

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Villa Jasmin (2008)

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OVERVIEW

Villa Jasmin is the story of the Jews' dilemma in Europe and North Africa both before and during the Second World War. It is the story of their impossibility of finding a welcoming and unprejudiced nation, of the anxiety that haunts them, and of the constant suspicion of which they are the subjects. The film was set in Tunisia in a period spanning the interwar to the 1940s.

CHARACTERS

<i>Serges fils</i> (Serge Jr.)	Son of Serge Sr.
<i>Serge père</i>	Father of Serge Jr.
<i>Odette</i>	Serge Senior's wife
<i>Claudine</i>	: Serge Sr. and Odette's daughter
<i>Jeanne</i>	Serge Junior's wife
Romdane Sr.	A friend of Serge Sr. and a Tunisian nationalist leader
<i>Guilbaud</i>	Resident General Admiral Esteva's communication director

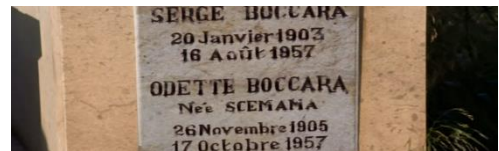
SYNOPSIS

In 1957, Henri Boccara left his native Tunisia for a boarding school in France at the age of nine upon the death of his parents, Serge and Odette Boccara. Years later, Henri adopts his father's first name, Serge, and returns to Tunisia with his pregnant fiancée, Jeanne, to excavate the history of his family of which he only has a remote, hazy, and romantic memory. Serge Jr.'s archeological quest meets with more frustration than satisfaction.

SCENES

Part 1 THE QUEST OF SERGE FILS (SERGE JR.)

Finding the parents' tomb Serge Boccara returns to Tunisia with his pregnant fiancée, Jeanne. He left Tunisia in 1957, at the age of nine, when both of his parents died. He knows little about his family history and wants to understand it. Serge and his fiancée check into a hotel.



Jeanne is tired and immediately after a bath falls asleep. Serge decides to go look for his parents' grave while Jeanne is resting. A young boy in the cemetery guides him to the tomb of his parents, Serge and Odette Boccara.

Finding Villa Jasmin Serge walks the streets of Tunis with an old family photograph showing him in the company of his parents, his sister, and their maid Rachel. He asks the old people of the city if they recognize anyone in the picture. He also wants to know if anyone remembers Villa Jasmin, or if anyone knows the address of the house, 69 Courbet Street. A young man knows the rue Palestine, which he says used to be rue Courbet. He also knows the house and offers to take Serge there. The villa has been transformed into an electrical cable business. The new owner gives them permission to look inside, but Serge prefers not to.



Searching for childhood tastes Serge meets his fiancée at the hotel's restaurant and tells her that everything has changed from what he remembers. She insists that it is rather he who changed. Serge

complains that his dish lacks harissa (Tunisian hot pepper). He grumbles that he cannot find in his dish the flavors of his childhood. He laments that the macaroni was made for tourists and lacks the local spiciness. His fiancée reminds him that they are in a tourists' restaurant. He insists that he is, nevertheless, at home in Tunisia, that he is not a tourist, and that, therefore, he expects his mouth to be on fire when he eats.

Visiting the theatre where his parents first met

Serge and Jeanne go to see the theater where his father met his mother for the first time. The door of the theater is now a rusty corrugated iron gate. It bears a handwritten sign that says, "For Sale." A woman opens a back door for them to take a tour of the place. It is a dark and decrepit room littered with scrap metal. Serge is speechless. Jeanne asks him if he is disappointed because he imagined the place to be bigger. He replies that he never saw it before, and that he was only told about the theater.



Nightmares

Serge wakes up sweaty and panicked from a nightmare. In his dream, he is back to the time he was a child in a boarding school in Paris after the death of his parents. His classmates accuse him of being responsible for the death of his parents. They tell him that it was his wickedness that killed them and made him an abandoned child. Jeanne comforts him, saying that he is not the cause of his parents' death, and that they did not want to abandon him.



