

-HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Bab-EL-Oued City (1994)

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OVERVIEW

Bab-EL-Oued City was filmed in the months leading up to the Algerian civil war that officially caused the deaths of more than 40,000 people (200,000 people by other reports). For security reasons, the film was shot in Algeria, at various secret locations, with a script that was only partially shared with the actors on the very days they were shooting particular scenes. To the effect that the film was warning against the bloodshed that just a year later engulfed Algeria, it was farsighted. In 1994, *Bab-El-Oued City* won the Cannes Film Festival FIPRESCI Prize, the Paris Biennial of Arab Cinema IMA Grand Prize, and it was nominated for the Valladolid International Film Festival Golden Spike award.

CHARACTERS

<i>Boualem</i>	An apprentice baker
<i>Saïd</i>	Islamic gang leader
<i>Yamina</i>	Saïd young sister and Boualem's girlfriend
<i>Mabrouk</i>	Boualem's colleague and best friend
<i>Mess (Immigrant)</i>	A member of Saïd's gang

SYNOPSIS

Boualem is a night shift worker in a Bab-El-Oued bakery, and it is a matter of practical necessity for him to sleep during the day. However, the fifteen rooftop loudspeakers that broadcast Islamic morals and prescriptions on conduct make it impossible for him to get some rest. So, Boualem removes the loudspeaker closest to his bedroom and throws it in the ocean. Hardly has he gotten rid of the noisy apparatus, however, than he realizes the gravity of his not-so-secret action. A group of young Muslim vigilantes led by Saïd, a hot-tempered Islamist zealot who has vowed to rid the city of its filth and sins, have now made it their personal crusade to find and punish the perpetrator, and make it known that no blasphemy against (religious) authority will be tolerated.

SCENES

Saïd's mission: Clean up Bab-EL-Oued Saïd's mission is clean up Bab-EL-Oued and educate the youth to give them an upbringing more in tune with Islamic faith. They force them to listen to holy sermons instead of music. They also want to get rid of Ourdya, a lone foreign woman who drinks alcohol and receives male companions in her apartment. Ourdya is afraid to open her windows, and she keeps her apartment in the dark. Boualem is her secret wine supplier. They mystify their roles in the 1988 anti-communist war in Afghanistan.



Imam wants Peace Imam's views are different. During the Friday prayer, the Imam of Bab-EL-Oued calls for peace and tolerance. He reminds his followers of past violence, of the many that died, and he urges the people of Bab-EL-Oued to work towards peace. The Imam's sermon does not sit well with Saïd, who insists on pursuing the perpetrator and setting an example.



Boualem steals the loudspeaker Fifteen loudspeakers were installed on the roofs of Bab-EL-Oued to diffuse Islamist morals. Boualem removes the loudspeaker closest to his bedroom and throws it in the ocean. Boualem's action does not go unnoticed. From her window, Yamina has seen him untie the loudspeaker from its pole. At the bakery, Mabrouk, Boualem's colleague and best friend, notices that something bothers his friend. Mabrouk presses Boualem, who admits and regrets his act, the inevitable consequences of which he now realizes. Boualem and Mabrouk dive in the sea to search for the loudspeaker. Saïd is looking for the perpetrator who broke God's law by stealing the loudspeaker. Yamina, Boualem's sweetheart, is doing laundry on the terrace. Her old brother Saïd accuses her of looking for a pretext to spend a lot of time outside. He believes she saw the person who removed the loudspeaker because she is always standing at the window. He bullies her to reveal to him who it is that stole the loudspeaker.



Boualem has a date with Yamina in the Bab-EL-Oued Cemetery.

