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Thalathoun Of Fadhel Djaziri, and the Afforded Opportunity to the Contemporary Generations to Re-Live the History of Tunisia, Their Homeland

## MAKING OF, MAKING RE-LIVE

### ***Thalathoun of Fadhel Djaziri, and the Afforded Opportunity to the Contemporary Generations to Re-Live the History of Tunisia, Their Homeland<sup>1</sup>***

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In addition to the variance between the histories of different nations, the old time of one same population, may be defined as so heterogeneous due to the distinction of each region of the related country, by its own specificities: it is the case of The Tunisian territory, having welcomed numerous different civilizations

A fertile DNA of cultural heritage figures either materially through the archaeological sites that testify the different dynasties, which have passed through and left traces, or immaterially through different styles of music, garments, rites, cuisine et cetera, which immortalize the multiple civilizations that have crossed Tunisia.

The new generations, while studying the history of their nations, may sometimes feel deeply attached to one of its interesting stages, until they like it so much as to compose a drama and play it during a course, an exam or an educational celebration, of course under the supervision of their teacher. But due to the limited financial budget of an educational framework, such a history illustration stills so limited.

What if a cinema production company supports the making of a historical film, whose patriot filmmaker does his utmost to give birth to a masterpiece, which can be classified as a memory, and would reach a big, various and fertile audience?

*Thalathoun* movie made by Fadhel El Jaziri in 2007 is a perfect example to such quest (Jaziri, 2007). In order to demonstrate the creation of memories, distinguished by an artistic fingerprint through the fiction movies, I will analyse this movie, to reveal how much it makes the Tunisian audience proud of their past, of the history of their homeland and of their identity.

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<sup>1</sup> My recognition to the English teacher : Mr **Pietro Polic (Italia)** for having reviewed my article before my application



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Looking at the title of the movie “*Thalathoun*”, we can deduce that it refers to a specific period of Tunisia’s history: the thirties. Yet, at the international level, the thirties represent the worst time lapse of history, starting with the Wall Street crash of 1929 which caused a downfall called the Great Depression, due to the traumatic effect of poverty, unemployment, and most of all the Second World War.

And in Tunisia, under the French Protectorate and the ruling of Ahmed II Ben Ali Bey, France kept the Bayat system, while maintaining the power in the hands of the general resident, which pushed the Tunisians to revolt in April 1938 calling upon the establishment of a Tunisian Parliament.

In this context, the French geographer Jean Poncet, (Poncet, 1976) in his research about the influence of the 30s crisis on the French colonisation, states that:”*the thirties crisis gave a decisive impulse for the national movement of struggle for independence*”<sup>2</sup>

Such a deep link between the cinematographic creativity and the memory of Tunisia, which is perfectly highlighted by Tunisia’s cultural heritage, in other words our memory, or let’s say our identity, without which, we are lost; is clearly represented through the famous Tunisian characters of the movie *Thalathoun* such as: Tahar Haddad the syndicalist thinker and the women rights advocate , Abou Al Kacem Al Chebbi, the Poet and lawyer, Ali Eddouaji, The novelist, dramatist and caricaturist , and Mohamed Ali El Hammi, the unionist, trade union movement founder.

Without forgetting three “Indispensable” secondary roles of Habib Bourguiba the founder of the neodostour during the thirties, and later Tunisia’s president for three decades: 1956-1986 Ahmed II Ben Ali Bey, the ruler of Tunisia from 1929 to 1942, year of his death and Zine EL Aabidine Essnoussi (1901-1965), the journalist, reformer and one of the leaders of Arab contemporary literature, who condemned the modern Arab thought.

In the following diagram *figure.1*, the temporal axis represented in yellow, evokes the common period in which the characters illustrated in the film *Thalathoun* existed and revolted together. Yet, the exact resemblance between the real historical figures and the role players *figure.2*, is not purely coincidental; such choice should be made only purposely, in order to make the representation, the closest possible to the true history, and make the audience feel as if they were viewing, and even re-living the situation with the real Chebbi, Haddad, young Bourguiba, and so on.

<sup>2</sup> This is my own translation to this french extract from the mentionned reference: *La crise des années 30 a donné une impulsion décisive au mouvement national de lutte pour l’indépendance. »*



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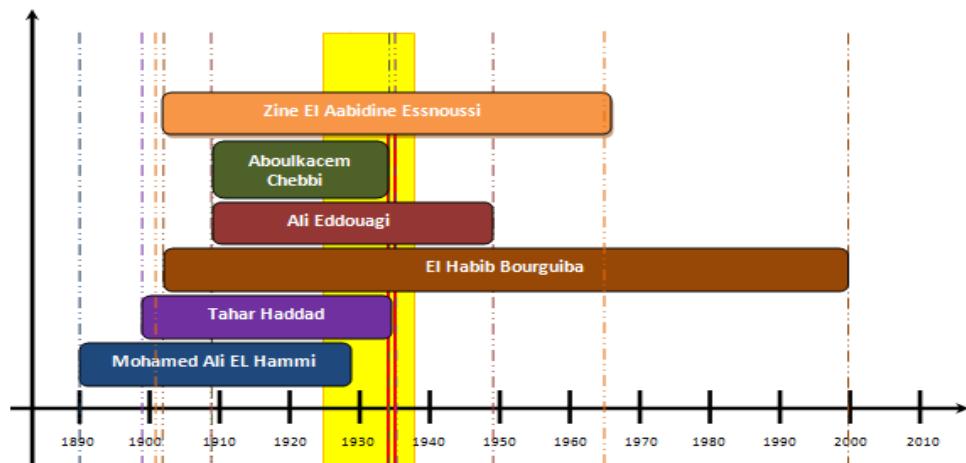


