

Inch'Allah Dimanche

2001, France

By Jen Westmoreland Bouchard

“Inch'Allah Dimanche” was written and directed by the French-Algerian film director Yamina Benguigui. Set in 1970s Paris, the film recounts the story of Zouina (Fejria Deliba), an Algerian woman who moves to France with her three children and mother-in-law (Rabia Mokeddem) to join her husband, Ahmed (Zinedine Soualem), who has been working there for over ten years. After World War II, the French government encouraged Algerian men to come to France to replenish the work force and essentially rebuild the nation. In the early-1970s, many of these men sent for their families to join them. Zouina represents of a wave of Algerian women who left their families to join their husbands in France during this period. Yamina Benguigui states, “France didn't recognize us or talk about us; the countries which we came from didn't talk about us and knew nothing about us; and our parents were silent, told us nothing. I realized that in France we had this first generation, this first wave of immigrants, who were slowly dying out and vanishing, and it was important for me to stop and capture them, to transcribe their experiences. As the daughter of immigrants, it was important for me that even before moving into fiction, I wanted to capture this memory, and to work with memory.”

A compelling and personal drama, “Inch'Allah Dimanche” provides a fascinating glimpse of both French and Algerian cultural mores and paints a disturbingly accurate portrait of the racial tensions surrounding immigration policies in France immediately following the Algerian revolution, which marked the end of France's colonial reign. One of the most fascinating sociological aspects of the film is the relational triangle between Zouina, Ahmed and Aïcha (Ahmed's mother). The tension among them is introduced when Zouina, her three children and Aïcha arrive in France and see Ahmed for the first time in ten years. Ahmed immediately embraces his mother and children, yet greets Zouina as if she were a stranger. Per Algerian culture, the mother-in-law is the designated head of the household when Ahmed is away, and Zouina quickly becomes little more than the family's maid. When Ahmed returns from work and discovers Zouina has disobeyed his mother, he physically abuses her and forbids her to leave the house for fear of “corrupting” outside (French) influences.

Needless to say, Zouina faces great challenges both in the family home and within French society as she attempts to adapt to her new life. Though her husband is distant and distrustful, her mother-in-law is hostile and domineering, and her neighbors are racist and suspicious, Zouina manages to find moments of solidarity and happiness with various French and Algerian women in her neighborhood. She is bolstered by her newfound sense of independence during her secret excursions in the city and tethered to the confines of her home by the traditions and cultural conventions that keep her under her

husband and mother-in-law's control.

The emotional tension resulting from these situational extremes is released when Zouina, alone in the kitchen, performs a Kabyle dance that is traditionally shared between women. Tears stream down her cheeks as she thinks about her mother and homeland. The audience can't help but share in Zouina's grief, born of her physical and psychological displacement. As Benguigui expresses, "In France, she's in prison. It's at the end that we see Zouina's true face, her true identity. What the film depicts is her first tottering steps towards her own liberation." A difficult liberation process to be sure; one fraught with silence, tears, and introspection that eventually leads to the establishment of a new sense of self for Zouina.