

# The secret of a couscous: food and identity

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## Abstract

Human nature leads man to a constant search for sensory experiences. Nothing unites mankind as the purpose of sensual pleasure does. Food, the act of eating, is more than a physical, biological and basic need for survival. It is also an action that involves or may involve, each of the senses, so that one can experience a new, different and pleasant feel. The cinema is in the same position: it presupposes the search for sensations. In both fields, cinematographic and gastronomic, sensory perceptions of different nature occur, but both result in the possibility of connecting different senses and feelings that arise from them. The present study aims at demonstrating how cinema constitutes a representation of cultural and social identities. The film *The secret of a couscous* is analyzed from the gastronomic viewpoint and the relationships established between the characters around a specific food.

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*We may live without friends; we may live without books;  
but civilized man cannot live without cooks.*

Owen Meredith

## Introduction

In the words of historian Kenneth Kiple, in his book *A Movable Feast: Ten Millennia Of Food Globalization*,<sup>1</sup> while he explains the history of the second courses in North Africa, he affirms, with regard to the couscous:

*Initially, couscous consisted of a coarsely ground grain bran turned into a kind of bran pasta called kuskussù. But as the dish evolved, dough was employed and shaped it into sizes ranging from pellets to tiny balls. These were prepared in tiered clay devices within which vegetables, and perhaps mutton were cooked on the lower level and the couscous steamed on top. From North Africa, couscous spilled out into the Mediterranean.*

From this identity food element of a people and a culture, Abdellatif Kechiche, with the film *The secret of the grain*,<sup>2</sup> constructs a narrative that translates family and community relationships of North African migrants in the host country, France, in the present century.

Slimane lives and works in the coastal city of Sète, France. After more than three decades of service, he is dismissed and thus, has to face the feeling of worthlessness. With the support of his family and the Arab immigrant community, he intends to achieve the dream of opening a restaurant on a boat, giving sense to his life and his role as a patriarch.

The aim of this analysis is to establish the relationship between cinema and food as a historical source and social analysis. In this case, the present study starts from the featured food, couscous, in an effort to understand the particular context of conflict experienced by the North African people living in France at the beginning of this century.

*The secret of the grain* makes known the context of the Arab community in the host country, relating different aspects of the integration process, such as the lack of job security, the interaction with other immigrant communities and family relationships reasoned on solidarity-based and shared identity values. It also reflects on today's important issues, present in the Western culture, namely "the family" as an institution, the phenomenon of migration, xenophobia, the working world, particularly the increasing difficulty of ensuring a regular livelihood for the household, personal/professional achievement framed in a context of social validity, and finally, politics.

## Couscous as an integrative food

Slimane has a dream: opening a restaurant on a boat. This project is born when confronted with the unemployment scenario. The restaurant embodies his chance of survival.

The fish couscous that his ex-wife prepares acts as a bridge between all of them. In a sense, it is the revelation of an act of love. A generous and unselfish love. Souda do not want to restore the marriage to Slimane, however, he is a family member, it is one of hers and it is worth giving him a second chance. Couscous, both in the family lunch and the inaugural dinner, or the offer to a neighbor and a beggar (who, perhaps metaphorically, is the only – or the first – to eat couscous in the restaurant's opening night), is the integrative and aggregative factor.

In the essential work by Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste*,<sup>3</sup> the author establishes the relationship between food and happiness, distinguishing the primary act of eating and human feeding. For Brillat-Savarin, the pleasure of the table lies essentially in the friendship and coexistence that this allows.<sup>3,4</sup>

Also, in Kechiche's work<sup>2</sup>, the inextricable relation between the table and its condition as an element of conviviality and happiness is established.

