

LUX

3 FILMS
24 LANGUAGES
28 COUNTRIES

FILM

DAYS

À PEINE J'OUVRE LES YEUX
(AS I OPEN MY EYES)

Leyla Bouzid
France, Tunisia, Belgium, United Arab Emirates



LUX
FILM PRIZE
THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
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À PEINE J'OUVRE LES YEUX

As I open my eyes

BY LEYLA BOUZID

In Tunisia in the summer of 2010, a few months before the revolution, 18-year-old Farah is taking her end-of-school exams and her family is already picturing her as a doctor ... but she doesn't see things the same way.

She sings in a protest rock group. She's restless, gets drunk and discovers both love and her town at night, against the wishes of her mother Hayet, who knows Tunisia and what is forbidden there.

Things turn sour for Farah when the group starts performing in the capital's cafés and she gives free rein to her thirst for freedom and her desire to live life to the full. Soon made aware of the wild life her daughter is leading in places normally frequented by men, Hayet tries to make her see sense, though in vain. Half-rebel, half-innocent and unaware of the risks she is running in the authoritarian Tunisia of the time, Farah is determined to spread the subversive message of Borhène, her boyfriend and leader of the group, and, by extension, the hopes of a generation.

IN CONTEXT

It is no coincidence that Leyla Bouzid sets the film just a few months before the start of the Tunisian Revolution, which marked the start of the Arab Spring, an international uprising that travelled through many countries against the authoritarian regimes in power, deep social inequality, a severe economic crisis and high levels of youth unemployment. In Tunisia, the sense of suffocation and injustice experienced by the youth was all the more problematic because 42 % of the population is aged under 25, educated and non-religious. In many of the Arab countries swept along in the revolution, hard-line Islamists saw an opportunity to establish themselves in power, with the results we all know, whereas in Tunisia a transition to democracy actually did take place. Despite initial electoral success, the Islamists were eventually ousted from power and, in January 2014, the country adopted a new constitution.

Five years on, Leyla Bouzid goes back to the beginnings of the revolution in Tunisia, bringing the underlying issues and causes into focus through the main characters: young, educated, middle-class and urban-dwelling Tunisians who are desperate for freedom (Farah and her friends), a climate of oppression and surveillance typical of police states (Borhène and Farah's arrests), corruption among government officials (when Farah goes missing, Hayet gives the police officer money to ensure that he immediately opens an investigation) and the weight of a traditional and patriarchal society (the way the men look at Hayet, for example, when she goes to find Borhène at the café the night her daughter goes missing).

Against the backdrop of the post-Arab Spring terrorist attacks, *À peine j'ouvre mes yeux* (*As I open my eyes*) provides an opportunity, without addressing the subject head-on, to reflect on the unexpected outcome of a revolution that ended up paving the way for the return of a conservative Islamism that had been ousted from Tunisian society in 2010. Not only does Leyla Bouzid's film portray the hopes of a generation, but it also powerfully alludes to their lost dreams and their present fears. In this sense, the film, which could be interpreted as a quiet call to political awareness and intellectual mobilisation, should make us think about crucial issues such as the importance of upholding the freedoms and values of democratic societies.





FARAH AND HAYET: THE MOTHER–DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP AT THE HEART OF THE FILM

Apart from its touching portrayal of a mother–daughter relationship, Leyla Bouzid's film shows, through these two female figures, how frustrations are passed on from one generation to another and, in particular, how difficult it is to bring about any form of change when living in a police state. Like Farah, Hayet has a rebellious past, but, unlike her daughter, she knows that any attempt to shake up the established order has serious consequences in a country like Ben Ali's Tunisia. Her journey, which has shaped her over time into a modern but still submissive woman, reflects the futility of any subversive action in such a repressive environment. As for Farah, who embodies the spirit of a young generation in search of freedom, we can already see that her destiny will mirror her mother's.



In terms of the cinematography, all the tensions arising between the two women on account of the oppressive climate imposed upon society by the regime are accentuated by means of emotionally charged cuts. This way of foregrounding highly intense moments emphasises the agonising indecision of a mother torn between her love for her daughter, her protective instincts and her faithfulness to her own youthful ideals.

INTERVIEW WITH LEYLA BOUZID (PRESS RELEASE EXTRACTS)

You talk about how people are afraid of the police system but, in Tunisia, there is also the threat of terrorism. Religion, however, does not feature at all in the film.