Yamina asks him to return the loudspeaker. He tells her that it is too late for that. Rachid, Saïd's right-hand man, spots Boualem and Yamina and overhears Boualem confess his crime. He also observes Yamina uncover her head at Boualem's request. He reports what he witnessed to Saïd. Saïd's gang sets about to track Boualem and punish him. They seek Boualem at the bakery, and when they cannot find him, they beat Mabrouk up to force him to tell them where his friend is hiding. Rachid blackmails the baker to fire Boualem. He has some dirt on the baker dating back to his collaboration with the French during the Algerian War. He threatens to divulge it if the baker does not let Boualem go. Boualem loses his job the following evening.



Harassment of Boualem The gang harasses Boualem. Saïd mails Boualem a shroud, symbol of death. The postman, whose advances were just rejected by a woman, is terrorized by Boualem's parcel and blames all this violence and resentment on the women's sinful behavior. Boualem confronts Saïd. They settle on a day to fight it out. Saïd and his hooligans attack Boualem and run him out of town. They replace the loudspeaker stolen by Boualem. Over the rooftop loudspeakers, the Imam denounces Saïd's brutality and intolerance, warns of violent days to come, and announces that he will be leaving Bab-EL-Oued for calmer horizons. Boualem returns to let Yamina know that he is going into exile and will come back to fetch her.



Yamina's letter to Boualem Seated in front of newspapers that headline the tumult of Algeria on their front pages, Yamina writes Boualem a letter that she will certainly not send him because she does not have his address. She writes that things have gotten worse in Bab-EL-Oued. Killings, constant fear, and curfews have taken over. Saïd is dead. He disappeared one day, and months later, his body turned up in the morgue.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

SAÏD (Criminal – Hypocrite – Coward – Bully)

Saïd is a criminal, hypocritical, coward, and terrorizing character. Saïd is a gangster involved in unlawful dealings with mysterious individuals who visit him often in a black BMW. For his illegal business to thrive, Saïd needs a submissive environment, where people do not snoop around, ask too many questions, or compete against him. For that, he needs a repressive machine. He finds it in religion, an institution predominantly persuasive and only minimally coercive. From religion Saïd extracts and enhances the least dominant elements, those of coercion and violence. However, things do not always go according to plan. A minority of unimpressionable individuals drive him to self-destruction.

Criminal Under his deceptive mask of a good Muslim, Saïd has ties with the criminal organization of Bab-EL-Oued to control the illegal traffic of goods coming from Europe. The occupants of the mysterious black BMW who bully him, follow his movements, and give him orders are certainly not people of good morality. They are his crime bosses. It is, thus, undeniable that Saïd's religious zeal has one objective, which has nothing to do with soul salvation. Religion is for Saïd an instrument for keeping the people of Bab-EL-Oued under his control as subdued consumers in his illegal trade.

Hypocrite The Imam of Bab-EL-Oued is unambiguous that Saïd's performance of Islam, which is steeped in intimidation and violence, is not in accordance with the *Koran*. Islam, the Imam reminds Saïd, is a religion of tolerance. He cannot claim Islamic faith and at the same time act against its very principles. Yet, this is what one observes in Saïd's everyday acts: He is a conceited, brutal, hypocritical gangster who uses the Prophet's name for his criminal enterprise.

Coward Saïd is also a coward. He enjoys intimidating the weakest and most vulnerable, like his mother and sister and the lonely Ourdya. However, when he is challenged by his victims, his bravery fizzles. After he sends death threats to Boualem, the young baker challenges him to a duel. And so, they meet to fight out their differences. As Saïd is starting to lose the fight to Boualem, his gang of hooligans intervenes, beats up Boualem and saves him. By accepting help from his gang, Saïd cowardly violates the principles of courage, honor, and individual responsibility that are at the very core of the duel.

Bully Saïd is a bully both at home and in his community. At home, he terrorizes his sister, his mother, and his younger brother. He imposes the television channels they can watch. He forbids his sister to look out the window or to spend too much time on the terrace because she might attract men's gazes. In his community, he wants to control the kind of music that young people listen to. He attacks Ourdya because she drinks alcohol, and he even orders her to leave the city.