## The family lunch

The study of sociability and gastronomy throughout history has shown the importance of eating together. Human beings take pleasure and joy in eating. The table, which serves as a platform to the act of eating, but also to sociability, is where «ties between people within the family unit» are reinforced and the place to «affirm the identity of various social groups.»<sup>5</sup>

It seems appropriate here to make a distinction between the act of nourishing oneself and the act of eating. Accordingly, as is becoming usual among various authors, the difference that draws a clear boundary between the nutritional and the survival act is presented, as well as and the social act related to «customs, protocols, behaviors and situations [...], what may be eaten is as important as when to eat, where to eat, how to eat and with whom».<sup>6</sup>

The act of eating with others usually takes place with the family. In the family context, situations like staying at the table and convivial experiences are – or were – more regular and common. Despite the fact that food has become less and less identified with the domestic universe, it has established itself as a mass consumption market, recording the considerable evolution and growth of restaurant and catering industry, taking the focus off home cooking that initially came about around the fireplace. The kitchen was the heart of the home, where family relationships became cemented and consolidated.

Family daily life has undergone profound changes due to the urbanization and industrialization phenomena, especially from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Phenomena such as the entrance of women into the professional ranks, significant improvements in living conditions and access to education, the popularization of the automobile, and even a greater access to leisure, travel and holidays, are relevant factors for these changes and for the relationship observed since then in families that stay at home, particularly women, and the consequent changes in habits related to the sociability dynamics and the relationships between diners.

Noticeably, under this set of circumstances, meals outside the household suffer a significant increase, triggering the development and growth of food service, both for companies and schools, as well as for communities, with the implementation of differentiated services, particularly the *self-service*.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the increase in the eating out phenomenon, the tradition of family lunch – especially on Sundays – is an ingrained social aspect, subject to less radical and time-consuming implementation changes over the last few decades. Although the advancement of the use of public spaces constitutes a phenomenon that has invaded the domestic sphere and changed some expressions of family relationships, the house remained the private domain, establishing the boundary between public and private life, although some aspects of the latter also occur in the public space. Also, the permeability of the home environment to the outside can be observed: welcoming friends and neighbors at home. The topicality of Pereira Brandão's ideas, proposed in the late nineteenth century, when he defined home as «an inexhaustible subject for study, because besides containing family destinations, it is also the focus where strangers come to gather, attracted by lively parties, the freedom of love and the mutual relationships based on thousands of interests»<sup>7</sup> clearly fits to illustrate the family lunch that one can follow in the history of the 21<sup>st</sup> century .

This chain of affection that unites everyone around the table, during the couscous lunch, reveals the complicity between the actors. The spontaneity with which the conversation that takes place during the meal allows the construction of affective relations that unite them. Conversation becomes a practice of friendliness, a reminiscence of old times and also an everyday phenomenon that crosses different social groups with different degrees of relevance and permanence. The great gains of the Industrial Revolution, media and entertainment, altered the importance that conversation had reached in traditional societies. The practice of dialogue appeared in a particular way in manuals of civility, where elegance and politeness were defended in this practice. Portugal had strong defenders, such as Antonio Feliciano de Castilho, who observed in the conversation «rites of conviviality between members of a family and between different families; conversation, which is for many people their only theater, their only Philharmonic, their only literature; that

is it, this wonderful and the most kind thing [...], if not the most natural, the oldest, the most unconditional, the most absolute and the most universal of all parties geared towards pleasure ?! [...] To the feast of conversation, understanding, memory, fantasy, tastes, interests, and each one's affections contribute. Actives and passives at the same time, all of them give and all of them receive; they give something; they receive more. One can learn about men, about life, about the notion of treating others, about benevolence, it expands the heart, the uncounted hours fly, friendships take shape or are improved, they are sown or green, and loves become stronger».<sup>8</sup>

Also, in the film *The secret of the grain*, Souda's home, Slimane's former wife, is the meeting point for family and friends. It is at the table, during the Sunday family lunch, that conversations about food, love and cultural differences take place. Interests and affections are naturally and spontaneously manifested. Souda's ability to gather everyone under the pretext of a couscous dish, suggests food's role in today's society, where cultural differences and the different contexts into which individuals gravitate are mitigated. Food has a double role, both to distinguish and to bring together, harmonize. If on one hand the identity issue comes out, defining the individual as someone belonging to a specific group, the rapprochement of different cultures, different universes, is also raised. The existing barriers in both cultures that intertwine in the narrative are not generating distance and remoteness, but they allow the discovery of different worlds. Again, cuisine unites people from different origins, but who look for the same, the sensory pleasure that food gives.