Figure 1: a common period of living between the characters

In order to compare the rates of the palpable and the fictional in the movie and to verify how far the script corresponds to the real historical events, I made a long research about the bygone era of the thirties in Tunisia, to facilitate the comparison, in addition to arranging an interview with the film maker Fadhel Jaziri on August, 11th, 2017. As a result, I have found much accuracy between what was illustrated in the movie and what really took place in Tunisia and has been made by the rebels, that I will precise.



Figure 2: An exact resemblance between the historical figures and the protagonists; making the audience re-live the situation



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Yet, I found that the film maker, since the storyboard plotting stage, has described with precision, the features on the protagonists faces, in addition to the view angle of the camera and the sound effects that should be added. These are amplification waves which would magnify the illustrated situation of the historical period of the thirties.

Jaziri has made, the prelude to *Thalathoun*, beginning with the prayer call, as a sound track associated with the shot of the Zaytouna Mosque from a shooting angle of worms eye , as a way to magnify its value, being an architectural heritage, which dates back to the period of the Islamic conquest of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, through the construction order, issued by Hassan Ibn Annooman in 698 AD, and also which reflects the Punic civilization, through the authentic columns brought for construction, from the ruins of the old city of Carthage.

The sound track, parallel to the prayer call, contains also the voice of Taher Hadded, very ill during his last hours, remembering -as a flashback, which represents the major skeleton of the continuous movie narration- the beautiful past that he has spent with his friends. Between his souvenirs, figures the creation of the Tunisian workers' syndicate which took place during the thirties, by the above-mentioned character, Mohamed Ali El Hammi.

Many close ups, varying from medium to extreme, were taken showing the faces of Mohamed Ali El Hammi and some of the rebels. From the angry contracted faces to the rangy feet, passing through the fingers of Mohamed Ali El Hammi which look like Tiger Claws, we imperatively deduce that these actors' body language shows how deep their wound was, and how determined and resolved they were, to take the path of freedom by means of resistance, at any cost. Linking between such shots and sound track enhances the heartbeat of the audience, making them re-live the situation.

In the flashback, Taher El Hadded remembered the day of founding the syndicate, during which he has written a diary (Haddad, 1927) as a chapter of his book *figure. 3*, in order to immortalize the event. Such a scene was included from the concept to the shooting stages.



Figure 3: Illustration of the event's notation by Taher El Hadded



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And this is a comparison *figure. 4* between the dialogue and screenplay and an extract of his book:

**Extract from the book of Taher Haddad**  
**Chapter XI Page 135**

تاسيس النقابات التونسيّة  
فتنا سأبّدأ : إنّ مسألة الرّيسبيك يكتوّن قد امتحنّها خمسة  
امتحنّيات قبل الآخرين دون أن يجدوا من يساعدّهم أو يدعمّهم بزمانة  
ما عن غيرهم ونا انتصّ لهم جانباً من المفكّرين التّونسيّين في  
هذه الامتحنّيات الأخيّر للّقطّيل سيرهم دون أن يستكثّروا المساعدة اختار  
النقابات التّونسيّة المقرونة : سقط هذَا على ذلك الاتّحاد وأراد التّدرّك  
**العقلانيّة والّذوقية** ر. العبرّي (الّذوقية) - **العقلانيّة** - 1927

**Extract from the screenplay of the movie**  
**Scene 3 Screenplay 9**

جمع: ..... 3.8  
- محمد علي، محمد علي: ..... 3.9  
محمد علي: ..... 3.9  
- شيخنا جماعة البرط كيف أضربوا ..... 3.9  
ما وقف لهم هذه و هذه ما واسفهم ..... 3.10  
محمد علي: ..... 3.10  
- هنّي متّوا الفصلوا على القورة واستكروا... ..... 3.10

screenplay extract taken with the agreement of the film maker.

Figure 4: A comparison between Hadded's Book Chapter and an extract of the screenplay<sup>3</sup>

A famous conference entitled *Al Khayel Al Cheeri Inda Al Arab* (2013), organised by the poet Abou Al Kacem Al Chebbi *figure. 5*, and published later as a book with the same title, took place in Khaldouniya School. Its topic was about the style of critics, with a comparison between the eastern and western literature, and a call for innovation. Jaziri's extraction of many parts from this book (underlined in the figure) along with additions from Chebbi's speech, makes the spectators re-live the event exactly as it took place.

