

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Martial Frindéthié, PhD

The Flower of Aleppo / Fleur d'Alep (2016)

Ridah Behi

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

OVERVIEW

Auteur Ridah Behi was born in 1947, in Kairouan, at a time when Tunisia was still a French protectorate. He received a master's degree in sociology from Paris Nanterre in 1973 and a PhD with a thesis entitled *Cinema and Society in Tunisia in the 1960s*, which he obtained in 1977. Behi began his film career in 1967 with a short film, *The Woman Statue*. His *Sun of Hyenas* was awarded the grand prize at the 1979 Damascus International Film Festival. Behi has received numerous recognitions including the Grand Officer of the Tunisian Order of Merit, in 2016, and the Award for Best Director at the Alexandria International Film Festival of the Mediterranean Countries the following year. *The Flower of Aleppo* (2016), which Behi wrote and directed, was originally selected to represent Tunisia as Best Foreign Language Film at the 89th Academy Award before being replaced by Leyla Bouzid's *As I open My Eyes* (2015).

Film *The Flower of Aleppo* is mainly a denunciation of the indoctrination of the Tunisian youth by Muslim fundamentalism. However, there are also important sub-themes, such as the courage of Tunisian women in a patriarchal environment that does not always make it easy for them to succeed; the harmful effects of family dysfunction; and the resignation of fathers. While Behi's film clearly shows the atrocities of a war waged mercilessly by rival factions in the Muslim world, what is not always clear is who these factions are. How can we accurately distinguish between the soldiers of the regime and the soldiers of rival fundamentalist groups on the Syrian battlefield?

Background The flip side of the Arab Spring, which helped bring down totalitarian governments in countries such as Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, is that by liberating speech and restoring individual freedoms, it also became a breeding ground for fundamentalist movements that indoctrinated youth for global terrorism. At the high point of the Islamic State, Tunisia was the largest exporter of foreign fighters to Syria. The subject of fundamentalism and its decaying of the morality of the Maghrebian youth has been treated by filmmakers like Nouri Bouzid, Merzak Allouache, and Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud, to name a few. *Flower of Aleppo* joins this denunciation of the pernicious effects of Islamic fundamentalism.

SYNOPSIS

Mourad, a seventeen-year-old Tunisian, son of a thirty-seven-year-old ambulance driver and a fifty-seven-year-old artist, raised in France and then in Tunisia, finds it difficult to accept the separation of his parents and to integrate into his new environment. He gets recruited by a group of young fundamentalists and calls his mother one day from Syria to tell her to forget about him, and that he is on a mission to die as a martyr fighting against the regime of Bashar Al-Assad. Determined to get her son back from the clutches of the terrorists, Mourad's mother, Salma, poses as a devotee of the Islamic State and goes to Syria to look for him.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Salma:	Mother of Mourad, and ex-wife of Hichem
Hichem:	Father of Mourad and ex-husband of Salma
Mourad	Teenage son of Salma and Hichem, who joins the Islamic fundamentalist in Syria
Emir Nizar	A young fundamentalist leader who recruits Mourad
Dalel	Mourad's girlfriend

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

MOURAD (*Depressed, Malleable, Insecure*)

Mourad is a depressed, malleable and insecure young man who goes looking for the opportunity to prove to himself and the rest of the world that he is important.

Depressed Mourad is a young man who has never found his place in Tunisian society. His mother's withdrawing him from the French high school where he was studying, and which he liked, and the separation of his parents plunged him into depression. He, therefore, did not hesitate to separate himself from the things (his guitar, music) and the people (his mother, his aunt, his girlfriend) he loves.

Malleable Mourad's emotional fragility made him an easily, malleable target, who became the plaything of his friend Nabil and the Emir Nizar. Nizar easily convinced him with to separate himself from anything that could give him pleasure, and to cut all ties with his mother.

Insecure Mourad is a young man who lacks confidence and cannot stand up for himself. When Emir Nizar bullies him, rather than tell him face to face how he feels, he runs to his friend Nabil to complain. The only time he showed courage by volunteering for a mission, he shot his mother dead.

SALMA (*Strong, Independent, Resourceful*)

Salma is a strong, independent and resourceful woman. Alone, she raises her son and provides for his needs. Alone, she goes to Syria to try to remove her son from the indoctrination of the jihadists.

