

The film “Vive Laldjérie” depicts three different women who are in conflict with the culture around them. Goucem, the lead in the movie, is a 27 year old woman who works at a photo shop by day and is a wealthy doctor’s mistress by night. We learn at the beginning of the film of her financial dependance on him and also her desperation to marry him which he refuses to do. She shares a bedroom with her mother in a residential hotel. Her mother, Papicha, is a former cabaret dancer who has lost her purpose in life as she has aged. Throughout the film we discover that a newspaper has falsely called her a prostitute and Papicha spends the film disproving this to others. Their neighbor in the hotel is Fifi, who is a very busy prostitute. Though she has much more independence than any other character in the film, she is constantly working and also in danger due to her profession. The conflicts of each woman in this film all put into question the role of women in early 2000’s Algerian society. On the edge between the religious fundamentalist terror of the 90’s and the hope of the modernity of the new millennium, each woman battles between their traditional role as women and their desire for independence.

The film starts with Goucem at her job where we are introduced to a man who begins stalking and eventually harassing her throughout the film. This opens the film already with the viewers awareness of the danger of being woman. Goucem then goes and meets with the doctor she is having an affair with. In this scene Goucem is completely naked and there is a shot of her fully nude from the front, whereas the doctor is clothed. This objectification by the camera exposes the imbalance of power in this relationship but also overall in culture and society for Algerian women at the time. She then goes to a pizza restaurant where a man steals her wages from her purse. She speaks to another woman at the restaurant who tells her she should be thankful that she wasn’t physically assaulted or murdered, since this type of violence against women is so pervasive for them. As she is walking home she is again met with the man who has begun to stalk her, yet another reminder of how vulnerable to violence she is. We see her getting ready for a night out as her mother watches her through the mirror. Her mother is fully done up with a full face of makeup, a flower in her hair, and a beautiful floral negligee. Though she has aged the audience can see the similarities of how Papicha dolls herself up and how the younger Goucem wears makeup and ultra feminine and revealing clothes as a honed technique of using one’s femininity and sexuality to gain what they can. At the nightclub, we are shown a middle aged woman dancer wearing a show costume and standing up on a pedestal surrounded by young men looking up at her. Goucem similarly plays pool in a tight dress surrounded by men who stare

at her, even though she is not being payed as the dancer is, she is still the entertainment. Here, during Goucem's flirtation with a man at the club is the first mention of weapons. The man she is seducing has a gun which is seen as a desirable quality in him, walking the line between danger and protection, which is a representation of what every man in this film is. Is your relation to a man dangerous, or safety? They have sex in what looks like an abandoned military base, while Goucem's stalker and another random man watch. Afterwards the man she has sex with asks to see her again to which she says, "if not, will you kill me?". Everything about this sexual meeting is incredibly dangerous for Goucem, but she still engages with such acts liberally and seemingly derives pleasure and confidence from being both valued and endangered by these men and being able to survive them.

Next, we see Goucem and Papicha visit Goucem's dead father's grave at the cemetery. This is the first time we see them wearing veils and very modest dresses, very contrasting to the more modern and revealing clothes we have seen them wear in all the previous scenes of the movie. At the cemetery they fight about the affair Goucem is having with the doctor and Papicha gets put in a taxi where her fellow taxi riders are discussing an article in the newspaper about how cabaret owners and entertainers in Algiers had to move to France during the 90s due to the religious conservatism in Algeria at the time. The taxi riders judge them saying that they should've opened a mosque. Papicha gets very upset about this and leaves the taxi while they are still on the freeway and has to walk home on the freeway.

Goucem begins to get very paranoid about Sassi, as she can tell that he is lying about his whereabouts. She goes to visit his house to see if he is there, and his wife spots her, she goes to the hospital he works at and berates the nurses to tell her where he is. She calls him on the phone and begs him to marry her saying that she is 27 and can't live the way she is living anymore. With her unfulfilling and lowpaying job, and her and her mother's poverty and lack of power as women living in Algeria in the early 2000s it is true that a high earning man marrying her is one of her only tickets out of poverty.

Papicha begins to also start acting anxious and erratically after her experience in the taxi. On her way home she goes into a bar and drinks by herself, she tells a man who buys her a drink that her husband died of disgust and then begins singing along and dancing to the song playing in the bar. She takes off her veil and ties it around her waist, a similar costume to the costume that the dancer wears earlier in the film at the danceclub Goucem goes to. All the young men in the

room watch her dance and clap along to the music. Here we can see Papicha desperately try to reclaim the role she once had when she was younger, as the object of mens attention and as an artist who was able to be free from the constraints of traditional and religious soceital norms through the liberating act of dancing. Once she gets home she asks her neighbors for all their copies of the newspaper to try to find the article about the cabaret, the cococabana. She enlists the neighbors young daughter to look through each newspaper with her, covering her and Goucems room wall to wall with newspapers. The neighbors daughter says her mother has called Papicha a prostitute to which Papicha is very offended. Papicha explains to the girl that she was a dancer, and the girl tells her that she also wants to be a dancer. They go out to see the old cococabana club but it is closed and a young boy selling candy on the street tells them it is being turned into a mosque. Papicha gets the young girl to dance for the boy in exchange for a candy bar. They go back home and Papicha puts on her old dance costume and dances for the girl in her room, then she starts giving the girl dance lessons.