BOUALEM (Impetuous – Bold – Disillusioned)

Boualem is an impetuous and bold young man disillusioned in his country. Boualem poses the greatest threat to Saïd's ambition to put Bab-EL-Oued under his tutelage. If left unchallenged, Boualem's boldness could become contagious and deleterious. Thus, Boualem becomes for Saïd the man of whom it is necessary to make an example so that the inhabitants of Bab-EL-Oued get in line and act docile.

Impetuous Boualem removed the rooftop speaker that prevented him from sleeping after work and threw it into the sea. Later, he confessed to Mabrouk and Yamina that he did not know what was going through his mind at the time he made this decision. This decision made on a whim reveals Boualem's hotheaded nature. Mabrouk had warned him that his act would cause a lot of turmoil in a precarious environment where everyone tried the best they could to go about their own business without stepping on other people's toes. Indeed, like a kick in an anthill, Boualem's impetuosity further stirs the zeal of Saïd and his gang of thugs, giving them an excuse to police people's lives.

Bold To do what Boualem did in this city of Bab-EL-Oued terrorized by the gang of Saïd requires a boldness out of the norm. Daring to steal in broad daylight and throw into the sea a loudspeaker installed by religious fanatics requires audacity. To be the only man in a frightened city to sympathize with a woman called a disbeliever by fanatics, and to go so far as to provide her with alcohol is an extraordinary recklessness. But above all, to go and hunt down Saïd in his lair and challenge him to a duel, in the dark of the night, is an act of folly that only Boualem can perform in Bab-EL-Oued.

Disillusioned Boualem and his young brother are among the many who have lost faith in Algeria as a country capable of taking care of the basic needs of its citizens. As Boualem sits on the docks of the Mediterranean Sea, his eyes riveted on Europe on the horizon, he devises a plan to flee the stifling environment of Bab-EL-Oued. The brutality of Saïd's gang strengthens his resolve to go into exile and sends him on a boat to Europe.

MABROUK (Perceptive – Comic – Sincere)

Mabrouk is a perceptive and comic character, and sincere friend to Boualem. He is a "good guy" who, as he himself tells his friend Boualem, prefers not to trample on the anthill that Saïd and his gang represent. On his days off from the bakery, He has his small traffic of contraband goods from Marseilles that he would not want to see disturbed by Boualem's temerity. And when Boualem rocks the boat, Mabrouk tries the best he can to keep it from capsizing.

Perceptive When Boualem came to the bakery after stealing the rooftop loudspeaker, it only took Mabrouk one glance at his friend to realize that he had something wrong. Mabrouk is quick to see through Mess's dissimulation. He jokes at the beard Mess grew to pass for a good Muslim while his behavior is antithetical to Muslim faith. He tells Mess that he knows he is not sincere about his faith, and that he made himself a Muslim and a follower of Saïd just to feed off him. Later, he jokingly threatens to denounce Mess to Saïd for his penchant for womanizing.

Comic Mabrouk is a funny and comical character. He is quick to tell jokes. He does not fail to tease Mess whenever he sees him, although Mess has no sense of humor and takes offense a little too easily at Mabrouk's jokes.

Sincere Mabrouk is also a sincere character. When Boualem confessed to him that he stole the loudspeaker, Mabrouk did not hide his opinion that it was a stupid act. Instead, he immediately proposed that they go find it and put it back in place, and Mabrouk kept his friend's secret to himself. However, Mabrouk never pretended to be a hero, and the kicks and punches of Saïd's henchmen got the better of him. He came to confess to Boualem that he had betrayed him.

