

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Martial Frindéthié, PhD

The Prince / Le Prince (2004)

Mohamed Zran

OVERVIEW

Auteur Mohamed Zran was born in 1959 in Zrazis, Tunisia. Like most filmmakers of his generation, he studied cinema at the Ecole Supérieure d'Etudes Cinématographiques in Paris. He made mostly short films before embarking on his first feature film, *Essaïda* (1996). *The Prince* (2004), his second feature film, was nominated for the Golden Pyramid at the Cairo International Film Festival.

Film This is a straight to the point, feel good film about a poor man falling in love with a rich, older woman. Shot with few artifices, the film contains a sub-plot about the little consideration that is given to culture in Tunisian society, a personal plea on behalf of culture by a man of culture.

Background Before being known as a feature film director, Mohamed Zran was celebrated for his talent as a documentarian. In this film, which gives voice to characters from different strata of Tunisian society, we find his preoccupation with dissecting the daily lives of his fellow citizens by lending them his microphone and his camera. Also, the film reveals the frustrations of the working class, which broods over its resentment against life, the difficulties of artists and men of culture left to pauperization, but also the anxieties of the rich and their emotional needs. In Tunisian society very marked by class differences, Mohamed Zran wants to hope that the universal value of love is strong enough to unite his fellow citizens beyond their social categories.

CHARACTERS

<i>DONIA</i>	A divorced mother and bank manager
<i>ADEL</i>	A florist
<i>RAOUF</i>	Adel's friend, a poet and magazine editor
<i>MOUNIR</i>	Adel's friend, a chauffeur

SYNOPSIS

A young florist is struck by the beauty of a woman that (who) walks by his flower stall every day. He discovers that she is the branch manager of the neighborhood bank, and he starts delivering her flowers without telling her that he is her admirer. One day, he writes her a note inviting her on a date at a restaurant. He does not know if she will show up.

SCENES

Donia the banker Donia is the branch manager of a local bank in Tunis. She is divorced and a mother of a little boy. She devotes her time to her son and her work. She complains to one of her friends that work consumes her and that she has no social life.

No loan for Gargouz Mr. Gargouz, a businessman and client of the bank, who is behind in his payments, comes to see Mrs. Donia. He submits a business plan for which he would like financing. Donia tells him that he will not receive any financing from the bank until he has cleared up his debt. Gargouz leaves disappointed but not defeated. He promises himself that Donia will be hearing from him again.



No loan for Raouf Raouf is a poet, who runs a literary magazine. He is the chief editor of a new project called "The Unknown," inspired by the title of a poem by the great Tunisian writer Abu Alkacim Chabbi and intends to promote Tunisian culture. He sees Tunisian culture as a great resource ignored by Tunisians. He needs financing to launch his new project and comes to see Donia at the bank. She tells him that she is sorry, but that he already owes the bank money.



Adel the florist Adel works at the flower market in Tunis. He arrives late for work and his boss, Ali, asks him for an explanation. He replies that the police arrested him because he was not wearing a helmet on his moped. The street is very busy. A blind mirror seller proposes to passers-by to buy mirrors to see who they really are. Adel and his co-worker Slah admire the women who pass by, commenting on their figures.



Adel sees Donia Slah sees a young woman in a red dress and sunglasses approaching. It is the woman about whom Adel has been fantasizing for days. Slah informs him that she is coming. Adel looks up and sees her. He remains stunned by her beauty, following her with his eyes until she disappears from his sight. It is Donia, the bank manager.



Adel gets close to Donia Gargouz goes to the flower stall where Adel works and orders a large bouquet of flowers to be delivered with his business card to Donia. Adel arrives at the bank with the flowers and is surprised to discover that they are destined to Donia, the woman he has been dreaming about. He also realizes that Donia is the bank manager. He rushes out, forgetting to include Gargouz's business card in the gift. At the stall, Adel notices that he still has Gargouz's business card. He tears it into small pieces. Adel tells Slah about his adventure, saying that he has seen Donia up close and that she is even more beautiful than he had imagined. He tells him that she is the bank manager.