Strong Salma decides to go into the lair of the beast to find her son. It's a terrifying decision that many people dread, including Hichem. But she goes, confidently, up the chain of command to the supreme leader of the jihadists, causing the viewer to break into a cold sweat at every turn.

Independent Separated from Hichem for years, Salma lives and raises her son through her work, and, until very recently, without any help from her ex-husband. She makes her own decisions about the direction of her life and that of Mourad, and if she sometimes informs Hichem, it is out of courtesy. Salma is different than the traditional Tunisian woman, who only finds validation in marriage, even if it is abusive.

Resourceful To go and find her son in Syria, Salma has used great intelligence and a great sense of deception. Apart from the jihadists' top leader, Abou Al Walid, and Mourad's friend Nabil, who knew Salma's real identity and goal in Syria, no one else in the chain of command, from Tunisia to Syria, passing through Turkey, was able to uncover her physical and moral disguise.

HICHEM (*Eccentric, Aloof*)

Hichem is an eccentric and distant character. He makes no effort to be present in his son's life and would prefer to be bothered as little as possible.

Eccentric Hichem is an eccentric artist, who divides his time between his art, his enjoyment of women, and his penchant for alcohol. He goes to no one unless he is asked, and offers advice only if asked.

Aloof Hichem is a distant, even absent father to his son. Mourad has decided that his father is dead to him, so Hichem, too, has decided not to make the effort to win back his son's love. He only talks to him reluctantly, at Salma's insistence. But when Mourad humiliates him in public by calling him a drunkard, he cuts all ties with him, hitting him with his umbrella.

THEMES

SOCIETY (gender, womanhood, patriarchy)

Gender Nabil arrives at his friend Mourad's house and finds him studying with his girlfriend. He warns Mourad that when a man isolates himself with a woman, the devil is certainly part of it. The representation of women as bewitching enchantresses, the attribution of diabolic virtues to women, which would make men lose all discernment and would lead them to immoral acts, is not an idea unique to the Muslim world. It is found in almost all societies. The only difference is that under the power of the fundamentalists, this belief takes on a more assertive dimension to the point where they seek to remedy it by the erection of a wall between man and woman in the form of the veil, the cover. Thus, when Salma asks her son what he would like for his birthday, Mourad insists that she should start covering her head, and, then, eventually wear the *djellaba* before leaving the house. Mourad asks his girlfriend to wear less revealing clothes. Now that he has converted to fundamentalism, Mourad finds his girlfriend's clothing inappropriate. When Salma decides to enter the world of the fundamentalists to extract her son from their influence, she goes as a veiled woman completely covered with a *djellaba* because she knows that without this attire she will not be accepted by the community of the fundamentalists, who perceive a woman's body as an invitation to sin. It is ironic that Salma dies at the hands of her son while wearing the veil he wanted her to wear, the very thing that prevented Mourad from recognizing his mother.

Womanhood The film gives us the image of strong and independent women, who do not hesitate to take initiative in a society that has learned to crush them. Salma is a single mother who was given custody of her son, Mourad, after her divorce from his father. She is an ambulance driver and juggles her profession with her maternal responsibilities. When her son is indoctrinated by the fundamentalists, she takes all sorts of risks, going to the heart of the conflict in Syria to try to get him out of the terrorists' grip. Unfortunately, she dies trying to save her son, which is strong proof of her heroism. Next to Salma, there is also Reem, her sister, another independent woman, who lives life close to the bone, and who, in the face of the fundamentalists, who seek to control the lives of women, transforms the first level of her home into a dance hall that receives women from all walks of life. And then there is Dalel, Mourad's ex-girlfriend, sports enthusiast, conscientious student and Mourad's math tutor, who warns Mourad that the company he keeps can get him in trouble, and who, when she sees the path her boyfriend is stubbornly taking, prefers to stay away from him. All three are alternatives to the indoctrinated and submissive femininity that serves as a sexual prop for terrorist fighters.

