

HUMANITY INSTITUTE  
Martial Frindéthié, PhD

## **ZIZOU AND THE ARAB SPRING** (Zizou et le printemps arabe) (2016) Férid Boughedir

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

#### **OVERVIEW**

The event that is known as 'the Arab Spring' started in Tunisia when Tarek Bouzizi, a young Tunisian fruit vendor, set himself on fire to protest the police's confiscation of his fruit cart, igniting a protest that grew stronger the more the Tunisian authorities try to squash it. That bottom-up, grassroots event, started by a young man pushed to the urban center by the poverty of the rural zones, was conveniently coopted by various local and international interests that used it to fit their political narratives. What better way to restore the Arab Spring to its rural, humble origin than through a comedic duty of memory that places a fictional rural character at the center of the protest in the person of Zizou? With this film, Boughedir offers us a humorous, lighthearted interpretation of the popular uprising that changed the face of the Arab world, and of the world, *tout court*.

#### **SYNOPSIS**

Aziz Sayeb, affectionately called Zizou, leaves his small Tunisian village to seek employment in the capital city of Tunis. While installing a satellite dish on the roof of a luxurious villa in the affluent coastal town of Sidi-Bou-Saïd, he catches sight of beautiful Aïcha and is immediately lovestruck. The problem is that Aïcha is held to be married by force to a nephew of the country's First Lady, who herself is part of a powerful crime organization. Zizou's resolve to free Aïcha from her captors runs parallel to, and sometimes merges with, the Tunisian people's determination to free Tunisia from the grip of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, a determination which, from December 17, 2010 onward, develops into the powerful political protest that will come to be known as the Arab Spring. Director Férid Boughedir inscribes Zizou in his comedic adaptation of the Arab Spring as an accidental hero of the socio-political protest that changed the Arab world.

#### **MAIN CHARACTERS**

**Aziz Sayeb (Zizou)** A young Tunisian peasant who comes to Tunis looking for a job

**Adel** A shopkeeper in the Moncef Bey souk

**Aïcha** : A young girl confined by the mafia

**Sadok** The representative of the Democratic Constitutional Rally (ruling party) in Moncef Bey

#### **CHARACTER ANALYSIS**

**ZIZOU** (Open to new experiences and agreeable)

Zizou is a conservative, gullible, adaptable, and determined character. His honesty and willingness to help often put him in the company of unsavory people and place him in unenviable situations. However, he is always carried by a providence that saves him from peril.

*Gullible* Zizou trusts easily. When he finds a job at Adel's shop in the souk as a satellite TV installer, Adel proposes to keep his first wages in his safe, telling him that it will be safer there. Not only does Zizou agree, but he even gives Adel all his savings to keep in his safe. Without telling Zizou, Adel spends the money on his trip to Libya to buy new supplies for his shop

*Conservative* Zizou has a conservative viewpoint on man-woman relationships that stems from his rural upbringing. Khadija is helping Zizou clean and prepare her sister Chedlia's summer house for rental. Their proximity and isolation from everyone develop into an affection and they end up making love.

Sometime later, an embarrassed Zizou tells Khadija that he will face up to his responsibility and correct his mistake by asking her to marry him. Zizou considers that by having sexual intercourse with Khadija outside of marriage, he has defiled her honor and must make amends and save her dignity by marrying her. Khadija is amused and tells him that he cannot go around marrying every woman with whom he sleeps.

*Adaptable* Zizou arrives in Tunis from his small village on the edge of the Sahara, amazed and disoriented. However, immediately, and thanks to Adel's mediation, he accepts a job with Hadj, which he starts the next day. Through Adel, he is introduced to the favorite hangout of the souk's shop owners, makes friends, and adapts to Moncef Bey's life as an active member of the community. However, his willingness to meet the expectations of the different interest groups that approach him causes him trouble.

*Determined* From his first conversation with the beautiful Aïcha, when Zizou learns from her that she is held prisoner by the mafia, "the family," he promises to free her. Aïcha doesn't believe him at first but soon sees his determination and helps him. At the risk of his life, Zizou returns several times to the villa of Sidi-Bou-Saïd to concoct rescue plans with her. He manages to free her, but they are caught by the guards, and Aïcha is taken back by her captors. In the chaos of the revolution, while the country is in turmoil, Zizou has only one goal in mind: to save Aïcha still prisoner of "the family." He succeeds when his testimony proves to the army that Aïcha is not a member of the family but one of their victims.

#### **ADEL** (Agreeable and Conscientious)

Adel is a caring, defiant, and determined character. Behind his intimidating gladiator appearance, Adel is a gentle person. It is he who, moved by the plight of Zizou, the stranger in Tunis with nowhere to go, finds him his first job and a place to sleep. Adel takes Zizou under his wing, who becomes his protégé, his companion in the struggle against the mafia, and his business associate despite himself.

