

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Martial Frindéthié, PhD

Foreign Bodies/Corps étrangers (2016)

Raja Amari (1971-)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Raja Amari was born on April 4, 1971 in Tunis. After a master's degree in Literature and French Civilization at the University of Tunis, she attended classes at the FEMIS (European Foundation for Images and Sound), in Paris. After Graduating from the FEMIS, Amari directed two short films, *Avril/April* (1998) and *Un Soir de juillet/An Evening in July* (2000). She then made four features, *Red Satin* (2002), *Secrets* (2009), *Tunisian Spring* (2014), and *Foreign Body* (2016).

Film *Foreign Bodies* is a film about living illegally in a foreign country and making it or failing. One aspect of the topic of migration that is seldom explored is the female plight as an illegal immigrant. After *Tunisian Spring* (2014), a film that features a female figure in Tunisian Revolution, with *Foreign Bodies*, Raja Amari allows another female story to be represented in the discourse about migration. *Foreign Bodies*, which was shot in France, was the winner of Best Screenplay at the 2017 RiverRun International Film Festival in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Background On January 14 2011, the Tunisian Jasmine Revolution precipitated the fall of dictator Ben Ali. The hope for a democratic Tunisia did not materialize. In the years that ensued, Islamic fundamentalists gained a stronger foothold in the country, introduced a climate of repression and fear, and drove many of the Tunisian youths to illegal immigration towards Europe. The question of illegal immigration and its perils became one of the central themes in Tunisian cinema. Raja Amari's *Foreign Bodies* takes part in this conversation by showing some of the ways the Tunisian youths, and especially the Tunisian young women, live clandestinely in Europe.

SYNOPSIS

A young Tunisian woman finds herself survivor on a French shore after the boat in which she was crossing the Mediterranean Sea capsizes, and she nearly drowns. She manages to reach a childhood friend of hers who is living clandestinely in France. They both become the protégés of an older bourgeois widow of Arabic descent. The three characters are involved in a relationship that alternately calls up care, passion, and hate.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Mrs. Berteau (Leila) (Hiam Abbass): A Tunisian-born bourgeois widow

Samia (Sarrah Hannachi): A young, illegal Tunisian immigrant woman

Imed (Salim Kechiouche): A young, illegal Tunisian man, who grew up with Samia in Tunisia

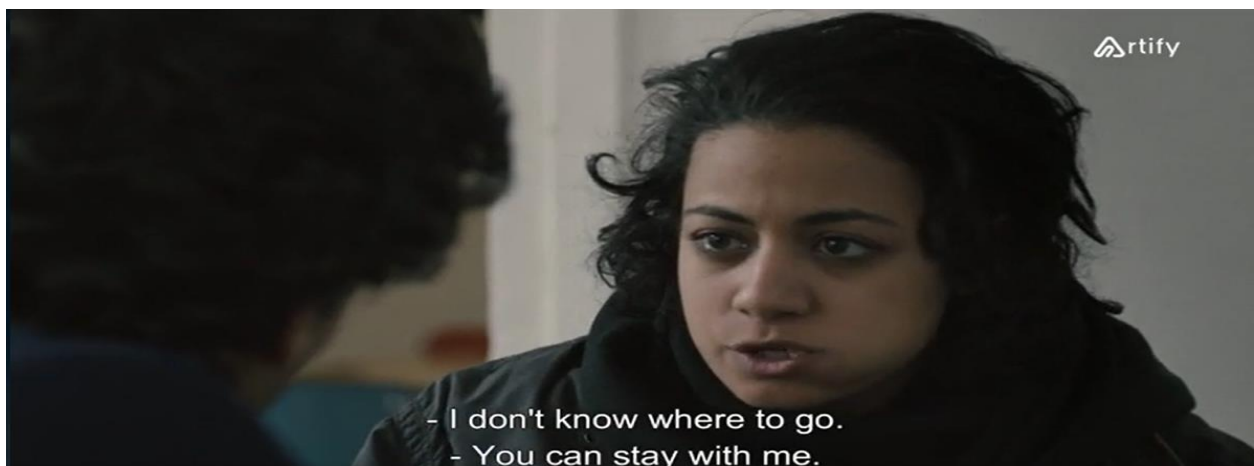
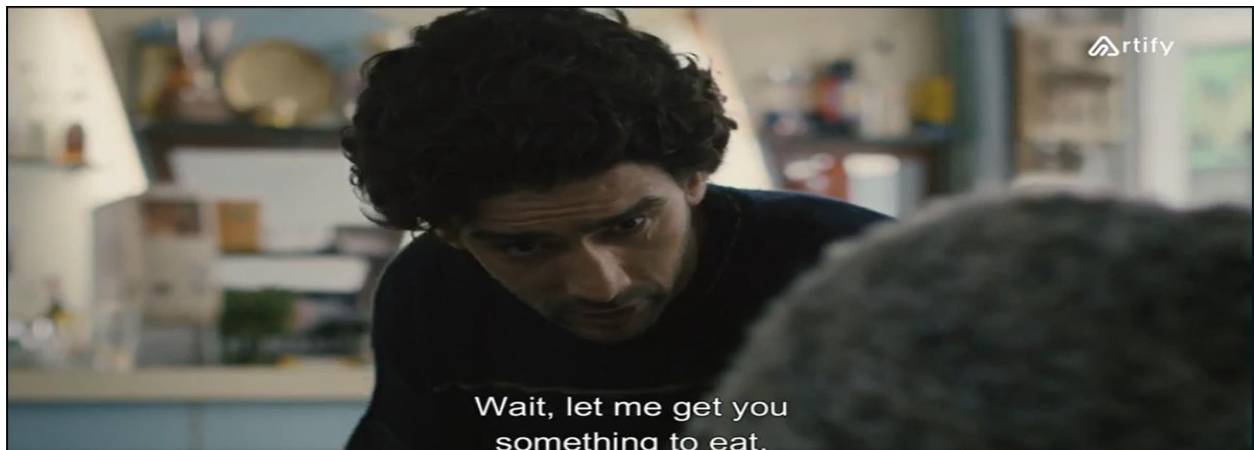
PLOT

SAMIA'S ARRIVAL

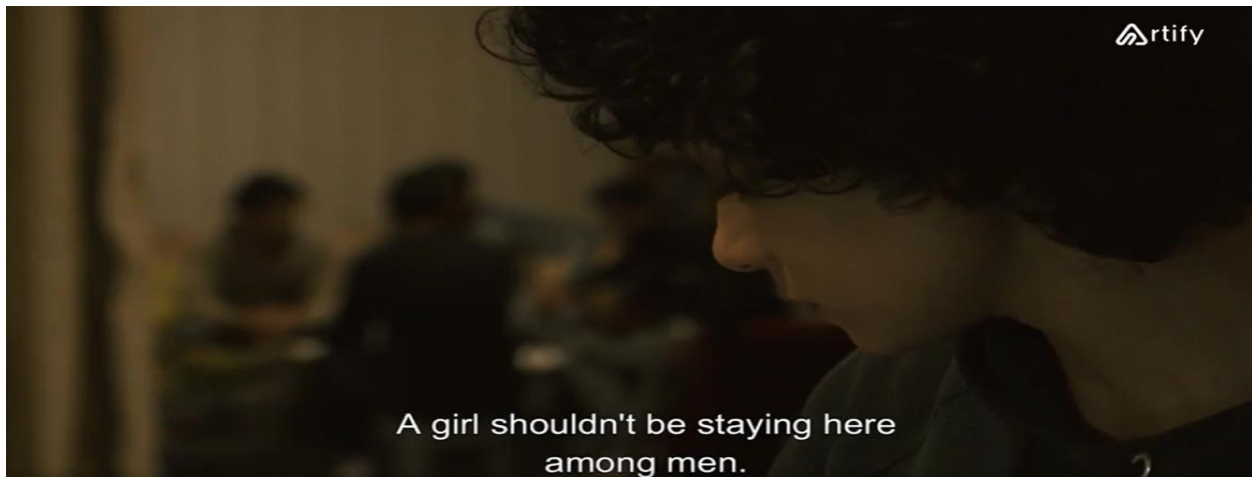
The shipwreck A boat full of North Africans seeking to migrate illegally to Europe capsizes in the Mediterranean Sea. A young Tunisian woman, Samia, survives the ordeal and finds herself alone and dazed on a French beach littered with debris and dead bodies. She scavenges what she can from the wreckage and makes her way to the city of Bordeaux



Samia finds Imed Samia looks for the work address of her childhood friend, Imed. She finds him at the restaurant where he works as a waiter and a barman. Imed is surprised and happy to see Samia. He wants to know how she arrived in France and if she came in illegally. She replies that she did. He offers her something to eat. Samia tells him that she has nowhere to go. He proposes that she stay with him. Imed gives Samia some money and tells her to meet him after work.



Mourad's sister Samia wanders around Bordeaux for a while and goes to a public bath to wash. She has torture marks on her back and arms. Imed lives in an apartment with a community of young Tunisian men. Some of them are not happy to see a woman share their space, but they are very impressed when Imed tells them that Samia is the sister of Mourad, a man for whom they have great admiration, and who has been serving jailtime for his radical religious stance.



How to evade the police

As Samia is washing her dishes after dinner, the young men all come, one by one, and leave their dishes by the sink for her to wash. She gives them an unhappy look. Imed finds her some clean clothes in his closet and a backpack, so she can evade the police's suspicion by passing for a student. He also gets her a cellular phone so she can call her mother.



Left alone Samia is awakened at dawn by the chattering of the apartment's occupants readying themselves for work. They will all be working until late in the evening. She closes her eyes to go back to sleep. Imed leaves a key to the apartment by her bedside



Mourad is a hero Thinking that she is alone in the apartment, Samia roams around. She discovers a pile of religious propaganda tracts on one desk. One of the occupants of the apartment comes out of the bathroom. He startles her. He tells her that her brother, Mourad, is an example for all of them, and that he hopes he will be freed soon and join them. His words seem to disturb more than comfort her.



Looking for a job Samia goes looking for a job. She scours the neighborhood businesses. Bernard, a restaurant owner, tells her that he is not hiring, but he advises her to look at the ads on his bulletin board. She sees a woman pinning an ad on the bulletin board. Bernard knows her well. Her name is Mrs. Berteau. She is looking for a housemaid. Samia snatches the ad and follows the woman. She lives in a flat above the restaurant.