Patriarchy Society, as understood by the Muslim fundamentalists, must be governed by the law of patriarchy, the concept of male dominance that structures all aspects of life. In the fundamentalist camps, women are subjected to the diktat of men. When Salma arrives in Syria, it is Abou Faris, Abou Al Walid's right-hand man, who gives her instructions and assigns her a role in the camp. She learns that women are expected to do whatever the men ask of them, which implies even being sexual slaves. Sexual slavery is a common practice imposed on women by the fundamentalists. The status of all-purpose workers, which is required of women, but not of men demonstrates, the male/female dichotomy based on equivalents of dominant/dominated, master/slave, and superior/inferior.

POLITICS (power/leadership)

Leadership The forces at play in Syria, the jihadist forces as well as those of the regime, are engaged in a struggle to eliminate the other and to structure the lives of the populations. Whoever wins this leadership struggle will be able not only to administer the country's resources but also to regulate the desires and movements of the people. One thing is certain, however. Whichever leadership emerges from this bloody struggle, its power will be the framework for the repression of women. Salma has been on both sides of the wall that separates the fundamentalists from the moderates, and her marginalization as a woman has been a just matter of degree. On each side of the Syrian battleground, she has been marked with the seal of inferiority by virtue of her gender.

RELATIONSHIP (marriage, family)

Marriage Hichem, Mourad's father, blames Salma for their son's problem. He imputes Mourad's trouble to the fact that Salma will not accept the conventional idea of marriage, that of a mother staying at

home to take care of the house and the children while the husband is working to provide for the family. He tells her that she is too committed to her work as a paramedic while Mourad needs a stable family with a father and a mother who live together and respect each other. For Hichem, whom Salma left because of his unfaithfulness, respecting each other is a euphemism for Salma closing her eyes to his infidelities. This conventional notion of marriage that silences the abused woman is not the ideal union for Salma, who filed for divorce, preferring to live alone.

Family If Mourad was so easily lured by the terrorists, it is because he was never able to find his anchor in the family unit. After Salma divorced from Hichem, his father, a carefree, semi-alcoholic artist, disengaged himself from Mourad, accusing his mother of having ripped his son's affection away from him. As Hichem complains to Salma, she is too busy with her job as an ambulance driver, and she has taken more time to look after her patients than her son, who is too often left to his own devices. The assumption is thus that it is this dysfunction of the family unit opened the breach which Emir Nizar filled, promising Mourad that in his gang, the young man would find a family that would be attentive to his needs.

QUEST (introspection, search)

Introspection Mourad is a young man who has done his introspection, who is searching for his fulfillment, and who thought he would find it in Muslim fundamentalism. After his first encounters with the Emir and his followers, Mourad tells his stunned mother that she deserves a better son than him, that his life has been a disappointment to God. Although his mother reassures him that God has nothing against him, Mourad repeats this same lament to his aunt, who also gives him the same answer. Mourad has allowed himself to be convinced by the fundamentalists that the education he has received in France, the language (French) that come with that education, and the people he has associated himself with have distanced him from God and not allowed him to reach his spiritual fulfillment. And it is this fulfillment that Mourad seeks by detaching himself from all what he considers as distraction—his guitar, music, and school, as well as from all those whom he sees as figures opposed to God, his father, the alcoholic artist, his mother, the liberal and independent woman not conforming to the conservative ideals, his girlfriend and his school friends, carefree youth sold on Western ideologies. To redeem himself from all the years spent in ignorance of Allah and to concretize his faith, Mourad decides to go and die for Allah, in Syria, in a so-called holy war.

Search Salma's journey to Syria via Turkey to bring back her child is a journey in search of her own happiness. Unlike Hichem, Mourad father, who has emotionally removed himself from Mourad, and who does not rely on the young man's wellbeing in order to have a sense of fulfillment, Salma has tied her own happiness to Mourad's and vicariously experiences joy and life satisfaction through him. She is happy only insofar as she sees Mourad happy, and Mourad's happiness is one that she has already defined as being what she wants it to be. She will not accept his own idea of happiness (fundamentalism) because it does not conform to her ideas. Thus, her pursuit of Mourad across Tunisia, Turkey, and Syria is the pursuit of her own happiness, her desire to bring Mourad back to her ideal of happiness, one that is condensed in him, and which she can only experience through him.