*Caring* Adel is the person who helps Zizou find his first job and his first lodging in Moncef Bey. He is also the first friend that Zizou makes in the Tunisian capital, and who introduces him to the other members of the souk community. Adel becomes his protector and, by force of circumstance, a partner, when, without making it explicit enough to Zizou, he invests the latter's money in a risky venture of illegal computer imports from Libya.

*Defiant* Like the other shopkeepers in the souk of Moncef Bey, Adel has only one source of goods, "the family," who hold the supply monopoly. However, when the costs of supplies are exaggerated and arbitrarily inflated by the mafia. Adel decides to stop buying from the organization and promises to find other sources. Although Libya is in the grip of instability due to the fall of Gadhafi, Adel travels there to buy cheaper computers to stock his store. Such defiance is unusual in the souk.

*Determined* Adel made a bet with Hamma that he would bring computers back from Libya for half the price offered by the First Family. Hamma was convinced that it was an impossible task given the instability that Libya was going through with the fall of the Libyan leader Gaddafi. Traveling by indirect routes in his truck, Adel won his bet to the chagrin of the mafia, who sent their henchmen after him. His determination broke the family's monopoly of the supply chain.

#### **AÏCHA** Conscientious

Proud and resourceful, Aïcha is the metaphor of a Tunisia taken hostage and brutalized by a dictatorial power. Her resilience and resourcefulness are those of the Tunisian people. Her liberation also heralds the liberation of the Tunisian nation.

*Proud* Even the presents and intimidations of the nephew of the first lady of Tunisia could not overcome Aïcha's pride. She decided that she would not marry under duress, certainly not a person for whom she felt no love. So, she remained adamant, demanding her freedom loud and clear until Zizou appeared and brought her out of her ordeal. Her pride helped her to resist the pressure of her kidnapper, the first lady's nephew, until her deliverance.

*Resourceful* Aïcha knew how to give Zizou signs of her distress as soon as she understood that he was an outside presence in the house of her kidnappers. The first time she saw him in the house, she stood in

front of him, silent because her captors were not far and could hear, but she gave him a look explicit enough for him to understand that she needed help. The day she saw Zizou on the roof, taking pictures of her with his cell phone, rather than shy away, she stared at him long enough and with pleading eyes for him to appreciate her SOS. Another time, she gestured for him to meet her at the rooftop door, where she was able to tell him about her ordeal through her prison bars. From there, she helped Zizou prepare her escape by giving him a soap-bar mold of a key that she had stolen for a few second from the maid. Aïcha was not a passive victim. She was intelligently looking for ways to escape.

## THEMES

### **SOCIETY** (patriarchy, gender, religion)

*Patriarchy* The nephew of the first lady had Aïcha removed from her mother's care to force her into a marriage to which she would not consent. And to compel her to give in to his advances, the nephew, whom she calls 'the ogre', holds her prisoner in his luxurious villa and buys her expensive gifts that she will accept. So, he entrusts her to the custody of a female servant to tame her with confinement and slaps. Zohra, who beats Aïcha whenever the girl refuses to give in to her captor's demands, is, as we have seen in several instances of North African cinema, nothing more than the guardian of the laws of patriarchy, which she curates and perpetuates. She is unfortunately complicit in a system that subjugates women, a hindrance to sisterhood, which must remain united in its goal to tear down the abusive power of patriarchy. The filmmaker does, however, offer us a glimmer of hope. He makes the character of Zohra, a physically tired woman, who moves with difficulty, and who is also psychologically diminished, because she suffers from the signs of dementia. This can be seen, for example, when she brings Zizou some tea but drinks it all up before handing him an empty cup. This is perhaps the filmmaker's hinting that women's collusion with patriarchy to undermine sisterhood is in its moments of passing.

*Gender* Aïcha's fate is illustrative of that of many Tunisian women, who are beaten when they refuse to fall in line with men's dictates. This can be seen when the henchmen recruited by Sadok, including Zizou who does not know what he is getting into, help the police break up a meeting of the League of Human Rights. Sadok's men ask the women of the organization to go back to the kitchen and take care of their husbands' meals. And when they protest, telling the men that their allusions to what should be women's role are insulting, the men slap them for their audacity to talk back. This provokes the indignation of Zizou, who attacks his own partners, whom he calls cowards for having raised their hands against women. For his about-face and his defense of women, Zizou receives blows from the police as well as from his companions. Men like Zizou, who come in defense of abused women in Tunisia, are the unfortunately the exception and not the norm. Tunisia still has a long way to go to reduce the influence of an all-powerful patriarchy that has its foot pressed down on the brake of equal rights between man and woman.