THEMES

SOCIETY (religion, identity, transformation, globalization)

Religion Despite their claims of acting on behalf of religion, religious faith is not at the foundation of Saïd and his friends' acts. In this case, how is one to explain their claim of following Islam and their assertion that Islamic faith is the guiding spirit of their decisions? In fact, what really interests Saïd in Islam is also what will draw any despotic mind to an apparatus of control. Saïd has detected a dormant force, an organizing principle in religion, which, once put to work, can transform religion into a formidable machine of repression. Religion is an institution that, like any other institution, contains both the force of persuasion and the force of repression, but which develops only one of those two forces predominantly than the other, leaving the other force to remain dormant but potentially active. For the Imam of Bab-EL-Oued, only the soft, persuasive force of religion must be used predominantly. The aggressive, repressive power of religion must be kept dormant. The Imam is patient, for his goal is salvation of the soul. It is through enduring charitable acts that the Imam wins his followers and recruits new members. Contrary to what the Imam advises, Saïd prefers that religion predominantly use its repressive force to gain influence. For Saïd, Islam must function explicitly by law and by decree as a public institution having control over people's mobility and education.

Identity The protagonists of Bab-El-Oued are all caught in a play that, despite themselves, makes them agents for the destabilization of the notion of pure identity. It is as if both in the presence of mind and the absence of mind of the characters, events themselves take turn in satirizing their nostalgia for the pure. Saïd is dreaming of an unadulterated Islamicized society under his control, but he cannot help assimilating authentic holy Arabic with inflections of the infidel's idiom, that is, French. At the bakery of Bab-el-Oued, Boualem's best friend, Mabrouk, has a "bad habit" of chewing tobacco while mixing his dough; this causes him to "contaminate" the French croissants and baguettes he makes with the flavor of Algerian tobacco. And yet, as if he were purer than the croissants he bakes, this maker of transcultural tastes is so certain of his pure Algerianness that he does not miss the slightest occasion to remind "Immigrant" of his foreignness.

Even as they decry the oppressive system “at home” and fantasize about a journey to the land of the other, out of the oppressive Algerian nation, most of the young Algerian men in the film remain infatuated with their own Algerianness, which they constantly evoke by indexing the other’s supposed lack of authenticity.

Transformation In today’s kasbah, the rooftop no longer belongs exclusively to women, and neither do the streets belong exclusively to men or veiled women. Mess and Yamina are necessarily bound to meet the other gender’s eyes, and vice versa. These are the realities of a globalizing world that embraces cultural, economic and social imperatives beyond exclusively local prescriptions. The Algeria that Saïd dreams of, and which would be rid of any foreign presence, such as, the Imam, Ourdya or the television mini-series that his mother, his younger brother and his younger sister love, is an Algeria that will not return. Young women on the terraces of Bab-EL-Oued rehearsing scenes from foreign films, commenting on the costumes of foreign actors or exchanging romance novels from far-away places have already scrapped Saïd’s Algeria. Saïd’s nostalgia can only end in resentment. Just as the Algeria dreamed of by Saïd died, so died, too, the Algeria of a nostalgic couple of Pieds Noirs, a man and his blind aunt, who roam the streets of Bab-EL-Oued, evoking the pre-independence time when the French colonists thought that they enjoyed undue privileges at the expenses of the autochthonous Algerians.

Globalization In Saïd’s defense, could it be that his efforts to barricade Algeria behind concocted religious principles are just reactive rather than reactionary? Could it be that Saïd is only responding to a trend, which in the years of *Bab-EL-Oued City* had seen proponents of the politics of purity in many (advanced and less advanced) countries advocate reinforcing nationalism to fend off political and economic annihilation by imperialist powers or cultural contamination by weak nations? For, indeed, the mid–1990s witnessed the growing influence of intolerant nationalist movements in countries like France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, where partisans of the politics of purity, like Jean-Marie Le Pen and Ross Perot, called for the immediate erection of a dividing fence between the “impure them” and the “pure us.”