Visiting the council meeting room Serge and Jeanne visit the meeting room of the Grand Council, the place where, during the French protectorate, the local officials of Tunisia met under the authority of the Bey. The Bey, he explains to Jeanne, was the king. He ruled without governing, the governance of the country being the responsibility of the Resident General, a French administrator appointed by Paris. Jeanne mockingly replies that the protectorate was in fact a French colony but refused to admit it.



Jeanne has a breakdown

Serge has an appointment with the son of Romdane, a friend of his father, and he asks Jeanne to get ready. Jeanne has a nervous breakdown. She does not want to run the streets of Tunis anymore. She thinks that Serge is chasing ghosts that he is looking for an ideal that does not exist. She worries about being pregnant so far from France and she wants to return. Serge reassures her that she has nothing to fear for the baby and suggests that they make an appointment with a doctor to make sure everything is okay. Jeanne calms down, regains her good humor and asks Serge to go to his appointment without worrying. Serge meets Romdane Jr., who asks him to come and stay with his family instead of at the hotel. Serge thanks him and promises to tell Jeanne about it.



Serge meets Rachel Serge visits the old family maid, Rachel. She is moved by his presence and hugs him. She tells him that she has been waiting for him. She has a relic from his mother she wants him to have. It's a medallion with a lock of his father's hair and poetic words engraved to his mother in Italian.



Finding closure

Serge is crying. He has found the family history he came to look for in Tunisia, but he did not find the hero he had hoped for in his father. Instead, what he learned is that his father was an ordinary Jew struggling to survive difficult times, like many Jews of his time. He now knows his family history. He has found closure. Serge returns to France with his fiancée.



Part 2: THE STORY OF SERGE PERE (SERGE SR.)

Serge meets Odette Serge is directing a play in a theater. There are two girls dancing on the stage. Serge asks what happened to the other dancers, why they are not on the stage, and especially where Marie, one of the dancers, went. He finally sees Marie arrive. She is accompanied by her cousin Odette, who wants to see the rehearsal if Serge does not mind. On the contrary, he tells her. While the dancers go to change, Serge invites Odette on to the stage. He falls in love with her beauty and offers her a role he wants her to learn right away. The dancers return and resume their routine, but Serge is distracted. He only has eyes and ears for Odette.



Serge marries Odette Serge talks about Odette to his mother. For the matriarch, it is out of the question for Serge to marry a little Jewish girl, a low-class Jew, from the French Ghetto in Tunis. Serge reminds his mother that their ancestors were also Jews from the Ghetto. The mother takes offense and insists that their ancestors are from a class of Tuscan aristocrats, Jews from the Mediterranean. The matriarch tells her son that she would die of shame to see him marry Odette. However, by dint of patience, kindness, and appetizing dishes cooked just for Serge's mother, Odette finally gains access to the matriarch's heart to become her daughter-in-law and bring together the two Judaisms in Tunis, the local and the imported, the chic and the not-so-chic. Serge and Odette move into the Boccaras' ancestral home, which Serge names Villa Jasmin. The matriarch dies peacefully in her bed a few weeks later with Odette by her side.



Serge's journalism Serge works for a newspaper in Tunis. His boss insists that he avoid political topics and stick to gossip. No attacks on the Resident General, no support for the Arabs of the conservative, anti-colonial Destour party. He wants optimistic articles that make people have positive image of their city. Serge's articles are appreciated and devoured by people in Tunis. Serge is inducted into the Socialist Party and becomes a member of the Tunisian Freemasonry.

Enemy of Resident General Peyrouton The new Resident General, Marcel Peyrouton, who has been in Tunisia for some time, is being officially introduced to the Tunisian local authorities. He is a condescending man, a sympathizer of Nazi Germany, who does not hide his admiration for the Italian Duce, Benito Mussolini. Serge exits the conference room before the Resident General finishes his speech. In the reception hall, Peyrouton wants to know what Serge has against his speech. Serge has very little respect for the Resident General, and he lets him know it during a conversation that quickly turns sour. He tells him that he has no knowledge of the country he is sent in to govern, that his politics reflect the blindness of the French administration and is more geared towards enriching big French capitalists who are in Tunisia to make money that they will repatriate to France than to make life better for the local population. Peyrouton accuses Serge of being hardly French because he is Jewish, a Socialist, who publishes articles against France. He charges Serge with treason against France and vows to have Serge's head.



