

Humanities Institute
Martial Frindéthié, PhD

Hedi: A Wind of Freedom / Hedi: Un Vent de liberté (2016)

Mohamed Ben Attia

OVERVIEW

Auteur Mohamed Ben Attia was born in 1976, in Tunis, Tunisia. After a diploma from the Institute of Higher Commercial Studies of Carthage in 1998, he attended the Université de Valenciennes, where he obtained a diploma in Audiovisual Communication. Ben Attia started in short films, for which he wrote and directed several fiction projects, including *Romantisme: Deux Comprimés Matin et Soir* (2005), *Comme les Autres (Kif Lokhrin)* (2006), *Mouja* (2010), *Loi 76* (2011) and *Selma* (2013). Having finally built up an artistic conviction, he directed his first feature film, *Hedi: A Wind of Freedom* (2016), which will be followed by another feature film, *Dear Son* (2018).

Film We are used to Tunisian films in which the woman is the allegory of Tunisia undergoing change. We could mention in this regard Donia in *The Prince* (2004) and Lilia in *Lilia, a Tunisian Girl* (2016) both by Mohamed Zran, Aïcha in *Zizou and the Arab Spring* (2016 both by Férid Boughedir, or Lobna in *Fatwa* (2018) by Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud. With *Hedi* (2016), however, it is rather a man who is the allegory of a country that has made its revolution, but which, indecisive and fearful, hesitates to assume its future and remains entangled in the stultifying traditions of the past, until a woman inspires him. Perhaps we have spoken too soon and that, here again, it is the figure of the woman that metaphorizes modern Tunisia. Perhaps, here again, as many of his fellow filmmakers have done, Mohamed Ben Attia repeats a motif of Tunisian cinema. *Heidi* won the highest recognition, the Diamond Valois Prize, at the Angoulême Francophone Film Festival, in 2016. Majd Mastoura (who played Hedi) won the Silver Bear for Best Actor, and the film won the Best First Feature Award at the 2016 Berlin International Film Festival. At the 2016 Amiens International Film Festival, Mohamed Ben Attia won the Amiens City Award for Best Director and Faiza Ben Messaoud (who played Rim) won the Best Actress Award.

Background The action in the film take place three years after the fall of Tunisian dictator Ben Ali and the liberation of speech in the country, in 2011. However, the budding democracy also brought about social frustrations, including, as far as this film is concerned, a deterioration of the economic landscape followed by unemployment, which was a consequence of the relocation of French companies and assets to neighboring Morocco because it is considered more stable. In this uncertain economic and social environment, our two main protagonists fall in love, Hedi, a young nonchalant salesman, who doesn't seem to care too much about his job in the struggling company that is Peugeot, and Rim, a tourist show entertainer for a hotel chain that has also seen its customers flee and its turnover decline.

CHARACTERS

Hedi	A young Tunisian car salesman
Rim	An itinerant dancer for a hotel chain
Khedija	Hedi's fiancée
Ahmed	: Hedi's brother
The mother (Baya)	Hedi's mother

SYNOPSIS

Hedi is a twenty-five-year old Tunisian car salesman at Peugeot whose only passion seems to be drawing graphic novels. He is sent by his boss to acquire new customers in the city of Madhia, but he lacks the persuasive power and enthusiasm to be a winner in his profession. His family life, until his impending arranged marriage to Khedija, a girl he has been seeing for three years, is managed by his mother. Hedi, who seems to be enduring life rather than spurring it on, meets Rim, a thirty-year-old liberated woman, with whom he experiences enchanting moments for the first time in his life. Hedi's meeting with Rim opens his

eyes to the exiguity of his life and to the dullness of his relationship with his future wife. Will Hedi and Khedija's wedding really take place?