The identity reinforces the sense of belonging. The couscous, in the family, has a sociability function. The topics of conversation are the same: love and the Arabic language. Both get closer or move away. However, the pleasure associated with that meal is the same for everyone. The pleasure of extending the meal is expressed by all while sharing the couscous. Souda is praised for her cooking. She is aware of her role as a woman that feeds the family and extends this gift to those outside the family context. Although her marriage to Slimane has come to an end and, on her part, there is no intention to resume the relation, but the ties of love and solidarity remain. Souda shares her couscous at home, but sets aside two dishes for Slimane and a neighbor, in a sharing exercise that is also translates into solidarity. That is one of secrets of the couscous, it strengthens the bonds of solidarity.

Slimane receives the visit from his children Majid and Riadh, who take the couscous. And the sharing cycle can be also noticed once more when Slimane shares the food with Rym, his stepdaughter. During the meal, Slimane is subject to different opinions about his future, even if his purpose is to open a restaurant.

## The restaurant

It is not up to the present article to present the history of food services and restaurants since their inception to the present day, but it is possible to point out the genesis of this term in order to understand the principle of what the restaurant represents, an aspect also highlighted by the film mentioned here.

When Boulanger opened his establishment in Paris near the Louvre, around 1765, and began to sell *restaurants* or ‘restorative broths’, i.e., hearty meat-based broths to restore the weakened, certainly he was not aware of the phenomenon he had elicited and the dissemination of the term “restaurant”. After the end of the late Middle Ages period, when the word “restaurant” was used to refer to these succulent broths made from chicken, beef, various roots crops, onions, seasoning herbs and, depending on the recipes, spices, candy sugar, toasted bread or barley, butter, as well as apparently unusual products such as dried rose petals, Damascus raisin grapes, amber, etc. To attract customers, Boulanger wrote on the façade of its establishment the following Gospel sentence: *«Venite ad me omnes qui stomacho laboratis et ego vos restaurabo.»*<sup>9</sup>

The term was imposed and, nowadays, we have “restaurant” in France and in England, “ristorante” in Italy, and Spain and Portugal “restaurante”. It has already gone beyond the borders of Europe reaching as far off or distant places such as Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Rio de Janeiro or Cairo. Also, the French cooks all over the world still come out their restaurants with invitations. Although French cuisine maintains a line, even though in a constant state of renewal, the current trend is that of its permeability to foreign influence, namely the immigrant communities in France.<sup>9</sup>

Slimane’s restaurant, especially the boat-restaurant, materializes his chance of survival. A survival that does not take place on the physical level, but rather on the mental level. In this film, it represents two distinct but interconnected aspects throughout the narrative. On the one hand, it is the motto for his self-assertion and recovery as an individual, as a man that is worthy of his family, his community and society in general. He is seized by a deep feeling of worthlessness, therefore, his only alternative is to build a project so that he can earn respect from his family and himself.

On the other, it constitutes a form of cultural identity and distinction, but inclusive at the same time. Slimane is of North African (Maghrebian) origin, culturally formed under the Arab precepts, proud of his identity, his community, but he is a man who lives in France, and as such he wants to be recognized, as an enterprising man who responds to the wishes of his peers, but also to French people’s expectations, as they want to experience some exoticism in relation to food.

This is the second secret of couscous. The meaning of the couscous for Slimane. Its role in his relationship as an individual and as a member of two communities: the home community and the host.