*Religion* To ensure that Aïcha cannot escape from the prison where they are holding her, her kidnappers demand that all her clothes be removed. Aïcha's kidnappers surf on a religious conception that makes nudity, and more particularly female nudity, one of the cardinal sins of Islam. The body offered to the gaze is an image that provokes negative reactions from the one who sees it, and that can have violent effects against the one who exposes it. All the logic of the veil, of the enclosure of the body, stems from this uneasiness and shame that the naked body generates in the Muslim religion. Nakedness is a sin. Aïcha's kidnappers therefore know how to rely on this aspect of religion to keep Aïcha in prison. She will never be able to present herself naked in public to ask for help. This would make her more of a victimizer in society than a victim and could expose her to more repressive actions from an offended mob than help from them. Religion thus becomes an accomplice to Aïcha's kidnappers, who make it the second, and perhaps the most formidable, lock in her detention.

### **JUSTICE** (corruption, repression, revenge)

*Corruption* In March 2021, a Tunisian court sentenced deposed-Tunisian dictator Ben Ali's brother-in-law, businessman Belhassen Trabelsi, to ten years in prison for corruption. Trabelsi's crime is, according to Tunisians, the tip of the iceberg of Ben Ali's nine brothers-in-law's activities of racketeering, kidnapping, fraud, embezzlement, and money laundering. In this film, 'the family' is the criminal organization run by the first lady's brothers. It is a mafia possessing a monopoly on all the supply chains in the country and thus decision-making on prices. There is a scene in the film featuring Zizou, Hamma, and Adel coming to buy

computers in the family's warehouse. We see a shopkeeper slipping a thick envelope of money to the representative, which he discreetly puts in his drawer, under Zizou's astonished look. Here, the allusion is clear: The family extorts money from the shopkeepers. And it is certainly this illegal pressure on the retailers that put Mr. Ghorbal out of business.

*Repression* The family uses intimidation and prison as means of repression. The mafia's crimes are not just commercial. They are also crimes against humanity. Aïcha's case is illustrative. She was unlawfully removed from her mother's care and is being illegally incarcerated to force her to love the first lady's nephew. Intimidation and illegal detention are the family's tools of repression. Thus, we learn, for example, that the family burns down the souks or sell them to private promoters, certainly to other members of the organization, when the shopkeepers resist them. We also learn from the regulars of the Moncef Bey souk bar that it is forbidden to change TV channels when the president appears on the screen, or that it is risky to laugh at his big nose. For those who do it, their sentence is prison. Adel is jailed for daring to break the family's monopoly on supply chains by sourcing from Libya, and Sindicato, the souk communist, whom no one had heard from for days, was actually languishing in prison for daring to call for a demonstration against the family's abuse. Prison or the threat of it, thus, becomes a means of silencing all dissent and punishing and eliminating all opposition to the family's political, commercial and private activities.

*Revenge* The Tunisian people, who for twenty-four years lived under the undivided rule of Ben Ali and his family, one day stood up with their arms in the air to shout out their exasperation. From the souks of Moncef Bey to the posh neighborhoods of Sidi-Bou-Saïd, spontaneous demonstrations grew and spread through the streets of Tunis. Ben Ali, cornered, appeared on television to make a final appeal for calm, making promises that were not only unrealistic (bread for all the people and work for all the youth), but that also came too late, accusing his collaborators of having hidden the realities of the country from him. The televised pleas and regrets of the dictator, who once despised the people, remain without effect. In a purgative gesture, to rid themselves of their overflow of frustration, the people loot, burn, and break everything, including damaging the public services they will need, even if it means starting over from scratch, forcing the ruling family to run for their lives by sea, air, or land.

## **PSYCHOLOGY** (Loss)

*Loss* The family of the Tunisian dictator Ben Ali took away Aïcha's basic rights by arbitrarily imprisoning her. This same family ruined Mr. Ghorbal and ran him and his daughter out of town, thus, stopping Zizou's dream of having a stable job and family life by marrying Mr. Ghorbal's daughter. Zizou and Aïcha have therefore losses to impute to the Ben Ali regime—she, the loss of her freedom and he, that of his job, marriage, and possible family.. However, our two protagonists are only a sample of the Tunisian population oppressed by the Ben Ali regime. In fact, the whole souk, and beyond the souk, most of the Tunisian population, is a victim of the dictatorship of the ruling family. Therefore, the liberation of Aïcha is parallel or even merged with the liberation of Tunisia from the clutches of its oppressors, in this case Ben Ali and his extended family.