SCENES

Hedi would rather draw than sell cars

Hedi works as a sales agent at Peugeot in the city of Kairouan. He has been living in Kairouan with his mother since his father's death a year ago. Business is slow and Hedi's boss demands that the salesmen go out to do door-to-door. He is, therefore, assigned to work in the city of Madhia, about 100 kilometers from Kairouan. He is getting married in a couple of days and wants a few days off for his honeymoon. His boss tells him that he cannot satisfy his demand now, and that he can have days off in a few months. Hedi's door-to-door sales do not fare well. The customers are either disinterested, rude, or in a difficult financial situation. After a few failures, he decides to return to the hotel. He cannot sleep and decides to sketch. Hedi lacks enthusiasm. Hedi irons his shirt and shines his shoes for his next appointment. The day before, he had worn sneakers with his suit by mistake. He passes the gate of a house and sees two dogs looking at him. He turns around and goes back to his car to do his sketches. His boss calls him. He tells him that he was able to reach two potential customers.



HEDI'S WEDDING

Visiting Khedija's family

Hedi, his mother and his aunts go to meet the parents of his future wife, Khedija. Hedi's mother spends all her time praising Hedi's older brother, Ahmed, who lives in France, is married to a French woman, looks very much like her, is very intelligent, and calls her every day. She gives Khadija a wristwatch as a gift. The women ululate with joy.



Ahmed is coming for the wedding

As soon as they get home, the mother asks Hedi to connect her to her brother on skype. Hedi connects her and goes and sit in a couch. Hedi's mother asks if she can talk to little Sarra, Ahmed's daughter. Ahmed answers that Sarra is already in bed. Ahmed asks his younger brother to pick him up at the airport. While the mother and Ahmed are online, Hedi receives a text message from Khedija, who asks to see him. From her balcony, the mother watches for Ahmed's arrival. She goes down to greet him when she sees Hedi's car arrive. She hugs her son and is surprised not to see her granddaughter, Sarra. Ahmed tells her that Sarra is sick and that he decided to let her rest in France. Then he points out to his mother that her veil does not cover her hair properly, and he adjusts it for her.



Hedi is indifferent about his wedding preparations

The mother and Ahmed discuss the dowry and the wedding formalities. Sitting in a corner, Hedi does not seem to be concerned at all. Instead, he asks his brother if he remembered to bring his coloring pens. The mother tells him that this should be the least of his priorities at this time. She asks him to put some effort into the wedding preparations. Faten, Hedi's cousin tells Hedi that she, too, will be married soon because Hedi's mother has found her a husband. The mother scold Faten and asks her to be a little discreet. The mother criticizes Hedi. Hedi eavesdrop on his mother and brother talking about him. They discuss how they will furnish his and his future wife's living space. His mother denigrates him as a good-for-nothing whom she cannot count on for anything. The mother tells Ahmed that he will be able to choose the room he wants in the house when he decides to come home permanently. Ahmed thinks that Hedi is spoiled. Hedi is preparing to go to Madhia for his job. His brother asks him if he gets a raise for traveling such a distance. His mother reminds him to take his pillowcase and his charger and gives him money for the trip. His brother complains that she should not give him money at his age. Hedi learns from his mother that his brother has found him a job as a manager in his future father-in-law's firm. He will start in September. He tells his mother that his brother should not interfere in his business. She tells him that he should since he is his older brother. He says he does not know what a manager does. His mother insists that he will learn and asks him to stop complaining when they are doing him a favor. Hedi gets angry and decides to return to Madhia.

Hedi misses Khedija On the second night, unable to sleep, he gets down on the hotel courtyard. A group of itinerant dancers is performing in the courtyard of the hotel, and he sits down to watch them while smoking a cigarette. He texts Khedija to tell her that he misses her. She replies that she misses him, too.



HEDI FALLS IN LOVE WITH RIM

Hedi'd rather spend time at the beach than sell cars Hedi goes to the beach to swim and relax. He is lying in a lounge chair with a book in his hand. Around him, children are playing with one of the dancers he saw the night before, chatting and laughing. His phone rings. He picks it up and runs inside the hotel to answer it. It's his boss. Hedi lies that he is waiting for customers.