The couscous is analyzed here as a food anchor which reveals the cultural miscegenation. According to the studies carried out by Santos, “the formation of food taste does not occur exclusively due to the nutritional aspect, but biological. Food is a historical category, as patterns of placement stability, changes in dietary habits and practices are rooted in their own social dynamics. Food is not just food. No food that goes into our mouths is neutral. The historicity of gastronomic sensitivity explains and is explained by cultural and social events that act as a mirror of an era and that marked an era.»<sup>10</sup>

From this point of view, couscous, food and cultural identity of the Arab community in Sète, is indeed the food that can unite the two communities, acting as link between cultures and distinct and distant social behaviors.

## The “family” institution

The family is one of the striking features of the narrative *The secret of the grain*. It is the raw material of relational dynamics. Fundamentally, it plays a key role in bringing together and uniting different elements, the blood family and the family that arises from affinities, and both strengthen the ties of solidarity and mutual aid. They contribute to the construction of the protagonist and are both responsible for the inglorious outcome and the collapse of Slimane project.

Souda is the matriarch, the clan leader, the selfless woman and a catalyst for the general welfare. Not only for the family, but also for those who are close to her or deprived and neglected by the responsible social structures. Her attitude cannot always contribute to the happiness of the different family members, among whom blood ties determine divisive behaviors.

Throughout the film narrative, one can observe the different roles played by the family, most often as an integrative element, but also as a divider.

## Integrative

Initially encouraged by Rym, his stepdaughter, and then by all family members and the Arab community to which he belongs, Slimane acquires and retrieves an empty boat, and build the restaurant. This retrieval may be a metaphor: his own personal recovery. The rebirth of hope, of new a life, of his dignity.

Slimane’s firmness of purpose is mainly fed by Rym. More than any other character, the stepdaughter tries, from the very first moment of the project, to contribute to the success of the enterprise.

The relationship between Slimane and Rym will eventually be the one that best defines a family connection based on love and dedication. Since the beginning of the narrative, Rym's personality and her affection for Slimane appear in a transparent and consistent manner. In the first sequence, no one accepts the fish offered by Slimane as his stepdaughter does. Souda refuses it, Karima despises it, Rym is overjoyed and ostensibly thanks Slimane. More than the value assigned to the fish offered, this act reveals a deep sense of love and communion with him, who represents a paternal figure for her. Therefore, her commitment to contribute to the realization of Slimane's dream/project is constant. She relentlessly struggles against the bureaucratic process; unifies efforts and involves her mother, Latifa, and the Arab community with whom they share the community living space; contests the suggestions of Slimane's children to return to his home country; and finally, she is also tireless in carrying out the final plan to entertain guests with her sensual dance while the others attempt to resolve the problem of the lack of couscous.

Throughout the narrative, the viewer has access to other characters, who also show a relevant and integrative role. Slimane's children, albeit with some initial reluctance, eventually act as enablers in the construction of their father's project. In concrete terms, Riadh stands out, as he helps his father to retrieve the boat. His help is precious in this context of physical work and involvement in the project. Milder in temper than his brothers, he is a collaborator, a peacemaker and the only one who feels affection for Rym. A feeling that has nothing of fraternal. For him, Rym embodies desire.

Olfa behaves identically to Riadh. More discreetly, her role is also to support the father's dream. She believes in Souda's love for Slimane and seems to be the only one that keeps the faith in the power of that love and the possibility of the resumption of her parents' marital relationship. During the party, she has a decisive role in achieving various tasks, including the responsibility to bring the couscous from home to the boat. Confident in the allocation of tasks, she believes that Majid, with who she transported the couscous, took all the pots of food to the boat. The shock of discovering the lack of food is reflected in a desperate anguish to make contact by telephone with her brother that left the party, taking with him the pan with the main ingredient, the couscous!