أجل، فإن نظرة الأدب العربي إلى المرأة نظرة دنيئة سافلة منحطّة إلى أقصى قرار  
من المادة، لا تفهم من المرأة إلا أنها جسد يُشتهي ومتّعة من متع العيش الدنيء ...  
ص46

الشاعر العربي لم يرفع بصره إلى ما هو أدنى من ذلك بكثير، فهو إذا حدث عن جمال  
المرأة لم يتحدث عنه كفّن مستقل متجرد عن هاته المظاهر المادية التي تتصل باللّنصر  
والرّيدف ونحوهما، وإنما تحدث عن هذا الجمال المتّهيل (الذّي يوزن بالرّبط والّقطّيل)  
من الشّحم واللّحم) كائناً الجمال جسد يُجسّس ومادة تُمسّ، أما أن يتحدث عنه كما يقول  
ص47

غراء، ميسام، كان حديثها  
در تحدّث نظمها، منتشر  
مخطوطّة الساقين، مضمرة الحشا  
ريّا الروايف، خلفها ممكّور<sup>27</sup>  
دل ولا كوقارها توقير  
لا حسنها حسن، ولا كدلّالها  
ص54

Figure 5: Abou Al Kacem Al Chebbi at Khaldouniya

Another important historical event was illustrated through an intercut made by the director between shot scenes and extracts from the national archive, to illustrate the famous Eucharistic congress, which was the 30th in a series of Catholic religious conferences, held in the Christian countries of the European continent.

<sup>3</sup> Fadhel Jaziri illustrated Taher Haddad (*figure 3*) while taking notes of the rebelling, as a part of his book *Tunisian workers and the emergence of the trade union movement*, And then formulated the dialogue (*figure 4*) in a revolutionary way, based on the description of this revolution(in the page 135 of the book), precisely on the day of the announcement of the establishment of the Tunisian Workers' Union



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Carthage was chosen to welcome this event, being an ancient capital of Christianity in North Africa. The Tunisians considered this conference as a challenge to their Islamic feelings, especially in the distribution of leaflets in Arabic calling on Tunisians to convert to Christianity.

The reaction of the rebellious citizens to this event *figure. 6*, was illustrated through a parallel editing between the call for rejecting the event in the Zaytouna Mosque courtyard and the Dockers meeting at the port, while garnishing the dialogue with Al Hadded Poem “El yed fel yed, ma nkhaf men Had” (which means hand in hand we are not afraid) written during that manifestation.



Figure 6: Rebels Refusal of the Eucharistic Congress

The Tunisian historian and journalist Sadok Zmorli, has written the biography of the editor Zine El Aabidine Essnoussi as a chapter of his book ‘Aâlam Tounisyoun’ (الزمري، 1986)-Tunisian Celebrities. Linking this biography of Essnoussi, to the interview I made with Mr. Jaziri and the scene of Essnoussi’s refusal to edit Haddad second book: Imraatouna Fi Sharia Wal Mojamaâ, I deduced the reason of this rejection *figure. 7*, after having supported his first book: since Essnoussi had got married to the daughter of Ahmed II Ben Ali Bey, he was no more able to support the reformers by editing their work.

This figure is a junction between a footnote from Zmorli’s book, particularly the chapter on Essnoussi, mentioning his involvement with the royal family, and the snapshot of the movie, which illustrates his refusal to perform the editing.



(١) كاتب قرارات العابدين إلسنوسي محرر وناشر من إجلاء الأمير أحمد بن مكي الشاهي الذي توافق الإماراة من سنة 1929 إلى سنة 1942.

Figure 7: Snoussi's Rejection of Haddad's Book Editing, due to his alliance with the Bey



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In the last shot of the movie script, figures Taher El Hadded -who was thrice shocked by the deaths of his beloved friends Abou Al Kacem Al Chebbi, Mohammed Ali El Hammi and the young Aâsfour - as if he was joining them through a dissolving transition *figure. 8*. The future index Aâsfour, taken in the hands of Taher Al Hadded, symbolises the youth that will continue the revolution requesting the independence and the installation of parliament.



Figure 8: Dissolving Transition showing Hadded's death and his joining to his close missed friends

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I replayed the movie uncountable times to capture in every vision, a new detail, to which I had not paid attention in my previous viewings. Yet, many other events and history points were deeply and identically represented in this priceless masterpiece making it eligible to be even a thesis topic.

Historical movies, like Thalathoun, may be used for an educational goal, as a way to teach students the history of their homeland, through a screening debate.

Such methodology of teaching history, may bring to the course of history an enjoyable aura, switch the magisterial (vertical) courses to a friendly brainstorming between the students, having the teacher as coordinator of the course, which could make them draw it through speeches, presentations, workshops.... In this way, students will be the course redactors. The teacher-editor will just link the works, correct mistakes and add missing information: I taught my courses in this way, until upsetting my students' view to the Cinema history subject, from boring to enjoyable.

...End...



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