Hedi meets Rim On the way back to the beach, Rim, the dancer who saw him running, approaches him and inquires if everything is okay. He lies that he got a phone call because his mother fell down the stairs and broke her hip. She wishes his mother well. A few hours later, at the hotel restaurant, Hedi sees Rim sitting at a table with one of her friends. He approaches her and tells her he wants to apologize for what happened at the beach. As she does not understand, he launches into long explanations on his profession, on what he does in the area. He explains to her that he lied, that his mother never fell, and that he does not even know why he told that lie. He explains that he did not want his boss to know that he was at the beach when he was supposed to be working. She tells him that it does not matter. And as he returns to his table, the two friends look at each other, puzzled.



Hedi and Rim make love Hedi arrives late at night in Madhia. He sees Rim again in the hotel lobby. She tells him that she is going to swim in the sea to escape the heat of her room. He asks her if he can accompany her. She takes off her dress and jumps into the water. He doesn't have a bathing suit and watches her swim from the shore. Then he takes off his T-shirt and dives in his shorts. He joins her. They look at each other. Then they kiss. They meet in Rim's room and make love.



Hedi spends the day with Rim The next day Hedi does not go to work. He spends the day at the beach with Rim, swimming and sunbathing. She asks him if his boss does not call him anymore. He tells her that he no longer answers his calls. She asks him if he is not afraid of being fired. He replies that he intends to quit his job although he does not know yet what he will do next. He confides to Rim that he draws comics strips, which he dreams to see published one day. She encourages him to make it a project rather than a dream.



Hedi is happy with Rim Hedi proposes to Rim that they go back to the hotel. She tells him that she is supposed to be in Tunis with the other members of her dance group and that she cannot be seen at the hotel now. So, he suggests that they climb into the room through the window. She finds the idea funny. They spend the day in Rim's room clowning around and making love. The following days are work-free days for Hedi. He drives around admiring the landscape, spends long minutes at the beach, and goes sightseeing in the city of Madhia with Rim. He learns from her that she travels a lot with her dance group and changes hotels a lot.



BACK HOME

Sealing the bond After prayers at the mosque, a delegation of men, led by Ahmed, goes to Khedija's parents to seal the bond between the future couple. Khedija's father received the visitors positively. After a short prayer of blessing, the men shake hands. Khedija, her mother, and her friends, who were watching from a window, let out ululations of joy to greet the happy event.



Hedi will not partake in his wedding preparations Hedi arrives home and goes up to his room just long enough to get some things and his drawings to return to Madhia. His mother reproaches him for spending more time in Madhia than in Kairouan, where everyone but he is busy preparing his wedding. His brother asks him to do his part. Hedi insists that he cannot make himself available because he has his work to do in Madhia.

Hedi tells Khedija that they do not know each other Hedi drops Rim off at the hotel and returns to Kairouan. He calls Khedija and tells her that he wants to talk to her, that it is very important. Hedi goes directly to meet Khedija, as usual, in a dark alley, in his car. He asks her what she wants to do with her life. She doesn't understand the question and finds him strange for asking it. He tells her that he is not strange, and that, in fact, she does not know him, or she would not have said that. He tells her that they do not know each other, that in the three years they have been seeing each other, they have never met anywhere else but in his car, and that they have never done anything together. Khedija tells Hedi that she wants to get married and have children. He tells her that this is what is meant to happen according to their parents, but he insists that she tell him what she would like for herself and not for others. Khedija tells him that he is just being stressed before the wedding, which is normal. He shakes his head and replies that she does not understand what he is saying. He leans in to kiss her. She pulls back. He tells her that he does not understand that she keeps texting him saying she dreams of being in his arms, of kissing him, yet she wants none of that when he is near her. Khedija goes out to meet Hedi, who is waiting for her in his car. Khedija is anxious to know what Hedi's mother's impression of her is, whether she finds her acceptable and beautiful. Hedi tells her that his mother liked her a lot. Khedija is titillated by the thought that in a few days she and Hedi will be married, living in the same house, and that she will no longer have to submit to her parents' questions and curfews. Khedija is unhappy at home. Hedi tells Khedija that his boss refuses to give him leave for his wedding. She thinks that Hedi's boss is insensitive and also for forcing him to travel from Madhia to Kairouan for his wedding celebration. After a short moment of silence, she tells Hedi that her father's passport has been seized, and that no one wants to explain why. She tells him that her parents are always quarrelling and that she cannot wait to get away from them.