PSYCHOLOGY (isolation, guilt, loss, fear)

Isolation The strategy of the fundamentalists in recruiting and then indoctrinating their targets is to cut them off from the world they know, to isolate them in order to better control them. For Mourad, it is a matter of alienating him from everything that gives him joy, and which could serve as an escape or a refuge from the brainwashing of the fundamentalists. Thus Nabil convinces Mourad that his relationship with his girlfriend is diabolical, and the Emir convinces him that his music is profane and goes against the teachings of the Prophet. So Mourad destroys his guitar, stops listening to any form of music, and breaks off his relationship with his girlfriend after accusing her of dressing indecently. Then, to prevent the teachings of his school from contradicting those of the Emir, and to prevent his school friends from turning him away from the teachings of the fundamentalists, the Emir convinces him to abandon his studies. Finally, it is from his parents that the fundamentalists isolate Mourad, who avoids his father and mother and finds refuge at the home of the Emir. Thus, the isolation works to make Mourad malleable by the fundamentalists, who send him on a mission to Syria.

Guilt When he first sees Salma at the terrorist camp, the terrorist leader, Abou Al Walid, tells her that he knows everything about her, and to prove it, he tells her who she is and what she has come to do in

Syria. He has a discussion with Salma, during which she tells him frankly what she thinks of him and his followers, of the violence of their actions and the destruction they cause. She tells him that the mothers, whose children his movement recruits to be killed in Syria, are the first victims of his war. From this discussion, Abou Al Walid comes away with an appreciation for Salma's courage and candor. He comes out of it with respect for her. Therefore, when he learns that she has been captured by the enemy, he is filled with regret and remorse, and he orders a special force to go and free her. Mourad is part of this force, who mistakes his mother for an enemy and kills her. And when he discovers that it is his mother he has just gunned down, Mourad is overwhelmed by guilt.

Loss The departure of her son to Syria to fight alongside the terrorists is a tremendous loss for Salma, who abandons all her activities in Tunisia and goes to look for him. Hichem, the father, does not feel this loss like the mother because he had already gotten used to the loss of his son, who, since his separation from Salma, no longer has any consideration for him. When, during a conversation that Salma had begged Hichem to have with his son, Mourad calls his father an alcoholic from whom he can learn nothing, Hichem signs the separation from his son by a symbolic gesture. He is willing to separate himself completely from Mourad, to lose him completely, by hitting him in public with his umbrella. When Salma panics and comes to tell him that Mourad has disappeared, he does not feel the same way as Salma does. Hichem takes the news in stride, asking her to wait two or three days before starting the search. The disappearance of Mourad, which is experienced by Salma as a loss, is for Hichem only an everyday occurrence to which he has long become accustomed. In fact, Hichem seems more afraid to lose Salma than his son whose loss he has already accepted.

Fear The war between the fundamentalist terrorists and the Syrian regime is a confrontation in which fear is used as a psychological weapon by both factions. The fighters of terrorist leader Abou Al Walid are convinced that they are fighting for a just cause, one that aims to bring down the regime of Al-Assad, which they consider infidel, illegitimate, and brutal. From their point of view, their war is that of good against evil, the sacred against the profane, the just against the unjust, for which the end justifies the means. However, this is not what Salma thinks, as she tells Al Walid that his war is as deadly, as saddening, and therefore as unjust as that of the regime against which it is directed because it alienates the civilian population as much as the war of Al-Assad's regime alienates them. This is because these two opposing forces have chosen fear as an instrument of persuasion or deterrence. The fundamentalists, as seen in the summary execution by of captured soldiers, create carnage to create fear in the enemy. And like them, the soldiers of the regime, murder, rape anyone suspected of alliance with the enemy.

SCENES

TEENAGER MOURAD

MOTHER

Mourad does not like Tunisia Salma, Mourad's mother, is an ambulance driver. She drives her son to school. He complains that he is no longer a child, and that he can go to school on his own. Mourad's parents, who are getting divorced, have brought him back to Tunisia from France where he was studying, and he is not very happy about it. He tells his mother that he would have rather stayed in France.



The divorce is complete The divorce between Salma and Hichem is finally pronounced. She has custody of Mourad, and his father will have to pay her child support.



Mourad is self-critical For his birthday, Mourad's mother gives him a book that she received from her father, and which she rebound for him. He thanks her and tells her that she deserves a better son than him because he is a disappointment to God. His mother is shocked. She reassures him that God has nothing against him. She manages to get a smile out of him by giving him the car key so he can drive them to the restaurant.