Karima, Slimane and Souda's eldest daughter, exercises dominion over family relationships – actually she follows in her mother's footsteps. Somehow, the female characters in the narrative are, all of them, women with strong personalities, determined, accustomed to overcome adversity. However, their inner strength leads them to tenaciously pursue their goals, tracing a thin line between aggression and determination.

In family disputes, particularly in the stormy relationship between Majid and Julia, Karima is the element that shows a more assertive and coherent attitude. She disagrees with her brother's adulterous behavior, decrying and making him reflect on his attitude. At the same time, she warns



Julia about her public displays of anger and sadness, showing that family conflicts should be solved in the private space, in a mature manner and without affecting the extended family relationships.

Despite having little sympathy for her father's second family, Rym and Latifa, with effort, Karima can demonstrate a friendly and peaceful behavior towards both. The feelings expressed at the boat-restaurant opening party invariably lead to a search for an achievement and the resolution of all problems and conflicts, ensuring success to her father's project. Slimane is the integrative element of all these characters. All of them converge for the ultimate recovery of that man, either as a relative or a friend.

Before Slimane buys the boat, Majid encourages him to return to his home country, but then he gets involved, like all others, to realize his father's project. However, his unwise character, individualism and selfishness revealed in his personal behavior would determine the failure of the family's enterprise.

Latifa does not have a homogeneous behavior throughout the narrative; her relationship with Slimane oscillates between rendition and affection, and disappointment and resignation. Although the husband feels distressed with her inability to offer him stability, Latifa does not see their relationship as an exercise of power. Nonetheless, at some moments she feels disappointed and abandons Slimane's dream. At the eleventh hour, however, she is persuaded by her daughter and embraces the cause that moves everybody. Although she is not a magnificent cook like Souda, she tries, in the epilogue, to save the party and prepare the couscous.

As mentioned earlier, it is up to Souda to unite, to congregate through food. She transforms this food in the focal point of the narrative: the couscous in the family; couscous as a gift; couscous as a possibility of Slimane's physical and psychological salvation; couscous as a reinforcement of the sense of belonging and identity; couscous as a differentiating mechanism and couscous as an agent triggering a disaster, the collapse of a dream, which leads to an outcome that promises to be fatal for Slimane.

## Disruptive

In this narrative, as it was mentioned above, the family has a crucial role in the outcome of the plot. Its role as an integrative system prevails, but one cannot neglect its power as a disruptive mechanism.

Majid is a character whose temper contributes more decisively to the tragic outcome of Slimane's dream. Throughout the narrative, his actions are motivated by personal goals that are not compatible with those around him, particularly regarding Julia, his wife. Majid's wife, of Eastern Europe origin,

knows she is betrayed by her husband, and by Souda, her mother-in-law, who is largely quiescent with the adulterous behavior of her son, and even facilitating his extramarital relations.

Julia feels abandoned and betrayed by everyone, not only by her husband but also by his family. Although Karima censure her brother, she asks Julia to handle her marriage problems less dramatically. Slimane, in his painful silence when confronted by Julia and her revolt, anguish and despair, is unable to provide any answers or bring her consolation. It is just one more tragedy and contradiction that arise in his life.

Souda is the integrative matriarch. She is the one who unites the family. Her couscous brings everyone together to accomplish Slimane's dream. Despite this unifying love, Souda does not welcome effectively her daughter-in-law. Albeit indirectly, she contributes to the dramatic and confrontational relationship that Julia has with Majid. The aid her mother-in-law gives Majid in his adulterous relationships motivates disappointment and Julia's wrath. Her cries resemble that of a wholesale animal, a being torn by pain. Indifference to Julia's suffering takes from Souda the absolute appeasing character.

The sordid and vile feelings and behaviors contribute to give those characters a human face and nature, just as important are those who show courage, boldness and determination.