## **APPEARANCE** (dishonesty-betrayal)

*Dishonesty* Sadok, the representative of Ben Ali in Moncef Bey, was, like the president and all his collaborators, a dishonest character. Sadok abused the naïveté of Zizou and sent him on a punitive expedition against the League of Human Rights, which he represented to Zizou as a dangerous organization. He also used Zizou to find and ransack the headquarters of the Islamic fundamentalists. When Zizou started working for Sadok, the latter had made Zizou believe that what motivated him was the general interest of the Tunisian people. Sadok had even reproached Zizou, who asked that the police help him to free a friend held in detention (Aïcha), that his request was of personal interest. Yet, Sadok, who advised Zizou to put the general interests above all things, had only his personal interests in mind. Thus, as soon his interests were threatened with the fall of the dictator, Sadok did not hesitate to betray President Ben Ali, whose so-called positive actions towards the Tunisian people he used to praise.

*Betrayal* Sadok betrayed President Ben Ali. As the representative of the presidential party in Moncef Bey, Sadok was obviously the biggest supporter of Ben Ali in the city. He was the one who organized the rallies in honor of the president, who had the posters printed, who paid the per diem of the crowds he gathered, and who harangued them. He was also the one who organized punitive expeditions against those

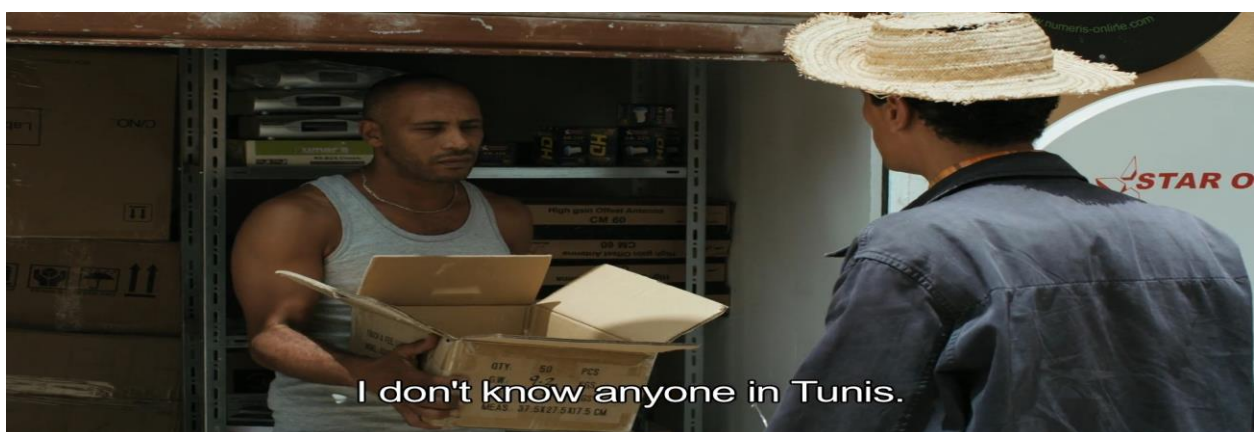
he considered hostile to the regime, such as the Human Rights League or the Islamic fundamentalists. However, when Ben Ali's regime collapsed under the pressure of the crowd, and when the fundamentalists took advantage of the situation, vandalizing and looting the villas of those close to the president, Sadok bought himself a false beard and found himself on the side of the fundamentalists that he had beaten up only a few hours earlier, participating in their demonstrations and threatening those who hesitated to take part. In fact, Sadok's loyalty to Ben Ali was insincere and purely opportunistic. He did not hesitate to betray the president.

## PLOT

**Zizou goes to Tunis** Aziz Sayeb, a young, unemployed Tunisian with two years of college geology under his belt, heads to Tunis to work with his future father-in-law in the Moncef Bey souk, or shopping center. He boards a bus on barren land in the Sahara Desert. On his way, his bus stops at a police checkpoint for a routine identity verification. When the police learn that he is going to Tunis to work in the souk of Moncef Bey, they joke that he is going to work with traffickers.



**City: Disoriented** Zizou arrives in the noisy and bustling city of Tunis. He looks around in bewilderment. He asks passers-by where the souk is and is shown the direction. In the souk, Zizou notices that the shop of Mr. Ghorbal, his future father-in-law, is closed. The next-door shop owner, Adel, tells Zizou that Mr. Ghorbal has gone bankrupt for owing too much money to "the family," a crime organization run by the nine brothers of the First Lady of Tunisia. Mr. Ghorbal lost everything to them and left the city. When Zizou tells Adel that he has some experience installing satellite dishes, Adel introduces him to Hadj, a satellite dish shop owner in the souk, who can employ him on commission. As wages, Hadj proposes that Zizou will keep one third of what he will make on each job. Zizou accepts without arguing. Salouha, one of Hadj's workers, advises Zizou that he should not accept the first offer made to him without bargaining. Zizou has nowhere to sleep. Adel recommends Zizou for a room in a dilapidated family hotel, where Zizou shares a room with two other tenants. Zizou does not trust his roommates. He clings to his belongings and keep his eyes open all night long.