FATHER

Mourad wants to drop out of school Salma goes to see Mourad's estranged father, Hichem, who lives nearby. She tells him that Mourad intends to drop out of school and that she has been worried about him for a while. Hichem blames Salma for this because she is too busy working to spend time with Mourad. He also tells her that Mourad's problems started when she left home with him. She asks him to talk to Mourad. He tells her that what Mourad needs is family stability, a father and mother who live under the same roof and respect each other.



Father Hichem hits Mourad Hichem, Mourad's father, is waiting for him at the entrance of the mosque and offers to take him to his house to talk. Mourad tells his father that he does not enter houses where there is alcohol. His father suggests that they go and sit at a café. Hichem asks Mourad to finish his last year of high school. He replies that a degree is not necessary and calls his father a drunk, who is not qualified to give him advice and should rather repent. The father gets angry and hits Mourad with his umbrella.



AUNT

Mourad at his aunt's Mourad visits his aunt Reem, his mother's sister, who gives dance lessons in her home. Sitting on the stairs, Mourad enjoys watching her dance, and she comes to dance for him. Suddenly, Mourad's expression becomes somber, and he gets up and leaves the dance hall.



Mourad goes to see his aunt Reem Reem notices that he is dressed like an Afghan. He retorts that he might as well be taken for a Hindu. He asks his aunt if he can spend the night at her place. She is delighted. He asks her not to tell his mother. She promises and reminds him that she and his mother have not spoken for a long time. Reem notices, however, that Mourad's gaze has changed and asks him if everything is okay between him and his parents. She asks him if he is in love. He replies that he is in love with God.



GIRL FRIEND

Mourad is a student in high school Mourad is jogging on the beach with his girlfriend, Dalel. Afterwards, they meet at his place and sit on the couch to study for their math class. At another night, Mourad is playing a tune on his guitar for his girlfriend between classes. His friend Nabil drives by and tells him that he did not see him at the mosque. He informs him that the Emir would like to see him. Mourad gives his guitar to his girlfriend, who advises him to be back in time for the next class. Mourad says goodbye to her and gets into Nabil's car



FUNDAMENTALISTS

Emir sends a gift. Nabil, a friend of Mourad's knocks on the door, and Mourad goes to open it. He gives Mourad a gift bag from Emir Nizar (a young fundamentalist leader) containing a book, a fez, and a tunic. He reproaches Mourad for being alone with his girlfriend. Mourad presents his gift to his girlfriend, who tells him that she hopes he won't wear this embarrassing outfit when they go out together.

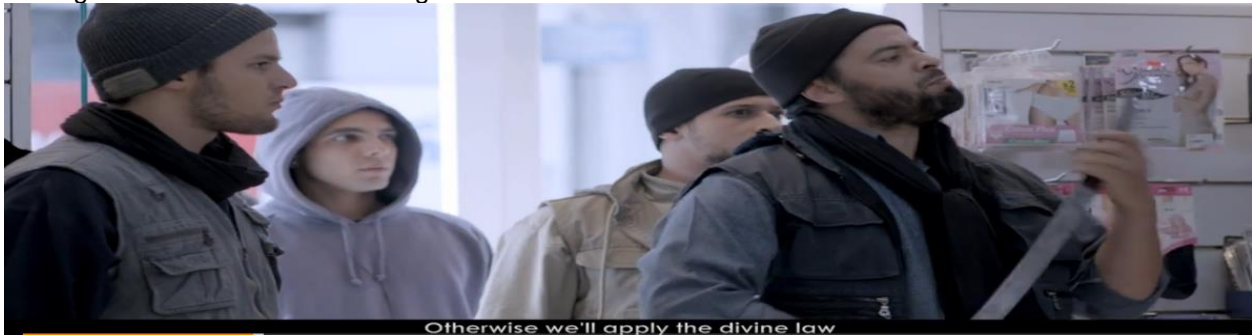


Mourad meets the Emir

Nabil leads Mourad to the training camp of young fundamentalists. The Emir welcomes Mourad and asks him about his knowledge of martial arts and weapons. Mourad tells him that his hobbies are the guitar and the internet. The Emir tells him that this is not a problem because the internet, too, is a weapon.