MRS. BERTEAU

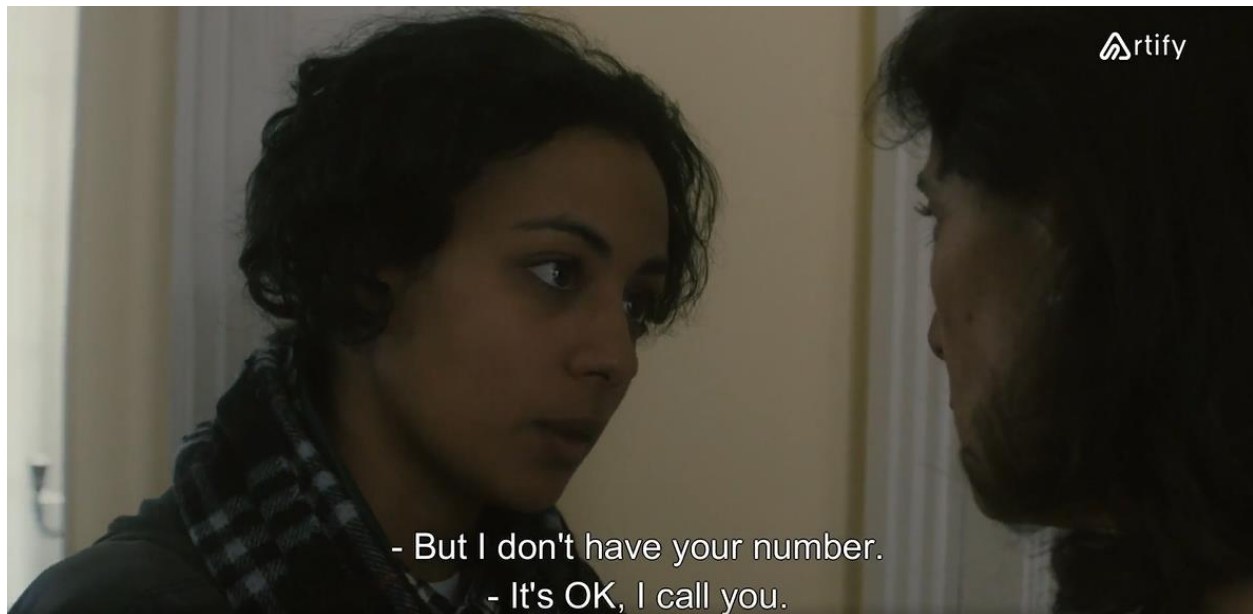
Meeting Mrs. Berteau Samia takes advantage of a woman exiting the building to bypass the security code and enter. She finds Mrs. Berteau's name on the intercom system and rings her. She tells her that she has come for the ad and lies that she was sent by Bernard. Mrs. Berteau greets her at her door and invites her in.



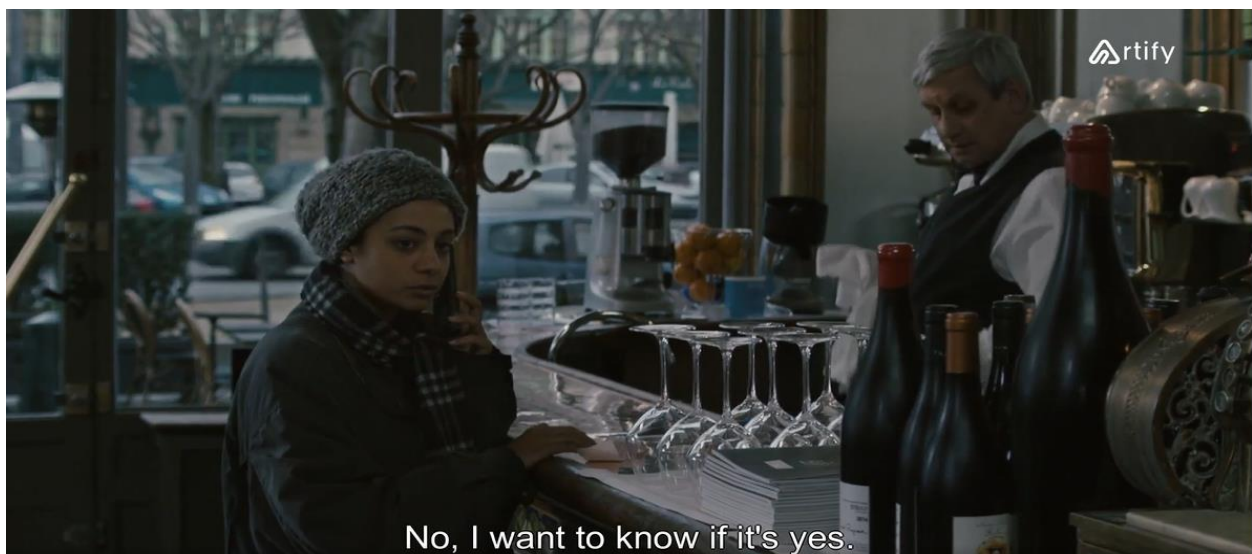
Ready to do anything Mrs. Berteau has lost her husband recently. She is trying to put some order in her house, sort out some clothes, and file some documents. She needs someone to help her with that. Samia answers her questions, tells her that she can read and write, and that she is available to work as many hours as Mrs. Berteau needs her to. She wants to know if Samia has regular identity papers. Samia lies that she left them at her parents' in Marseilles. As Mrs. Berteau looks at her suspiciously, Samia quickly adds that she is ready to do anything, clean, cook, and more.



“Tu vs Vous” As she sees Samia to the door, Mrs. Berteau promises to call her and asks for her number. Samia insists that she will call Mrs. Berteau instead. Mrs. Berteau uses the formal “vous” of people unfamiliar with each other when she addresses Samia, but the young woman uses the informal “tu” of people who know each other when addressing Mrs. Berteau.



Samia is assertive Samia sits by the river and looks at the patches of ice floating past her. The scene brings back to her memories of her ordeal in the cold Mediterranean Sea when the boat that carried her and other immigrants capsized. She returns to the restaurant and asks Bernard if she can use the restaurant's phone. She calls Mrs. Berteau to ask if she has the job. Mrs. Berteau tells her that she has yet to make up her mind.



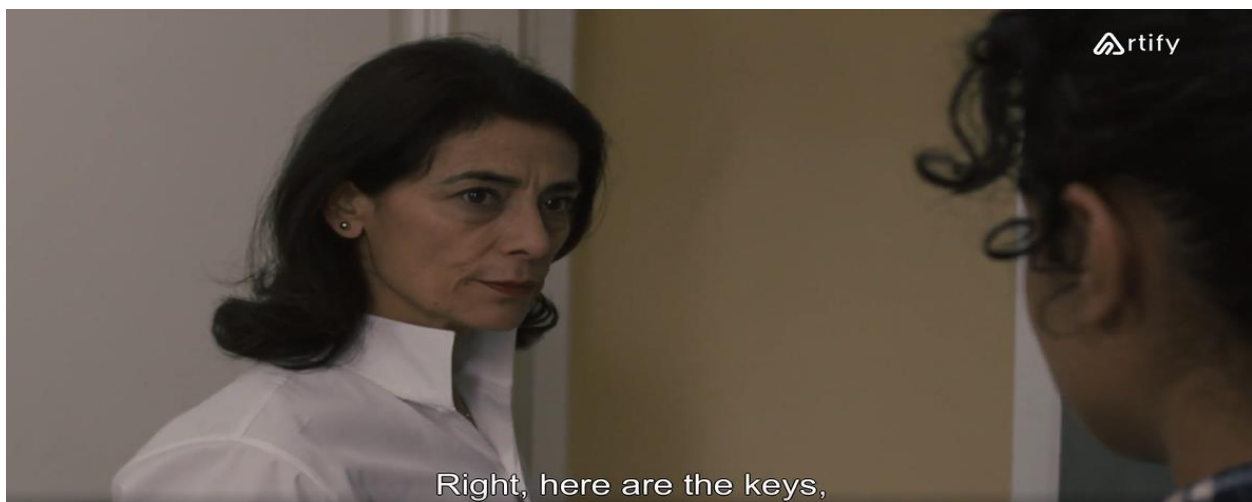
Samia has a job From her window, Mrs. Berteau sees Samia sleeping on a public bench. She goes to wake her up and hires her. Mrs. Berteau asks Samia to settle in the bedroom that she and her husband used before his death. She has since been sleeping in the guest bedroom.



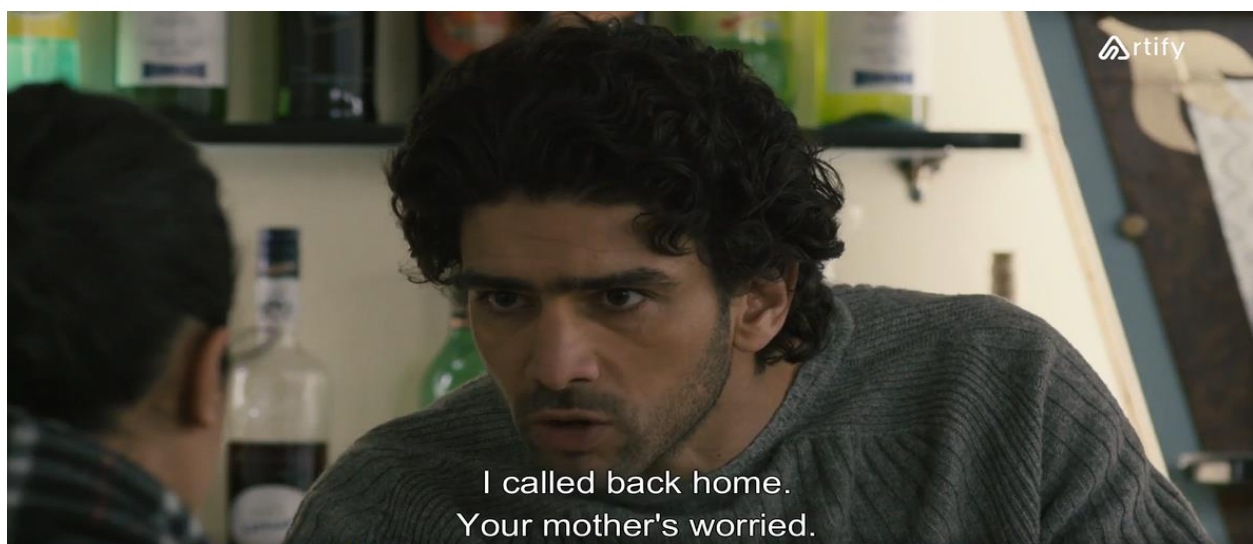
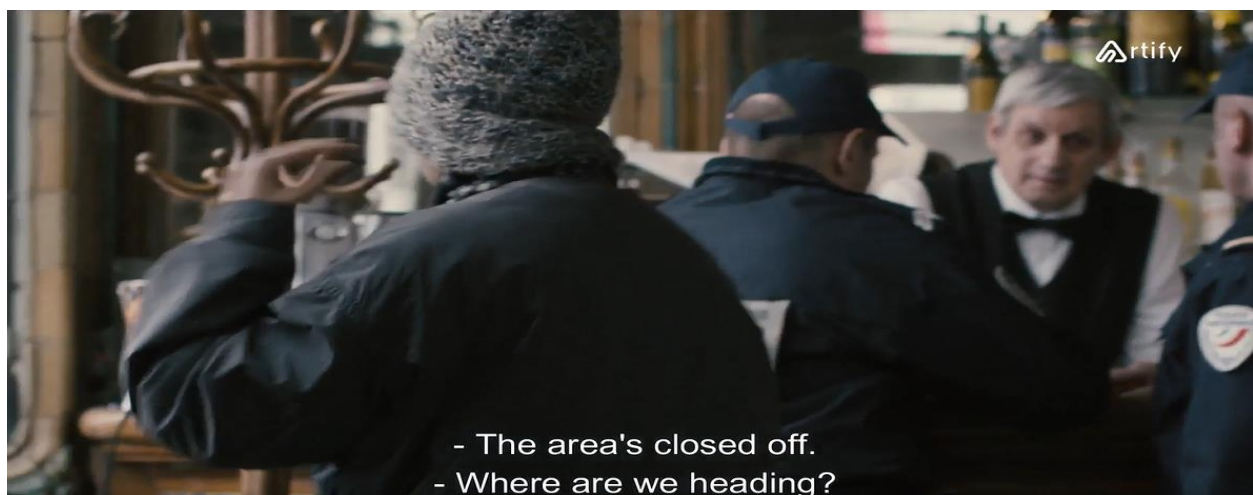
Mrs. Berteau is angry Mrs. Berteau asks Samia for her social security number and her ID so she can declare her. Samia tells her that she thought she was being hired illegally. Mrs. Berteau gets angry and tells Samia that she is not playing this game. When Samia hands over her passport, Mrs Berteau sees a picture of Samia hugging her mother between the pages of the passport. She softens and tells Samia that they will learn to know each other.



