

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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A Summer in La Goulette (1996)

Férid Boughedir

OVERVIEW

At a time when many of our conversations are theorizing about globalization and intercultural coexistence, Férid Boughedir's *A Summer in La Goulette* challenges us to look inward to see how far we are willing to go in order to find the determination needed to extend a brotherly or a sisterly hand to the other. For Jojo the Jewish, Youssef the Muslim, and Giuseppe the Christian, this question puts at stake what they hold most dear, their faith and their family honor.

CHARACTERS

<i>Youssef</i> :	A Muslim train operator
<i>Jojo</i>	A Jewish pastry seller
<i>Giuseppe</i>	A Catholic fisherman
<i>Gigi</i>	Jojo's daughter
<i>Meriem</i>	Youssef's daughter
<i>Tina</i>	Giuseppe's daughter
<i>Wassila</i>	Youssef's wife
<i>Fritna</i>	Jojo's wife
<i>Lucia</i>	Giuseppe's wife
<i>The Hadj</i>	Muslim authority figure

SYNOPSIS

Giuseppe, a Catholic Sicilian fisherman, Youssef, a Muslim Tunisian train operator, and Jojo, a Jewish French pastry seller, are old friends and inhabitants of the Tunisian beach town of Lagoulette. Their respective daughters, Tina, Meriem, and Gigi have made a vow to become women by losing their virginity this summer. Their bold decision and the partners they choose to accomplish their goal test their parents' friendship.

SCENES

Children The boys of La Goulette skip their siesta routine to enjoy as much of the day as possible. The youngest ones trespass the villa of the Hadj, the town's feared Muslim authority, explore his garden, and make up fantastical stories about him. They steal peanuts from the peanut vendor on the beach and run to seek the protection of their fathers enjoying a card game.



Parents Giuseppe's, Jojo's, and Youssef's families are very close. They live on the same floor of an apartment building. The men spend time together at the local bar, play cards together, and go fishing together. At dinner time, the families exchange dishes. Giuseppe's Catholic family and Jojo's Jewish family enjoy Wassila's (Youssef's wife) non-kosher *gnaouia* (gombo). Giuseppe's wife Lucia sends some Italian pasta to Wassila in return. Fritna (Jojo's wife) sends some *pkaila* (spinach, white beans, and rice) to Wassila. The bar is a place for men to unwind, recall historical events, and tell interethnic jokes. Arabs make fun of Jews, Jews laugh at Arab and Christians, and all ends up in good humor with someone picking up the tab for everyone. The women, too, go to the café to unwind. The daughters join them there.



The Hadj has followed Meriem there. He is infatuated with her beauty. He pulls pictures of her of when she was a child and looks at them. Taita proposes herself to be his wife. The Hadj accords her no attention at all. It is Meriem that he wants.

Hadj's Greed, Lust and Death

A woman in debt sends Taita to see the Hadj on her behalf. She is willing to pawn her jewelry and mortgage her house for a loan. The Hadj refuses to lend her money, claiming that it is usury and against his religious principles. However, he offers to buy the woman's house and rent it back to her. Wassila and Youssef have invited the Hadj, the Muslim authority and landlord, for lunch. He hates Jews and will not eat Fritna's *pkaila*. The Hadj goes to wash his hand in the bathroom and walks in on Meriem taking her shower. She does not notice him. The beauty of the young girl so overwhelms him that he almost faints. The Hadj visits Meriem in the absence of her parents. She sees that the old man is affected by her presence. She uses her charm to convince him to talk to her father into letting her go back to sewing school. She promises to come and see him wearing the veil with nothing underneath. The Hadj tells Youssef that he wants to marry Meriem to protect her honor and quiet all the disgraceful rumors. Youssef is reluctant. The Hadj reminds him that he was offered a good price to tear down the building in which Youssef lives, but he has been holding back because of Meriem. He tells Youssef that he can live rent-free if he gives him his daughter. Humiliated by Youssef and now certain that Meriem will never be his wife, the Hadj takes revenge on his renters. He starts evicting them to sell his building to a modern developer. Meriem decides to do something. She wears a veil with nothing underneath and goes to see the Hadj. She drops her veil in front of him and reveals her nudity. The old man is overwhelmed. His heart cannot take the shock. He collapses and dies.