The film follows young adults who are always busy, bursting with energy, want to make their music, perform at concerts and live their art. Religion is not a central part of their lives. This energetic and creative youth is what I wanted to capture: a generation that every day issues a challenge to those in power merely by existing, and one that is rarely talked about. The only voices that have a right to be heard in the media are those advocating extremism and violence. I think it's important to draw attention to the young Tunisians who want to live, to give them a voice through Farah, to show that they are being silenced by a terror that is part

of the political system. There are other forms of terror aside from terrorism. Farah wants to be an individual and to have her voice heard.

We're familiar with 'the Tunisian people', 'We', 'the Nation' ... But where does 'I' fit into all this? What's the price of being a free individual in Tunisia? Have you had to pay that price?

The film asks a question: in Tunisia, how can you break free from family, society and the system? What kind of strength would it require, what resistance would it face and what violence could it lead to? We follow Farah, a girl with a lust for life and who lives every day intensely in the face of all opposition, and for this she is punished and crushed.

I think that in Tunisia we all pay a price, regardless of whether we're artists or not. We face this sooner or later in life, on a personal level or in our family, social or school life. In Tunisian society, you either have to make sacrifices or you find yourself up against too many obstacles.

The film is not autobiographical, but it does depict some situations that I have experienced, such as finding out that a close friend, who used to hang out at the same film club as me, was a police informer, someone who was there to watch us and infiltrate us. It was a big shock. That was when I realised how isolated we were and how we couldn't trust anything or anyone.

You film the underbelly of Tunis, the nightlife, the bars, the trains, male-dominated places, and you see them through a woman's eyes ... Then you go into the countryside, the mining district, where the dusty surroundings stand in stark contrast to the bustling urban setting.

There is a border between these places and I feel the need to bring it down and that it is possible to do so.

During filming, the trickiest scene was when Hayet goes into the bar. The people there are the actual customers of a seedy bar. Each time we did a take, the actress had to re-enter the bar and it was a new challenge each time. The men, although only extras, stared at her in an almost obscene way, without being directed to do so. In fact, all the women on set felt the intensity of their gaze.

I wanted to film Tunisian locations, with their authentic atmosphere and the people who actually work or hang out there, keeping it true to life. The suburban train, the bars and the bus station are all filmed in a documentary style.

I wanted to put the film's fictional characters into the town's liveliest and busiest places. Even in the dusty phosphate mines, a centre of resistance to the Ben Ali regime, the workers are playing themselves.

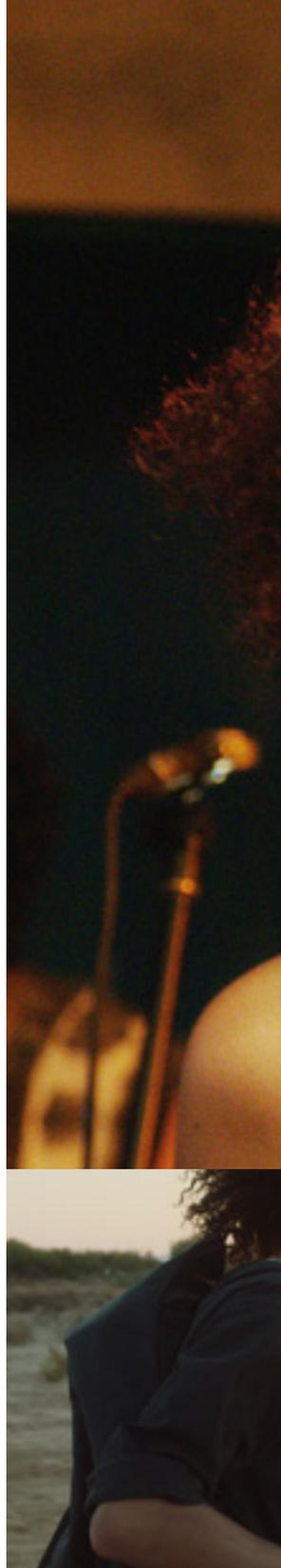
In the film, this scene marks a break, creating some distance from the story and zooming out to get a picture of the country as a whole. We are reminded of how the words of the songs come from a place far away and how deep the feeling of suffocation runs in society. The film pays homage to these workers, who are still in conflict with the government today, by showing how their resistance paved the way for the uprising in the country. They started expressing their discontent in 2008, well before Bouazizi's now-famous act.