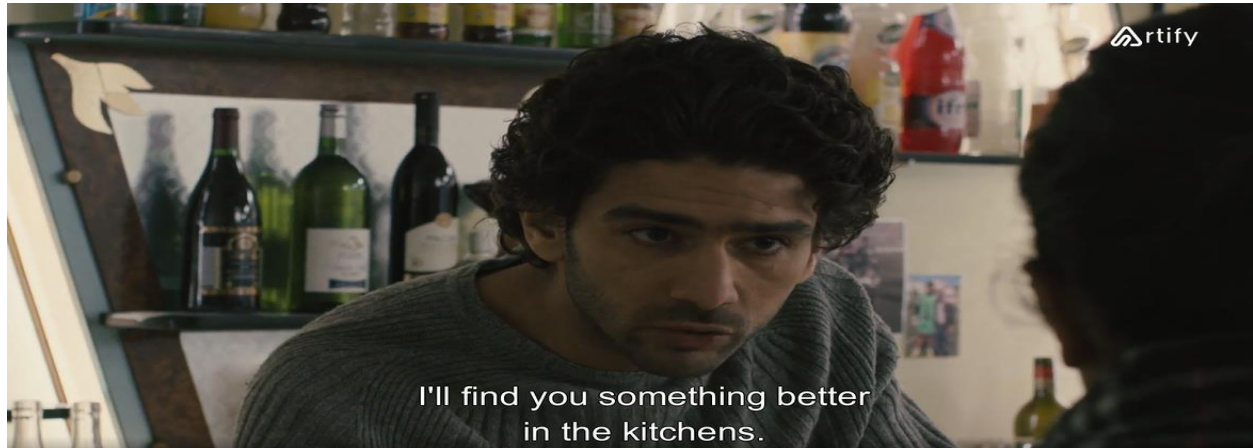
Samia takes liberties The following morning, as Mrs. Berteau is giving her the list of chores to do, Samia asks for her name. She tells her that her name is Mrs. Berteau. Samia says that she meant her first name. Leila, she is told. Samia smiles and tells Mrs. Berteau that her cousin has the same name. Mrs. Berteau does not smile. She shows her where the apartment's keys are, turns around, and leaves



Samia is paranoid Samia is having coffee at Bernard's. Two police officers enter the restaurant and start chatting with Bernard. Samia panics and leaves the restaurant precipitously. She goes to see Imed to tell him that she has a job. He is not happy with her leaving without telling him where she was. He tells her that her mother is worried back home in Tunisia and that she should be ashamed for not calling her.



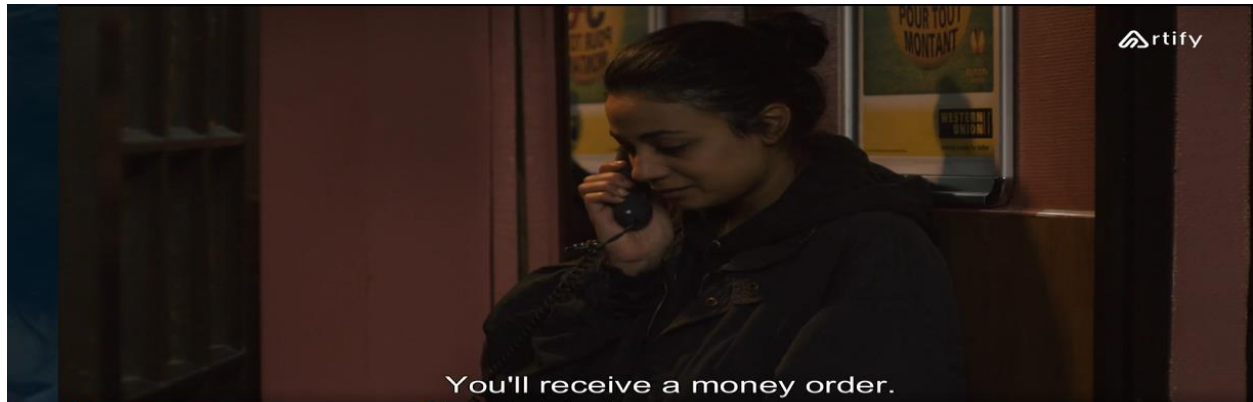
Samia will not work in the kitchen Samia tells Imed that she thinks she is being followed by the cops. He thinks that she is paranoid. She tells him that she is working for a rich widow as a maid, and there at least, the police will not come looking for her. Imed does not think that working as a maid is a good job for her. He wants to find her a job in the kitchen, which will allow her to get her papers after a few years. She tells him that she will not bury herself in a kitchen. He thinks she is too impatient.



Imed's feelings are hurt Samia gives Imed his keys back. He is hurt. He asks her if she is independent now and does not need him anymore. Mrs. Berteau is having company, and Samia is helping her set up the table. Mrs. Berteau's guests ask where she knew her maid from and whether she can trust her. From another room, Samia eavesdrops on the conversation.



Samia will not hear about her brother Samia calls her mother from a phone booth. Her mother is upset and worried. Samia tries to reassure her that she is fine and promises to send her some money soon. Samia's mother wants to tell her about her brother, but Samia refuses to hear about him.



Dress properly Mrs. Berteau goes shopping with Samia in a luxury clothing boutique. She buys herself something and chooses a pink sweater for Samia. Mrs. Berteau advises Samia to dress properly to not attract attention.



Mrs. Berteau is melancholic Samia is dusting Mrs. Berteau's living room. She opens a drawer and looks at her pictures with her husband. She does not see Mrs. Berteau watching her sadly. Mrs. Berteau later withdraws into her room and lies down in bed fully clothed, melancholic, and toying with her wedding band.



Dream of love Mrs. Berteau dreams that she is walking at night, following a man in a dark alley. Then she sees the man pinning a woman against a wall and kissing her. The woman face, which is indistinct at first is revealed by a dim light, and it is her face.



Mr. Berteau's scarf Samia is putting Mr. Berteau's shirts away. She spots a nice scarf and wears it around her neck after admiring it for a while. Mrs. Berteau enters the room, sees the scarf around Samia's neck, and leans over to smell it. She tells Samia that the scarf still carries her husband's scent. Samia removes the scarf from around her neck. Mrs. Berteau asks her to keep it.



Samia sends money home Mrs. Berteau gives Samia her wages with a little bonus and asks her to take the afternoon off and go shop for herself. Samia goes to a Western Union branch to send some money to her mother in Tunisia.



Samia pays off her debt

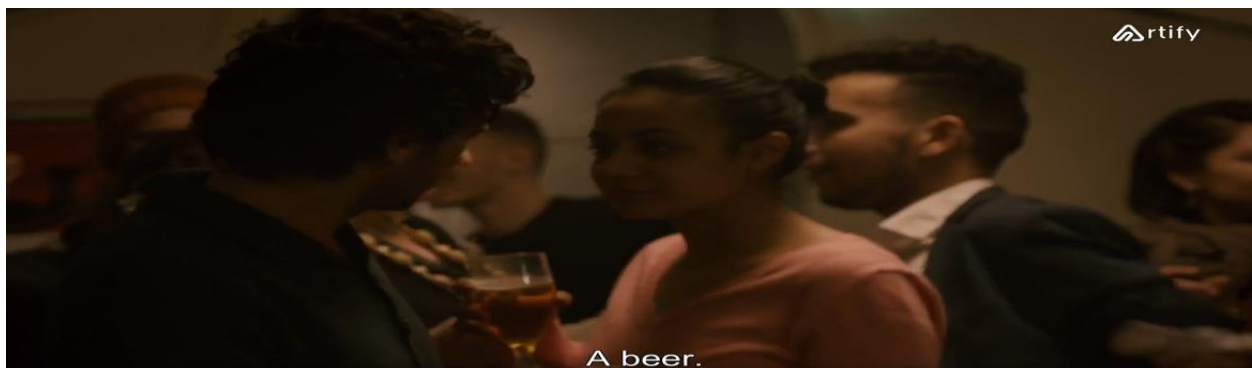
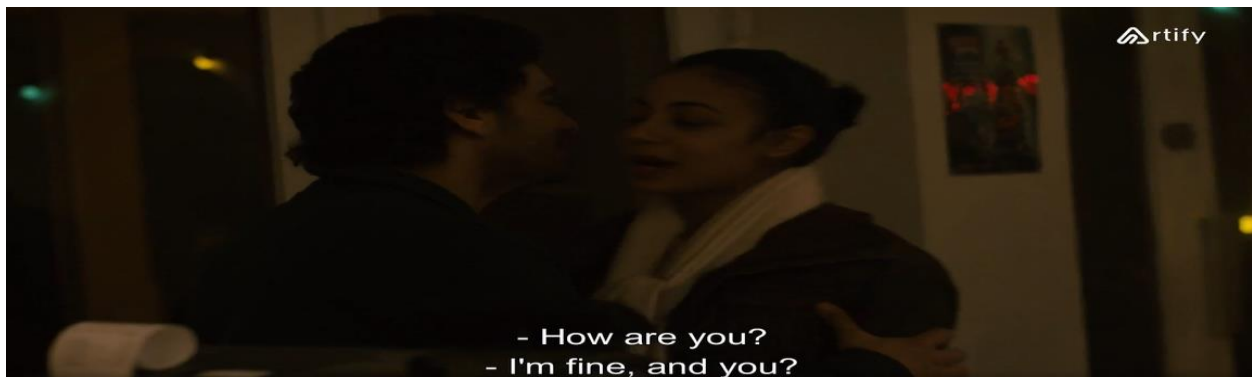
Samia interrupts Imed's card game to talk to him. She has come to pay him back the money he loaned her. Imed wants 20 euros more for the cell phone he bought her. She tells him that she is broke. He scoffs at her. He tells her that many prisoners have been freed in Tunisia, and that he hopes her brother will also be free soon. She gets upsets and wants to leave. He holds her back and offer her a new cell phone, so he does not have to worry about her whereabouts. She gives him a kiss and leaves.