Daughters' quest for adulthood

Jojo's, Giuseppe's, and Youssef's daughters, Gigi, Tina, and Meriem, too, are very close friends. They work as apprentice seamstresses in the same shop, and they go to the beach and to the movies as a group. This summer, the three girls have decided to go on a quest for their femininity. They want to become women, to lose their virginity on the day of the Madonna Parade. They go to church to light candles to the Madonna. Taita, the town matchmaker, has followed them and eavesdropped on their pledge. The bigger boys of La Goulette, too, are on a quest for their manhood. They have been marking their territories on the streets by heckling the younger boys and affirming their masculinity by flirting with the town's girls on the streets and on the beach. Gigi has hoped to lose her virginity with Jojo's nephew, the handsome Maxo, who is on summer vacation in La Goulette. However, Maxo tells Gigi that he has a girlfriend waiting for him back in Italy. Meriem has been meditating on the fate of Latifa, who committed suicide because the Hadj chose for her a husband she did not love, and whose picture hangs on the wall of the seamstress' shop. Meriem knows that the Hadj is a respected authority in the Muslim community of La Goulette. He is the spiritual matchmaker. She has seen him stalking her, and he might decide to marry her against her will. Or maybe he will not if she is impure, no longer a virgin. The girl decides to put their plan into action. They will lose their virginity with the first three boys that they see. The three troublemakers who have been pestering the girls are the first three boys to show up. They have come to ask them to be their dates at Lucette's (Gigi's sister) wedding reception, and they are astounded to see that the girls so easily agree to go on dates with them.



The Girls' plan put into action

The three friends, Meriem, Gigi, and Tina, join their dates in a private room for a private party. The girls choose a boy from a different religion. Meriem, the Muslim girl, chooses a Catholic boy. Tina, the Catholic girl, chooses a Jewish boy. And Gigi, the Jewish girl, chooses a Muslim boy. The Hadj's view is obstructed by the dancers, and he does not see the girls leave. He goes to look for them and hears music and voices coming from one of the hotel rooms. The Hadj rushes to alert the girls' fathers, who surprise their daughters with their dresses unbuttoned. The girls have been bragging that they are no longer virgins. The boys, who have taken refuge in an old train garage, swear that nothing happened. The Hadj wants to know if Meriem is no longer a virgin. He asks Meriem's mother to teach her how to wear the veil. Meriem



finds the idea of the veil amusing and does not show much resistance to it. Gigi's mother asks Taita the matchmaker to find her daughter a good husband.

Discovery There is tumult in the building. Youssef accuses his friend Jojo of hiding his cousin's bad intention about his daughter. Most of all, he resents the fact that his daughter chose a Christian. Jojo blames his daughter's choice of an Arab boy on the bad education she received from her mother. Giussepe beats his daughter for dating a Jew and orders a virginity examination to make sure that she has not lost her father's honor, which her mother opposes. The fathers turn on one another and will no longer be friends.



Reconciliation Jojo sends for Youssef. He tells him that he needs his help boiling eggs because his Jewish faith forbids him to come near fire on Saturdays. While the eggs are boiling, he asks Youssef to get a bottle of *Boukha* (a Tunisian Jewish distilled beverage produced from figs) and two glasses from the shelves. Youssef gets three glasses, then a fourth one. Soon, Giussepe and Hamouda join them for a card game.



