

The Black magic: An aesthetic analysis of its illustration in the sociohorreur film: *Dachra*

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Abstract

Throughout history the black magic has always been treated as an ugly and frightening human folklore in many cultures. This negative depiction suffers from a bad reputation even today, due to its distinction with mysterious and suspicious practices that have been implicated upon them. This has been a point of contention that transcends beyond religious and ethnic differences. The bias beyond even the discussion around the topic may push the interlocutors to ask: what if such an international taboo subject is treated through a motion picture? Would its reception be any easier? And how would a horror film by an auteur film director treat social issues at the same time? Will there be a difference in the reception of the film by its potentially conflicting audiences? Would this fact positively influence its distribution? We will try to answer all those questions through our article on film *Dachra* made by Abdelhamid Bouchnak.

Keywords: Cinema; socio-horror movies; black magic; witchcraft; Immaterial Cultural Heritage; *Dachra*; Rithos Diabolicos; Abdelhamid Bouchnak



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Faten Ridene

Introduction

Having crossed the history of humanity, despite the Humanity, the black magic figures among the components of the imposed human folklore. And treating this cause through a film of the horror genre “that explores the margins of ethnology ¹” (Lamontagne, 2005, p. 339), seems well suited to the nastiness of the subject, thus promoting the fear rate of its reception by the spectators, and thereby convincing them of the need to discuss such a frightening subject aloud.

Individually or in combination, witchcraft, black magic, and cannibalism are all part of the popular imagination, capable of demolishing or even fragmenting the faith of a society. These occult practices are part of our rituals, whether we like it or not; they are a common heritage imposed on human identity, despite Humanity. It is a taboo subject that we refuse, or even fear, to talk about with our family, or even with our friends, given the fear that we may feel when we discuss it. This trio went back historically to the earliest human periods and has been perpetuated over the centuries from the Pharaohs and the Babylonian people up to the present time, all the while identifying an attachment of this phenomenon to the religious and dogmatic perspectives, which exist in the myth of folklore, along with modern science; and that is what has filled every society with a number of victims of such practices, as versatile as it is in bringing together both rich and poor, illiterate and educated targets.

Just trying to imagine a possible contact between humans and djinns, or a cannibal storing vials containing human body parts, a spell of sewn mouth not to tell a truth or a child's throat slit to bring out a treasure... these scenarios of rather dark and frightening practices, make us tremble, until we feel like we are living any situation described which we find so repulsive and sickening.

That is why we obviate their discussion in our daily life, thus avoiding any hallucination that such a thought may cause us, which plunges us into deep pits of fear, curses, spells... It is indeed an ambiguity eligible to be treated with an aura of fear through a horror film, being an “*attraction of horror*” (Blake & Bailey, 2013, p. 12), which can affect any large community, one or more ‘dachras’, which we can also call micro-societies, and which are scattered all over the world, wanting to distance themselves from behaviours and lifestyles, quite unsuited to the whims of the humans who live there, while imposing their own laws and forcing their fellow citizens to follow their rules, without the slightest discussion: an environment full of opacity, of darkness despite the daily sunlight that covers it, of inner cries to the souls of the people who suffer there, without daring to ask for help, and whose screams become mute, in front of the echo of a wind that blows to invade such dark and deep places, which makes each 'small' *dachra*, a funnel full of terrifying, hallucinating secrets, while being wrapped in a stunning natural beauty: this *dachra*, the isolated and terrifying place, in favour of such diabolical practices; features well in *Dachra* -the sociohorreur film- which we will analyse in our article.

Dachra, the film, is deeply immersed in ambiguity, hence its title

Etymologically speaking, the word *Dachra*, and like hundreds of other words in the Tunisian dialect we talk daily, is inherited from the Amazigh language, which was, for thousands of years, the official language of the inhabitants of the northern part of the African continent (الجزيرة+) (2018). And in his dictionary *Tunisian words of Amazigh origin*, Jihéd G. Mejrissi indicates that the Amazigh term *Dachra* is the feminine noun, synonymous with the English word, which is written the same way in French: village (Mejrissi, 2013, p. 05). We can then find these *dachras*, or villages or rural areas, in African countries as well as in European, American, or Asian ones.

And this etymological axis may well break all boundaries, making Dachra, the film, well assimilated, even digested, wherever it is screened.

3. D A		
D'hakk	n	Exhaustion
Dachra	n (f)	Village
Daddech	v	To help walk
Dahdes	v	To walk with being able to see
Darreq	v	To conceal
Dolech	v	To walk without a particular destination

Figure 1: Amazigh Origin of the word "Dachra" (Mejrissi, 2013, p. 5)

Moreover, the word "Dachra", cleverly chosen by director Abdelhamid Bouchnak as the title for his first feature film, is commonly used in Tunisian, Algerian and Moroccan dialects. It relates well to rural environments, isolated from each other, where each dachra plays the role of an independent community, which is usually set apart from its neighbours, with a material or moral gap.