Memories of drowning Samia is lying in her full bathtub. She slowly slides down and completely submerges herself. She remains under the water for a while and suddenly comes out gasping for air. Mrs. Berteau hears her and comes knocking on the bathroom door. Samia opens and tells her that all is fine.



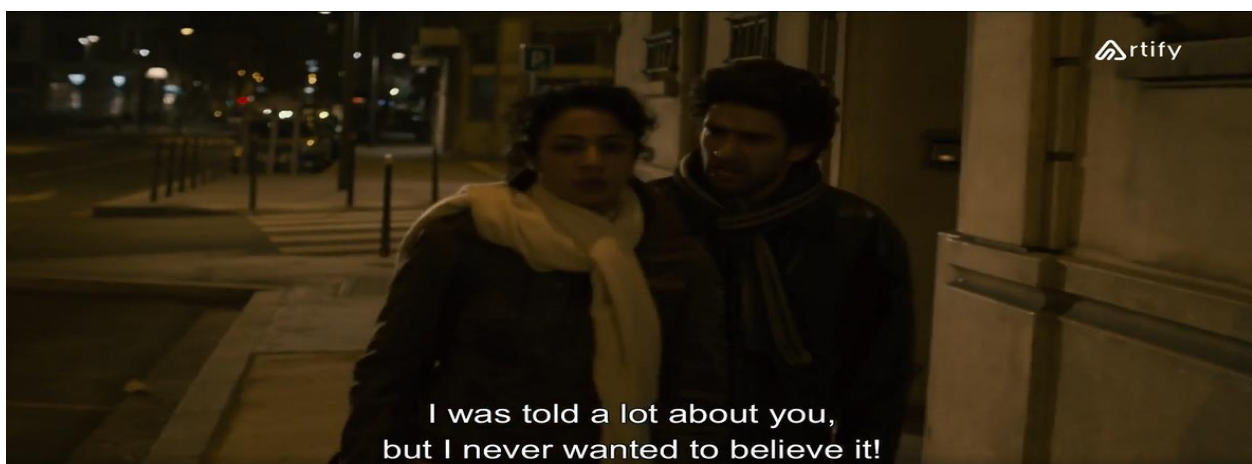
Dancing at Imed's bar Imed dials Samia's and hangs up when she picks up. She calls him to ask what he wants, and he lies that it is not him calling. While they are on the phone, he invites her to his bar. Samia arrives at Imed's bar. He is happy to see her. He serves her a non-alcoholic beverage, but she chooses to drink some beer. She wants to dance with him, but he must be behind the counter serving customers.



Imed is jealous Samia starts dancing flirtatiously with the customers. Imed is annoyed and asks her ironically if she is enjoying herself. She seems to want to upset him. Imed pulls Samia away from a man she is dancing with. He tells her that the man is fondling her. She tells him that she does not mind. She removes her sweater and exposes her tank top. She lifts her tank top and exposes her belly. Imed has had enough. He decides to close the bar for the night. He dismisses all the customers.



The quarrel The customers leave the bar, disappointed. Samia gathers her things and leaves. Imed wants to take her home because she is drunk. She refuses. He closes the bar quickly and goes after her. He tells her that he is responsible for her. She retorts that he is not her father. He calls her a whore and a disgrace to her pious brother, and he tells her she should have stayed in Tunisia. She slaps him. From her window, Mrs. Berteau catches the scene.



Trading places Mrs. Berteau and Samia are having a sauna session. Mrs. Berteau tells Samia that she wished she could turn back time and be the person she was when she first came to France with nothing. Samia tells her that she would gladly trade her life for her own. Mrs. Berteau replies that she had no life after she married. After she was disowned by her parents for marrying a Christian, her life was to follow her husband around and organize his life.



Samia's scars Mrs. Berteau offers to scrub Samia's back. She sees Samia's scars and asks her how she got them. She wants to know if Imed did that. Samia tells her that, no, it was a long time before. Samia tells Mrs. Berteau that Imed harasses her on the phone, and that she is starting to fear him. Mrs. Berteau offers to help.



LOVE TRIANGLE

Mrs Berteau dresses Samia Mrs. Berteau pulls a red dress from her closet, which she says has become too small for her. She wants Samia to try it on. The dress fits Samia perfectly. Mrs. Berteau asks her to sit and starts doing her hair. She brings Samia some high heels to wear with the dress.



Imed stalks Samia From the window, the two women watch Imed pace outside the building. Mrs. Berteau proposes to go down and talk to him and find out what he wants. Samia tells her that Imed will realize that she is a lone rich woman, and he will try to take advantage of her. Mrs. Berteau asks Samia if this is the way she represents her. She replies that this is certainly the way Imed will see her.



Mrs. Berteau wants to meet Imed Samia chooses the outfits she wants Mrs. Berteau to wear to impress Imed. She wants Mrs. Berteau to look French, to look like a woman different from the Arab immigrant that Imed is, the sort of women who never look at people like him. Mrs. Berteau asks her what she knows about what French women think of people like Imed. She tells Samia that Imed is a rather handsome man.



Mrs. Berteau meets Imed Mrs. Berteau goes down to the street. She approaches Imed, who is sitting on a public bench. She pulls out a cigarette and lights it. Samia observes the scene from the window. Mrs. Berteau asks Imed if she can sit on the bench and he says yes. They start to chat. She asks for Imed's phone number. As he is writing it down, she looks up daringly at Samia.



Mrs. Berteau sleeps at Imed's Mrs. Berteau meets Imed at his bar and waits for him to finish working. After work they go to Imed's apartment. She lies on his couch and falls asleep while he is making her coffee. She wakes up in the morning to see that Imed is sleeping in a single bed next to her. She goes to him, kneels, and passes her hand over his body. She grabs her jacket and leaves the apartment.



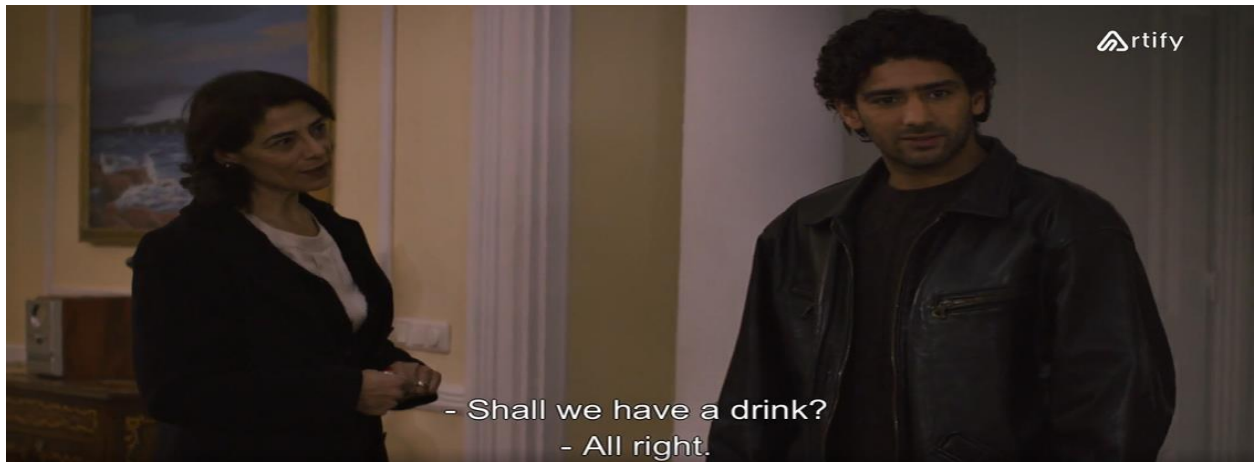
Samia is inquisitive Samia has been waiting for Mrs. Berteau. She tells her that she tried to reach her several times on the telephone in vain. She wants to know if Mrs. Berteau spent the night with Imed. Samia wants to know what she and Imed talked about. Visibly annoyed by Samia's questions, Mrs. Berteau orders her to go make her some coffee. Samia gets up and leaves.



A childhood friend Mrs. Berteau and Samia are visiting Mr. Berteau's grave. Samia decides to let Mrs. Berteau grieve alone, and she walks out of the graveyard. She sees a group of young Muslim men at a street corner ahead. One of them recognizes Samia. She tells him that he is making a mistake. He identifies himself as a former neighbor who went to school with her. She tells him that he is mistaken. He tells her that he wanted to let her know that he was in jail with her brother.



Imed is invited into the apartment Imed is back roaming around about the apartment building. Mrs. Berteau decides that the game has lasted too long. She goes downstairs and invites Imed up to the apartment. He is surprised to see Samia there. Samia is not happy to see Imed in the apartment. She asks him why he follows her. She accuses him of wanting to take advantage of Mrs. Berteau.