Still virgin At the ruins, the girls have come wearing armour. They were not serious about losing their virginity. They sewed their outfits in ways that made it impossible for the boys to get them unclothed. Alerted that their fathers are coming, the girls scurry to the Saint's Tomb, where their fathers find them praying.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

MERIEM Open to new experiences (Flirtatious – Defiant – Manipulative)

Meriem is a flirtatious, defiant, and manipulative girl. Like her two friends, Tina and Gigi, Meriem is part of a generation that no longer recognizes itself in the strict social rules set by their communities. For Meriem, who has no consideration for the Hadj whom everyone fears in La Goulette, it is out of the question that the Hadj choose a husband for her, let alone that he be that husband. Although she is not serious about losing her virginity, she intends to make her parents uneasy on the subject. This is her way of telling them that she alone will decide on her sex life, and that she has the ability to do so.

Flirtatious Wassila is teaching her daughter how to wear the veil. To convince her that the veil is not constraining, she tells her that she sometimes goes shopping wearing only her underwear beneath it. Meriem jokingly asks her mother if she can be totally naked under her veil. This is an idea she will use to tease and ridicule the Hadj, who has been stalking her and insisting that she wear the veil. The Hadj comes to visit Meriem on a day her parents are absent. She notices that the Hadj's gaze is plunging into her breast. At first repulsed, she then decides to play with the Hadj's imagination. She grabs a stool, sits in front of him and tells him that she is totally naked under her dress because it is hot. The old man cannot control himself and his shaking hand spills his glass of milk on her thigh. She rubs her index finger in the milk on her thigh and licks it sultrily. The old man is affected. She promises to come see him naked under her veil. She sees that he is completely at her mercy. She asks him to convince her father to let her go back to sewing school. He tells her that he will do whatever she wants.

Defiant Meriem's and her friends' decision to lose their virginity before marriage is a defiant act against the principles of their families and their community. Such an act would bring shame on the family, and would result in the loss of the father's honor and status in the community. But above all, such an act would emancipate her from the authority of the guardians of religion, such as the Hadj, who has granted himself the right to choose husbands for Muslim girls. Latifa, a seamstress like Meriem, preferred to rebel against the decision of the Hadj by committing suicide. Meriem does not intend to commit suicide, but she wants to fight back by making herself unfit for the Hadj's decision, by making herself impure, unmarriageable.

Manipulative Meriem is a manipulator. The Hadj has a weakness for Meriem. He is fascinated by her youth and beauty and dreams only of making her his wife. This idea is repugnant to Meriem. However,

when the Hadj gets angry with Youssef for having publicly humiliated him and decides to evict Meriem's family from the house he rents to them, the young girl knows she can count on her hold on the old man to make him change his mind. She goes to see him in his home, completely naked under her veil. And when she uncovers herself in front of the Hadj, offering him the nudity he has so much dreamed of, the old man's heart gives way under the emotion. He falls and dies on the spot.

THE HADJ Disagreeable to others (Ruthless - Hypocrite - Vindictive – Prowler)

The Hadj is a ruthless, hypocritical, and vindictive prowler. The Hadj has tried twice to go to Mecca and has failed twice, thus, the mocking sobriquet of "Double-Hadj" that people use for him in his absence. Nevertheless, he has used his financial stature to impose himself as a community leader and the Muslim authority in La Goulette. His dishonesty permeates his ruthless commercial methods, his vindictiveness, and his immoral pursuit of Meriem.

Ruthless Hadj is an unscrupulous businessman. Owner of several houses in La Goulette, he harasses his tenants at the end of the month and threatens them with eviction. He ruins indebted families by buying back their houses at low prices to resell them at a higher price. When he wants something, he uses his financial influence as a lever. For example, he is much more lenient with Meriem's family, letting them pay their rent as late as they want, because he has his eyes set on their daughter, whom he wants as a wife. As the 1967 Arab-Israeli War breaks out, Hadj has his plans all figured out. He is predicting that the Jewish population in Tunisia will be scurrying to sell their homes and flee to Israel. He asks Taita, in case this happens, to give him a list of all the Jewish families fleeing Tunisia, so that he can buy their houses cheaply from them and make a huge profit later.

