

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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The Silences of the Palace (1994)

Moufida Tlatli

OVERVIEW

On its 1994 list of the ten best movies, *Time magazine* placed Moufida Tlatli's *The Silences of the Palace* in tenth place. The *Silences* gained international acclaim as the first film by an Arab woman filmmaker to have global success. The film won a number of awards, among which special mention by the Jury at the 1994 Cannes Festival, making Tlatli the first female Arab director to win recognition at the Cannes. Tlatli graduated from the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques de Paris (IDHEC) in 1968 and worked as script supervisor and a film editor before making her first film.

CHARACTERS

<i>Khedija</i>	A servant in the beys' palace
<i>Young Alia</i>	Daughter of Khedija
<i>Sid'Ali</i>	A bey
<i>Sarra</i>	A little princess, friend of Alia
<i>Khalti Hadda</i>	Senior servant

SYNOPSIS

The Silences of the Palace is the tale of a young servant coming of age in Tunisia in the 1950s. Born under bondage, in the palace of the beys, the last monarchs of this French protectorate, of a slave mother and an unknown father, young Alia grows up amidst the songs, cries, laughter and gossips of the many servants of the palace, who try in vain to assuage their sorrows. Like them, Alia is expected to serve her masters' needs and desires for the rest of her life. Like them, too, she longs for freedom and for a true family life outside the stifling gates of the palace, away from the authority of the beys.

SCENE

Alia's birth Two births take place on the same day. In a Tunisian palace, a little princess and the daughter of one of the palace servants are expected to be born on the same day. Two princes (beys) are waiting in a room. One of them, Sid'Ali, is pacing the room. A servant announces the birth of the princess. The second bey, Si Bechir, goes to see his newborn daughter. Sid'Ali is seen pacing again, this time, in the servants' quarter. In one of the servants' bedrooms, Khedija is having a more difficult delivery than Si Bechir's wife. She finally gives birth to a girl. The newest servant in the group asks who the baby's father is. Khalti Hadda, the oldest servant, orders her to shut up.



Alia has grown up. Alia, is now an adolescent. The two girls born on the same date, Sarra, the little princess, and Alia, a slave's daughter, are now playmates. They try to open the palace gates, and one of the wardens scolds them. Alia watches Sarra learn to play the lute and tells her mother that she wants a lute, too. While playing with Alia, Sarra is fetched for a family picture. Alia follows her and positions herself in the frame. The photographer asks her to move out of the frame. After the royal family picture, Sid'Ali calls Alia over for a picture with him and his niece Sarra. Alia sneaks into Jneina's bedroom, uses her makeup, puts on her dress, and tries to imitate



her mother's dance moves. She spins until she gets dizzy and falls on Jneina's bed. Jneina surprises her in her bedroom and gets angry.

A girl's first period Alia has her first periods. She will not tell her mother what is going on with her. She runs and isolates herself in the attic, where she picks up an old lute. Alia runs out of the kitchen to her bedroom. Her mother, Khedija, follows her to reassure her that what she is going through is normal.



Sid'Ali fascinates Alia Sid'Ali, who is always affectionate towards Alia, fascinates her. Sid'Ali falls asleep reading his paper in his lounge chair. Alia walks to him and leans very closely over his face. He opens his eyes, and she takes off running.



Alia's Questions Alia has a lot of questions. Her Mother wants her to stay in the kitchens with her and not take Sarra as a model. Alia asks who, then, must be her model. She asks who her father is. Khedija orders her to never raise the subject again. Alia repeats the question of her filiation. She also asks her mother where Khedija comes from. Her mother explains that her parents sold her to the beys at the age of ten, promised her that they will come back for her, and never returned.



Alia is curious and spies on her mother Sid'Ali asks Khedija to bring him his tea tonight, meaning to join him in bed. Alia follows her mother upstairs to spy on her. She witnesses a deep, mutual attraction between Sid'Ali and her mother. She also hears Sid'Ali talk about how much he likes her. Another night, Khedija entertains the beys. From Sarra's balcony, Alia and Sarra are watching Khedija. Alia seems mesmerized by her mother's dancing performance. Alia also spies on Sid'Ali as he slips into her mother's bedroom in the servants' quarter.



Si Bechir wants Alia Si Bechir asks Khedija to have Alia bring him his tea upstairs. Khedija is devastated. She tells him that Alia is a mere child. Khedija orders her daughter to go upstairs no longer. Khedija tries to protect Alia by lying to Si Bechir that the young girl is sick. The prince does not believe her.