Peyrouton's retaliation Serge uses the columns of his newspaper, *Tunis Socialiste*, to fight the Resident General. Peyrouton ends up getting the better of Serge. He is prosecuted for undermining the internal security of the protectorate and sentenced to six months in prison. *Tunis Socialiste* is suspended. Odette visits him with news of the outside. Her brother has decided to go to Palestine, where Jews can hope to have a nation of their own. Serge's socialist friends have raised money to pay his fine. When he is released, they also want him to meet with the Tunisian nationalist leader Habib Bourguiba to rally the voices of the Tunisian nationalists for independence. Odette tells him that she continues to attend the meetings of the Socialist Party and of the League of Human Rights.



Proud Socialist Serge proudly flashes his affiliation for the Socialist Party by displaying at the entrance of his home two large banners in support of the assassinated socialist leader Jean Jaurès and his successor Léon Blum. In September 1939, Serge is drafted. Two years later, Serge is demobilized and returns to his family to surprise Odette, who was not expecting his arrival.



Enemy of Guilbaud Anti-Semitism is gaining ground in France, Marshal Philippe Pétain decrees a law against Jews, depriving them of the right to hold public office, designating them as a lower class, and denying them citizenship. In Tunisia, Serge takes a job at *Le Petit Matin*, a paper that allows him, under the pseudonym of the snooping rabbi, to write articles in favor of the Jewish cause. A new Resident General in Tunisia, Admiral Jean-Pierre Esteva, starts importing the anti-Semitic principles of the Vichy regime to Tunisia. However, Georges Guilbaud, in charge of the Resident General's communication, believes that his boss is applying Vichy laws in Tunisia too softly.



Serge is fired Serge overhears Guilbaud's suggestion to crack down on Jews, Gaullists, and freemasons, and he confronts him with his support of Nazism. Guilbaud threatens to make Serge pay. Serge's close friend and owner of *Le Petit Matin*, is furious. He thinks that Serge is exposing the paper by being political and provocative. He fires Serge.

Guilbaud's retaliation Serge embarks on subversive activities against the Vichy government. The Germans land in Tunisia and Guilbaud carries out his threat. He requisitions the Boccaras' house for the German ambassador in Tunisia. The Boccara family find themselves destitute and homeless. Serge, his wife, and their daughter Claudine find refuge with an Arab friend, Ben Romdane, one of the leaders of the nationalist Destour party.



Diverging views on independence Serge and his friend Ben Romdane, the Tunisian Jew and the Tunisian Arab, have a passionate discussion about the future of Tunisia and the relations that the country should maintain with the European powers, especially France and Germany. Romdane believes that Germany, a country that claims not to have colonial ambitions, can be an ally for Tunisia in its quest for independence. He considers that the defeat that Germany inflicted on France has weakened France, and that France will not last long in Tunisia, especially with the German presence in the country. It is therefore necessary to wait wisely for Germany to rid the Tunisians of France. Serge, on the other hand, advocates a transition to independence, during which Tunisia would not cut itself off completely from France to the point of discarding all French vestiges. It would be a Tunisian independence that allows Tunisia to continue to cultivate the modern values of equality and human rights, which are universal values. Moreover, Serge argues that the brutality of the Nazi regime disqualifies Germany as worthy of any kind of partnership.



Serge is deported Serge is in a resistance group. The group's activities are discovered and its members arrested by a militia led by Guilbaud, who is happy to see Serge in a vulnerable situation. Guilbaud has Serge put in a basement, where he takes it upon himself to torture him. Serge and his fellow prisoners are transported from Tunis to Naples and then to Berlin. After a thirty-minute train ride with other prisoners, Serge and his companions find themselves in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.



Odette looks for Serge Odette goes looking for her husband at the headquarters of Guilbaud's militia. The guards there harass and humiliate her. She rushes out crying, not knowing where her husband has been taken. With her daughter, she joins the rest of her relatives in a makeshift shelter.