The Emir is a bully The Emir and his followers, including Mourad, order the owner of a women's clothing store to completely cover her mannequins in the windows. They threaten to come back to see if she has complied. If not, she will suffer God's punishment by their hands. The Emir and his gang retreat, leaving the store customers shaking.



Otherwise we'll apply the divine law

Grooming Mourad The Emir tries to groom Mourad by intimidation. He chastises him when he has his headphones in his ears. He forbids him to listen to music while they wage war on the sinners. He forbids him to speak French and tells him that he owes him obedience and submission. Mourad confides in Nabil that he does not like the way the Emir treats him. Nabil asks Mourad to be patient.



Mourad wants his mother to wear the veil Salma explains to her son that the divorce proceedings have been finalized. She asks Mourad what he would like for his upcoming birthday and he replies that birthdays are an invention of the infidels, which he can do without. She insists on asking him what he would like as a present. He replies that he would like her to start wearing the veil when she leaves the house. She asks him if he is joking, and he assures her that he is serious.



You are still both of our responsibility

Mourad destroys his guitar Mourad comes to meet his girlfriend, who is playing volleyball with friends in the park. Dalel wants to know why Mourad has been avoiding his school mates. He informs her that he is dropping everything, including his studies. She doesn't understand and asks if he is depressed. He retorts that he is rather depressed to see her half naked. She tells him that he has changed. He replies that he has changed for the better. Mourad goes home and destroys his guitar.



The Emir trains Mourad Mourad has dropped out of school. He spends his days with the Emir, who teaches him how to use a Kalashnikov. Their targets are female dummies. The Emir also inundates Mourad with videos of Islamic State fighters, which he watches on his computer, and which he hastens to turn off as soon as his mother returns from work.



Mourad has disappeared Salma is worried because she is incapable of reaching Mourad by phone after he did not spend the night at home. She goes to see his girlfriend, who has no news of him. His father also does not know where he is but advises Salma to wait two or three days to see if he does not reappear before getting worried. Salma goes to report Mourad's disappearance to the police.



Mourad lives with the Emir Mourad went to seek asylum at the Emir's house, who gladly opened his arms to him. He now lives in a community with other followers of the Emir, who is preparing him for an immediate departure to Syria to fight alongside the rebels against the regime of President Bashar Al-Assad. Mourad asks the Emir to let him spend his last night at his aunt's house. The Emir accepts on the condition that the young man has no contact with his mother.



Salma discovers propaganda in Mourad's room. Salma goes looking for Mourad at the mosque. Those she questions seem afraid to give her information about the Emir and his group. Salma searches her son's room and finds propaganda books and CDs of terrorist propaganda, as well as the flag of the Islamic State. Hichem is shocked when his ex-wife shows him what she has just discovered



I don't hang around with them

Mourad telephones from Syria Mourad calls his mother from Syria to tell her not to worry, that he is now in God's hands. He tells her that he will never come back to Tunisia, and that he intends to die as a martyr in Syria. Salma is devastated. She goes to confront Nabil, Mourad's friend, who swears that he tried to dissuade Mourad, and who launches into a profusion of apologies. Nabil says he can put her in touch with the smugglers who arrange the departure of jihadists to Syria and Libya.



In Syria ?

Other Families Reem introduces her sister to a friend from the association *Give Us Our Children Back*. She suggests that Salma come and share her pain with the support group of parents like her, whose children have gone to join jihadists or have been kidnapped by their Syrian or Libyan fathers. Salma watches videos of parents, men and women, grieving the absence of their children and complaining about the government's inaction.



Salma decides to go to Syria Salma has a nightmare in which she goes to a *Bring Our Children Back* meeting and is shocked by the ritual of resignation of people who know her son, and who, dressed in black, mourn him. She decides to stop crying and do things differently. She will go to Syria to fetch her son. Hichem thinks her idea is irrational and begs her not to put her life in danger, saying that he has connections at the Ministry of the Interior who have promised to help them. Salma tells him that she cannot wait any longer.



Salma is interviewed by the Jihadists Nabil introduces Salma and Reem to the jihadist recruiting organization. Salma is interviewed by a man behind a translucent screen, who wants to know her motivations for going to Syria. She tells him that she wants to help the wounded in Syria, to join her son and die as a martyr with him, and that it is unbearable for her to remain indifferent to the plight of the Syrian people facing the brutal regime of Bashar Al-Assad.