Hedi is absent at his wedding reception Hedi and Khedija's wedding reception dinner takes place, but the future groom is nowhere to be found, and both his phones remain switched off. Khedija arrives with her parents, and her mother is surprised that the future groom is not there to welcome them. Embarrassed, Hedi's mother explains to them that he has not given any sign of life, and that they are afraid that something bad has happened to him. Ahmed and his mother decide to go to Madhia to find out what is going on. The concierge tries in vain to reach Hedi in his room. The mother asks Ahmed to go look for him in the vicinity of the hotel, while she waits in the lobby. Ahmed spots his brother sitting at the beach with Rim and hails him.



Hedi will not marry Khedija Hedi's mother is furious. She wants to know where he was. Ahmed tells her that he found Hedi at the beach with a girl. The mother does not understand how Hedi can be having fun in Madhia while in Kairouan she is worried about him. She gives him a slap. Hedi calmly tells her that he will not get married. His mother wants to know if it is the girl from the beach who put this idea in his head. He answers that nobody has influenced him, and that he is in love with that girl. Hedi wants his mother to stop controlling his life. Hedi's mother and brother ask him how he can be so ungrateful after all they have done to provide him with a beautiful wedding and after having humiliated themselves before his future father-in-law to find him a decent job. Hedi replies that he never asked them for anything. He tells them that they did it for themselves and not for him: his brother, to ease his conscience and stay in France; and she,

to look good in front of the neighbors. He tells his mother not to tell him how to live his life anymore because she has made it a living hell by controlling him and constantly comparing him to his brother.

Hedi tells Rim that he loves her Hedi and Rim go dancing at a *hizb*, which Rim explains is a typical Madhia party. Hedi dances himself into a trance. They get a room in a close-by hotel and make love passionately. They return to their hotel, and just as Rim is about to get out of the car, Hedi holds her back and tells her that he is getting married in two days. Devastated, she gets out of the car and leaves, crying. As Hedi is going to his room, the hotel concierge catches Hedi and gives him a note from Peugeot, which he mechanically puts in his pocket without reading. He sits in his room for a long time, sad and thoughtful. The next day, he decides to go and talk to Rim. He tells her that he loves her, that he wants to stay with her, and that he wants to go to Montpellier with her. She asks him what he will do in Montpellier because she has a job there, but he does not. He tells her that he will find something, anything. He could also publish his drawings there. He already has a visa for France, which he obtained for his honeymoon.



Hedi wants to know what he is up to with Rim Hedi asks Rim what their plans are after Montpellier. The most important thing for the moment is being together. He tells her that life is not a game, and that at some point one must set a goal and follow it. She gets offended and asks him if he means that she is superficial. He takes her in his arms to apologize for having offended her. Hedi goes to get some clothes and his passport for the trip to Montpellier. As he is packing, his brother comes into his room and tells him that he is right to want to leave, and that he, too, has nothing left to do in Tunisia. He informs him that he had intended to associate with Khedija's father in a business venture, but the latter has just been arrested for corruption. He tells Hedi that his life is in France anyway, that he could never live in Tunisia because his mother hates his French wife. Hedi hugs his brother, opens his mother's bedroom door and looks at her sleeping for a few seconds, then leaves to join Rim, with tears in his eyes.



Hedi changes his mind ... again Hedi arrives at the airport before Rim. He sees her arrive and goes to meet her. She asks him if he has already checked his luggage. He answers that he has not. She understands that he will not be going with her to Montpellier. They embrace for long minutes, in tears. They separate and go their separate ways, with heavy hearts.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

HEDI (*Indecisive, Indolent, Inhibited, Cowardly*)

Hedi is an indecisive, indolent, and inhibited character. Although he succeeds in overcoming his inhibition, he is still far from proving that he can overcome his indecision and indolence.