Defeat of the Germans On May 7, 1943, the Allies land in Tunis and begin fighting the Germans. The Germans are defeated. The Nazis and their collaborators, including Guilbaud, burn all compromising documents and rush to flee Tunis. Tunisia is liberated. Odette finds the Boccara family house in a sorry state. With her daughter, Claudine, she is busy cleaning and putting it in order when a Tunisian woman arrives and offers to help her and stay with her because she has lost her daughter and has nowhere to go. Odette welcomes her in her home. Her name is Rachel.



Serge reappears in Paris No one has any news of Serge, and everyone is convinced that the Germans killed him. Odette and Claudine try to live as best they can without Serge. One day, while they are at the movies, and the newsreel is on, Claudine recognizes her father on the screen, by the side of General de Gaulle in Paris. Serge is alive. The movie theater is in celebration.



Serge's homecoming Serge returns from Sachsenhausen. He is the only Tunisian Jewish survivor. He is received as a hero by his friends in the Socialist Party. Odette does not attend her husband's reception ceremony. She prefers to wait for him at home. He finds her there with Claudine and Rachel. Claudine sees that her father has aged.



Nine years later Henri Boccara is nine years old. His father is on his dying bed, but the boy thinks that he is sleeping, and he wants to wake him up because it is his birthday, and he has not received his comic book he was promised. His mother gets him out of the room and his older sister scolds him and orders him to sit quietly on a bench outside the room. He sees people dressed in black reciting prayers in one room. In another room, a rabbi and Rachel, the maid, are standing before a coffin placed on a catafalque. Rachel is crying. She asks the boy to try to cry, but the boy can't shed any tears. Three months later, his mother also dies of cancer and *chagrin*. Later, when he grows up, Henri adopts his father's first name and is, thus, called Serge Boccara, like his father.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

SERGE FILS (Serge Jr.) *Conscientious (Idealist- Determined- Reckless- Affectionate)*

Serge Jr. is a conscientious person. He is idealist, determined, affectionate, but somehow reckless. Engaged in an excavation for the reconstitution of his family's history, Serge fils is animated by the idealism and the passion of the archaeologist who ignores the risks to which he exposes himself and the people around him. Serge carelessly drags his pregnant fiancée through the streets of Tunis until she breaks down. His recklessness hides, however, an enormous tenderness for his fiancée and a great sensitivity for his entourage.

Idealist Serge fils is a dreamer. He has painted an image of his family and of Tunisia that comes to him from the phantasmagorical kingdom of childhood, and which is far from reality. His fiancée, whom he drags from one site to another, tells him that his quest is futile as the world he is looking for only exists in his dreams. But should we blame him? Don't we all dream of a hidden glory in our family history?

Determined Serge is determined to find his personal history. He started with an idyllic family picture in mind. He devoted energy, time, and passion to this project. At the end of his journey, although Serge cries about the ordinary humanity of his father, whom he imagined to be a hero, he still manages to find the vestiges of his past, the people, the places, and the events that contributed to the constitution of his identity. Serge's determination allowed him to reconstruct his family's history and give himself a foundation for the

future.

Reckless The viewer cannot help but notice the recklessness with which Serge drags his pregnant wife in the sun, through the streets of Tunis. In his exhilaration, Serge seems to forget at times that she is expecting a child and that her delicate condition requires that she rest. Moreover, she ends up having a nervous breakdown at the hotel and refuses to accompany him to see Romdane Jr., preferring to spend the day resting at the hotel.

Affectionate Serge may be a reckless man, but he is still an affectionate person. He adores his wife and drowns her in unreserved affection. When she worries about her condition, he takes her in his arms, covers her with kisses, and reassures her that everything will be fine. He imagines himself comforting his father, who is crying in his arms after his horrible experience in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. And when Serge finds Rachel, the family maid who witnessed his birth and took care of him as a child, he is moved and throws himself into her arms.

SERGE PERE (Serge Sr.) Open to new experiences (Loyal - Optimistic - Direct)

Serge Sr. is a loyal, optimistic, and direct person. A man in search of a nation is a description that would suit Serge Sr. well. Caught between two nations that reject him, Serge wants to build a welcoming land with universal principles. This task, which he undertakes with passion and impetuosity, puts him at odds with various interests and jeopardizes his freedom and the stability of his family.