Who sent the flowers? Donia calls her best friend, Leila, to ask her if the huge bouquet she received is from her. Leila tells her that it is probably a gift from her ex-husband, who has been trying to win her back for a while. A female custodian at the bank finds Donia at her office while all the bank staff has left. She complains to Donia about the hard life that women lead, including her and Donia.



Adel daydreams Adel daydreams each time Donia passes by. His boss starts to get angry about his lack of concentration at work and threatens to fire him. He tells him that flowers don't wait. They are like women, who must be sold before their buds open and fade.

Adel's sends flowers to Doria Adel arrives at work before the market stores open and secretly makes a bouquet of flowers that he takes to Donia without identifying the sender. Adel admits to Slah that he has gone back to see Donia. Adel brings a third bouquet of flowers to Donia. This time, she is tired of receiving flowers from people she doesn't know. She tells Adel that this is the last time she will accept his flowers. Gargouz arrives at the bank just as Adel is leaving. Donia, who suspects that he is the sender of all the flowers, shows them to him and asks him to stop sending them. Gargouz understands that it is Adel who is behind all this, and that Donia never received his business card that accompanied the first delivery.



Mounir's Advice Mounir, a friend of Adel's, has been hired as a driver for a rich man. He wears an elegant chauffeur's uniform and drives a shiny Mercedes. He comes to see Adel at work and offers him a ride in his boss's car. Adel invites Mounir to the bar to ask his advice on behalf of a friend, who is poor but in love with a beautiful, rich woman. Mounir is not fooled and knows that this friend is none other than Adel himself.



Mounir advises him to tell his friend to avoid powerful women. On another night, Mounir joins Adel in a bar. Mounir does not understand what is happening to Adel, who is completely drunk. Adel tells him that he is in love with Donia and that he cannot get her out of his mind. Mounir implores Adel to forget Donia. He insists that she is out of his reach and that he will only suffer from thinking about her. He tells him that there are many other girls he could date.

Picking up girls Mounir's boss has a two-hour meeting, and Mounir proposes to Adel to pick up some girls with his boss's car. At first reluctant, Adel embarks on the adventure. They arrive at Raouf's house with two girls and Mounir asks him to give them his apartment. Raouf tells them that his house is not a brothel, but he ends up being convinced by his cousin Mounir. As for Adel, he is not in the mood for fun with a stranger. He leaves.

Adel is fired Gargouz hires a young gangster to settle his account with Adel. Ali, Adel's boss, intervenes and manages to convince the young gangster to let Adel go. Ali accuses Adel of jeopardizing his business and fires him.



Adel beats up his sister's boyfriend Adel goes to see his sister, at the dry cleaner's where she works, and asks her to lend him money. His sister is being courted by her boyfriend, who rushes out as soon as he sees Adel arrive. His sister asks him why he is not at work and finally understands that he has been fired. She gives him twenty dinars to get rid of him. Adel follows his sister's boyfriend. He catches the young man and his sister kissing. He drags him out and threatens to cut his eyes out.



Adel's family On his way home, Adel goes shopping at the local grocery store. He lives with his mother, who only wants to go back to live in the old town, and who complains about the suffocating heat of the apartment and headaches, about his father, who spends his nights in front of the TV dreaming of sudden wealth by betting on soccer games, and about his sister, who complains that Adel is a scrooge, who brings back empty bags of groceries when it is his turn to do the shopping.

Adel is drunk Adel comes home drunk and in a sorry state after almost getting hit by a truck and crashing into a parked car with his moped. From her balcony where she watches for her son's arrival, his mother sees him and is concerned about his condition and the time he is coming home. She wants to know what is happening to him.

The mother's lamentations At home, Abdel makes his mother believe that he is on vacation. His mother is worried that he is still single and childless. She tells him that he should work and put her and his father out of poverty. The father, who is praying while a soccer game is playing on TV, interrupts his prayer and runs to sit in front of the TV when he hears clamoring. He is convinced that his team will win and that the bet he has placed will make him rich.