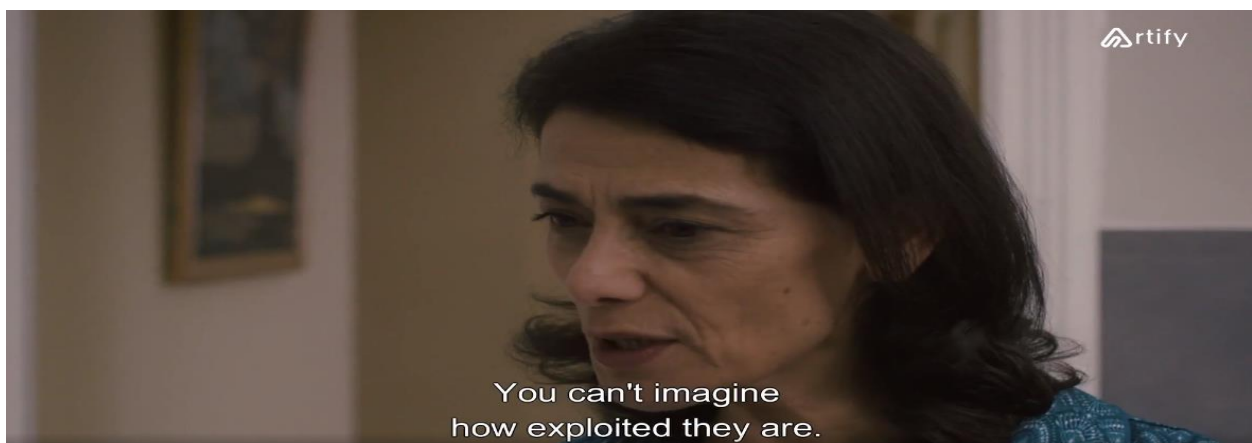
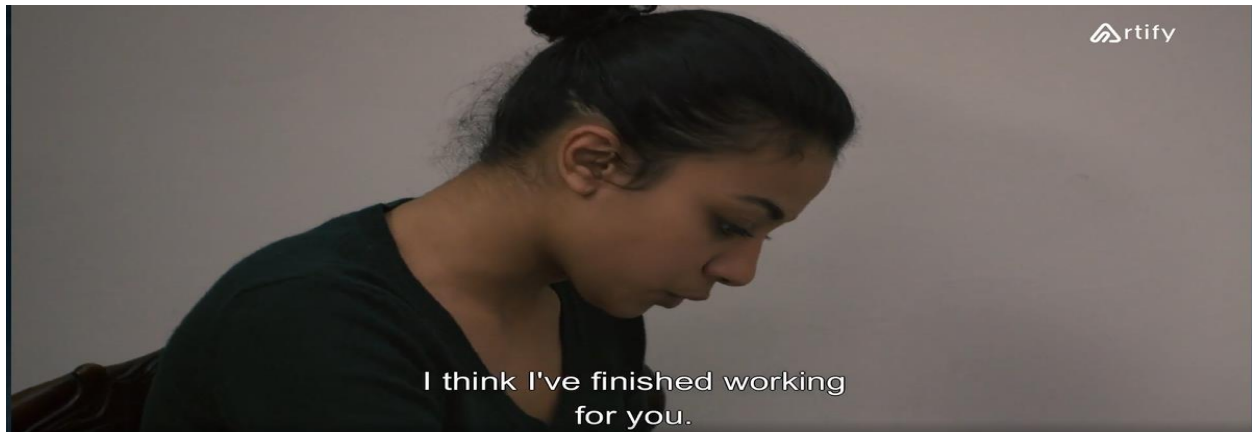
Exposing Imed's hypocrisy Samia serves Imed a glass of liquor. As he is about to drink, she snatches the glass from him and reminds him that he is a pious Muslim and does not drink alcohol. Mrs. Berteau asks Imed if it is true that he does not drink alcohol. He replies that, indeed, he serves it to customers but does not drink any. As Mrs. Berteau goes to fetch some juice in the kitchen, Imed wants to know why Samia is being so disagreeable. She asks him to behave. Mrs. Berteau returns, and the two young people cut short their dispute.



Transforming Imed Samia sees Mrs. Berteau dressing up Imed with her dead husband's clothes. She even has him wear the scarf that Samia was wearing, and which she said carried the scent of her husband.



Samia wants to leave The next morning, Mrs. Berteau sees Samia looking at job ads in the paper. Samia tells Mrs. Berteau that she is done working for her and is looking for another job, a waitress job. Mrs. Berteau tells her that waitresses are exploited by their bosses and harassed by the customers. She tells Samia that she can pay her more. Samia replies that Mrs. Berteau understands nothing, that money has nothing to do with it. Mrs. Berteau gets angry and retorts that Samia is nothing without papers. Samia gets up to leave the room, but Mrs. Berteau holds her back.

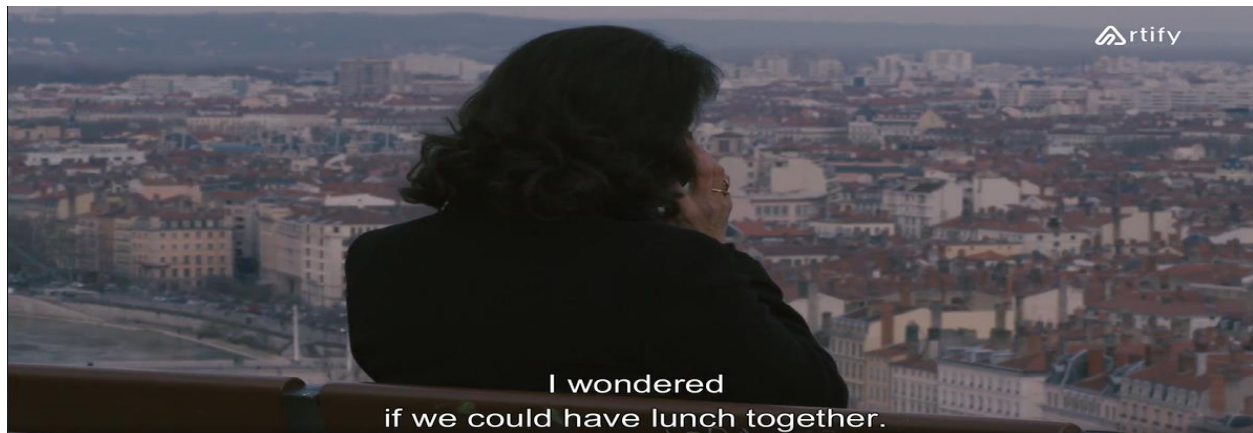


Mrs. Berteau proposes a love triangle Samia asks Mrs. Berteau if she is fond of Imed. She is taken aback by the question. She replies that she would enjoy some time now and then with Samia and Imed. In a gesture of disgust, Samia asks, "The three of us?" Then she leaves the room, angry.

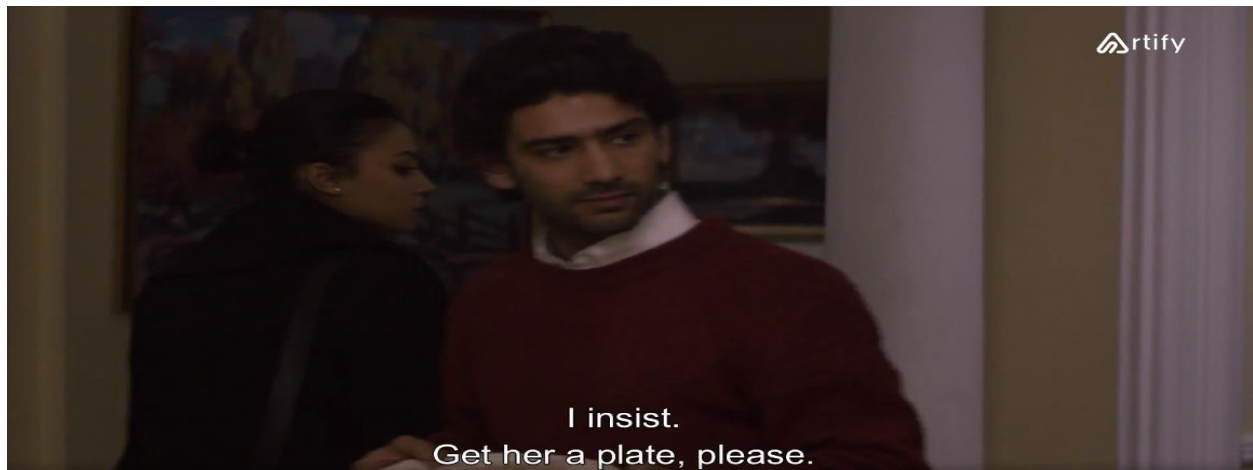


A job at a perfume shop

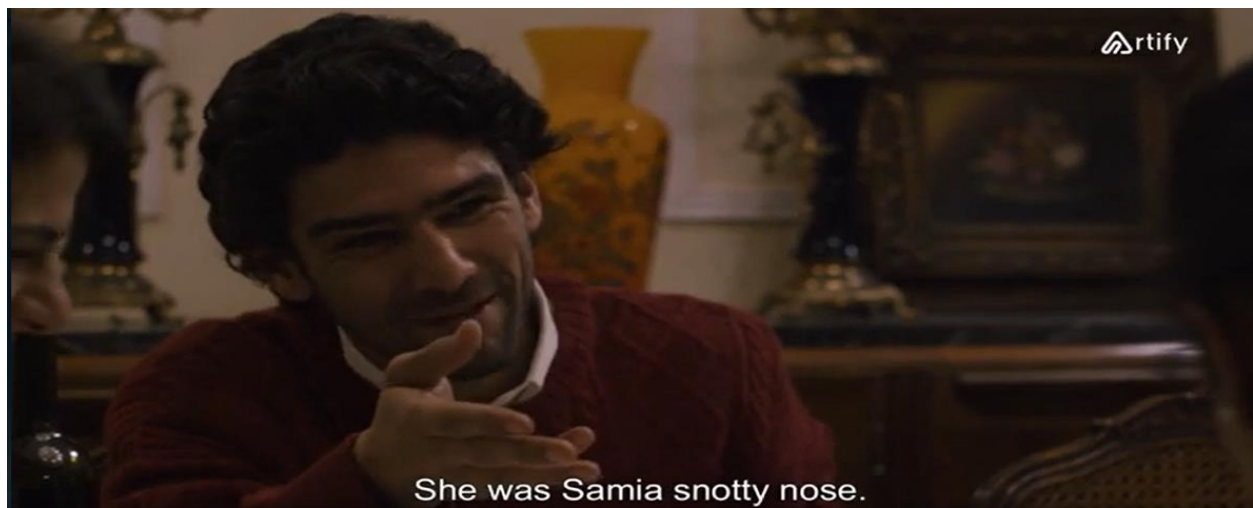
Mrs. Berteau calls one of her male acquaintances and ask him for a favor. The next day, she wakes Samia up to tell her that she found her a job at a perfume shop. Samia is elated and wants to know how they will get around the issue of no documents. Mrs. Berteau tells her that her friend knows all about her situation and will have her sign a contract.



Dinner at Mrs. Berteau's Samia comes home to find Imed and Mrs. Berteau together. They are getting ready for dinner and want Samia to join them. She is reluctant. Mrs. Berteau insists and Samia gives in. Mrs. Berteau and Imed are flirting at the dinner table. Mrs. Berteau goes to get some wine. Samia scolds Imed.



Making fun of Samia Imed starts making fun of Samia, telling Mrs. Berteau how she used to be a snotty little girl in Tunisia. Mrs. Berteau and Imed laugh at Samia. She does not find it funny. Imed is now very comfortable flirting with Mrs. Berteau. He promises to cook for her the next day. She tells him that she will give him the apartment key. Samia excuses herself and leaves the table.