Loyal Serge père's French nationality goes back three generations, as he proudly tells Resident General Peyrouton. Moreover, he was he drafted to fight for France during the Second World War, although the Armistice shortened his deployment and he did not fire a shot. He is also Tunisian by birth and has an attachment to that country, whose independence from France he wants. However, as he tells his friend Romdane, the nationalist, this independence should not lead to a total divorce from France. Tunisia must remain open to the French values of the Age of the Enlightenment, which he considers universal, such as equality and human rights.

Optimistic Serge père's quarrel with Romdane is that the nationalists who rely on Germany to drive the French out of Tunisia are allying themselves with a nation whose savage methods have shown that it has no regard for the Enlightenment's noble values. In spite of a wave of anti-Semitic decrees issued as early as 1940 by the Vichy government, and in spite of their accelerated application by zealous authorities, such as, Residents General Peyrouton and Esteva and their collaborators like Guilbaud, in spite of the fact that many young Jews, such as, his wife Odette's brother, are increasingly joining Zionist movements in order to escape from intolerant and anti-Semitic France and Tunisia, Serge père, in prison serving a six-month sentence for articles defending the cause of oppressed Jews, remains confident that the values of the Enlightenment will prevail in France and Tunisia.

Direct Serge senior always reacts in the moment and neither waits nor beats around the bush to say what he thinks to those whose ideas he does not embrace. In a very undiplomatic way, he accused Resident General Peyrouton of collusion with crooked French capitalists to the detriment of the Tunisian population, and he called Guilbaut, the communications officer of Resident General Esteva, a Nazi apprentice. Serge's impatience costs him expropriation, arrest, torture, and deportation to a German concentration camp.

ODETTE Agreeable socially (Strong - Supportive)

Strong and supportive, Odette is the central pillar of the Boccara family. More than once, the responsibilities of the family will rest on her fragile shoulders. And more than once, she will show admirable courage.

Strong Odette is the backbone of the family. Her husband's professional and political activities often take him away from his family. And when Serge Sr is absent, either because he is drafted for war, imprisoned, or deported, Odette holds the family together, endures the hardships with stoicism, and makes sure that their daughter, Claudine, is not lacking in affection or optimism about life until her father's return.

Supportive Odette is an invaluable support for her husband. Although sometimes reluctant, she gives Serge père the encouragement to pursue his ambitions, and she shares his triumphs with him. When Serge's political stances land him in trouble, she is at his side to support him. She visits him in his prison in Tunis and braves the brutality and boorishness of the Nazi soldiers to search for her husband, who has been kidnapped and whose destination she does not know. And when she learns that Serge is back from the concentration camp, she waits for him at home, far from the crowds, so that they can celebrate their reunion as a family.

GUILBAUD Disagreeable socially (Fascist- Disagreeable-Vengefu)

Guilbaud is a disagreeable vengeful fascist. He the image of the "petit blanc" (poor white man) of the colonies, who finds in the conquered lands of France, outside the metropolis, the opportunity to make for himself a glory which would not have been possible in France. To this purpose, the native becomes his punching bag.

Fascist As soon as he arrives in Tunisia following Resident General Esteva, Guilbaud complains that the anti-Jewish laws enacted in France are applied too weakly in Tunisia. He takes offense at the fact that Tunisian Jews hold respectable jobs while their allegiance to France remains questionable, and he promises to accelerate the application of the edicts of the fascist government of Vichy. Serge intervenes to call him a Hitler sympathizer.

Disagreeable Guilbaud carries out his mission with a malice and a cruelty that exasperates even the German authorities with whom he collaborates. The German Ambassador, for whom he requisitioned the Boccaras' home, always greets him with a bored look and asks him every time what he wants or what he is doing there as soon as he shows up. And the day he announces to the ambassador the raising of a Tunisian force to help the Germans against the allies, the ambassador says "I know" by rolling his eyes in exasperation. Guilbaud is the Frenchman who wants to be more German than the Germans, and his overzealousness is repugnant to his German masters.