Such a meaning, concerning the insulation of the exterior, applies well to any rustic area, regardless of the country to which it belongs. As for these two little syllables: "dach "+"ra"; added to their phonetic symbols d, a, ʃ, ɣ and a , all of which are pronounceable in the same way whatever would be the native language of the speaking spectator... Such specificities may favour, and even accelerate the distribution and exploitation of the film in the four corners of the planet, thus overcoming any ethno-linguistic obstacle, to find itself easily pronounceable as a title, and most of all, quickly appreciated as a film and discussed among the spectators, in each country where it would be screened, given the global cause it deals with. And among the countries where Dachra has been selected in a festival and warmly welcomed, we can mention, as an indication and without limiting ourselves to: Italy, America, Egypt, Lebanon, Poland... Without forgetting of course, the worldwide distribution of the film, ensured by dubbing it in Spanish (with the title *Rithos Diabolicos*) which is the official language of 21 UN member countries, in addition to its dubbing

in French, English and recently a Korean dubbing ensuring its release on November 7th, 2019, in South Korea.



Figure 2: Dachra's dubbing and distribution in South Korea

Dachra: A tremor of causes... like no other!

“We live with ancestral ideas that dominate, it's an old mentality, bad old customs that we haven't been able to get rid of, and that we live with, against our will, because there are still thousands of citizens who believe in it, even if they are of a high educational level” (Bouchnak, 2018)

The junction of black magic and witchcraft is so frightening that it has always been briefly mentioned in a few interviews, investigations or TV channel reports, of which we can quote the title: An investigation into the phenomenon of magic and witchcraft in Tunisia (2015, حمدي). But Dachra, that new blood injected into the veins of our screens (Jdey, 2018), was unique and pioneering in breaking this barrier of fear, and this with his dazzling puzzle, whose various components, perfectly interlocked with each other, appear simultaneously in : a good quality in its narratology, clearly visible in the construction of the script and dialogues, while ensuring a growing chronology of the fable; the dramaturgy in Bouchnak's direction of his actors, given the

experience that has reunited them with EL Teatro, by creating tailor-made characters for them, without the need to go through a casting; the techniques & aesthetics according to his choices of light, shooting angles, precise shooting schedules, chasing cloudy and grey afternoons (Bouchnak, 2018), thus supporting the ferocity of the story and the barbarity of its atmosphere, through his signatures in degrees of colour and scales of shots: This is what we will try to dissect through our reading and analysis of this pioneering film in the Horror genre (it is a suitcase word that we compose from the first syllable of the word social, horror and the second syllable the first syllable of the word auteur, aiming to prove that Dachra is a horror, social and auteur film at the same time).

Aesthetic signatures that make Dachra a sociohorreur movie

The access to Dachra, this mysterious place, was triggered by the shot below: a tree that symmetrizes the sky when the camera captures it in low angle (worm's eye view), and that highlights a witch holding all the derivatives of her surroundings in her hands, with the aim of taming them and to produce her slaves, while being supported by a greyish, heavy sky, sign of an euphoria felt by the inhabitants of this place, once their need for blood, flesh and black magic is satisfied...



Figure 3: The shot That identifies Dachra as site of Terror

The trunk of this tree is as long as the tall height of the witch, a goddess of this Dachra; the colour of the tree is as black as the colour of the witch's dress as she appears in dark nights in front of the camera; its two branches are as hard as the witch's arms, the actors of all her evil; its branches are as tough as the witch's fingers, and its twigs are as thorny as her angles. Added to this, there is an alternation of light and shade throughout the film, where we find enormously bright shots such as that of the dusty classroom, where books are piled up, a sign of an already archaic past (Blaise, 2019) and in which the teacher used to meet with his students to discuss final projects, versus greyish shots even in broad daylight or almost black filled with mischief.

The homogeneity of Dachra, the cinematic artwork, results from the heterogeneity of the team members who brought it to life. Whether it is in its soundtrack, with its terrifying effects, scary music, and its frightening percussion, the echo of which circulates in all the dimensions of the projection room; or through the distinctive choices of shot scales and angles, added to the choices of sets, clothes and make-up, of which the colours of fire represent the dominant dose; and without forgetting the marvellous interpretation of the actors who come from the theatre with the signature of Abdelhamid Bouchnak who directs them: It is indeed an amalgam of all these ingredients, giving

birth to a new and innovative cinematographic concept, a marvellous association of several solid links, which we will dissect link by link, and which produce a rather resistant, strong and complementary chain, that the director has baptized: Dachra!

Dachra: a powerful hummer of sound, wet with blood

In *Dachra*, sound, music and noise effects played a key role, making the horror “*an emotion one feels when faced with(...) a sudden noise*” (Blake & Bailey, 2013, p. 59): they constantly transcend the concentration of the audience by arguing the psychologies of Yasmine the anguished, Bilal the frightened, Mongia the rebel or Walid the devil -if we dare say so-, while highlighting their ethnic distinctions, as well as the educational and social conditions that each of them has lived through! And whether it is in the voice of the flowing water -during the scene of the purification of a corpse-, or the voice of the child when he was snoring after his throat was slit, and where we heard the diabolical message of this situation: “*Here he has a key in his eye*”² (Bouchnak, 2018), followed by that of the wiping of the blood on the stone, which was enormously amplified and therefore attractive, or again by mixing the sounds of fire and wind...and many other sound impressions, have well densified the aesthetics of the sound of Dachra, and therefore of the meaning of each of the situations experienced by its characters, which most of the time carries the reddish distinction: in clothes, in flowing blood or in the setting, which appeals to fear and dread. Such sound horror situation is clearly distinguishable when the spectators block their ears, close their eyes, or even shut themselves in by covering their faces with their arms, being afraid to see as diabolic situations as those appearing on screen!