Indecisive Hedi is a character who does not seem to have the strength to make decisions. His life is managed by his mother, who arranges his wedding, prepares the dowry, decides where he will live with his future wife, and, in a conversation he overhears between his mother and brother, even decides on the layout of his living space. He wants to marry Khedija, then changes his mind and decides to go to Montpellier with Rim, and changes his mind again, deciding to return to Kairouan or perhaps to Tunis, where he has an apartment. Hedi seems to go indifferently through life imagined and elaborated for him by others.

Indolent The work of a salesman requires persuasion, enthusiasm, and persistence, which Hedi desperately lacks. He arrives at a customer's home and is told that the current situation is preventing him from restocking his cars, and Hedi offers no arguments to persuade him, no incentives to encourage him to reconsider. In fact, he doesn't even take the time to sit down and stands in front of the customer, as if he were in a hurry to get out of his office. He arrives at a second company, where people ask him questions about what Peugeot offers, to which he simply answers yes or no. At a third potential customer's house, the presence of two dogs in the yard persuades him to go back to his car to draw pictures. Hedi drags this indolence everywhere, even in the organization of a wedding to which he seems to have submitted.

Inhibited Hedi has suppressed emotions that finally appear with time. First, the passion for love that he experiences with Rim is a feeling that his conservative upbringing could not allow him to express, and which was silently bubbling up inside him. With Rim, he gives free rein to his feelings that finally find an eruption. And then, there is also the suffering killed for many years due to the way his mother treated him. Towards the end of the film, Hedi tells his mother never again to decide for him or dictate to him how to live his life. He tells her that he has suffered from her contempt and propensity to always see him as the ugly duckling and his brother as the perfect son. He tells her that he no longer wants to be her whipping boy.

Cowardly Hedi is a cowardly character. He has hardly ever had the courage to say things as he sees them. He would like to get a leave of absence for his honeymoon but is unable to articulate the importance of it to his boss and just gives a wedding reception invitation card to his boss in the hope that it will sway him. He walked out of his marriage to Khedija without informing her, but rather tiptoeing off in a cowardly manner. At least he had the courage to come to the airport and tell Rim in person that he was not going to Montpellier with her anymore. It is there, perhaps, that one must give him credit for not having always been a cowardly person.

RIM (*Independent, Spontaneous, Attentive*)

She is an independent, spontaneous and observant woman. She is a dancer. She seemed to have no romantic attachments until she met Hedi. Although she was devastated by their separation, she quickly dried her tears and flew to Montpellier for a new adventure.

Independent Rim is a woman with no emotional attachment, who lives her life by traveling and meeting new people. She has visited many countries through her work, met many people, and made many friends. She relies on no one and works hard in several countries to support herself.

Spontaneous Rim takes life in stride as it comes to her, without much thought as to what tomorrow will bring. She likes Hedi, and she does not hesitate to have sex with him. She goes to Montpellier for a short-term job without really knowing what she will do next, but she does not care about that for the moment and will seize the first opportunity that comes to her. Hedi wants to come with her to Montpellier? So why not? She spontaneously accepts his company. And when he changes his mind at the airport, she cries, but moves on to the next thing that life has in stock for her.

Attentive Hedi is a woman attentive to details and curious. Her meeting with Hedi started from her curiosity to know what made him run on the beach. In addition, in the few hours she spent with Hedi, she noticed some interesting details about him: She remarked that he had one ear more detached than the other, that he would soon go bald, and she told him that she was surprised that he had participated in the revolution, because he did not have the head of a revolutionary. With this last remark, Rim captured the nature of Hedi, a man of few initiatives.

KHEDIJA (*Shy, Conservative, Sensitive*)

Khedija is a shy, conservative, and sensitive girl. She has been dating Hedi for three years and is looking forward to getting married with him and having her own conservative family.

Shy Khedija sends messages to her future husband, Hedi, in which she expresses her desire to be in his arms and to kiss him. However, when Hedi is near her, shyness prevents her from acting on her desires. Inhibited by her conservative upbringing, she does not even dare to give or accept a kiss from her future husband.

Conservative Khedija has a conservative understanding of her role in her family life. When Hedi asks her what she would like in life, she can find no other answer than that of marrying him and having children. Moreover, in order not to give of herself an image of an indecent girl, her meetings with Hedi for the past three years have only taken place under cover of darkness, within the strict confines of the latter's car, and never beyond the 8pm curfew imposed by her parents.