Hypocrite The Hadj is a hypocrite who does not hesitate to violate the social and religious principles he preaches when his personal interests are at stake. Taita comes to the Hadj to negotiate a loan for a woman in debt. The Hadj refuses on the grounds that it is usury and that it is against his religious principles. However, he offers to buy the house of the indebted woman and then to rent it to her. Thus, under the pretext of religion, the Hadj refuses a request that would benefit the indebted woman and then makes another proposal that would completely rob her. Another instance of his hypocrisy can be seen when he proposes to Youssef to marry Meriem. Then Meriem and her two friends make their parents believe that they are no longer virgins. According to Muslim custom that the Hadj guarantees in La Goulette, a girl like Meriem would be impure and therefore unmarriageable. However, the Hadj is so obsessed by Meriem's youth and beauty that he is ready to ignore all his socio-religious principles to make her his wife.

Vindictive The Hadj wants Meriem as his wife. He promises Youssef that if this happens, Youssef's family will live rent-free in the house they rent from him. As Youssef hesitates, the Hadj warns him that he can be evicted from the house, for he has received profitable offers to tear down his building and sell the land to developers. He tells Youssef that he has not sold his land yet because of Meriem but could change his mind if Youssef does not agree to the marriage. Youssef gets fed up with the Hadj snooping around his house and stalking his daughter, and he angrily exposes him during the Madonna Procession. The Hadj understands that Youssef has dashed the likelihood of making Meriem his wife. In reprisal, the Hadj plans to evict Youssef.

Prowler Since the day the Hadj saw Meriem naked in the shower, he has not stopped following her and snooping in her parents' house hoping to catch her there alone. He stalks her when she is at the café with her friends and her mother. He hates Jewish people but goes to Lucette's wedding celebration just to keep an eye on Meriem's movements. When Meriem, Gigi, and Tina disappear to meet their dates in a private hotel room, he frantically looks for them to find the room they are in and inform their fathers. The Hadj goes to Youssef and Wassila's place when he knows they are not at home and Meriem is alone. It is while snooping around in Youssef's home that he discovers the girls' plans to lose their virginity and he rushes to inform their fathers. This time, Youssef is fed up with the Hadj's prowling around and harassing his daughter, and he humiliates him.

The parents:

FATHERS: YOUSSEF, JOJO, GIUSSEPE Emotional (*Protective Proud*)

The girls' fathers are protective and proud parents. Despite their differing religious beliefs, Meriem's, Gigi's, and Tina's parents are mirror images of one another, with the fathers on one side and the mothers on the other.

Protective The fathers are protective of their children. The little boys of La Goulette are rascals who always find a way to get into trouble. When they are not snatching TSF's radio antenna or stealing peanuts from the beach vendor, they are snooping around the Hadj's villa. They know, however, that they can always count on the protection of their fathers, to whom they run to seek salvation as soon as they are chased by the victims of their bad jokes.

Proud The fathers are proud of their religious and cultural heritage, which they intend to maintain and perpetuate through their daughters. For this, it is necessary that the daughters avoid any contaminating actions with the culture of the other religions. Friendship must stop where cultural mixing begins, and cultural mixing begins where interactions between boys and girls of different cultures are no longer innocent but sexual. Lucette, Jojo's oldest daughter, marries a Jewish man like him. Jojo, the Jew, enjoys Wassila's non-kosher gombo. His future son-in-law will only eat kosher food. Jojo praises him for being an exemplary Jew and congratulates his daughter for choosing a good Jewish man as her future husband. Therefore, he tells Gigi to take her sister as an example, instead of cavorting with a Muslim. Youssef, who would have liked to see his daughter Meriem preserve his Muslim heritage, is shocked to learn that she has chosen a Catholic lover. And Giuseppe is apoplectic that his good little Catholic daughter has chosen a Jewish lover. So, despite the great friendship between them, when the continuity of their faith and family culture is threatened, the fathers are ready to erect barriers between their families. The fathers' excessive pride in their individual culture borders on intolerance.

MOTHERS: WASSILA, FRITNA, LUCIA Rational (*Protective – Conciliatory*)

The girls' mothers are protective and conciliatory. Unlike their husbands, they are more reasonable than emotional.