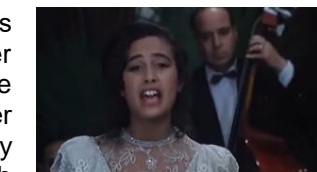
Si Bechir rapes Khedija On another occasion, Alia runs in circles in the courtyard until she collapses. Si Bechir sees her on the ground. He picks her up and takes her to one of the palace bedrooms. He is about to force himself on her when Khedija comes looking for her daughter. Si Bechir locks the door and assaults Khedija. Alia regains consciousness and as she opens her eyes, she sees her mother being raped by Si Bechir.



Alia is traumatized. Alia falls ill from seeing her mother get raped. She will no longer speak. Sid'Ali comes to see her. Sarra visits her and plays the lute for her. Khedija notices that the sound of the lute makes her daughter come out of her shell and smile. Khalti Hadda and Khedija pull their savings together to buy Alia a lute. Alia recovers her voice.



Alia sings at Serra's wedding reception. Sid'Ali wants Alia to come upstairs and sing for the princes. Khedija is tormented by the thought of sending her daughter upstairs. Khalti Hadda tells Khedija that she cannot contradict the prince. Alia goes upstairs and sings for the princes while Sid'Ali accompanies her on the lute. She is happy to have pleased her audience. After a first song very appreciated by the audience, Alia catches sight of her mother, watching her with a painful grimace, and of Lofti, a young and radical teacher. She then launches into a revolutionary song accusing the beys of cowardice for abandoning Tunisia. The beys and their guests leave in protest.



Khedija dies from abortion Khedija has a nervous breakdown. She tries to cause herself to abort the child by punching her belly. Khalti Hadda's abortion medication takes effect sooner than expected. Khedija begins to feel unwell. She is transported to her room. The midwives cannot save her. Khedija dies of a hemorrhage.



Independence. The country is on edge, as the nationalists defy the French colonial regime with general strikes. At the palace, the beys are preparing to take refuge in their country home after Sarra's engagement. There are demonstrations for independence. Two servants are fighting in the kitchen, and one of them mentions that she wants her independence from the palace. Houssine, Khalti's son, arrives and asks them to be quiet for there is a bigger fight out in the street. The French have surrounded the city and shoot all those who dare speak the word "independence."

Lofti seduces Alia Lofti, a young teacher and nationalist revolutionary, is being tracked by the French authorities. Houssine asks his mother to hide him for two days. Alia discovers that Khalti has been hiding Lofti. Lofti teaches Alia to write and read. He seduces Alia by painting her a picture of great changes to come to the country with independence. He promises her a bright future outside the gates of the palace, where her voice will enchant crowds.



Ten years later On Sid'Ali's death, Alia returns to the palace. She wanders around the property and recalls her life there. She concludes that her life outside the palace has not been much different from her mother's. She, too, has lived in sin, unmarried. She has had a series of abortions. She is pregnant with Lofti's child again. This time she will carry the pregnancy to term despite Lofti's opposition.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

KHEDIJA Could Khedija have changed her condition if she was less resigned and more daring? Would she have come out of slavery if she had had the courage to break her silence and speak frankly to Sid'Ali about her sorrows and sadness? Or would it be too optimistic to assume that the slave could reason with her master? We will never know because Khedija never took these actions. Remaining silent about one's suffering was the palace's rule not to break.

Resigned Sold by her parents to the beys at the age of ten, Khedija resigned herself to her life as a slave and did not dare to consider the possibility of another life outside the palace. When her daughter asked her why she stayed in the palace all these years, her answer was that she did not know anyone else outside. Khedija saw her dependence on the beys, even if abusive, as a lifeline. Unlike her daughter, she was afraid to take the plunge and envisage life otherwise.

Feminist If we stick to the classical definition of feminism, it would be difficult to conceive of Khedija, or any of the slaves, as a feminist. And yet, her strength, her endurance under institutionalized hardship, her sense of protection, and especially the sacrifices that she makes to shield her daughter from the abuses of the palace, and which even lead her to be raped in her place, would earn her this appellation. She is protective, affectionate, and gives her daughter the necessary instructions so that one day she can escape the palace gates. Nonetheless, she can only do so much in the oppressive environment of the palace.

ALIA Alia represents the body politic of the Tunisian nation. Impetuous, ambitious, promised a better future, she rebels and frees herself from the external oppressors (France and its local representatives, the beys), only to see herself subjugated by reactionary endogenous forces.