## The community

According to Carlos Silva's concepts on the subject of cinema as a mechanism of «cultural representation of a particular group, thus expressing the way this group is seen, it is impossible not to include the movies as a communication media that influences this construction of identities».<sup>11</sup> It is also difficult not to connect the cultural background of the author of the film with the subject and the community concerned.

Of Tunisian origin, Kechiche emigrated to France with his family, when he was a child. With dual citizenship and well integrated into the French reality, his sensitivity to the immigrant issue is reflected in his work, particularly in this film. His point of view would be certainly different and conditioned by his cultural involvement with this community. The social differences and inequalities are analyzed as well as the Arab marks of identity.

Here, the film has entertainment as its primary purpose, but it works essentially as an object of reflection. The «relationship between cinema and cultural identity assumes that the film is undeniably an important cultural activity that acts like a reflection of a certain social segment that finds on the screen not only entertainment, but also a fictional mirror of their daily lives, their desires, problems, emotions and even dreams.»<sup>11</sup>

Although it is focused on the immigrant community, it will eventually be more appropriate to define it as *communities*, since the film is based on the relationship between the Arab community and the local one – the French.

## The immigration phenomenon

Abdellatif Kechiche becomes integrated to the cinematographic movement of the diaspora. This “immigration movie” focuses on the identity issue, on an individual, community and national level.

Despite the fact that many authors defend the idea that there is not a Maghrebian community in France, there are actually six million inhabitants of North African origin. A community that is distinguished by its cinematographic culture, with young filmmakers belonging to third generation immigrants from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, as in the case of Kechiche.

Called “beurs” by the French, they have in common the fact that they belong to a generation marked by religious and social prejudices, living between two cultures. They oscillate between Islamic tradition and Western modernity. The biggest challenge is their integration into the French society. This reality is often the subject of this cinema that is neither Maghrebian or French, but whose common denominator is the “subject of the search for an identity”.<sup>12</sup>

According to a study carried out in 2011 by the French Institute of Demographic Studies (INED),<sup>13</sup> «immigrants in France are less segregated than they were 50 years ago and their descendants are far less likely to live in poor neighborhoods», and the levels of segregation of North African immigrants has fallen 5%. This document also highlights that 72% of immigrants of second and third generations live outside of the poorest neighborhoods, underlining the French “dynamics of residential integration”.

In *The secret of the grain*, this integrated relationship is well exploited. Similarly, they are the search or the affirmation of an identity. Slimane worked his whole life in the shipyard. He is dismissed, but he has the intention to stay in the country that welcomed him. He feels included in this space. His children’s suggestion to return to his home country is not well received. He plans to stay in that territory and build something that will keep him integrated into the local community. Offering couscous, the mark that distinguishes him from the French, reveals the need to maintain the link highlighting, however, his cultural identity.

The recurring question “we are what we eat, or we eat what we are?”<sup>14</sup> arises in this context of gastronomic memory or gustatory memory. The couscous brings to Arab community their sense of belonging, which is not linked to a physical territory, but to a cultural heritage.

## Labor precariousness

It is common to associate immigrant labor to precarious labor, although this is not an exclusive attribute of immigrant labor. Currently, labor relations increasingly obey this paradigm, branching out to all categories of workers, including the highly skilled.

The immigration phenomenon is not a one-off issue, but rather it has perpetuity outlines in modern societies. One do not refer only to unskilled immigrants, but also, with increasing relevance, to highly specialized sectors that require high skills and abilities.

The “age factor” also has a bearing on unskilled immigrants. The ageing population reached an unimaginable spectrum, conditioning considerably the job market and the employment opportunities, besides altering unequivocally the immigrants condition itself.

Kechiche gives warning of these social issues in his cinematographic narrative. The *modus operandi* of an employer is subject to the new socioeconomic realities. Slimane is not old to retire, nor is sufficiently young and useful to perform an activity where there is an oversupply of labor. The loyalty for which he feels indebted is not included in the employer’s system parameters. The economy screams in unison his dispensability.