Vengeful Guilbaud is a vengeful man, who promises Serge that he will make him pay for the humiliation he caused him at the reception where he called him a Hitler sympathizer. He carries out his threat by seizing the Boccaras' house, arresting Serge, torturing him, and having him deported to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

THEMES

SOCIETY (Identity, class, religion, gender)

Identity The 1940s Tunisian society was a place of happy yet precarious coexistence between the various ethnic groups that claimed Tunisia as their country. Peyrouton and Guilbaud were telling examples of what Europeans in Tunisia thought of Jews and Arabs. They were also telling examples of the fear that the vulnerable position of German-occupied France and the possibility of France losing its grip on Tunisia stirred in the French settlers. That anxiety existed also among Jews and Arabs, aware that the balance of power could shift any moment and reconfigure the notion of national identity. In fact, the struggle for independence had an open agenda of cultural identity, and that cultural identity's foundation was religion.

Religion For Ben Romdane, for instance, Tunisia was first and foremost a Muslim country, even, as Serge Sr. insisted that Tunisia must remain secular. The nationalists in Algeria, like Romdane, were mostly indigenous Muslims, who sought an independent Tunisia ruled by Islamic law. They understood Socialism as incompatible with the Prophet's teachings. On the other hand, Socialists, like Serge, were mainly Tunisian Jews who were aspiring for a secular state where they could be free to practice their religious faith. With the prospect of independence and the uncertainty of what was in store for the various cultural groups in the country, each group held tightly onto its identity, consolidating it further with internal marriages. Serge's marriage with Odette, a Jewish girl, fell within that logic of safeguarding cultural identity.

Class Within religious identities, a class struggle is played out. It is not enough to love a person of the same identity. It is also necessary that this person be of an acceptable social class. Thus, Serge's mother opposes his marriage to Odette, whom she considers to be of an inferior Jewish class. The matriarch thinks that the Jewishness of Odette's family is imported, and therefore, second-hand, whereas hers is

Mediterranean, pure, and aristocratic. Serge's mother thinks that her son is crazy to let himself be carried away by the blindness of love rather than by a sense of duty, that of perpetuating a worthy ancestral heritage. She tells him that she would not survive such a marriage, such a shame. As the matriarch shows, these positions on social class are often very entrenched and inflexible.

Gender Despite the difficulties of marrying across social classes, in the case of Serge and Odette, however, love, patience, and persistence eventually win out. Serge and Odette are deeply in love, and Serge gives Odette the tactics for making his mother change her mind: Odette gets closer to the matriarch, listens attentively to the stories she likes to tell, cooks her some appetizing meals, and ends up winning her heart and obtaining her blessing for the wedding. The strategy that Serge gives to Odette to conquer her mother is in fact how to be a woman according to the matriarch. And it is this role of woman as the nurturer of the family, the mistress of the house, and the discreet support of the man that Odette played throughout the career of her husband and the ups and downs that the family went through.

JUSTICE (injustice, punishment, revenge)

Injustice The protectorate, or simply the colonization of Tunisia, is a great injustice to the native Tunisian populations, an injustice that imports into the colony the racism and anti-Semitism cultivated in France. The residents general and their collaborators who succeed one another in Tunisia hardly treat the Tunisians as full human beings. Serge denounces this injustice both in person and through his writings. The newspapers in which he writes columns, *Le Petit Matin* and *Tunis Socialiste*, are channels of denunciation of the French injustice towards the Tunisian people. In a conversation with Resident General Philippe Peyrouton, Serge tells him of his abhorrence for his open Nazism and collusion with the French capitalists who exploit and impoverish the local population. Similarly, Serge confronts the Nazism of Guilbaud, the information officer of Resident General Esteva, Peyrouton's successor.

Revenge-punishment All these men, who are Serge's targets, promise him revenge, and they hold on to their promises: his newspapers are suspended by the Residence; his house is requisitioned by Guilbaud on behalf of the German Ambassador; his family is thrown into the street; and he is later tracked down, tortured, and deported to the concentration camp of Sachsenhausen. However, Serge's oppressors, France's Vichy Nazi government, the German invaders, and their collaborators in Tunisia, Resident Esteva, Guilbaud and his anti-Semitic militia are defeated by Allied forces, and Serge returns to a liberated Tunisia, to his family, and to his house.