Goucem is still being stalked by the same man, but her deameanor towards him has changed and she starts to flirt back with him. The audience can tell that she is doing this in a desperate grasp at male validation in a moment where she feels rejected by Sassi. She spends an afternoon with him but he is not a wealthy man, he drives a little motorbike not even a car, and would probably not be able to lift her out of poverty. So she rejects him by saying that she is about to get married. That night she receives a letter in the mail from Sassi with the money for her and her mothers rent, and also with a promise that they will go to dinner together soon.

Papicha tells Goucem that she is going to sell her old apartment that she owns in Sidi-Moussa, a seemingly dangerous place to live, and reopen the copacabana. They have an argument about the dangers of doing such a thing due to the religious extremeism and violence in Algeria, to which Papicha declares "Terrorism is over!", Goucem insults her mother for being a topless dancer and says that she feeds her. This argument is the conceit of this whole film, the fear of violence from religious extremeists, the self policing and internalised misogyny that women partake in, and the powerlessness of women that lead them to sex work. Goucem is unable to recognize that they way she is able to support her mother is by sex work, receiving money from her wealthy lover Sassi. Papicha leaves the argument by saying, yes she was a half naked dancer but she was never a prostitute.

In Goucem's descent into despair due to her circumstances she walks into her neighbor Fifi's room while Fifi and one of her clients are in the bath. Goucem marvels at the luxuries Fifi owns, her perfume, her nice bedsheets, her expensive and sexy clothes, her feminine pink decorations. Goucem then reaches into Fifi's client's jacket and takes his gun. She sits in her room and plays pretend shooting with it. Fifi's client leaves and we finally see her and Goucem interact as friends. Throughout their intimate conversation about their lives, Fifi's client continually calls her cell phone about his gun which he has lost. The next day Fifi takes Goucem to a psychic to help Goucem with her problems with Sassi. We see Fifi for the first time outside of their building and she is wearing the most conservative clothes of any character we have seen throughout the film. She is wearing a white veil with a matching white dress, with a face covering. This is starkly contrasting with every other costume we have seen her wear thus far, all of which being lingerie. At the psychic we see hoards of women waiting to meet with her, all there trying to find a husband. This shows so clearly the desperation of women in this culture to find men as it is one of the only solutions to the hardships they endure in life and their only access to power. When Fifi comes back to their building by herself, she is ambushed by her client, and several other men, whose gun was stolen by Goucem and is kidnapped. He demands his gun back and she is unable to do anything as she doesn't have it. She slowly realizes that they are going to kill her and does everything she can to escape, she somehow gets into a stranger's car and begs them to help her. In the car are three adult women and one young boy. The adult women force her to get out of the car yelling that there is a young boy in the car and implying that the boy's life is more important than helping Fifi escape her murderers. Here we can clearly see a society destroyed by both fear of violence and an extreme lack of value to women.

When Goucem finds that Fifi had never returned home and all of her stuff is missing she questions everyone if they know of Fifi's whereabouts. Everyone dismisses her worry for her friend saying she should not mess with it. Goucem is the only person worried and goes to the police to report Fifi as missing. Here we see that Fifi is completely worthless to their neighbors at the hotel as she is not only a woman but a prostitute. Goucem goes back to the police the next day and discovers that her body was found dead on the beach. She goes to the hospital and demands to see her friend's body in the morgue and she is not allowed to, until Sassi makes an exception for her. As she embraces Fifi's dead body in the morgue, Sassi berates the morticians for the mistreatment of Fifi's body to which they exclaim "She was a prostitute!". This further

shows even after death the utter display of Fifi's worthlessness to the world. On Goucem's way home, she stops at a sports match where her stalker is playing and begins to flirt with him again. Even though she has experienced such a horrible loss from the death of her only female friend, she still must continue in her work in finding a man to support her or else she will experience a similar untimely and brutal death as Fifi.

In Papicha's last few scenes in the film, she finds the men who are opening a cabaret similar to the Copacabana and they offer her a job as an entertainer there. She performs a song at their opening night where she confidently stands on stage in a beautiful dress and returns to her rightful place as a liberated artist, after all the years of terrorism in Algeria she endured.

Throughout, "Vive Ladjérie", we are shown the many facets to what being a woman in Algeria in the early 2000s meant. The danger, violence, mistreatment, and desperation that was endured by impoverished and powerless women who were faced with remaining religious conservatism and systemic misogyny. Varying degrees of sex work, being that as a prostitute, a mistress, or a wife are seen as the only solution to the hard life they endure but finally we see, through Papicha's return to being a cabaret entertainer, that self empowerment and liberation through arts and passion is the only possible stepping stone towards a good life for them.