JUSTICE (violence, revenge, resistance)

Violence The local Algerian Jihadism is a harbinger of a jihadism that will gradually globalize until reaching in the 2000s a wave of unimaginable proportions whose first victims will be women. In Bab-EL-Oued City, the women are delaying this radical Islamist wave as best they can by showing small, potentially dangerous, acts of resistance: Yamina lingers as long as she can in front of her window, spying on the sun and street scenes, or she meets her lover, Boualem, in the city’s cemetery, where she removes her veil for him. On the terraces, far from the censuring eyes of the men, the women of Bab-EL-Oued tell each other the latest episodes of American tv series or exchange forbidden novels before it all gets worse. And worse, it gets. As Yamina explains to Boualem through a letter that she might never mail since she has no address of him, Bab-EL-Oued has changed. Death prowls. Fear is constant. And women have been forced to cloister themselves even more.

Revenge “Japanese,” the bartender of Bab-EL-Oued’s tavern, is often discriminated against, and he has decided to take his revenge. “Japanese” is perhaps not even from Japan, but his physical features are all that is needed for him to be inaugurated as the representative of the whole Japanese nation. None of his clients ever calls him any other name but “Japanese,” which stands as a euphemism for the non–Algerian, the inauthentic, the impure, the other. Japanese is about to give these self-sufficient authentic Algerians a taste of their Algerianness. As if to protest against this willingness to oversimplification that has branded him with the seal of Japanese essentiality and Algerian otherness, as if to say to the so-called “untouched” Algerians, “since you are so pure, have a drink of yourself! Have a taste of your Algerianness!” “Japanese” quenches his clients’ thirst with their leftover beer, gathered from their half-drunk glasses. What makes “Japanese’s” repulsive commercial method a revolution is that it disrupts the underlying assumptions that govern the moment of Algerian unity. It reveals how much the preachers of generalization remain hypocritically shut within themselves as particular and distinct individuals.

Resistance “Japanese’s” resistance, one might object, is implicit, veiled, not forceful enough to have a real transformational impact. So are most resistances in Bab-EL-Oued. In this town run by Saïd and his hooligans, it is *en catimini* (on the sly) that one dares to love, to smoke, to drink, to read, to laugh, to feel, to desire, and to exist. Thus, for example, it is quietly, with her windows shut, that Ouardya, the ill-reputed woman whom Saïd accuses of perverting Bab-EL-Oued, sacrilegiously receives her male companions or appreciates a glass of the hard-to-find wine that Boualem gets her at great risk to himself. Unostentatiously,

for example, Yamina, Saïd's sister, can enjoy a French movie in the absence of her bullish brother or meet Boualem, her lover, in the Bab-El-Oued cemetery. It is covertly, then, that the young girls of the town trade love stories, rehearse passages of Western movies, or make timid homosexual passes at one another. It is by unpretentiously nibbling at the central pillars of Saïd's sacrosanct ideological edifice that the people of Bab-El-Oued are causing that structure to collapse little by little.

RELATIONSHIP (power)

Power Saïd is more interested in crowd control and manipulation than salvation. By using violence, Saïd hopes to control the population of Bab-EL-Oued solely for the illegal deals that he runs with his mysterious accomplices in the black BMW. For that, Saïd must proceed by false pretenses. Only through an act of connivance, which makes his public gestures conform with Islamic conduct, will he be able to move his own agenda forward in the name of religious truth. In co-opting religion, Saïd hopes to rule Bab-El-Oued by imposing himself as the leader of a great collective enterprise. Islam, Saïd and his hooligans anticipate, will silence all voices of pluralism, and make way for a population under their control.

PSYCHOLOGY (otherness, confinement, nostalgia)