Inquisitive Alia knew more about the secrets of the palace than her mother could imagine. This is because she was very curious. By spying on her mother, she caught the very intimate and affectionate relationship between her and Sid'Ali and overheard them talking about her. So, she knew what her mother

wanted to hide from her: that Sid'Ali was her father. She also knew that her mother was carrying a child she did not want and was preparing, with the help of the servants, to get rid of it. This pregnancy could well have been caused by Si Bechir, the man she witnessed raping her mother.

Rebellious Alia never wanted to get used to the life of a slave. For this reason, she tried to give herself as much freedom as Princess Sarra could afford, even claiming a place in the royal family's picture. Of her mother, who advised her not to take Sarra as an example, she asked, "Who is my father," as if to tell her that she knew that it was Sid' Ali, and that, therefore, she too was a princess like Sarra and would behave like a princess. For that, she did not forbid herself any corner in the palace; everything was subjected to her curiosity. Unlike her mother, who had become accustomed to her life as a slave, she promised herself that she would get out. When given the opportunity by Lofti, she did so, but not without giving the royal family her opinion on their cowardice.

Disenchanted Lofti promised Alia a life of freedom and dignity outside the palace. She is disappointed to realize that the stigma attached to being the daughter of a slave has followed her outside the palace walls, where Lofti is reluctant to make her his wife. At best, she can only be his concubine, forced to abort her pregnancies. If anything, she realizes that her life is not very different from her mother's. Lofti is a man who imposes his desires on her, as the beys did with her mother. To break her dependence on Lofti, Alia decides that she will keep the last pregnancy.

SID' ALI Sid'Ali, like the other beys, is a victim of his patriarchal environment and his social class, which blind him to the suffering of his servants. He has convinced himself that the people whom the princely family keeps in slavery on the ground floor live in the best of all possible worlds for them, and that they are happy under the tutelage of the princes. Despite his closeness to Khedija and Alia, despite his affection for the servants, he never bothered to understand life from their point of view.

Warm Sid'Ali has a special affection for Alia, her mother, and the servants. This is perhaps because Alia and her mother constitute for him a stronger link to the people downstairs. Of the two princes, he is the only one who comes to the slave's quarters, either to order food and drink or join Khedija in her bed. He has even gotten to like the servants' food, which draws their mockery and his wife's indignation. Sid'Ali's bond with Khedija seems sincere. He shows Khedija love and tenderness, and he supports her delivery, as can best be done in the class-conscious context of the palace, by waiting anxiously by her door when she is in labor. However, still holding to his position of prince and of man in a society that is strongly patriarchal and highly stratified, he cannot accept being contradicted by Khedija. When challenged by her, he can shift from being affectionate to being aggressive in a fraction of a second.

Paradoxical It is undeniable that Sid'Ali has a particular fondness for Alia. He knows that he is the father of this girl whose birth he anxiously awaited at the same time as his brother anxiously awaited the birth of Sarra. However, he is to her a distant and absent father who cannot protect her from the perversity of the palace. In fact, he even contributes to putting her in danger when, knowing very well the morality of his brother, he asks Alia to go upstairs and sing for him.

KHALTI HADDA Khalti Hadda is the quiet force of the slaves on the ground floor. She speaks little, but her presence is reassuring. She is the mother, caregiver, and educator of the servants. All Khedija and most of the servants know they owe much to Khalti Hadda. And the princes also owe her their lives, even if their position in the social hierarchy prevents them from acknowledging it.

Matriarch Khalti Hadda is the adoptive mother of Khedija, whom she has raised since her parents sold her to the palace at the age of ten. She is also the mother of all the servants of the palace, who find in her the rootedness and discipline that they lack in their lives. Gentle and affectionate, but assertive when necessary, she keeps order, harmony, understanding, and good humor among the servants. She disciplines, she nurtures, and she heals. Above all, Khalti Hadda has managed to establish a parallel governance on the ground floor, which allows the servants to continue celebrating social rituals and give themselves a semblance of freedom.

Dedicated Khalti Hadda dedicated a lifetime of loyal service to the palace. She is the midwife who saw the birth of the princes and cared for them. She is also the mother who raised Khedija from early childhood and supervised the birth of Alia. It is difficult to say whether she has been rewarded for her loyal service. There is no doubt that the slaves have boundless respect and affection for her. As far as princes are concerned, however, Khalti Hadda is just a servant like the others, the eldest perhaps, but nothing more than that.