**Initial Work** The following day, a tired Zizou gets his first client. A man in an expensive car comes to fetch Zizou to install international soap opera channels on his wife's bedroom TV. Adel advises Zizou to charge the customer fifty dinars. The client leaves Zizou with his wife to instruct him on the kinds of channels she wants. However, the woman is more interested in getting Zizou in her bed than getting some work done on her TV. When Zizou refuses her advances, she sends him packing without him finishing the installation.

The unsuspected husband arrives to drive Zizou back to the souk. Zizou was supposed to get fifty dinars, but the customer pays him only forty dinars. Zizou meets Adel and the other shopkeepers in the souk's bar and explains that he took what the customer gave him because he was ashamed to ask for more. They want to know what the customer's home looks like. When Zizou explains that he has three big cars, two swimming pools, and a row of satellite dishes on his roof, Aloulou, one of the men in the bar, becomes more interested and asks what kind of security system the house has. Zizou is about to explain when Hamma, a shop owner, warns him that Aloulou has criminal intentions that could land him in jail as an accomplice.



**The first family** Zizou learns that “the family” is a crime organization run by the nine brothers of the First Lady of Tunisia. They have taken over the souk, control the supply chain, and impose their prices on the shop owners. And when they are opposed, they burn the souk. They have just announced a rise in their fees, but Adel vows that he will not bend to them.

**The president** The men are zapping the TV channels for something interesting to watch, and they land on the news. The president of Tunisia is on the news. The bartender announces that at this point, changing the channel could be costly. No one can change the channel when the president appears on the screen. The president thanks the people for urging him to run for another term in 2014, and he promises to reduce the cost of necessities, such as, milk, sugar, and bread. Syndicato, a communist hustler in the souk, advocates uprising. He makes fun of the president’s nose, and the bartender asks him to stop or they will all end up in jail.

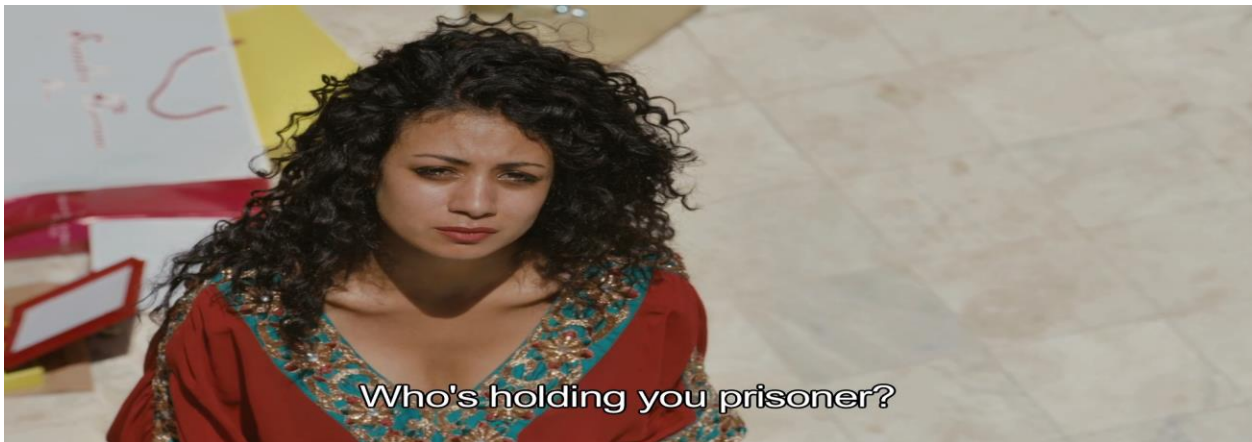


**A mysterious woman** Two big men in black suits are looking for a satellite dish installer. Salouha tells them that Zizou is the best they can find. Zizou does not strike them as knowledgeable, but they take Salouha’s word for it. Salouha explains to Zizou that they are looking for a very discreet and trustworthy person to work for a conservative boss. The men in black blindfold Zizou and take him to a luxurious home under heavy surveillance. A maid leads Zizou to the TV that needs fixing and leaves to make some coffee. She instructs him not to leave the room. Zizou has some questions and goes looking for her in the house. He sees a naked young woman lying in a bed, crying. He hears the maid coming and rushes back to his work.