Poverty The father loses his bet again. The mother regrets that she never went to school because, she says, her life would not have been so miserable, she would never have married and had children who leave her refrigerator empty. Adel is saddened and gets up. He promises his mother to fill her fridge and goes to the local grocery store. Adel passes his order, and the grocer fills his bags. However, when the time comes to pay, he asks the grocer to give him credit. The grocer refuses and takes back his goods.



Raouf has accepted the offer Raouf is packing his books to vacate his office: His friend is trying to convince him to stay for another magazine venture, one which will showcase Tunisian traditional cuisine to a global audience. Raouf is blasé and says he is no longer willing to work for tourists and the "nouveaux riches." He castigates globalization as a concept that makes the rich richer and the poor poorer. A bailiff takes stock of Raouf's offices. The last pieces of furniture seized are followed by the now-jobless staff like a funeral procession. Raouf tells his



girlfriend that he has accepted the offer from Canada. He takes her in his arms and tells her that he loves her. She tells him that she is pregnant with his child. He remains speechless. She gets angry and gets out of his arms. Later on, she tells him that she was never pregnant.

Raouf leaves Tunisia Raouf organizes a party on the roof to say goodbye to Tunis. He invites Adel, Mounir, and two girls. They eat, drink, and dance. However, Adel soon sinks into melancholy. He leaves the party early.



Adel is rehired In the absence of Adel, Slah finds himself with two apprentices who botch the work they are assigned to do. Ali is not very happy. Slah tells him that they are short on staff. Moreover, Donia arrives with her friend Leila, who insists that the florist for her wedding be the one who composed Donia's bouquets because they are well done. Ali lies that the employee (Adel) who made them is off for the day. He offers them flowers and promises them that Adel will be there the next day to take care of their order. Adel returns to work. Slah informs him that Donia has come to the store to ask about him. Adel makes another bouquet for Donia, but this time the guard violently forbids him to enter the bank and destroys his bouquet of flowers.



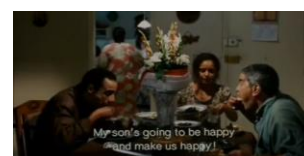
Ali tells Adel's family Ali goes to Adel's parents' house. Adel is not at home. He says he is surprised that Adel is not at work. He tells them that Adel is infatuated with a young woman who distracts him from his work and takes all his money. The mother says she now understands Adel's strange behavior in the last few days that he has been bewitched by this woman. Ali tells her that the woman works at a bank in the neighborhood. He asks Adel's mother to tell him to go back to work the next day.



Scandal at the bank Adel's father calls out to him from the balcony as he is coming home and tells him that his mother is going to the bank to make a scene, and that he had better catch her before it's too late. Adel gets on his moped and runs off to prevent a scandal. Adel is too late. His mother has attacked the bank receptionist, accusing her of ruining her son. Adel arrives at the bank in the middle of the scene and takes his mother home.



Family is happy Adel's mother, who now knows that Donia is the bank manager and not the receptionist she picked on, is in a very good mood. She organizes a meal to celebrate the news with her family and encourages her son to pursue Donia. She says that, after all, Donia is only a woman and her son is a handsome, intelligent man. And Adel's sister goes on to say that even Princess Diana fell in love with an ordinary man like Dodi. Adel arrives home to enhance the atmosphere with a bouquet of flowers for his mother. The mother tells him that happiness is knocking on his door and wants to know if Donia is married or single. The sister asks if Donia can get her a job at the bank. None of them know that Adel is only fantasizing about Donia and that he has never confessed his love to her. Adel suddenly becomes the focus of the family. The father, on the other hand, is content to feast and compliments the mother on her good cooking.



The invitation Encouraged by his parents, and especially by his mother, Adel returns to the bank with a new bouquet of flowers accompanied by a note declaring his love and asking for a date with Donia. He evades the guard, enters unannounced into Donia's office, where Gargouz has come to pay his debts with bundles of bills, places the bouquet on Donia's desk, hands her the note, and leaves hastily without a word, to the surprise of Donia, her colleague, and Gargouz.