THEMES

SOCIETY (Patriarchy-Reproductive identity-Productive identity-Complementary identities–Gender-Feminism)

Patriarchy The palace is structure according to the regime of patriarchy, whereby the beys or princes are the dominant males and the servants are the subaltern females. In the palace, each servant has her own house or her personal quarters. Nevertheless, there remains a network of interactions between these units, which ultimately adds up to one thing: the masters' watchful gaze. The servants' "territories" are all codified and assigned by the masters according to a geometry of subjugation. The territories mimic the general outline of a camp or fortification. Following a pyramidal model of hierarchization, the beys' rooms are upstairs, and the slaves' downstairs, by the kitchens. Each time a female servant is summoned upstairs, she knows that she is being sent for to sexually gratify the masters. The language of the palace has codified upstairs as the space of coercion and submitted all the servants to that linguistic codification. Thus, the masters have only to mention to the slaves that they want their "herbal tea" upstairs for the slaves to be prepared to satisfy the masters sexually. The slaves have become so habituated to the voice that chains them to their servitude that they can only expect freedom to be uttered by that very voice. So, they live in the anticipation that the masters will offer them their freedom one day, even though the masters manifest no intention of releasing their slaves.

Reproductive/identity (imitation) Sarra's identity is reproductive. It is of the order of imitation. Sarra was raised in an environment with a father and a mother, with an established genealogy with its rules and its grammar that she is expected to uphold and pass on to new generations. Sarra's identity goes by the book of the palace's masters or by the shibboleth of patriarchy. Sarra remembers to do everything according to Daddy's Law: "A girl should not run ... my parents found me a husband ... my cousin ... it does not matter that we love one another..." She starts from the beginning of the book, learns of how her ancestors have curated the familial, patriarchal law, and, methodically, thoroughly, she works her way towards its end. She does not create anything; she is not expected to. Instead she repeats an old tradition.

Productive/identity (creation) When it comes to her identity, Alia the little slave is free. Alia is not submitted to reproducing or imitating a patriarchal genealogy. Her investment in the social field is from the order of production rather than from that of mere representation or reproduction. She does not seem to imitate preexisting models (her mother, the servants, or even Sarra the little princess). She seeks to create new intensities; and this quest for the new, she is convinced, is not vain pursuit of an unattainable ideal. She can claim no known genealogy. She is an "impure" child ready to connect with anyone. As such, she is able to steer away from, but also connect to, the code of language that, according to Palace-Philosophy, is one of bi-univocity, whereby "herbal tea," signifies "sexual gratification" when it is voiced by the master. And "upstairs," is codified as "the chamber of domination. From this perspective, Alia's imitation of Sarra is not representative or reproductive. It is not mere tracing. Rather, it is a connivance that ends up generating productive movements. Alia, on the other hand, seems to unfold everything from the middle: "I like to run ... do you love him? ... I am dreaming of love ... outside the gates of the palace." Alia has no beginning or end. Always in the middle, she constantly seems to overthrow the good order of things, like the day she almost ruined a perfect family photograph by surreptitiously inserting herself among the members of the royal family. Constantly between things, she overturns the father's shibboleth of good manners; like the day she ruined Sarra's wedding by singing a revolutionary song that denounced the royal family's collusion with France, their betrayal of the Tunisian people and their subjugation of Tunisian women.

Complementary identities Alia, the slave girl, and Sarra, the little princess, are illustrative of two kinds of identities, one supple and the other one rigid. Nonetheless, each identity contains the terms of the other,

only minimally. Alia is not the strict opposite of Sarra, even if, for the convenience of expression, while speaking of them, one is compelled to use such dichotomous terms as “like” or “unlike” or “on the one hand” and “on the other hand,” which tend to suggest a substantive opposition. Both Sarra and Alia are the products of the father’s desire for controlling femininity, and both embody, respectively, how the father succeeds and fails to control the free flow of aspirations that his desire unleashes. Sarra represents what the father has been able to structure and organize. Alia on the other hand, represents what he has failed to structure. Like Sarra, Alia contains elements of assimilation that urge her to enter the familial organized structure or the family picture. Nevertheless, she also possesses stronger elements of dissociation that compel her to scramble the father’s codes and flee the organized familial structure. Alia and Sarra are like the two strata or layers of the same matter, each serving as a substratum for the other. They both contain the same qualitative characteristics, however in varying degrees.