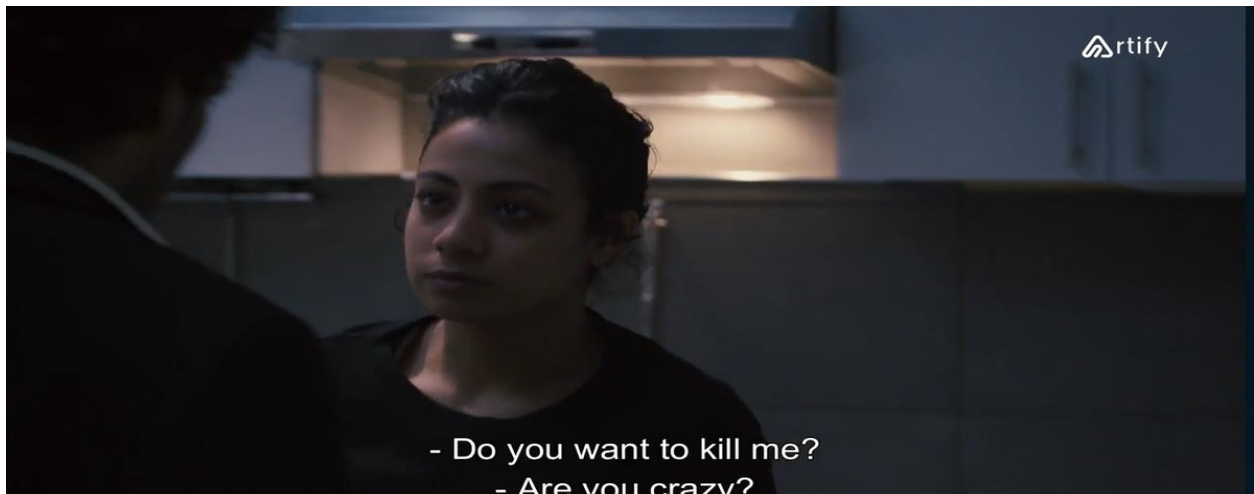


Imed has sex with Mrs. Berteau

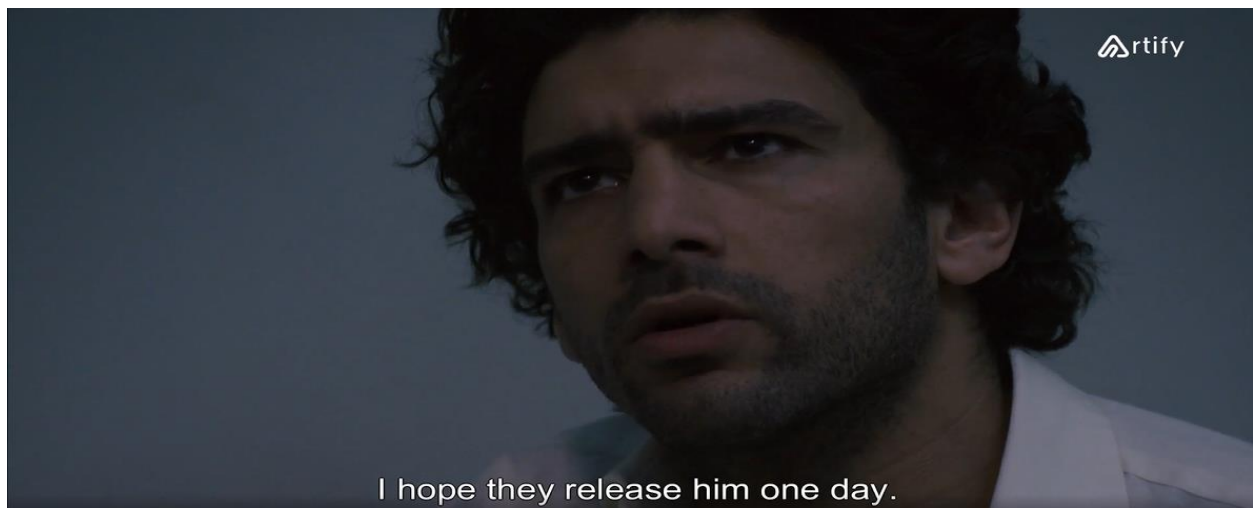
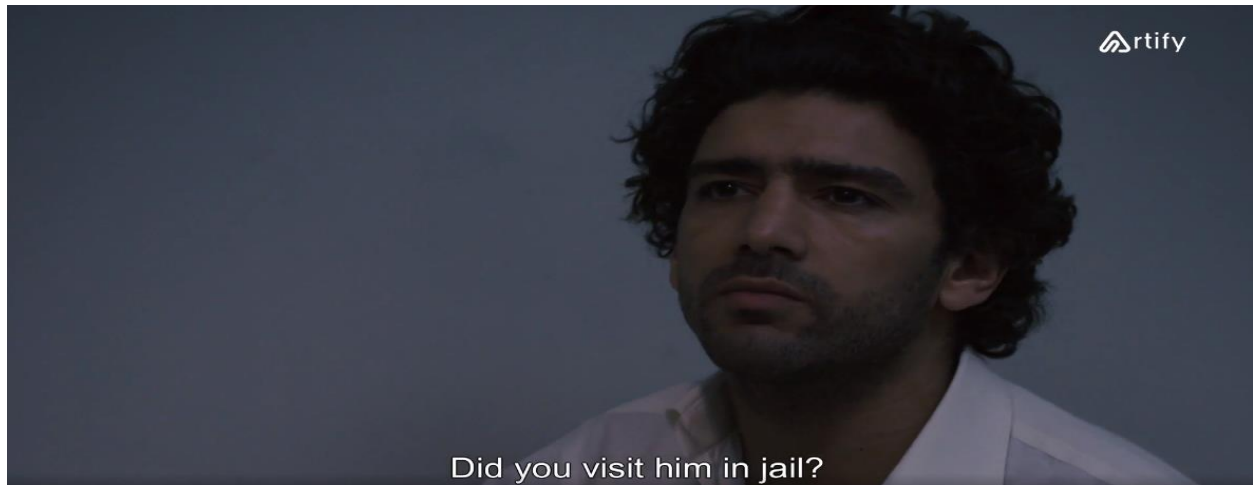
Samia calls her mother to tell her that she has a real job and will be signing a contract. Her mother is happy for her, but she is also worried about her brother, who is rumored to be in France or Belgium. Samia gets home and sees Imed's clothes strewn over the couch. He is sleeping in Mrs. Berteau's bedroom. She goes through his pocket and retrieves his apartment key.



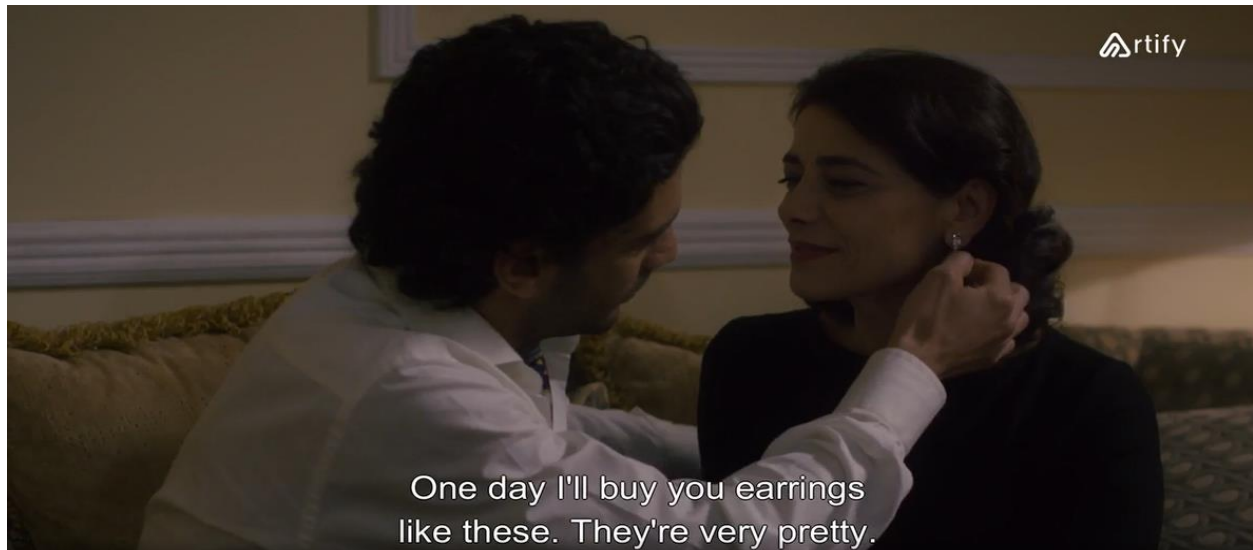
Looking for a picture Samia sneaks into Imed's apartment and goes through his things. She discovers some pictures of young fundamentalist men. One of the pictures seems to catch her attention. She puts it in her handbag, gets out of the apartment and returns the key before Imed is out of Mrs. Berteau's bedroom. She tells Imed that she had a nightmare about him strangling her and asks him if this is his intention.



Samia probes Imed Samia asks Imed if he has news of her brother. He does not, he says. She tells him that someone reported her brother to the police. He replies that this is what he heard. He asks if she visited him in jail. She replies that her brother is not allowed any visits.



Ménage à trois Imed is flirting with Mrs. Berteau on the couch. Samia comes in wearing the red dress that Mrs. Berteau has offered her. She puts on some music and starts dancing. Imed joins her, and soon, Mrs. Berteau joins them. The three of them become entangled in a sensual dance, and the two women take turn kissing Imed. Then Mrs. Berteau gets even closer to Samia and tries to kiss her. Samia suddenly becomes violent, pushes her away, grabs Imed's jacket and throws it at him. She pushes him toward the door and orders him to get out. Samia holds Mrs. Berteau in her arms.





SAMIA RETURNS

Samia has a nightmare It is the end of the day, and Samia is preparing to lock up the perfume shop. She sees a person with their face hidden in a hood staring at her from the street. She slowly retreats to the back of the shop. When she turns back, the person has disappeared. Samia tells Mrs. Berteau about her nightmare. She tells her that she thinks her brother is after her.



Samia talks about her brother Samia explains to Mrs. Berteau that her brother is a Jihadist. He was recruited by a group of young men from the village, and over time, he became intolerant and violent towards her. He disapproved of the way she dressed, of the way she spoke, and of the people she spoke with. She denounced him to the police. He spent eight years in jail. Now, he is free. Mrs. Berteau is shaken by the revelation.