Leila encourages Donia to date Donia goes to help Leila pick up her dress for her wedding scheduled for the next day. Leila is so brimming with love and interest in male passers-by that Donia asks her if she is really sure she wants to get married.



Adel gets ready for the date Adel's friends are preparing him for his date with Donia without knowing whether she will be there. Mounir lends him his chauffeur's suit and Raouf gives him a bow tie. When they finish dressing Adel, Raouf looks at him and notices that his attire reflects more than anything else his inferiority complex. He advises him to be himself, to be natural. Adel turns around, looks at himself in the mirror and takes off the fancy suit that Mounir lent him and wears his own simple clothes. When Adel is dropped off at the restaurant, his friends give him advice on how to win Donia over: that he should be simple, that he should be natural, that he should speak to her with the intelligence and clumsiness that characterize him. And Mounir wishes him to win Donia's love for them all, to show that people like them can afford to dream.



The date Donia arrives at the restaurant before Adel and goes to rinse her hands in the restroom to calm her nerves. Mounir drops Adel in front of the restaurant, who smokes a cigarette to calm his nerves. Adel finally meets Donia. He declares his love for her, nervously. She says nothing. He gets up and prepares to leave. She calls him back, smiles at him, and raises her glass to his health. He raises his glass to her, too.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

ADEL Adel is a great romantic. He is shy, but persevering. Against all the advice of his friends who tell him to be careful, he persists and conquers Donia.

Romantic Adel is a florist, and as such, he still believes in the feelings expressed through flowers. For Donia, he goes out of his way to compose beautiful bouquets that Donia's co-worker and her friend Leila find exquisite. His sentimentalist touch gets Donia and Leila to come looking for him at the flower stall.

Shy Although Adel is voluble with his friends Mounir, Raouf, and Slah, but in front of Donia, he becomes a man of few words and delivers his bouquets and disappears as quickly as possible. His nervousness is perceptible the day Donia agrees to meet him. It takes him several minutes before he dares to look her in the eye and declare his feelings for her.

Persistent ,For the flowers Adel sends to Donia, he gets beaten by a gangster hired by Gargouz, and he gets humiliated by the bank guard who violently pushes him onto the sidewalk. None of this, not even his friends who try to dissuade him, sway him from his goal. Through persistence, he finally obtains a date with Donia.

DONIA Donia is an isolated and uncompromising woman. She is not intimidated by the bank's customers or by the employees who think they can take advantage of her gender.

Isolated Donia confides in her friend Leila that her life outside the bank and her son is monotonous and that she is lonely. She tells Leila that work is consuming her and that she wishes she had a love life. Leila advises her to come out of her isolation, to meet as many men as she wants, that she is free, can afford it, and should not deprive herself. It is on Leila's advice that Donia meets Adel.

Intransigent Donia is intransigent with the rules of the bank. Neither Raouf's plea for culture nor Mr. Gargouz's supplications make her bend to grant them a loan. In addition, the bank's cashier, who always finds excuses to take days off, is denied leave by Donia when he again tries to get time off.

RAOUF Raouf is a disillusioned and contradictory character. He is the mouthpiece of cultural professionals, very often marginalized and pushed towards impoverishment.

Disillusioned Raouf is disillusioned with Tunisia. He thinks that culture, which he sees as a great natural resource on the same level as geological resources, is not accorded much importance. And he complains that cultural professionals are scorned. He receives an offer to teach in Canada. After much hesitation, he decides to accept it, for Tunisia, which he loves dearly, has nothing better to offer him.

Contradictory Raouf scorns globalization as a distorted ideology that maintains and keeps feeding class divisions. Therefore, he refuses his friend's offer to be the chief editor of new magazine to cater to a

global audience and draw in money from global advertisers. Yet, Raouf accepts a position to teach in Canada, something that falls squarely within the framework of global exchange.