POLITICS (Power, leadership, intrigue)

Power *Villa Jasmin* is a political film. It is the story of a young man who wants to understand the impact that national and international interests vying for power have had on his family and Tunisia and how it has shaped the person that he is. In this film, the French colonization of Tunisia is put on trial. It is shown to have been deceitfully presented under the acceptable cloak of protectorate, which gives local elected officials a false sense of government, while the army and the economy are controlled by France. This power that a foreign force exercises over the economy and the army of a native nation is what Jeanne points out to Serge who tries to explain to her the notion of protectorate. This is the power that the various independence forces in Tunisia are fighting against.

Leadership *Villa Jasmin* is not only about a struggle between the international powers, France, Germany, and Italy, who are looking for economically and militarily strategic enclaves in North Africa. It is also a struggle for internal leadership between the socialists, of which Serge is a member, the Muslim nationalists, of which Ben Romdane, Serge's best friend, is a member, and the French capitalist colonists, of which Peyrouton, Esteva, and Guilbaud are members, and for whom Tunisia is a territory of France and had to remain attached to France like a cash cow to its owner.

Intrigue In the consolidation of their positions, some actors use negotiation. Romdane the Nationalist and Serge the Socialist's strategy to win the other to their cause is peaceful yet impassioned discussion. We see this discussion between the two friends concerning the independence of Tunisia and the means to achieve it taking place in an electric atmosphere at Romdane's home. Romdane proposes that Tunisia wait patiently until Germany drives already-weakened France out of Tunisia. Serge thinks that Germany, because of its savagery, has disqualified itself as a credible partner, and that Tunisia needs an

independence that does not cut it ideologically and philosophically from France and its values of the Age of Enlightenment. Beside these intellectual debates, Nazi Germany and the Vichy government chose only brute force, intimidation, expropriation, torture, deportation, and assassinations, as the lived experience of the Boccara family illustrates.

RELATIONSHIP (marriage, love, loyalty)

The occupation of Tunisia by colonial France and then by Nazi Germany tested the strength of the relationships between the different protagonists of the film.

Marriage Serge and Odette's Marriage is tested several times, and each time, it passes the test of strength. First, Serge is drafted and deployed to France to fight The Germans, leaving Odette home alone in Tunisia to care for their house and their daughter Claudine. Then, Serge's journalistic activism, his writings against the colonial regime and its enforcers (Peyrouton, Esteve, and Guilbaud) more than once causes him to lose his job. Finally, Serge's direct involvement in the resistance against the Nazi occupiers causes him to lose his family home, puts his family on the street, has him arrested and deported, and exposes his wife and daughter to intimidation, humiliation, and financial, physical, and moral insecurity. None of these difficulties can shake Serge and Odette's marriage. On the contrary, they strengthen it even more

Love Through all the hardships caused by Serge's deployment, his repeated joblessness, the family's homelessness, and Serge's deportation to the German concentration camp of Sachsenhausen, love and loyalty remain the glue that keeps the family together and hopeful. After the liberation of Tunisia by the allied troops, while Serge was at Sachsenhausen, and everyone in Tunisia thought that he was dead, Odette kept her hope set on Serge, though with little faith that she would see him again. Odette's cousins felt sorry for her and urged her to go out, start meeting people, and rebuild her life. They invited her to parties, which she refused. However, she accepted to go to the movies with them. It was on that occasion that Claudine saw her father on the screen. Odette's patient love and loyalty has maintained the Boccas' unity.