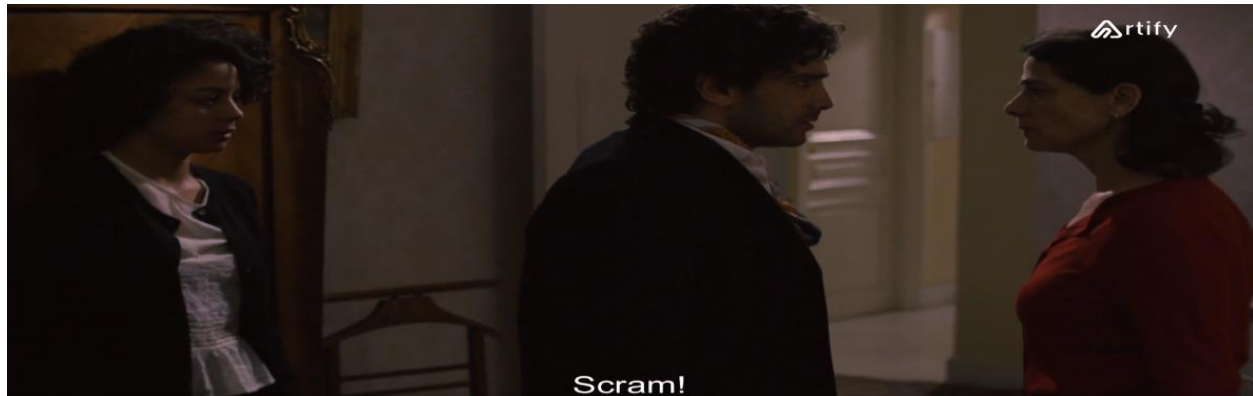
Imed is a Jihadist Mrs. Berteau asks Samia if her brother knows where she lives. She thinks that Imed has told him where she lives. Mrs. Berteau doubts that Imed can do such a thing. Samia brings the picture she stole from Imed's room and shows it to Mrs. Berteau. Imed is standing in the picture with Samia's brother and another young man. She tells Mrs. Berteau that Imed has not changed.



Mrs. Berteau avoids Imed Mrs. Berteau is pacing her apartment nervously. Imed enters and startles her. He wants to kiss her. She stiffens. He wants to know what is wrong with her. She tells him that she cannot see him, that she is going out to dine with friends. Imed goes to Samia and asks her what she told Mrs. Berteau about him.



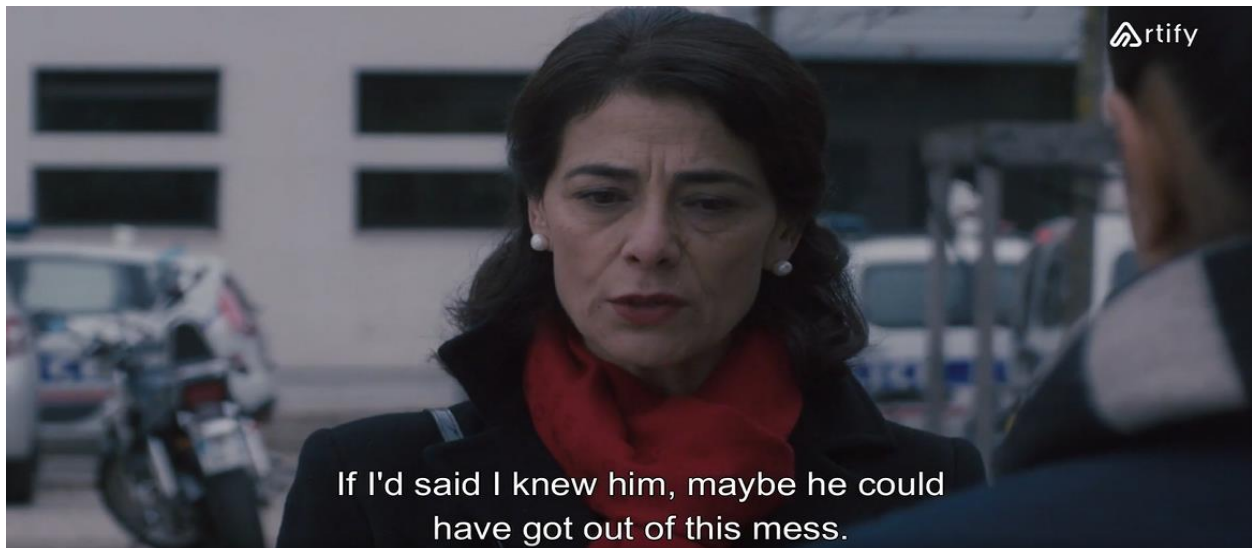
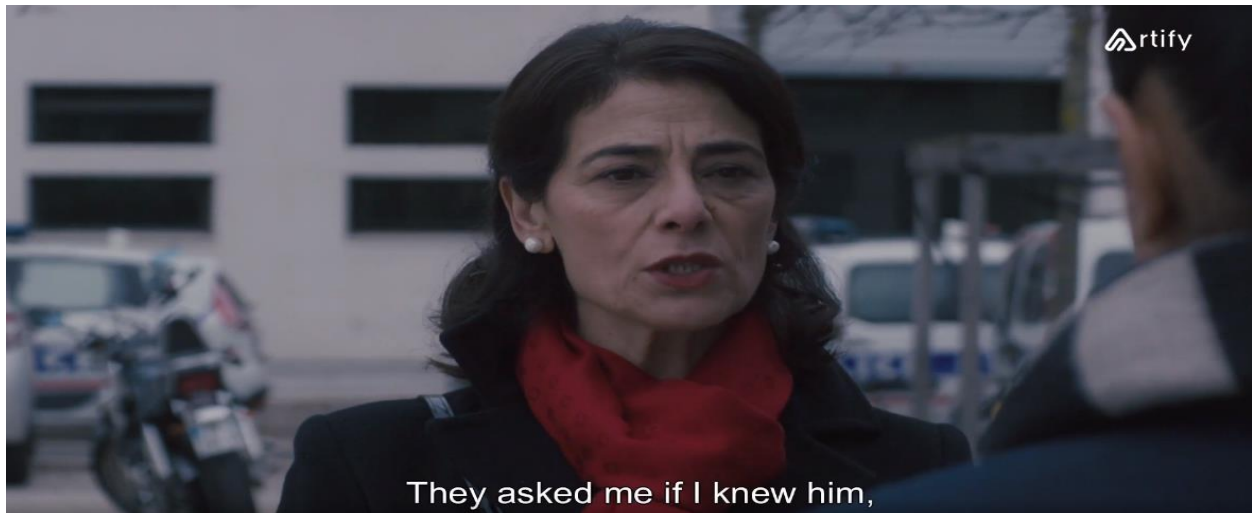
Imed becomes violent Samia tells Imed that she has shown Mrs. Berteau a picture of him with her brother. Imed attacks Samia. Mrs. Berteau hears the commotion and comes asking what is going on. She asks Imed to leave her flat.



Imed is drunk Imed returns to Mrs. Berteau's apartment drunk and collapses in her bed. Mrs. Berteau and Samia try to figure out what to do. Samia suggests that they call the police and have him sent back to Tunisia. Mrs. Berteau is torn. Finally, the two women leave him where he is and share the same bed. Imed sobers up and leaves the flat in the middle of the night.



Imed is deported Imed gets picked up by the police and gives them Mrs. Berteau's name and address. She tells the police that she does not know him. He is deported.

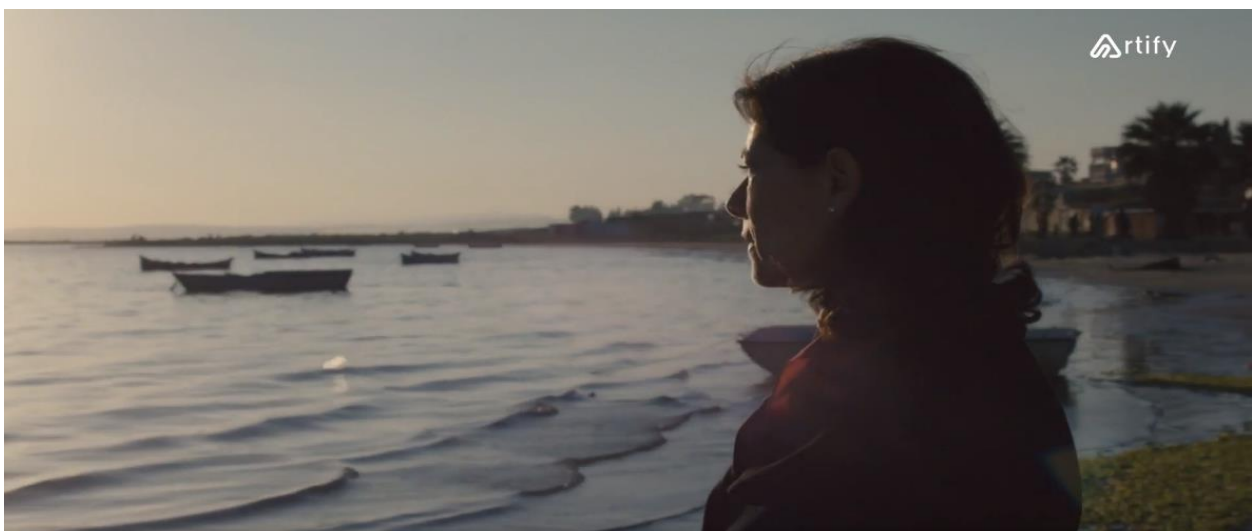


Samia's brother is dead

Samia calls her mother and learns that her brother died in jail years ago. She is devastated. She returns to see the young man that hailed her at the gate of the cemetery. He talks of her brother as a hero. She tells him that her brother was a miserable man, and she uncovers her shoulder to show him the scars of her brother's brutality.



Return to Tunisia Samia returns to Tunisia with Mrs. Berteau to pray at her brother's grave. Samia's mother conducts the prayer ritual. Mrs. Berteau is happy to see the mother and daughter reunited. She leaves them together to bond and walks to the beach. She casts a long look at the sea, and the movie ends with images of the possessions of drowned people sinking to the bottom of the sea. Her husband's scarf, which she finally gave to Imed, is one of these lost possessions.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Mrs. Berteau (Emotional)

Mrs. Berteau is an enigmatic, nostalgic, and vulnerable woman. Once a young illegal Tunisian immigrant, she married a rich French man. Now a widow, she has a mysterious relationship with two young Tunisian immigrants that alternates between nostalgia, maternal love, and sexuality.

Enigmatic Mrs. Berteau is an enigmatic woman whose reasons for pursuing Imed and Samia remain a mystery. Sometimes she behaves with them as a motherly figure and a protector. Other times, however, she acts like a vulnerable lover seeking unfulfilled sexual pleasure in younger partners.

Nostalgic Mrs. Berteau holds on to her life with her husband by dressing up Imed in his clothes and by cherishing his scents on his scarf. She is also nostalgic of her youth, of the time when she was in Samia's condition of an unattached, illegal immigrant freshly arrived from Tunisia. Her marriage with Jean Berteau caused her to be estranged by her family from Tunisia, and she tells Samia that she wishes she could recapture the time when she had her Tunisian family.

Vulnerable Mrs. Berteau is a vulnerable woman. Samia's perceptive mind has detected her vulnerability, and she tells her that she does not want Imed to take advantage of her. In fact, Samia tries to prevent that from happening by shielding her against Imed. However, Mrs. Berteau easily falls for Imed, who starts taking some liberties with her until his anger and violence cause him to be deported to Tunisia.

