of his glory and honor. They are in France and America, communicating with him when they can. He sends

them presents from home and is happy that they are happy with their respective families. His happiness is not contingent on their doing what is good for him. He is an open character with whom Hachemi likes to talk.

- b. **Zineb** (*The Golden Horseshoes*) Zineb is a modern and financially independent Tunisian woman who does not intend to have her life dictated by a man. Her position on this subject could seem arrogant, especially to Youssef who, whatever one says, remains conscious of a societal judgment on what it entails to be a man.
  - c. **Aida** (*Bent Familia*) Aida is a hospitable, defiant, and sensitive person. She is a woman with a strong personality. Divorced and the subject of gossip, she lives her life with little attention to her neighbors' condemnations and speculations. Her home is a sanctuary for her friends in difficulty, who find security and affection there, although she herself is chasing after an ever-deferred love.
  - d. **Zina** (*The Scarecrows*) Zina is a flirtatious, adventurous, and idealist character, who has been disillusioned by her trip to Syria. She had romanticized it as a thrilling adventure, but she got more than she was prepared for.
2. Closed
- a. **Mustapha** (*Man of Ashes*) He is a conceited and clueless character. He is the prototype of the traditional Tunisian patriarch entrenched in a closed universe that prevents him from seeing the suffering of his son. Instead of trying to understand Hachemi and help him, he adds to the young man's anguish.
  - b. **Abdallah** (*The Golden Horseshoes*) Abdallah, the butcher and Youssef's brother, is the prototype of the chauvinist male fed by fundamentalist ideology. For him, there should be no other world than his own according to the Koran. He imposes his vision of the world by punishing some and intimidating others.
  - c. **Khomsa** (*Bezness*) Khomsa is a confused and psychologically confined character. She is the embodiment of a person torn between personal aspirations and social restrictions. She does not know if she loves Rufa for fear of leaving him and contradicting cultural and family prescriptions. She does not know if she refuses to love Fred for fear of contradicting her religious preconceptions that place him in the category of the uncircumcised infidel. She knows, as Ghalia has confirmed to her, that she deserves better than Rufa. She also knows that Fred is sweet, sensitive, and handsome, and that she is not indifferent to his charm. However, she also remembers that Ghalia, who nevertheless threw her into his arms, warned her that dating Fred would require a lot of boldness, as it would be tantamount to sinning twice. Khomsa's body is the scene of a constant struggle between what she wants and what her culture tells her to want.
  - d. **Amina** (*Bent Familia*) Amina is a shy, loving, and courageous character, who gradually comes out of her shell. Amina's abusive relationship seems to have struck her with aphasia. She speaks little, but the expressions on her face say a lot about her suffering. By reuniting with Aida, Amina experiences a happiness she has not known since the day of her marriage to Majid.
  - e. **Majid** (*Bent Familia*) Majid is a hypocritical bully. He is the quintessential chauvinistic man and husband. He sees his wife as his property whose voice and movement he is entitled to control, and he cannot understand that she sees things otherwise.

3. Agreeable

- a. **Rebeh** (*Clay Dolls*) Rebeh is the rural victim of urban immorality. She arrives in Tunis at a very young age from her village in the depths of Tunisia, with moral principles barely embedded in her child's brain, and she was thrown amid unscrupulous families. Raped and impregnated by her employer, she is marginalized in a society that disingenuously espouses an antiquarian ethics of decency.
- b. **Feddah** (*Clay Dolls*) Little Feddah could not have known what she would be exposed to when her nine-year-old imagination built a dream world around the concept of the big city. Her dream turned into disillusionment only a few hours after arriving in Tunis. In her isolation and melancholy, her little clay ball brought from the village keeps her company.
- c. **Driss** (*The Scarecrows*) Driss is a friendly, reliable, and compassionate character. Like Zina, he is a pariah of the Tunisian society. Therefore, he understood her anguish the moment they were introduced, and he supported and defended her against Nadia's suspicions that she might try to protect the terrorists.

4. Disagreeable

- a. **Rufa** (*Bezness*) Rufa is a hypocritical, lying, aggressive, and undependable crook. As the eldest son in the family, with his mother, siblings, and fiancée to take care of, Rufa's task is difficult in a country that is "developing" at the expense of its people. Rufa seems to be telling us that he has only two choices: go back into exile and leave his family without a cultural helmsman or stay with them, while working in a profession that corrupts his role as a family leader.
- b. **The matriarch** (*The Season of Men*) 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.
- c. **Riva** (*Clay Dolls*) Riva is the embodiment of the unscrupulous urban thug who lives off the exploitation of others. He wants to make Rebeh an instrument of his pimping and extortion business. She understands this early enough to escape his control with the help of her friend, Aziza.

5. Conscientious

- a. **Hachemi** (*Man of Ashes*) He is a melancholic, loyal, lonely, and conscientious character. He is a tormented young man, who takes refuge in a chronic melancholy. His father is too selfish to understand him and his mother too fragile to bear his pain, while his friends idealize his situation. Only old Levy, who died before he could talk to him, could perhaps have helped him.
- b. **Aïcha** (*The Season of Men*) 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.
- c. **Omrane** (*Clay Dolls*) Omrane is a conscientious man who tries to remain honest and to respect the word he gave to the parents of the girls he places in the families of Tunis



to protect their offspring. His task is not easy, as shown by the difficulties that face him in the case of Rebeh. Rebeh's dilemma also becomes his own. Should he disregard his moral convictions and marry for convenience, in a fake marriage, a girl he really loves, that he would have loved to be his wife for real, even if it is only to save her?

- d. **Nadia** (*The Scarecrows*) Nadia is a determined and suspicious lawyer. Resolute to defend Zina to the end, she remains, nevertheless, wary of her client's sincerity. She believes that Zina is leading her on to protect the terrorists, which Driss finds insensitive.
6. Unconscientious
    - a. **Saïd** (*The Season of Men*) 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.
  7. Emotional
    - a. **Farfat** (*Man of Ashes*) Farfat is a promiscuous and angry character who acts on a whim. Hachemi once confided to Touil that he was afraid things would end badly for Farfat. He was right. Farfat's uncontrolled anger ended up making him a fugitive wanted for murder.
    - b. **Youssef** (*The Golden Horseshoes*) Youssef is the tragic hero who dies at the end of the film from the ingratitude of human society. His mistake is an error of judgment. That of not having understood the fickleness of the masses, their propensity to quickly bend their backs when the whip of repression cracks so close to their ears.
    - c. **Fred** (*Bezness*) Fred is an elated and bold photographer led by his camera into the narrow streets and open beaches of Soussa like an emotional, frantic explorer. Fred's Tunisia is the one offered to him by the lens of his camera. Unfortunately, this camera only chooses to go after what Fred considers strange and mysterious. With Rufa, his friends, and Rufa's family members, Fred could have been closer to the real Tunisia if he had chosen. In fact, Khomsa once advised him to put down his camera and look at the country with his own eyes rather than with the eyes of an exalted and bold mystery hunter.