Throughout the movie, other characters will express that insecurity derived from labor precariousness. Could be his common scenario among immigrant community members extended to the rest of the population?

## Xenophobia and cultural integration policies

Models of immigrant integration in European countries have changed little. Successive waves of immigrants, mainly from former African colonies, reflect a slow Islamization of the country. The increasing number of Muslims push the country towards an attempt to adjust its approach to this reality, debugging its cultural references. The same State that has «implemented measures to restrain cultural and religious expressions of the new immigrants. The truth is that a large part of the Muslim population not only shows an aversion to their full social integration, but also states that they cannot identify with the republican values and the French culture».<sup>15</sup>

Kechiche compels to reflect about this fact through the movie *The secret of the grain*. Is it possible to notice xenophobic behaviors on the part of the French community in relation to the Arab community? Could not the act of accepting Slimane’s invitation for dinner be translated into a paternalistic attitude?

The reaction to the proposed project of the boat-restaurant mirrored, since the beginning, the local community resistance as well as that of the responsible entities. Bureaucratically, the difficulties encountered by Slimane gave a hint that the dream was doomed. Licences and loans were hampered or even denied, despite the unyielding determination showed by Rym – more than Slimane – in this endeavor. However, Slimane, in a last attempt, wants to show authorities and local forces the value of his project. He assumes that Souda's outstanding couscous will conquer the demanding palate of his guests, so that the project's approval would prevail.

While waiting for the main course, tempers become weaker, and although Slimane, his family and friends believe dinner is well on track, since the beginning, all guests have clearly defined their objection to the project. Conversations around the proposal from an immigrant raise doubts and reservations. There is no willingness to integrate this man and his dream in what they assume to be their domain. The man and his community will always be foreigners.

### *Happy end? No, thanks!*

“The happily-ever-after ending is sometimes imposed by producers to filmmakers. Such was the case of the classical Hollywood cinema: in romantic comedies, heroes of an unrequited love would finally meet and chastely kiss each other”.<sup>16</sup>

This is how the typical happy ending is defined in film language. This movie does not present such an ending. There are several phenomena that explains this fact: the tumultuous relations between the different family members, essentially Majid and Julia, and the couple with the rest of the family; Majid's disappearance with the couscous pot; the poor responsiveness of the French community to Slimane's project; the desperate and fruitless search for his son Slimane and the theft of Slimane's motorbike by adolescents of the community.

In this particular case, the situation gives the spectator a feeling of anguish and disbelief. Slimane cannot overcome the increasing adversities that appear since his dismissal; the bureaucratic hurdles for his boat-restaurant project; the initial distrust of his family toward this dream; doubts surrounding his relationship with Latifa; the difficulty to communicate with Souda; the numb and silent observation of Julia's anger; the tribulations with the opening dinner, ending with the act of “betrayal” by the community, as a result from the perverse and cruel joke related to the theft of the motorbike.

In the third part of the movie, the two scenes that will alternate – Rym's dance and the attempt to retrieve Slimane's motorbike – have no dialogues. Here, the voice was replaced by music and noise. The diegetic sound leads the spectator to the outcome of the story, on the one hand,

through the music that accompanies Rym's dance and inebriates guests, making them forget the food service fault; and on the other, Slimane's increasingly labored breathing, predicting the irreversibility of the disaster.

A quote by Brillat-Savarin, in his aforementioned book, *The physiology of taste*, supports the idea that «to receive guests is to take charge of their happiness during the entire time they are under your roof».<sup>3</sup> This is the motto prevailing throughout the opening dinner of the boat-restaurant. It is relevant to question whether this goal is achievable or achieved.

The end of the film, though is not expected to be happy, remains uncertain. Many suggestions are presented to the spectator. It is up to each one choose the ending. Will the guests accept Latifa's couscous? Can she overcome the lack of this ingredient with limited experience she has as a cook? Does Slimane just get ill or does he die?

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