Otherness One of Saïd's henchmen is Mess, an enigmatic French citizen referred to as "Immigrant". He is trapped in Algeria with no papers and no place to stay, grows a beard and passes for a Muslim as a matter of survival. He also joins Saïd's gang. To those who hate Saïd's group of bullies, "Immigrant" announces that he does not actually know "these guys," and that his stay in Algeria is only an insignificant transitory stage. To Saïd, on the other hand, Mess represents himself as a fervent believer in Islamic faith. In fact, like many other characters in Bab-El-Oued, "Immigrant" is symbolic of the extent to which Saïd's project of simplification of identity in the name of Islam is actually fraught with tensions. "Immigrant," who claims to be a pure French citizen, has so convincingly played his masquerade, of passing for an Arab, that he finds himself caught in his own game. No one in Bab-El-Oued takes him seriously when he decides to recover his "true" identity. His efforts to reclaim his Frenchness clashes with people's conviction that he is an Arab. For the people of Bab-El-Oued, "Immigrant" is perhaps an Arab from a neighboring country, Tunisia or Morocco, maybe; but above all, he is not a French subject. The role of otherness, which for the sake of survival "Immigrant" wanted to assume only temporarily, has stuck, and become his fixed identity. And France, to whom "Immigrant" enthusiastically pledges allegiance and to whose bosom he wishes to return, is paradoxically the nation that has thrown him out, without papers, without any identity, like an impurity extirpated from the authentic.

Confinement One of the themes that *Bab-El-Oued City* explores is that of the confinement of women. This confinement is dramatized very early in the film when Yamina's frightened and veiled face appears stealthily in the frame of a small attic window to witness Boualem's stealing of the loudspeaker. In the scenes that follow later, we quickly realize that Yamina's world is reduced to that of interiority, her bedroom, the living room, and to the extent that she must perform domestic tasks, such as laundry, the terrace. This tiny universe of Yamina, as if it were not already restricted enough, is endangered with further reduction by her brother Saïd, who, under the impetus of a radical Islam, threatens to completely eliminate the light and any form of distraction from it. As a woman under the extremist religious regime imposed by her son, Saïd's mother is not spared from his dictates either. She is a woman like her daughter, and what is at play here is the inferiority of her gender in the face of the religious radicalism of which her son is the herald. For Ourdya the lone woman, this spatial reduction and elimination of light and leisure is already a fait accompli. Her reputation as a prostitute has had Saïd's gang put a price on her head, which forces her to remain cloistered in the darkness of her apartment, with her only consolations being the furtive visits that Boualem makes to her and the bottles of wine he brings her at the cost of a thousand risks.

Nostalgia In the streets of Bab-EL-Oued, Mess's wandering eyes linger on some female passers-by. This provokes Saïd's wrath, who accuses his gang member of immorality and transgression of Islam. When his sister Yamina lingers on the terrace doing laundry or stands in front of the window to enjoy the sunlight, he threatens to wall her up. And to his family who spend time in front of the television watching foreign mini-series, Saïd promises to destroy all the satellite dishes on the roofs of Bab-EL-Oued. To the young people who listen to Rai music, he offers instead a taped Islamic lecture. Saïd lives in a bygone world. His threat to confine his sister in order to prevent her from seeing the light of day or prevent the gaze of men on her is a proposition that is nostalgic of the time when men's and women's spaces were strictly partitioned and

monitored by familial or statal culture police, a time when the interior courtyard and the terraces were the spaces of women and the streets those of men.

QUEST (homeland, exile)

Homeland *Bab-El-Oued* ends with a beautiful irony: Mess (“Immigrant”) is finally able to obtain a French passport and is returning “home.” As he rushes to the harbor to catch his ship, he bumps into Mabrouk (the young baker and another victim of Saïd’s gang) and proudly exhibits his French papers. Only then does Mabrouk realize that Mess, despite all appearances, is “really” French and that he has been telling the truth about his nationality all these past months. Mabrouk is happy for Mess and wishes him good luck; in fact, he urges him to hurry to his boat, as if he were afraid that by some strange circumstance, Mess would be stuck, once again, in the Algerian asylum. Mabrouk’s hunch almost materializes. In his excitement, Mess nearly leaves his passport with Mabrouk, but the latter hails him and gives him back his papers. Finally, “Immigrant” makes it to the vessel.