Protective The mothers are the accomplices of their daughters, whom they protect, and who confide in them about everything, or almost everything. When the fathers, believing they have lost their honor through the loss of their daughters' virginity, beat them, it is their mothers who come to their rescue. Fritna stands up to Jojo's injunction that her daughter undergo a virginity examination. The mothers are openness with their daughters. One can see the playful tone with which Meriem and Wassila discuss wearing the veil, or the sincerity with which Tina and Lucia address the issue of men's infidelity and the impossibility of a paradise for women outside La Goulette.

Conciliatory Unlike the fathers who see their cultures and faiths as rigid and unchangeable entities, the mothers are more accommodating and realistic. For them, culture is a flexible entity, which lends itself to interpenetration. Thus, to Youssef, who laments seeing his daughter with a Catholic, Wassila suggests patience and calmness because after all, a Christian may well convert to Islam and vice versa. To Jojo, who already sees his daughter in a Muslim home, Fritna reminds him that dancing with the other is far from being an act of marriage. And it is still the mothers who meet at the prayer temple to light candles and wish for the return of good understanding among their husbands. The friendship of the mothers, although less noisy and less demonstrative than that of their husbands, is deeper and more sincere.

THEMES

SOCIETY (patriarchy, gender, religion)

Patriarchy Whether one is a Muslim, a Jew, or a Christian, the law that governs the family is that of the father. First, in the large Muslim community, the fundamental father is the Hadj, the Muslim authority, who plays the role of a spiritual adviser. The Hadj chooses husbands for Muslim girls without considering their opinion. Then, in the smallest family context, it is the law of the father that dominates. The father is the symbol of family honor, and this honor is achieved through the good conduct of the women in the family, and more specifically through their good sexual behavior. Women should be faithful, and girls must remain virgins. Thus Jojo, when he believes that Gigi has lost her virginity, asks his daughter how she could sully her father's honor. And Giuseppe orders a virginity examination for Tina, while Youssef beats up Meriem. And all these men accuse their wives of having been negligent with their daughters, thereby allowing them to humiliate them.

Gender For the adolescent girls the quest for femininity has come. It would be a trivial matter if they were boys. However, they are girls, and in their sexual conducts rests the honor of their families. The achievement of femininity requires their intimate encounter with a man, which will cause the loss of their virginity. Thus, Meriem, Gigi, and Tina make an oath that this summer in La Goulette will be the last summer for them as virgins. They will lose their innocence, they have decided. And so that it is done, the girls place their decision under the protection of the Madonna of the fishermen and select the Parade of the Madonna, on August 15, as the day to realize their project. If the loss of innocence for boys is perceived by their families as an act without disturbing consequences, when it comes to girls, this loss of innocence is an act that cannot be taken lightly. Becoming a woman outside of marriage upsets a whole social nomenclature. It is an anti-genealogical act. It is a mutiny against familial and communal order.

Religion Tina, Gigi, and Meriem have decided to become women on their own terms, that is, to lose their virginity. They have chosen a date. This decision goes against the principles of their respective families. Tina is Catholic, Gigi is Jewish, and Meriem is Muslim. Their families are conservative. In these conservative families, people marry within their faith, and premarital sex is just not permitted; so that for these three girls of various confessions, to lose their virginity before marriage would be a sacrilegious act. However, that doesn't matter to them. They are determined to go through with their decision, or at least they think so. The choice of partners that the girls make turns their quest into a double insurrection. Tina, the Catholic, chooses a Jewish partner; Meriem, the Muslim, chooses Christian partner and Gigi, the Jewish girl, chooses a Muslim partner. These choices test the friendship of their parents and expose their repressed preconceptions that each ethnic and religious group must remain with its own for the world to go round. The subversion does not stop with the girls.