Quantitative-qualitative Alia is more supple, more molecular, more prone to disconnection, whereas Sarra is more rigid, more molar and organized, that is, more receptive to unification, integration and hierarchization. As a substratum, whatever Sarra can bring to Alia (her substratum), such as the experience of the father’s voice, is not substantially foreign to Alia’s composition. It is only more organized and more organizing (the prince wants his daughter to behave like a little princess and puts in place a set of rules for that to happen). Likewise, as a substratum, whatever Alia brings to Sarra (her substratum), such as, the silence and movements of a slave mother, is not substantially extrinsic to Sarra’s constitution. It is just less organized and less organizing in Sarra. It is this composition that leads Alia to seek in one of the beys, Sid’Ali, the father figure. At the same time, it is this multiplicity in her that keeps Alia’s gaze fixed beyond the gates of the palace and allows her to ultimately steer away from the beys’ authority on the very day her mother dies aborting another bastard child.

Gender In the end, the difficulty of Alia’s life outside the gates of the palace makes her realize that women’s prison is not merely a physical reality; it is a conceptual one. To the extent that women enter a binding contract with men, the terms of which are written by men to maintain women in a condition of dependency, they will remain slaves and will be entitled to nothing, not even their bodies. Alia, now an adult, arrives at this conclusion after a visit to the palace, many years later, upon Sid’Ali’s death. It is the flashbacks prompted by this not-so-happy “homecoming” that allow the viewers a glimpse into Alia’s life within the palace. This visit also makes Alia understand that both inside and outside the palace her life has always been dictated to her by patriarchy, by the beys inside the palace and by her live-in boyfriend outside the palace. Alia’s stopover at the palace is a cathartic event that helps her regain control of her mind and her body, as she becomes aware that all her life, her body has been violated by men and abused by too many abortions. This time, she has made up her mind. She will object to her boyfriend’s demand that she abort her child. She will keep her pregnancy as a token of independence. However, does not Alia’s ultimate gesture of emancipation, too, have at its core a degree of falsity, some may wonder. Is Alia not reproducing an antiquarian familial order?

Feminism In an interview with Peter Lennon, Tlatli had this to say about what Tunisian feminism is not: It is “... not the stupid American variety of feminism ... where women become as strong as men, live like men and work like men. It is too stupid. How can a woman work in a factory or an office all day and then at night be sensual for her husband?” For Tlatli, therefore, had it not been for the situation of coercion in which the servants of the palace find themselves, the household chores they perform and the role of purveyors of sensuality that they play for the beys would make them feminists. Here, feminism is less about assuming oneself as the equal of man than about working to fulfill one’s societal role in one’s own space. It is from this perspective that the beys’ slaves are feminists while the beys’ own wives are not. The beys would not survive a day without the servants, who toil in the kitchens to make sure that they do not starve, that their clothes are washed and pressed, that their bodies do not ache, and that their sexual desires are taken care of. In addition to all this, the servants must find strategies to survive the harsh conditions of slavery and prevent, as does Khedija, their daughters from becoming victims of the beys. It is in helping the beys to survive and in finding ways for them, too, to survive their harsh conditions that the servants must be even more applauded for their feminism.

QUEST (Movement/Freedom)

Movement/Freedom Unlike her mother and the other servants, who have been waiting for the miracle of emancipation to happen through the magic of the masters' voice, Alia is determined to allow herself small freedoms. For her, freedom seems to imply autonomy of movement more than it does freedom of speech. As a servant who is not allowed to go wherever she wishes within the palace, Alia, nonetheless, forbids herself no space, no corner of the palace. Thus, walking in the footsteps of her playmate, Sarra, the little princess, Alia allows herself as much freedom as Sarra is afforded. To her mother, who reminds her of her place in the kitchens of the palace, remarking that she cannot "take Sarra as an example," Alia replies that she hates pots and pans, meaning that she hates her condition of slave. So, moving about in the palace, Alia ascertains her freedom not through words, as she talks little, but through movements, that is, by annexing spaces. Alia seems to have understood that if people are oppressed, it is less because language has failed them than because their movements have been restricted. She seems to have understood that to subvert patriarchy's will-to-domination, one must be inhabited by a multiplicity of movements. Alia, a girl claimed by no identifiable father, by all indications a bastard child of an abusive rapport between a slave mother and an all-powerful master, is necessarily "meant" to escape the holy unified trinity (the father, the mother, and the child). This bastard child speaks no father's language; she speaks not at all. Instead, Alia walks, trots and runs, leaps, dances and dreams of love, where no girl is expected to run; where Sarra, the legitimate child, and the good princess, Daddy's precious little girl, is not supposed to run; where movement, especially excessive movement, is not girl-like, is not, in other words, in the order of things.