Exile The ship that is taking Mess “home” is the same one that is taking Boualem into exile. Now the roles are reversed. As Mess thinks that he is putting an end to his nomadism in Algeria, Boualem’s wandering in France has just begun. In Europe, Boualem will be the “Immigrant” that Mess was in Algeria. He will henceforth be the one to live by connivance, to pass for the “pure.” He who has failed to be an authentic Algerian will now try to pass for pure French. However, is this possible? Can Boualem pass abroad the test he failed at home? “Immigrant” has been on both sides of the fence. Could Boualem only speak to Mess, he would learn of the impossibility of being authentic both at home and abroad. Nonetheless, to learn from Mess would be too easy. It would be a falsification of life for Boualem to appropriate Mess’s experience as his. “Immigrant’s” experience is unique and irreproducible, even by “Immigrant” himself. Boualem has to roll his own dice; he has to write a story of his own. In a remarkably adroit cinematic gesture, Allouache does not make it possible for these two characters to meet on the boat. As they come aboard, not aware of each other’s presence on the vessel, the two protagonists choose to go in opposite directions, thus avoiding, perhaps out of the necessity of original experiences, the possibility of an encounter.

APPEARANCE (dishonesty, hypocrisy)

Dishonesty Although Saïd’s special culture police claim that their decisions are dictated by their drive for religious purity, that is, for the Law as Prophet Mahomet prescribed it, their own daily deeds hardly conform to this ideal of perfection. According to the Imam of Bab-El-Oued, Saïd’s interpretation and application of the precepts of the *Koran* are contrary to the teachings of the holy book. Islam, the Imam reminds Saïd, is a religion of tolerance; violence, he warns, can only breed more violence. Despite the Imam’s call for peace, Saïd persists on finding and disciplining the perpetrator of what he regards as a great infamy. It becomes clear that his determination is fueled more by his own inflated ego than by his religious conviction.

Hypocrisy Saïd’s culture inspectors have all displayed evidence of their false pretenses. They have proven that Islam is not what actually motivates them. Saïd’s behavior is antithetical to the Muslim credo of tolerance, simplicity and honesty. Saïd is a narcissistic and conceited man with little sense of honor. While he physically brutalizes his young sister and keeps her locked up in the house, lest she should attract men’s attention, he himself spends great time in the powder room tending to his facial appearance. Furthermore, Saïd is tied to the mob in Bab-El-Oued and its illegal trafficking. And like any good mobster, he never does his dirty job alone. After Saïd discovers not only that Boualem is the one who stole the loudspeaker but also that Boualem has been dating his sister Yamina, he orders the gang to quash the young man’s relation with his sister and starts sending Boualem death threats. Fed up with Saïd’s intimidations and tired of constantly watching over his shoulder, Boualem seeks out Saïd and challenges him to a duel. Instead of fighting Boualem alone as they had agreed, Saïd gets the whole gang to attack Boualem. Like their leader, the gang members are duplicitous characters who rule Bab-El-Oued by threatening, blackmailing, and terrorizing the people as well as mythologizing their roles in the 1988 anti-Communist revolution.

Questions

1. Can you detect a symbolism in the rooftop loudspeakers against the backdrop of the women's whispered conversations? Explain.
2. The central project of Saïd and his gang is the creation of a homogenous Algerian identity based on Islam. Show how this project is undermined from within.
3. Rachid, Saïd's right-hand man, reports to him that he saw Yamina with Boualem in the cemetery. Why does Saïd ask Rachid not to publicize this? What does this say about Saïd?
4. Do you see a competing message in the continuous flow of consumer goods from the West (such as the perfumes and alcohol sold by Mabrouk and the BMW driven by Saïd's bosses) and Saïd's rants against Western culture as it is promoted through music, literature, and television?
5. The Imam of Bab-El-Oued chooses to withdraw from the city when Saïd refuses to hear his message of peace and things get hot. Should he have stayed? What do you think of his decision?
6. What has been women's fate with the globalization of Jihadism? Can you illustrate your answer with specific examples?