RELATIONSHIPS (friendship, marriage, desire/lust)

Friendship One would have thought that the ordeals suffered by the families of La Goulette had sealed their friendship forever, strengthened inter-community ties, and eliminated mistrust of the other forever. The sincerity of their friendship will soon be tested by a dreaded event, another war in the Middle East. Indeed, the rumors of war between Israelis and Palestinians that had been circulating for some time on the airwaves and on the lips, and that no one took seriously, finally materializes in what would become known as the Six Day War. On the eve of this conflict, Tunisian Jews and Christians, fearing for their safety, abandoned their homes in Tunisia to seek refuge either in Israel or in Europe. The friendship of the people of La Goulette was ultimately only superficial. In their deepest recesses, Jews, Christians, and Muslims continue to rub shoulders with distrust. Here, Boughedir raises the question of the sincerity of our relationships with one another. To what extent are our interfaith, interracial, interpersonal acts merely gestures that we make mechanically, for the sake of convenience, and which inwardly hide our aversion to others, our fear of their culture and religion?

Marriage Lucette, Jojo's daughter will soon get married. Her fiancé is Jewish like her. She brings him to eat at her parents' house, and he makes Jojo proud. He only eats kosher, unlike his future father-in-law who, although a Jewish, loves the non-kosher dishes that Wassila, the wife of his Muslim friend Youssef, brings him from time to time. Jojo is proud that his future son-in-law remain faithful to the Torah's prescriptions, and he congratulates his daughter for choosing a good Jew. Already, thanks to his eldest daughter, he is assured that the family's identity, which is based on Jewish faith, will be preserved. And Jojo pays for Lucette's wedding, which he organizes lavishly, with Claudia Cardinale as the guest of honor. Everything would be perfect if the day of the reception, Gigi, Lucette's younger sister, had not gotten it into her head to lose her virginity to a young Muslim. Jojo becomes apoplectic. Could she not follow her sister's example and take a good Jew? On their side, Giuseppe the Christian and Youssef the Muslim are inconsolable, too: their daughters Tina and Meriem have, respectively, chosen to get involved with a Muslim and a Christian. Giuseppe and Youssef, too, expected their offspring to continue the perpetuation of the family's identity through a marriage in the strict religious faith of their ancestors. In their anger, the criticisms they hurl at followers of other religions are stereotypical. For them, marriage must take place within the same religious faith because this faith is the foundation of identity, and marriage is the river through which that identity flows through generations.

Desire/Lust The Hadj is the demonstration that because desire was born before the law, no law can stifle it. Desire cannot be legislated. The Hadj is the Muslim authority in La Goulette. He is the guardian of the faith and the Muslim law in the community. He is the one who regulates desires, douses them where he thinks they should be doused and lights them up where he believes they should be lit. It is under his authority as matchmaker that the young Muslim women of La Goulette are married. But when the Hadj sees Meriem naked in the shower, his desires play tricks on him. He, the great regulator of desires, who opens and closes the valves of lust, can no longer control his lust. He contorts himself. He humiliates himself. He lowers himself. He threatens. He manipulates. He gets manipulated. He bends the law. He begs even. All to satisfy his desire. And after all these embarrassments, his desires prevail without him being able to satisfy them. He dies of unfulfilled desires.

FLAWS (anger greed)

Anger Youssef, Meriem's father, gets angry and flouts the Hadj's authority in La Goulette. In principle, in Youssef's conservative society, a girl who has lost her virginity before marriage is a lost girl who can only be saved by a generous man who, ignoring her impurity, will offer to marry her. Such a proposal is a blessing for the parents, who see in this suitor a savior. The Hadj is therefore convinced that his proposal to marry Meriem will be received with great gratitude by Youssef. Besides, his position as Youssef's landlord and creditor makes him a feared person to whom few things are refused. However, the Hadj finds an angry Youssef, who denounces him in public and sends him packing. The father's love for his daughter is stronger than his fear of the Hadj and his honor in the community. The Hadj, this "snooping, dirty old man," as Youssef calls him to his face, will not marry his daughter.