Sensitive Khedija's parents are going through a situation that makes her anxious. Her father has had his passport confiscated for reasons she does not know (he will be arrested later for corruption), and her parents argue all the time. She confides in Hedi that her parents' trouble worries and hurts her. Although

she is happy to get married soon and go live with Hedi, the idea of leaving her parents alone in this cold environment makes her very unhappy.

THE MOTHER (*Overbearing, Conniving*)

Hedi's mother is an overbearing and conniving character. Not content with ruling Hedi's life, she also wants to rule Ahmed's.

Overbearing The mother has been controlling Hedi's life and stifling him since his father's death. She has transferred her happiness onto Hedi's existence, and she wants to mold him in a way that makes her happy. Hedi, who, according to Rim, does not look like a revolutionary, finally rebels and tells his mother to stay out of his life.

Conniving The mother never accepted the fact that Ahmed is married to a French woman. She would have preferred him to have a Tunisian wife, and preferably one whom she has chosen for him. So, without telling Ahmed, she was grooming her young niece to be his Tunisian wife. It is not clear how she would have made Ahmed agree to it, but she had already told her niece that she found her a husband.

THEMES

SOCIETY (gender, religion, patriarchy)

Gender The film gives us a glimpse of several aspects of the female gender in Tunisian society, not so much to contrast them as to show the diversity of Tunisian women. Hedi's mother is illustrative of the Tunisian matriarch who is deeply rooted in her tradition and aware of how she is viewed by her neighbors. Therefore, she wants to make sure that her son's marriage reflects positively on the family. And so, she invests years of planning in it, to the point of marginalizing the one who is directly concerned, that is, Hedi. Somewhat in the same vein as the traditional female, but with a dose of modernity, is the young Khedija, Hedi's bride, who regards her marriage to Hedi as an escape from the overbearing, conservative grip of her parents and the stifling atmosphere created by their never-ending quarrels. And then there is Rim, an unattached, uninhibited woman who lives according to her passions, quick to jump in with both feet on the next adventure, and who gives Hedi some strength for rebellion and some aspiration for freedom. These three images of women illustrate the diversity of the female gender in Tunisia, which should not be painted with a single brush stroke.

Religion The theme of religion is only mentioned in passing, but it is nevertheless present and important in the film. We see it from the beginning when the older brother arrives from France, and his mother goes down to greet him in the street. After embracing his mother, Ahmed immediately remarks that her veil partially reveals her hair, and he adjusts it for her. This gesture shows that religion is part of the organizing principles of Tunisian society. And this principle still asserts its importance in Hedi's wedding rituals. It is soon after the prayer, and straight from the mosque, that a delegation of men from Hedi's family, led by his brother, goes to Khedija's father to officially ask for his daughter's hand in marriage.

Patriarchy When Hedi's mother finds him at the hotel in Madhia, where he had gone to join Rim while he was expected in Kairouan for dinner the night before his wedding, she tells him that if his father were alive, he would have disapproved of his behavior. The mother considers that what she does for Hedi is in the name of his father, in accordance with what he would have wanted to see happen. She is thus, in the absence of the father, an extension of the father's authority. When Hedi's older brother, who lives in France, arrives in Tunisia, the mother unloads this task onto him. It is therefore Ahmed, the elder brother, who plays the role of the father, and who leads the delegation of men who will officially ask Khedija's father for her hand in marriage, while Khedija's mother remains confined to the floor above, with her daughter and the other women, watching through a latticed window, which allows them to see the men's transaction without being seen, as mere spectators. Once the men's pact is concluded, the women can then ululate to celebrate it. Here, the authority of men is emphasized, for it is from them that the laws of society unfurl.