Salma travels to Syria

Salma passes the test with the recruiting organization, who book her a flight ticket to Turkey. After immigration checks at the airport, she is allowed to board a plane to Turkey. In Turkey, a man meets her in a luxurious hotel and has her driven by his chauffeur to the camp of the jihadist leader Abou Al Walid in the Syrian mountains.



The jihadists' camp

As she arrives At Abou Al Wali's camp, Salma crosses path with her son, now called Abou Hisham, who is going out on a mission with a group led by Nizar. Salma is greeted by Abou Firas, the right-hand man of Abou Al Walid. He informs Salma that her role will be mainly to care for the wounded, but that she is expected to cook and clean and even to go to the front to fight. A woman takes Salma up to her room and tells her that their contribution to the fight is to do whatever is asked of them by the men.



The Ambush Mourad (Abou Hisham) is in his first battle. He and his group ambush the Syrian army. They blow up military vehicles, kill enemy fighters, and summarily execute prisoners.



My brothers, your iihad honors you

Salma learns the use of weaponry While she is preparing couscous, Salma learns from Abou Firas that Abou Al Walid has ordered her to go to the front. At the front, Salma learns from a Tunisian fighter that there are two other Tunisians in the group, including Nizar and Abou Hisham, a young man of eighteen. She understands that it is Mourad. Her many questions end up irritating the Tunisian fighter.



Salma visits the wounded When Salma visits the wounded, a nurse explains to her that they are in need of everything, even painkillers. Among the wounded are fighters as well as civilians, women as well as children.

Salma meets Abou Al Walid After returning from the front, Salma hears moaning and tiptoes over to see what it is about. She discovers an old man dressed in all white lying in a bed. Abou Firas catches her in the room and puts a gun to her head, asking her what she is doing there. She explains that she came to help the dying man. It is Abou Al Walid. He asks his right-hand man to leave him alone with Salma. He tells her that his days are numbered, but that he wants to live a long enough to see the fall of Bashar Al Assad's regime. He tells Salma that he is the only one who knows about her secret, and that he knows that she has come for her son, and that she hates his movement. Salma replies that he makes mothers sad by killing their sons.



Salma is captured Salma returns to the front line with a Dutch journalist who has come to document the war. She goes to rescue jihadists and civilians who are victims of an attack by the Syrian army. While they are there, the army attacks again and captures them. The jihadists are executed on the spot. The journalist is kept alive for an eventual prisoner exchange and Salma is spared to serve as a sex slave.

Salma kills her captors Salma is repeatedly raped and beaten by her guards. While they are eating, having left their weapons at the door, she asks for a drink and takes the opportunity to grab one of the Kalashnikovs. She eliminates all her guards, grabs one of their uniforms and puts it on. She goes out into the courtyard, confused, not knowing where to go



Mourad kills his mother by mistake

Abou Al Walid learns that his men and Salma have been captured. He gives orders to send the best of his men to surround the guards who are holding them prisoner and kill them. Mourad is among the volunteers for this special mission. From his hiding place, Mourad sees a person in a Syrian army uniform come out. He aims and shoots. The person falls and he runs to see who it is. Mourad realizes that he has just killed his mother. He is grief-stricken.



Questions

1. Mourad's father suggests that Mourad could have been saved from jihadism if he were raised in a nuclear family rather than a single-parent family. How would this claim be proved true or false? Elaborate.
2. Did the filmmaker have an agenda in giving Salma a profession as a paramedic rather than another profession? Explain your answer.
3. Several people failed to sound the alarm to alert Mourad's parents of their son's drifting, including his aunt Reem and his girlfriend Dalel. Would you have reacted differently in their place? What would you have done?
4. Hichem comes to get Mourad at the entrance of the mosque under a light rain and offers him to take shelter under his umbrella. Mourad refuses. A few minutes later, in a café, Mourad insults his father, who gets angry and hits him with his umbrella. What is the symbolic significance of this scene?
5. Why is the visible female body so repressed in some religions?
6. Name two scenes in the film that show that women are the first victims of armed conflicts.