Greed The Hadj is the personification of greed. He is already the owner of many buildings in La Goulette, whose tenants he harasses and blackmail. That is not enough for him. He exploits the vulnerability of indebted people to buy their properties at low prices, which he resells at a higher price to make big profits. Promoters have contacted him to buy his buildings at very high costs in order to destroy them for the land. Putting forward the profits he would make from such a deal rather than the welfare of his loyal tenants, the Hadj arrives with a bailiff to put his tenants on the street. Moreover, with the imminence of the war in the Middle East, he already sees good business to be done. He anticipates that many Jews would not want to take the risk of living amongst Arabs and would hastily sell their properties to move to a safe place in Europe or Israel. He asks his secretary, Taita, to keep her eyes and ears open and to make him a list of those who would be ready to flee, so that

QUEST (play, exploration/knowledge)

The childhood kingdom is the realm of innocence, freedom, fantasy, dangerous play, provocation, curiosity, and exploration. And for school children, what time offers more opportunity than summertime, when school is out, to experience these possibilities?

Play *A Summer in La Goulette* opens with the children of the three featured families escaping their nap routine and setting up to explore the Hadj's villa. They build around the Hadj all kinds of fantastical stories. The Hadj, also dubbed 'Double-Hadj' for unsuccessfully attempting to reach Mecca twice, the children claim, is single because he is a sorcerer who killed and buried his seven fiancées under the slab of his courtyard. Having satisfied themselves with their fantastical tales and stolen flowers from the Hadj's garden, the children wander in the streets of La Goulette. There, they come across boys older than them, but wanderers like them, who heckle them in a friendly way to mark their territories as bigger boys. The youngest have borrowed from their elders some comic books that they are slow to return, and they would like to make sure that the books do not end up in the local bookstore. But the children, knowing the weakness that their elders have for their sisters, find ways to get out of trouble by reassuring them that their books are in the girls' good care. Then, jumping carelessly in the back of a passing carriage, they head to the sea to harass the peanut vendor, who comes complaining to their parents for unpaid merchandise. The time of childhood is also the time when, having wandered all day on the beach, the children find at home mom's steaming dishes, which make them lose all sense of propriety, so great is the impatience of their hollow bellies. Thus, Gigi's young brother is scolded by his father for rushing to grab a dish, forgetting that the family is receiving a guest, which requires a little more decorum than usual.

Exploration/knowledge If for the youngest the time of childhood is a moment of pure hedonism, for their elders, the teenagers in the age of puberty, this moment presents a more existential stake, that of becoming-man or becoming-woman. For the older ones, girls as well as boys, it is the time of the quest for adulthood, the age of passage. There is in the big boys a sort of frantic anticipation. It's as if time is running out, and every little minute must be seized as not to miss the train to emancipation. The young men whistle at passing girls, give them awkward compliments and offer them flowers picked without authorization in a neighborhood garden. They offer to escort them out of the cinema or to go with them to the next film. They propose to help with the preparation of an upcoming wedding in the hope of getting closer to Meriem, Gigi, and Tina. For the older boys, the kingdom of childhood is a time of quest for knowledge of the female body. It is a time of awkward flirtations and long waits on the beach, peeping in the girls' showers, hoping to catch some female nudity. And when it happens, one of the boys is so overwhelmed that he faints, bumping his head against the shower wall, revealing their presence, causing their victims to cover their nudity and scurry away: All this eagerness has only one goal, to become a man as soon as possible by making one's initiation through the knowledge of the woman.

QUESTIONS

1. Why are the mothers less worried about their daughters losing their virginity than the fathers?
2. Giuseppe orders a virginity examination for Tina, but her mother Lucia opposes it. Try and rationalize the mother's opposition.
3. Why is the interracial, interreligious picking on others that takes place in Hamouda's bar important? What role does it play in strengthening community ties?
4. What traditional cultural/religious incompatibilities do you know about the following pairs that would make the fathers uneasy?
 - a. A Muslim-Christian couple
 - b. A Christian-Jewish couple
 - c. A Jewish-Christian couple
5. Are the above oppositions stronger or weaker than they used to be?
 - a. If yes, what events have consolidated them?
 - b. If not, what events have occasioned their erosion?