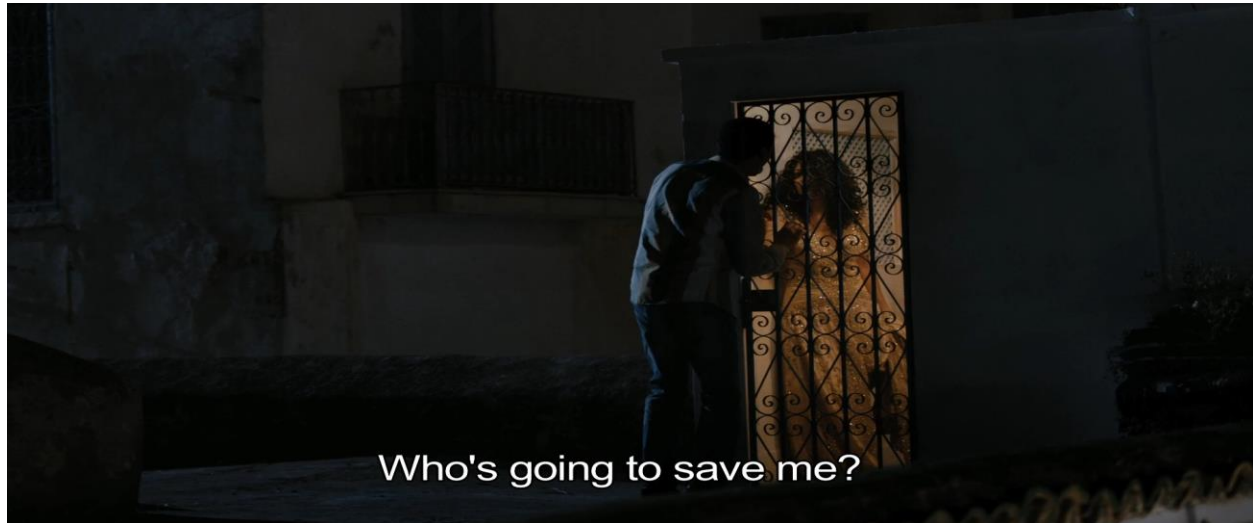
Zizou insists that he must go up to the roof to check the satellite dish. The maid asks him to wait for her to find him an escort. As the maid walks away, the young woman appears and looks at Zizou with supplicating eyes without saying a word. She runs back to her room when she hears the maid calling for Zizou. On the roof, an indiscreet worker drops the name of the town, Sidi-Bou-Saïd. Zizou makes sure that the worker repeats the name of the town. He scans the neighborhood from the rooftop to identify some landmarks that will allow him to pinpoint the villa. It is by a conspicuous lighthouse.

The following day, Zizou decides to go to Sidi-Bou-Saïd. Going from rooftop to rooftop, he finds himself on the villa by the lighthouse with the mysterious woman. He hears screams in the courtyard and lies flat on the edge of the roof to see what is taking place. The woman he saw the day before is crying, asking to be returned to her mother. She is brought a lot of presents by a big man flanked with two guards. She throws the presents away and begs them to free her. Zizou leans over to take a picture of her with his cell phone. She looks up, recognizes Zizou and looks at him with the same imploring eyes. The big man orders the maid to keep an eye on the girl. Two guards take her back to her room.





**Zizou speaks with Aïcha** At night, Zizou returns to the rooftop of the Sidi-Bou-Saïd luxurious villa. The confined girl is pacing in the courtyard, and he manages to catch her attention. She signals to him that she is coming upstairs. They speak through her prison bars. Her name is Aïcha. They cannot talk much because the maid is calling for her. The maid slaps her and tells her to strip. She hands her a bedsheet to cover herself and drags her to another room. Zizou waits for her to come back and falls asleep on the roof. He is awakened by the voices of the guards and the maid taking Aïcha to an unknown destination.



**Aïcha tells Zizou she is a prisoner** Zizou returns to the rooftop of the Sidi-Bou-Saïd's villa. Aïcha is nowhere to be found. He decides to wait and falls asleep. He is awakened by some noises and sees Aïcha sitting in front of the TV with the maid. He scrambles the TV screen from the satellite dish on the rooftop and waits for the guards to come fetch him for repair the next day. He refuses any other customers until the guards arrive. He runs to their car, and they blindfold him and drive him to the villa. Mrs. Zohra, the maid, needs to go out for an errand. Zizou tells her to trust him. He just needs an hour to finish the job. Zizou finds Aïcha. She tells him that she is being held against her will by "the ogre" who wants her to love him. She will not say his real name. She tells Zizou that the maid has locked away all her clothes so that she cannot run away. Zizou promises to buy her a dress and get her out of her prison. He hears the maid coming and rushes back to his work.



**New Lodging** Mr. Sadok laments the fact that Zizou sleeps in a decrepit hotel. He tells him that the president, who cares for the youth, will not allow that. Mr. Sadok suggests that Zizou fetch his belongings and come sleep in a spare bedroom at the party's headquarters. Zizou gets his belongings, settles in his new bedroom, sit at a desk with the picture of the mysterious woman on his phone in front of him, and starts working on Mr. Sadok's propaganda banner.