THEMES

SOCIETY (gender, identity, class, myth)

Gender The expectations placed on Adel by his parents are that, as their son, he should take care of them. They have done their job in bringing him into the world and raising him. It is their investment in him. Now he must repay his debt to them by taking care of them. If the father does not make it very clear to him, the mother does not beat around the bush. She constantly reminds him of this in blunt terms. Adel feels this pressure every time he comes home. And when his mother sees that he is not fulfilling his mission, the language she uses against him is merciless. She calls him a cursed man who should be in hell. She regrets having married and given birth to him. Although he is broke, Adel promises her that he will fill her fridge, but when he goes to the local grocer he is refused credit. It is his sister who, to get rid of him in order to see her boyfriend who ran away when Adel arrived, lends him twenty dinars to go and buy provisions to satisfy his mother.

Identity For Leila, one's identity is what is superficially perceptible. How the people around you perceive you, or the illusion they have of you. She thinks that what matters is to cultivate that illusion in the public space and live one's true self in the private space. She advises Donia to live her private life intensely because her image in the public sphere is already established as that of a rich, powerful, and independent woman. She has nothing to prove to anyone in this area. However, her private life is waning. Leila likens her friend to a piece of wood and tells her to give free rein to her passion and desires and to go and meet this young man who has asked her to meet him in a restaurant. She tells Donia that she would have gone in her place if a wedding was not holding her back that night. For her, this illusion of herself, this identity, is completed with her marriage. Tomorrow, she says, she will be 'madam', no matter what. This is what will be perceived, even if she feels more attraction for her lover from Germany than for her future husband; even if, as she suggests, she will cheat on her husband. She will still be identified as Madam, and that is all that matters.

Class Raouf puts globalization on trial as an ideology that exacerbates the class struggle in Tunisia. This class divide is perceptible. Mounir says that his boss's Mercedes is the car for small grocery store errands, that he has two others of better quality. Adel chases Donia's Range Rover with his moped, all the way to her posh and immaculate building protected twenty-four hours a day by a guard who forbids access to intruders like him. Raouf himself, as a poet, is part of that middle class to which the intelligentsia belongs, and of which Ali speaks, a class of people for whom even a cup of coffee is too expensive a luxury. The lamentations of Adel's mother, who lives in a suffocating apartment that gives her headaches, the anguish of Adel's father in front of his TV, betting on soccer matches, the idle youth of the neighborhood who, in order to exorcise the pain of their condition, have ironically named themselves 'the club of the unemployed', and who spend their days playing cards, smoking, and drinking—all this, against the backdrop of Mounir's boss's three luxurious cars, are evidence of the class divide in Tunisia.

Myth The florists, who every day see the women of high society pass in front of them, admire them from afar as unattainable dreams. They tell themselves that their worlds are so opposite that the possibility of a romance between them is only illusory. They have built a myth around these women that stands like an impassable rampart. So they ask Adel to get down to earth when he begins to dream of making Donia his wife. They are afraid that his hopes will be shattered against the reefs of impossibility. His friend Mounir tells him that he is going to crash against the walls of fantasy by dreaming of dating Donia, and that he should take her out of his thoughts. He tells him that people in Donia's class only see those in their class as usable and disposable objects. However, Adel persists and eventually wins the heart of Donia, who herself was just waiting to be loved. In doing so, Adel shatters the myth of the impossibility of love across social classes.

JUSTICE (injustice, revenge)

Injustice Tunisia, as Raouf's friend (who is trying to keep him in Tunisia for the creation of a new magazine) tells him, is in the age of globalization. Raouf denounces this globalization as an ideology that

has deepened the gap between the rich and the poor. Globalization, says Raouf, means prison for the poor and a yacht for the rich. Raouf refuses to be an accomplice to this ideology of predation by working for the tourists, the new rich, and the multinationals who are the vultures of globalization. Mounir and Slah, too, see their condition as the result of a great social injustice, of the exploitation of a class of the poor by a class of the privileged. Moreover, it is with resentment that Slah dresses up the wedding cars with flowers when he tells Adel that they spend their time making other people's dreams come true and not their own. And every time Mounir comes to see Adel at work, he asks him if he is still slaving for the rich. And Mounir has an aversion to the upper class, which he expresses when Adel confesses his love for Donia. He tells him that she will only crush him and reject him.