In the film, music is a form of resistance. Iraqi Khyam Allami is the composer.

Music and dance are releases that have always been part of Tunisian popular culture. The 'Mizwad', traditional music, dances and wedding celebrations are a really intense spectacle and a way for people to let loose. A rap music scene has recently been emerging in Tunisia, coming from the poorer districts. For some people it offers an escape and is a powerful form of resistance that can reach a large number of people. The state clearly sees these anti-establishment rappers as a threat and has been clamping down, taking their lyrics as a pretext to arrest them.

Music was the film's biggest challenge because we not only had to find an actress who could sing, but we also had to form a band and write the music and the lyrics. At times I thought it would be impossible. I met a lot of musicians, but we didn't see things the same way.

And then one day, by chance, I was at a concert in Paris and found myself completely entranced by a group I saw there: the Alif Ensemble. Khyam was one of the five musicians who all came from different Arab countries. He wrote the songs Baya would sing, and they rehearsed for weeks on end before the filming began. This helped them to gel. The music swept all of us along with it.





SOME POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

What does this film tell us about the position and role of art in society?

les grignoux



10 YEARS OF EUROPEAN CINEMA FOR EUROPEANS

The European Parliament is pleased to present the three films competing for the 2016 LUX FILM PRIZE.

À PEINE J'OUVRE LES YEUX (*As I open my eyes*), by Leyla Bouzid
France, Tunisia, Belgium, United Arab Emirates

MA VIE DE COURGETTE (*My life as a Courgette*), by Claude Barras
Switzerland, France

TONI ERDMANN, by Maren Ade
Germany, Austria, Romania

These multi-faceted stories, which are the result of the great dedication and creativity of talented young European film directors, will be screened during the fifth edition of the LUX FILM DAYS.

LUX FILM PRIZE

Culture plays a fundamental role in constructing our societies.

With this in mind, the European Parliament launched the LUX FILM PRIZE in 2007 with the aim of enhancing the circulation of European films across Europe and sparking Europe-wide debate and discussion about major societal issues.

The LUX FILM PRIZE is a unique initiative. While most European co-productions are shown only in their country of origin and are rarely distributed elsewhere, even within the EU, the LUX FILM PRIZE gives three European films the rare opportunity to be subtitled in the EU's 24 official languages.

The winner of the LUX FILM PRIZE will be chosen by the Members of the European Parliament and announced on 23 November 2016.

LUX FILM DAYS

The LUX FILM PRIZE gave rise to the LUX FILM DAYS. Since 2012, the three films competing for the LUX FILM PRIZE have been shown to a wider European audience during the LUX FILM DAYS.

The LUX FILM DAYS invite you to enjoy an indelible cultural experience that transcends borders. From October to December 2016, you will be able to join cinema lovers from across Europe in watching screenings of *À peine j'ouvre les yeux* (*As I open my eyes*), *Ma vie de Courgette* (*My life as a Courgette*) and *Toni Erdmann* in one of the EU's 24 official languages. Don't forget to vote for your favourite film via our website <http://luxprize.eu> or our Facebook page!

AUDIENCE MENTION

The Audience Mention is the LUX FILM PRIZE people's choice award. Don't forget to vote for *À peine j'ouvre les yeux* (*As I open my eyes*), *Ma vie de Courgette* (*My life as a Courgette*) or *Toni Erdmann*! You might be chosen to go to the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in July 2017 — courtesy of the European Parliament — and announce the winner of the Audience Mention.

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& VOTE



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LUX
PRIZE
.EU

DIRECTOR: Leyla Bouzid

SCREENPLAY: Leyla Bouzid, Marie-Sophie Chambon

CAST: Baya Medhaffer, Ghalia Benali, Montassar Ayari, Lassaad Jamoussi, Aymen Omrani

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Sébastien Goepfert

MUSIC: Khyam Allami

PRODUCERS: Sandra da Fonseca, Imed Marzouk

PRODUCTION: Blue Monday Productions, Propaganda Production

CO-PRODUCTION: Hélicotronic

YEAR: 2015

DURATION: 102'

GENRE: Fiction

COUNTRIES: France, Tunisia, Belgium, United Arab Emirates

ORIGINAL VERSION: Arabic