APPEARANCE (Betrayal)

Betrayal The attraction that the young Alia has for Lofti is not only physical and romantic. Lofti, the revolutionary, also allows her to aspire to a future of autonomy for Tunisia and for the country's vulnerable populations, including women. This hope that Alia nourishes does not materialize. Tunisia obtains its independence, of course, but it has kept its patriarchal system intact. And it is Alia who realizes this, when it becomes clear that a marriage with Lofti will never take place; that Lofti, clinging to the patriarchal system, will always see in her profession as a cabaret singer the defilement of an unmarried woman and therefore an unworthy mother for his potential children. From their sinful relationship, Lofti asked her to go from abortion to abortion, until the day when, tired of seeing herself dehumanized, she decides to take control of her body, claim her autonomy, and keep her pregnancy.

PSYCHOLOGY (Electra complex - Loss)

Electra Complex There is in Alia a desire to supplant her mother and be the target of Sid'Ali's attention. Alia understands that there is a special bond between her mother and Sid'Ali. The enthusiasm with which Khedija satisfies the demands of the prince is not the same enthusiasm she displays for the other members of the royal family. And so, Alia follows her mother whenever she is summoned by Sid'Ali. She wants to understand the nature of their relationship. She wants to understand her mother's affection towards the prince. For that, she hides behind curtains, she peers in keyholes, she listens behind doors, and she even leans audaciously close over Sid'Ali's face when he is dozing, as if to decipher in the lines of his face or in the smell of his breath what so attracts her mother to him. Every touch of Sid'Ali, she feels with deep warmth, and every request of him, she reports faithfully. If her mother is so fond of Sid'Ali, then, he must be special; then, he could be her father. And so, Alia pesters her mother defiantly: "Who is my father?" For no obvious reasons, Alia avoids her mother, refuses to speak with her, and sometimes even gives the impression of detesting her and the kitchen (the milieu in which she evolved), seeking greater closeness to Sid'Ali, to his world, that of the first floor. Sarra is her most common medium for entering that world. However, Alia has bolder gestures: She enters Jneina's bedroom and puts on Jneina's makeup and her clothes and awkwardly imitates her mother's dance moves. Sid'Ali's wife surprises her in her bedroom and sends her away, but not without hurling nasty insults at her and her mother. Alia wants to be in her mother's place and gain Sid'Ali's exclusive love.

Loss The opportunity for Alia to supplant her mother and captivate the full attention of Sid'Ali, her natural father, will soon come. Following the rape of her mother by Si Bechir, which she witnessed, Alia falls ill and loses her voice. And when she recovers her voice, thanks to a lute offered to her by her mother, it is a languorous voice that charms Sid'Ali, and which he wants to showcase upstairs, in front of the princes. So, he orders Khedija to send Alia upstairs to sing for him and his guests. The mother is tortured but cannot

contradict the prince. Alia, therefore, goes upstairs and seduces the princes, and especially Sid'Ali. As the gazes of the audience focus on Alia, Khedija understands that her daughter is set to lose her innocence, and that she, too, is henceforth marked to become another victim of the palace's perversity. Fortunately for Alia, political uprisings and the beys scurrying to take refuge in their country home precipitate her escape from the palace before she can lose her innocence to the princes upstairs

Questions

1. Why did Jneina (Sid'Ali's wife) hate the servants? What did she have against them?
2. Si Bechir is reading a French book of poetry in the palace garden when he sees Alia unconscious on the ground and carries her to a bedroom with the intention of raping her. What symbolism do you read in that scene?
3. Sarra's identity is vertical. It comes to her from the royal genealogical tree. Alia's is horizontal and constructed as she goes along.
 - a. Explicate this thought.
 - b. Is your identity vertical or horizontal, or is it a combination of both? In case it is a combination of both lines, which one do you think is more dominant? Explain.
4. Would life have been easier for Alia if her mother had revealed to her that Sid'Ali was her father?
5. When Beya exhibits her daughter's blood-stained nuptial bedsheet to the servants, she is greeted with applause and ululations. What does this scene reveal about womanhood in Tunisian culture?
6. Alia is constantly torn between fascination with and hatred for upstairs (the first floor).