Revenge Adel is in love with Donia, there is no doubt about that. For his friends, however, conquering Donia would be the revenge of the poor on the rich. Indeed, now that Adel has had the courage to declare his love to Donia and invite her on a date, now that the possibility of Donia being won over by Adel is looming, Mounir, Slah, and Raouf see Adel's commitment not as a private matter, but rather as a victory that would restore all those who have been scorned and trampled upon by the privileged class. So, the friends all pitch in to prepare Adel for his meeting with Donia. They groom him, dress him, and Mounir drives him to his date in his boss's Mercedes. For Mounir, above all, Adel's success will be the victory of the poor over the rich, of the slave over the master. Thus, he encourages his friend to win for them all, to conquer Donia and to avenge the poor.

RELATIONSHIP (marriage, sexuality, love)

Marriage For Leila, Tunisian society is a society of hypocrisy, and marriage is only one of the devices of this hypocrisy. One marries, not for love, but to give a certain image of oneself in society. She keeps repeating that she can do whatever she wants on the eve of her wedding, and that tomorrow all her turpitudes will be erased. She will be called 'madam'. Marriage will absolve her of all her sins once her life is linked with that of a man. Even better, marriage will hide all her future sins, because once she is married, no one will suspect her of malice. For Adel's mother, marriage is an institution of incarceration for women. The modern woman should not marry; the woman who can stand on her own two feet and live independently from men should avoid marriage. She sees her marriage as a trap into which she has fallen because she is not educated.

Sexuality Having a boyfriend does not commit one, says Leila to her friend Donia, who is afraid of committing. Their status as powerful, modern women also grants them the ability to dispose of men as they want. Here, Leila gives a rebuttal to men like Mounir, for whom man is a spike and woman is a hole into which he thrusts and withdraws, trusting himself into as many holes as he wants. Just as Mounir advises Adel to give free expression to his desire, Leila also advises Donia to leave aside all emotional considerations and to make men the objects of her desires without any reservations. Here, promiscuity is no longer the sole preserve of men. The modern, rich, and independent woman also gives herself the right to be sexually active. Here the sexual passivity of the woman so precious in the Tunisian Muslim society is subverted. The woman's sexuality is expressed in the same way as that of the man, and sometimes more freely than that of the man.

Love Underneath her shell of a powerful and therefore untouchable woman, Donia has a heart that longs for love. She confesses to her friend Leila that her work absorbs her and that she has no love life. She wants to love and be loved. But this is not the image that Adel's friends have of women like Donia. For them, these women are too powerful to love. They have no feelings and are only predators ready to chew up the men who venture to fall into their nets. Donia proves them wrong. Not only is she ready to love, but she has a human heart and is as nervous to meet Adel as he is to meet her. While Adel nervously burns a last cigarette before meeting Donia, she, too, on her side, in the restaurant's restroom, tries to quiet her heart, whose poundings betray her emotions, by rinsing her hands with cold water. Perhaps Adel's mother says it best when she says that her son is only a man and Donia a woman after all. And a man and a woman, they both do love.

Questions

1. When Adel delivers Mr. Gargouz's flowers the first time and realizes that he forgot to enclose Gargouz's business card, he tears it in pieces. Would you have done the same thing if you were in his shoes? Justify your answer.
2. Adel's parents feel that his role as their son is to take care of them, to shelter them from poverty. In your culture, do you have the same expectations from your parents? Are there parental expectations placed on you based on your gender?
3. How do you feel about Adel's following Donia without her knowledge to find out where she lives?
4. Why do Adel's friends make his date with Donia a matter of collective concern?
5. What would have happened if Donia had witnessed the scandal caused by Adel's mother at the bank?
6. What do you think would have happened if Adel had gone to meet Donia in the clothes Mounir lent him? Would it have made any difference at all?
7. What does Raouf's departure to Canada symbolize? What is the filmmaker's message in that act?
8. What do you think is the symbolic significance of the blind man at night asking passers-by to buy a mirror to see who they are?