Samia (Open)

Samia is a proud, resourceful, and impulsive young woman. Thrown by the sea onto a French shore after she almost drowned when the illegal boat that carried her capsized, she quickly left her controlling compatriot and gained her position with her boss-cum-friend.

Resilient Samia is a resilient woman. She survived the tortures of her Jihadist brother in Tunisia and denounced him, which landed him in jail. She was the lone survivor of a shipwreck during her illegal crossing of the Mediterranean Sea. She fended off Imed's controlling moves and found herself a job with Mrs. Berteau. When she sensed that Mrs. Berteau wanted to maintain her in a condition of illegality, she threatened to leave and found a better situation. She finally returned to Tunisia on her own terms to visit her mother and her brother's grave site.

Proud Samia did not want to owe any debt to Imed which he might hold over her head as a controlling device. So, as soon as she obtained her first job and received her first wages, she went to him to reimburse the money he had loaned her when she first arrived. Imed also wanted to get Samia a job working in the kitchen. She told him that she did not intend to spend her life in France working in a kitchen. And when Imed tried to control her life, she reminded him that she was a free woman, and that he had no paternal rights over her.

Resourceful As early as her second day in France, Samia was out scouring the local businesses for a job. When she saw Mrs. Berteau pin an ad on a restaurant bulletin board, she snatched it and called to propose her services as a maid. Her insistence finally won over Mrs. Berteau, who hired her. However, Samia was not going to settle for a maid job. She pestered Mrs. Berteau until she found her a better and more respectful job at a perfume store, where she was put on a regular contract that allowed her to obtain her residency papers.

Imed (Closed)

Imed is a supportive compatriot to Samia. However, he is also a man torn between his radical religious beliefs, which demand a conservative, authoritarian outlook on women, and the necessity, for his survival, to adapt to his host country's liberal lifestyle. This conflict makes him appear deceitful.

Supportive Imed was very supportive to Samia when she first arrived in France, alone, with no friends, and nowhere to go. She found him thanks to an address she was given by his sister in Tunisia, and when he saw her, he greeted her with open arms. He fed her, offered her a place to sleep in the apartment he shared with other immigrants despite their reluctance to have a woman in their midst, and offered her some clothes from his closet. He bought her a phone and asked her to call her mother to tell her that she was safe. He also gave her some survival advice regarding how to elude the police. He took her right away under his wings.

Controlling Imed's preoccupation with Samia soon switched into that of a controlling big brother or father. He did not want her to accept any other job than the one he was trying to find her as a kitchen worker. He wanted her to keep him informed of all her movements. He disapproved of her dancing with customers in his bar and of her drinking alcohol. He told Samia that he was responsible for her. At one point, Samia told him to stop behaving as if he were her father.

Deceitful Imed was part of a group of young fundamentalists led by Samia's brother, Mourad. However, although Imed pretends to practice his radical religious faith in France, his activities are antithetical to his belief. For instance, he serves alcohol in a bar and drinks alcohol himself. When he tries to keep Samia from drinking, she points out his hypocrisy by snatching from his hand a glass of liquor he was about to drink at Mrs. Berteau's place and by reminding him that he was a pious Muslim.

THEMES

SOCIETY (class, gender)

Class Social class in France is a reality that is often expressed in the way people dress, the language they speak, and the decorum they observe. For instance, while in the United States people tend to interact informally with strangers or individuals they have just met, in France, unless people are old acquaintances, formality is the rule. Thus, Samia using the informal "tu" to address Mrs. Berteau indicates her ignorance of good manners. When she asks for Mrs. Berteau's first name, something an employee is not expected to ask her employer on their first encounter, Mrs. Berteau tells her that her name is Madame Berteau, making sure to prefix her last name with the title Madame. Samia will not have it and insists on being told her first name. Obviously, Samia's limited education justifies her lack of decorum, and Mrs. Berteau understands it. She allows Samia to interact with her on a first name basis, for, once upon a time, she was in Samia's inexperienced situation. Nevertheless, she takes upon herself to teach the young woman some decorum, such as how to dress and set the table.

Gender Imed and his young Tunisian compatriots in Bordeaux have internalized a conservative conception of gender relationships, which they repeat in their everyday lives in France. Firstly, some of them do not approve of Samia staying with them in the same apartment. One of them asks Imed if Samia has no family around and tells him that it is not appropriate for a female person to be sharing the apartment with them. They tolerate Samia only when they learn that she is the sister of Mourad, a Jihadist for whom they have a lot of esteem. Having accepted Samia, they, nevertheless, see her as the domestic of the house, and they line up to give her their dirty dishes to wash after dinner. Likewise, Imed, who serves alcoholic drinks at a local bar and drinks, too, does not approve of Samia drinking alcohol and dancing in the bar. He calls her a whore for doing that, and he tells her that she is a disgraced woman who would have done them all a great service if she had remained in Tunisia. Curiously, however, Imed's prejudiced views towards Samia do not carry over to Mrs. Berteau, the bourgeois Tunisian woman who has made it in France. With the latter, Imed is more subdued, docile even, as she transforms him. Imed's conservative views on women seem to only be applicable to those women who, like Samia, are not financially independent. Samia knows it, and she ascertains her independence from Imed as soon as she gets her first job.

PSYCHOLOGY (paranoia, return)

Paranoia Paranoia is one of the disorders of illegal immigrants, who constantly look over their shoulders, afraid that the police might be after them. Two cops, whom Bernard knows well, enter Bernard's restaurant while Samia is having coffee and start chatting with the owner. Samia panics and gets out of the place. She goes and tells Imed that the cops are following her. He scoffs at her and replies that it did not

take her long to catch the disease of paranoia. Samia's suspicion is compounded with the fact that she believes her brother, who she does not know has died in jail, is out to get her. She suspects every man crossing her path in a dark alley, every man bumping into her inadvertently in the street and every hooded man in front of the window of the store where she works of being one of her brother's henchmen. She has nightmares about being chased by her brother and about Imed strangling her. She confronts Imed and asks him if he intends to kill her. She promises him that if this is his intention, she will kill him before he has a chance to do the same to her.

Nostalgia For immigrants, the voluntary return to the native land allows for a better appreciation of what was left behind during the precipitous exile. It also allows for reconciliation with the native land. Once upon a time, as Mrs. Berteau says, she was like Samia, that is, a young illegal immigrant working as a waitress in France, whom employers easily exploited, and customers harassed. Today, as a rich widow integrated in the upper-class of the French society, she feels removed from her native Tunisia. She tells Samia that she would like to be in her situation and to have never been estranged from her family that disowned her when she married outside her faith. For the young immigrants, Samia and Imed, whom she took under her wing in an ambiguous relationship, she initiates the return to the native land both violently and persuasively. She gets Imed deported to Tunisia as a punishment for his brutality towards Samia. And she accompanies Samia to Tunisia to see Samia's mother and to pray on Samia's brother's tomb. And for Mrs. Berteau, Tunisia becomes a new vantage point whence she looks at Europe and the Mediterranean Sea. And what she sees is the charm of false promises of happiness and security that draw young Arab youths to the bottom of the sea. As Mrs. Berteau pictures the scarf that she offered Imed sinking to the bottom of the sea along with other immigrants' personal properties, one can guess that Imed has died trying to make the passage to Europe one more time after his deportation.

RELATIONSHIP

Friendship/caring/love triangle Samia and Imed have become playthings for Mrs. Berteau, who, like Pygmalion, shapes them and transforms them according to her whim. She makes Imed in the image of her husband by dressing him with her husband's clothes laden with her husband's scent. And she dresses Samia with her own clothes of the time she was as young as Samia. She makes Imed into a younger Mr. Berteau and Samia into a younger her. And once she has fashioned them the way she wants, she falls in love with them, and they become the object of her repressed desires. And the three of them get entangled into a love triangle that turns dangerous when Samia becomes jealous, and Imed becomes violent towards Samia. At the end, Imed gets deported, and Mrs. Berteau and Samia reunite in Tunisia, with the filmmaker leaving the viewer to guess what relationship Mrs. Berteau and that person of her fashioning will have moving forward. As for Imed, as the scarf that Mrs. Berteau gifted him is sinking in the Mediterranean Sea with other unfortunate immigrants' belongings, one can surmise that he met with death trying to return to France.

APPEARANCE (deception)

Deception The way people dress, the shell they put on, determines the way they are perceived and treated in French society. On Samia's second day in Bordeaux, Imed gives her some clean clothes, a backpack, and a few papers to carry in the backpack so that she can pass for a student and not attract police suspicion. This is because the police have marked out the immigrants with some stigma that allow them to easily track them. Imed's revision of Samia's sartorial choices allows her to elude the police. Mrs. Berteau carries on Imed's work much further. If for Imed, the clothes he puts on Samia can transform her from a suspicious illegal immigrant to an innocent French resident, for Mrs. Berteau, a good sartorial choice is not just transformative; it can lead to complete transfiguration, a change in attitude and in personality. Thus, Mrs. Berteau dresses Samia to be not just any legal resident of France but a respectable woman; one whose appearance would invite deference and shield her from people taking liberties at her expense. She also dresses Imed with her husband's clothes. And the change is perceptible in the gait of these two young Tunisians, in their postures, and in the new confidence they get from their new accoutrements. They are no longer the same persons, and they are no longer perceived as the same persons. In fact, they even accuse each other of showing off. Their new clothes have transfigured them, sending them over the barrier that separates the illegal from the legal, the poor from the rich. Mrs. Berteau knows the transfiguration power of dressing, for a long time ago, before she met her husband, she, too, was like Samia, a young,

destitute Tunisian immigrant woman working as a waitress, exploited by a ruthless boss and harassed by unscrupulous customers.

PAST (memory)

Memory The recollection of the past is always painful in *Foreign Bodies*. Samia's past is beset by violence, particularly the brutality of her Jihadist brother, who disapproved of her lifestyle, and who scarred her back for life. Her memories also have to do with her dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea and her near drowning, which haunts her when she is in her bath, or when she is simply sitting by the bank of a river. Samia's past is also the poor snotty-nosed child she used to be in the village, which Imed recalls in order to mock her. Mrs. Berteau also recalls her painful past as a young illegal immigrant in France exploited by her employers and harassed by the customers of the bistro where she worked as a waitress. Despite her painful past, Mrs. Berteau wishes she could go back and be the young illegal girl she used to be before her marriage with Mr. Berteau, for, at least in those days, she was not totally lonely. She had a family anchor in Tunisia, and she was not yet disowned by her family for marrying outside of her Muslim faith.

QUESTIONS

1. How can you explain the title, "Foreign Bodies", of this film?
2. In your cultures, do you put great importance on the way people dress and on table etiquette?
3. What element denotes high social class in your cultures?
4. How can you explain Mrs. Berteau's particular interest in Imed and Samia?
5. What do you think of Mrs. Berteau's decision not to save Imed from deportation?
6. How is the return to Tunisia important, respectively, for Samia and Mrs. Berteau?