**Adel defies "the family"** Adel, Hamma, and Zizou drive to the warehouse of "the family" to buy some merchandises to supply their stores. The 'family' has monopoly on the stock of electronics. They fix prices and decide what quantity each store owner can receive, and they require advance payments on future orders but will not give any receipts as proof of payment. Adel decides that he will not do business with "the family." He tells Hamma that he will drive to Libya to buy his own stock. Hamma thinks that Adel's idea is madness because Libya is a dangerous place to go to since the fall of Gaddafi.

**Inspectors at Adel's shop** "The family" has heard of Adel's trip to Libya to smuggle in electronics that he refuses to purchase from them. They send men to Adel's shop to verify the legality of his purchase. They want to see his receipts and invoices. Adel tells them that no one has ever produced an invoice at Moncef Bey, neither "the family" nor the shop owners. The situation gets tense, and the inspectors leave, promising to follow up.

**Adel invests Zizou's money** Mr. Sadok's men spy on Zizou and find out that he works with the Islamist fundamentalists. Sadok comes to the fundamentalists' headquarters with a group of hooligans to vandalize their warehouse of food and medicines. The fundamentalists accuse Zizou of betrayal and beat him up. Hadj tells Zizou to leave his place and never to return for work. Zizou goes to Adel to take his money and leave Moncef Bey, but Adel has used the money for his Libyan trip. He tells Zizou to consider himself as a partner in his business.

**Mr. Sadok** Mr. Sadok, also known as Lynx Eye, is the Moncef Bey representative of the Democratic Constitutional Rally, the presidential party. He has heard of Zizou and comes to recruit him. He wants Zizou to work for the party. Since Zizou's job as satellite dish installer gives him access to people's home, he wants him to be the party's ears and eyes. He tells Zizou that it is important for the party to understand the people's concerns in order to better help them. He also tells Zizou that his university education can be helpful to the party. Zizou lets Mr. Sadok drag him to his office. He dictates to Zizou the text of a propaganda slogan to reproduce on a banner for an upcoming rally.

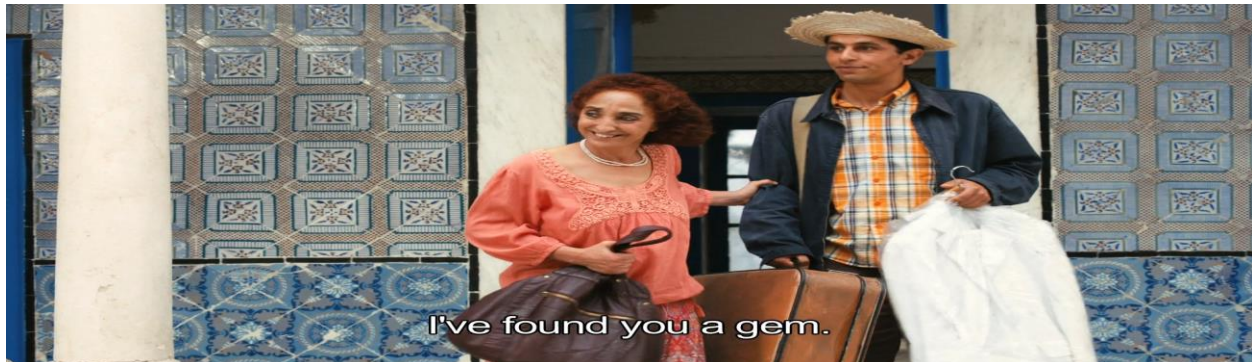


**Different groups** Mr. Sadok proposes to Zizou and his henchmen that they go help the police squash the meeting of the League of Human Rights, because the police are their brothers. Zizou proposes that, as their brothers, the police should also help them free a girl he knows is being held prisoner. Mr. Sadok shuts him down, saying that he must refrain from bringing matters of personal interest where public interest is at stake. At the League's headquarters Mr. Sadok's men get into a squabble with two women and hit them. Zizou comes to the defense of the women, calling his companions cowards for hitting them. Zizou's companions turn on him and help the police beat him up. Aloulou and his right-hand man, Ridha, help Zizou to Hadj's store. He has been badly hurt by the police and is bleeding. Had, a member of an Islamist group, summons the group's nurse to care for Zizou

**The Fundamentalists** As he promised, Adel is back from Libya with a stock of electronics purchased for half the price of what "the family" sell them for. The souk celebrates him as the man who broke the mafia's monopoly. Hadj lets Zizou sleep in his store and keep an eye on his merchandise. Fathi, the nurse, explains that Hadj, he, and some other members do charitable work for the poor. They give them food and medicine. He tells Zizou that they can use his help as a volunteer. Zizou agrees to work with the group. Fathi and his group members are Islamic fundamentalists that force their beliefs on the people they help, such as forcing women to wear the *burqa*.