Loyalty Beside challenging the familial loyalty within the Boccara's family, the situation in Tunisia also tested loyalty across religious, ethnic, and political divides. Ben Romdane Sr., who Serge Jr. was told was as close to his father as a brother, was a Muslim and a nationalist. Politically, he did not see eye to eye with Serge Sr., and religiously, they were of different faiths. When Serge and Odette became homeless and were being haunted by the Germans and Guilbaud's militia, it was Romdane who, disregarding the great risks to which he exposed himself and his family, hid the family of the socialist Jew in his home. Here, friendship and loyalty took precedence over ideological and religious differences

PSYCHOLOGY

Loss Serge senior is a man who is seeking to fill a lack. He is looking for a nation. Tunisian by origin but French for three generations, he is nevertheless subjected to the anti-Semitic discrimination that rages in France, more particularly from 1940 with the anti-Jewish edicts of the fascist government of Vichy. In his native Tunisia, too, his French nationality and his adherence to socialism create suspicion among Muslim nationalists, who question his loyalty to the ideal of independence. Between these two intolerant nations that marginalize him, Serge wants to make a place for himself, which he sees as the anchoring point of contradictory ideological, ethnic, and religious tendencies and against any communitarianism. This task, as shown by his frank and impassioned discussions with his Muslim and nationalist friend, Romdane, is not an easy one. History will show that it will be thwarted on the eve the six-day Arab-Israeli war, with thousands of North African Jews fleeing their home countries for Europe and Israel, a prospect that, unlike Odette's brother who chose to go there, Serge has never wanted to entertain.

QUEST (exploration, introspection)

Villa Jasmin is a film about a quest, the quest of a young Jew for a family ideal. Having left his native Tunisia at the age of nine when his parents died, Henri Boccara has only hazy memories and idyllic hopes of his homeland and his family. After adopting his father's first name, Serge, Henri Boccara, now

Serge Boccara Jr., goes to Tunisia with his fiancée, Jeanne, to explore his family and national past. Through the Jewish section of the Tunis cemetery, the local dishes offered by Tunisian restaurants, the visit of the old family villa and the narrations of those who, like Romdane Jr., know part of his family's history, Serge's quest leaves him nostalgic, with the taste of an unfulfilled hope. No one in the street seems to remember his father's name. The beautiful ancestral villa is now only a decrepit building housing an electrical cable business. The theater where his father fell in love with his mother is now only a pile of scrap metal barricaded behind a rusty sheet metal door. The meal served to him in the restaurant is far from the harissa-spiked cuisine of the maid Rachel. The bougainvillea he hoped to find have long withered. Perhaps it is his fiancée who tells it most sincerely: Serge is chasing ghosts. What he is looking for exists only in the phantasmagorical imagination of a child. The jasmine have never scented Tunisia with the strong perfume he imagines. The bougainvillea have not been always in bloom. Rachel's dishes have never been as spicy as he imagined. And his father was never a hero, but a Jew trying to survive the politics of discrimination and racial intolerance.

PAST (Memory)

Whatever one may say, Serge's journey into his national and family memory has created in him a closure that allows him to move forward. Serge made this trip to Tunis in order to fill a gap, his lack of a family and national memory. His memory of Tunisia and his family is limited to nine short years. After that, it is life in boarding school in Paris, and the mockery of his pals of the boarding school that furnish his "I". Thus, Serge chooses to adopt his father's first name. But a first name cannot rewrite a family history. For his wholeness, it is his past that he must understand, or else remain frozen in the doubt of his person and his destination in life. Serge idealized his past before knowing it. He gave it all the embellishments that the imagination of a nine-year-old child can put on a story. And as Serge discovers his past in Tunisia, he sees its marvelous ornaments fall off. What does it matter, though? Serge has a story. He discovers it in Tunisia. And whether it is beautiful or awful, from there, he will build a future for himself and his unborn son because memory is always the foundation for the future.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you see your identity in psychoanalytical terms as linked to your childhood and your family? If so, what are some of the elements that constitute it?
2. Do you see your identity more as a work of construction, a permanent investigation, a series of experiments? If so, where did this investigation, this series of experiments, consciously begin, and where did it lead you?
3. Smells and perfumes are carriers of memories and events. Are there particular scents that bring you back to specific moments or events? Please explain.
4. Have you ever been in a situation where your allegiance was torn between two nations, two states, two regions, or two communities?

When did this happen? How did you resolve this rift?
5. Using the film *Villa Jasmin* as the only historical source at your disposal, what does it teach you about the Jews of Tunisia in the 1940s?