QUEST (introspection, search)

Introspection The few days that Hedi spent in the city of Madhia, far from Kairouan, his mother, and his fiancée Khedija, but especially his meeting with Rim, allowed the young man to reflect and understand what

was imposed on him and what decisions were his own. What he understood from this introspection is that since the death of his father, he was only clay in the hands of his mother, who shaped him according to her family and social aspirations. What he understood was that his arranged marriage to Khedija fulfilled more these maternal aspirations than his own. What he understood was that he was neither free to move nor free to express his emotions. What he understood finally was that Rim's autonomy was liberating and allowed him to live his own freedom whereas his mother's conservatism was stifling and imprisoned his body and emotions. From this introspection, it became obvious to him that he had to free himself from the maternal hold, including Kairouan and Khedija.

Search The theme of the quest, in several forms, is central to this film. Hedi and Ahmed's mother search for social status within the community, which will be achieved through her son's successful marriage to a girl from a wealthy family. And until we learn of Khedija's father's setbacks, he is held in high esteem in the Kairouan community, so that by joining his family, Hedi's mother immediately reaps some social benefits. For Khedija, too, marriage would take her out of the status of a girl and propel her into the coveted status of a respectable woman. So she looks forward to the wedding with excitement. And then, there is Rim's apparent independence, her excessive exuberance, her endless trips, which are only the superficial coating of a feverish quest, that of a stable job and a fixed life. Hedi is also looking for this fixed life, but with a partner who would combine Rim's exuberance with Khedija's stability. When he asks Rim what they will do after Montpellier and she does not give him a satisfactory answer, something gets lost in him. He feels that with Rim, he will only have half of what he is looking for, the other half being held by Khedija.

PSYCHOLOGY (sadness, alienation, loss)

Sadness *Hedi* is a sad film because all three main characters are ultimately sorrowful. Hedi is the personification of melancholy. The rare moments when his face lights up with a smile are the ones he spends with Rim, on the beach, in his hotel room, in the streets of Madhia, or at the *hizb* party. Even there, a little thing brings him back to sadness: the view of the cemetery brings back memories of his father who died a year ago. Rim's joke about his detached ear takes him back to scenes of being bullied in school. And at the end, when he decides to return to Kairouan rather than follow Rim to Montpellier, his long-cherished dream of independence fades away and tears of separation absorb him. Khedija is also a sad character. For her, marriage is a way out of the family home, which is plagued by disputes between her mother and father and threats from the judicial authorities on her father's trail.

Loss Despite the facade of happiness she displays about her elder son, married in France to a French woman, Ahmed's mother hides the pain of losing him. She would have liked Ahmed to be married to a Tunisian woman, who would give her Tunisian grandchildren whom she would cherish and keep close to her. Instead, she lost him to France, to a French woman whom she hates, and who gave her a granddaughter she will certainly never see. To try to recapture this lost child, this lost love, the mother is preparing to pair him with a Tunisian wife, a woman from his home, in the person of her little niece who lives with her. But the son does not know this yet, and it is the niece's indiscretion that makes us deduce it.

Alienation Ahmed confides to his younger brother, Hedi, that he too will forget about coming back to live in Tunisia, that there is nothing to keep him in Tunisia because his place is in France, near his daughter and his French wife, whom he adores, and whom his mother will never accept. When Ahmed communicates with his mother via Skype, it is always about her granddaughter Sarra that the matriarch asks, never about her daughter-in-law. Ahmed's hopes of integrating his entire French family into his Tunisian milieu having been shattered by his mother's disdain and her obstinacy in finding him a Tunisian wife. The older brother feels alienated from Tunisia and decides, once and for all, to entrench himself in his host country rather than force an impossible cohabitation between France and Tunisia. Just as the matriarch's over-investment in tradition has finally separated her from her younger son, Hedi, her intolerance of her elder son's wife also cuts him off from her and causes her to lose him. The mother, Ahmed, and Hedi have alienated themselves from each other.

QUESTIONS

1. In your opinion, is Hedi a man abused or loved by his mother? Explain.
2. Have you ever felt like someone else was making important decisions in your life for you? In what context? How did you take it?
3. Given Hedi's personality, would Khedija or Rim make a better wife for him? Justify your answer.
4. Why do you think Hedi decided not to go to Montpellier with Rim?
5. Is it still possible that the marriage between Hedi and Khedija will take place? Elaborate on your answer.