**A new lodging at Chedlia's** Salouha finds Zizou a janitor's job at Chedlia's, a woman who lives with her two daughters and her divorced sister. Her husband, a political dissident, was framed for money laundering and jailed. Chedlia shows Zizou his room with a back door that will allow him to come and go and continue doing his job of satellite installation in his spare time. Chedlia also tells him to consider her daughters as his sisters and her family as his since he has no family. The mafia has been harassing Chedlia, trying to force her to sell her house. The woman says that her house is not for sale, and their tone becomes menacing. Zizou, who is just returning from an errand, walks in on the scene and makes them leave the property, telling them that he is Chedlia's son, and their house is not for sale.



**Zizou and Khadija** Salouha comes to see Chedlia. She has found her someone to rent her summer home for three months. Chedlia asks her sister Khadija to show Zizou the summer house and help him clean and prepare it for rental. Khadija is not taking her task seriously while Zizou insists on cleaning the house thoroughly. Khadija grabs Zizou's diary from his pocket and starts reading it aloud. He tries to take it back. They get into a jostling and fall on the ground, with Zizou on top of Khadija. He tries to get up, but she holds him firmly on her. They end up making love on the floor of the summer home. Zizou is embarrassed and tells Khadija that he is sorry for what happened, and that he will fix his mistake by asking to marry her. Khadija tells him that, as far as she is concerned, they just cleaned a house together, and that he cannot go around asking to marry every woman with whom he cleans a house.



**Khadija flirts with Zizou**

Zizou buys Aïcha a dress and hangs it in his bedroom. In his absence Khadija enters his bedroom and discovers the dress. She thinks that it is for her. She flirts with him and hand feeds him some food. She tells him that the dress will not fit her. Zizou tells her that the dress is not for her. She is upset.

**The riot**

There is a big riot going on. A man has set himself on fire because the police humiliated him. All the channels have been scrambled. Zizou fixes the bar's TV so that people can follow the events. The fundamentalists, too, have been watching the riot from their headquarters, and some of them think that they should take advantage of the situation. Fathi, the fundamentalist nurse, cautions prudence until they know who is behind the uprising. In the meantime, Adel has been arrested under accusation of stolen goods. The souk is on the edge. Even Hamma, who is usually cautious, calls for resistance.



**Zizou is arrested** Through Aïcha's prison bars, Zizou offers her the dress he bought, and she models it for him. Taking advantage of a moment of inattention of the maid, she made an impression of her prison key in a bar of soap so that Zizou can reproduce it. However, Aloulou the souk burglar, gives Zizou his master key. Zizou frees Aïcha, but they are captured by the guards. Zizou eludes his captors, and from the roof hangs on to a giant poster of the president to cushion his fall as he makes his escape. He rips the poster on his way down. The protesting crowd takes it as a deliberate act of defiance against political power and regard Zizou as a hero, as the man who mutilated the president, despite his explanation that he was just trying to save his life. Zizou and the protesters are arrested and thrown in jail, in the same cell as Adel and Sindicato the communist, who had disappeared for days.



**Zizou is released** The riots intensify. The army sides with the population. The First Lady and her brothers are in hiding. The president makes an appearance on TV to appeal for peace. He blames the political situation on his entourage that has misled him. He promises more freedom and jobs for the population. The Moncef Bey police chief is convinced that Zizou is the leader of the protest and asks him to calm down the crowd in exchange for special treatment and a comfortable life in the south of the country. Zizou insists that he cannot leave without Aïcha. The president orders the release of all the prisoners. However, the crowd now wants nothing less than the president to resign.



**The crowd celebrates Zizou** Zizou runs to Sidi-Bou-Said to try and find Aïcha. Her captors have fled on a boat and their home is being ransacked. Sadok, the representative of the presidential party in Moncef Bey, has flipped sides and is among the vandalizers. He has a fake fundamentalist beard and has turned against the president he fervently supported a few days ago. He asks Zizou to come burn the first family's homes with him. He calls Zizou a traitor for running in the opposite direction to find Aïcha. The army has captured "the family's" boat and arrested its occupants. Zizou recognizes Aïcha and the army frees her. The crowd recognizes Zizou, and carry Zizou and Aïcha on their shoulders. Aïcha and Zizou kiss. A fundamentalist is upset and promises that from now on, they will put an end to all this public display of affection in the country.





## QUESTIONS

1. To appease the rioters, President Ben Ali claims that he was misled by the people around him. What does his argument say about his governing skills?
2. What are the various ideological interests that are trying to coopt Zizou? What do they hope to gain by recruiting him?
3. Zizou has one overriding principle for joining the groups that court him. What is that principle? How is that principle tested in these various groups?
4. At the end of the film a fundamentalist complains about Zizou and Aïcha kissing in public, and he promises that things will change from now on.
  - a. What does this augur for the new Tunisia?
  - b. Will there be another liberation struggle to fight?
  - c. Who will be the protagonists of that new struggle?