And to guarantee this macabre effect, and to succeed in dressing up Dachra with a painful and deranged atmosphere, the composition of the soundtrack became a mission that Bouchnak entrusted to the binomial Rached Hmaoui and Sami Ben Saïd, while demanding a far escape from

the usual horror film sound themes which ‘*hissing sound breaks the silence*’ (Blake & Bailey, 2013, p. 15), or a scream, through a simple yet profound, dense and breath taking score, which absorbs the audience's total concentration to the point that they feel invaded by the film's scenic evolution. In addition, Bouchnak has played with the choice of percussion (Hmaoui, 2018) tapped on the Taiko- Japanese percussion instrument - (Ben Said, 2018).



Figure 5: Taiko

The musician Sami Ben Saïd explains that this instrument was preferred in the score that accompanied some scenes in *Dachra*, in order to add a more aggressive sound, something that would not have been ensured if the Timpani was tapped (Ben Said, 2018) Such



Figure 4:
Timpani

gravity of composition, played in parallel with the scenes where Yasmine was reading Mongia's agenda, added to the one where Bilel was massacred by Rebh who was making his intestines flow, and the one where Walid was attacking Bechir in his throat with a knife, represents the three climaxes of *Dachra*, distinguished by a dramatic tension maximized, even amplified by this strong percussion: this is where all the twists and turns end! This is where everything becomes clear! This is where Rebh's oscillations reflect those of the entire *Dachra*! This is where the good defended by Mongia and Béchir, followed by Yasmine and Bilel, is perfectly differentiated from the evil of Walid and his satanic tribe, supported by the witch, Rebh and the cannibal Saber, who are none other than the diabolical plots of the *Dachra*!

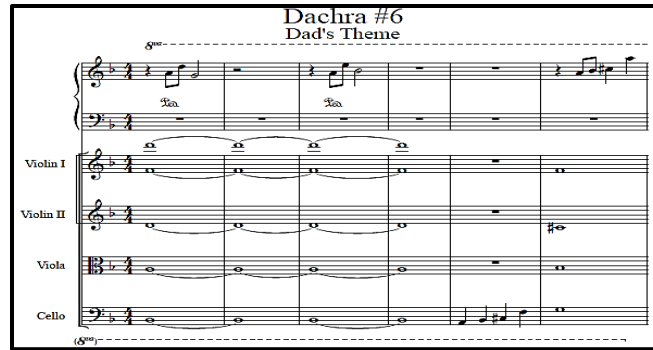


Figure 6: Extract from the partition of the Dachra soundtrack

Bouchnak also has a musical upbringing, lived with his father, the famous singer and composer, Lotfi Bouchnak. He reflects this well through his choices in the sonic axis of *Dachra*, where he has doubly paid tribute to the art of sound: firstly through his choice imposed on composers, to play on a limited number of notes (Bouchnak, 2018) while changing their octaves and especially while focusing on big moments of silence, thus highlighting his 'Bouchnakian' aroma derived from the aesthetic choices of his idols specialists in sound magic such as Steven Spielberg in his work *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975) and Stanley Kubrick the icon of *Shining* (Kubrick, 1980).



Figure 7: Shot of *Dachra* where the director pays tribute to the art of Sound

Secondly, through a *mise en abyme* of the aesthetics of sound engineering, by filming Walid, the perchman, after lighting a fireplace in the room where he lived with Yasmine and Bilel in *Dachra*, recording the voice of the fire that burns and stimulates sawtooth curves in Walid's hearing, and therefore in that of the audience. This scene acts as a message between the lines of *Dachra*, which

Bouchnak launched in order to highlight the inestimable value of sound, and the primordial role that the soundtrack plays in every cinematographic work, and without which, the effect on the spectators would never have been as frightening as it is during the screening, causing the audience to scream, to feel stressed, and even deeply immersed in the macabre atmosphere that distinguishes Dachra!

Theatre actors in front of the camera: a wonderful match

In the cinema there is editing, axis, rehearsal... and good experience in theatre makes the director's tasks in a film much easier (Bouchnak, 2018)

Despite the full balance he finds between the different hats he wears in Dachra (author, scriptwriter, co-producer, filmmaker, editor...), Abdelhamid Bouchnak admits that he has provided the maximum of his artistic energy, in the direction of actors, given the deep love he feels towards the art of theatre (Bouchnak, 2018) : a potential due to his theatrical experience, at El Teatro Studio, for several years, and with several members of his team including Yasmine Dimassi, H la Ayed and Aziz Jebali, under the direction of the founder of El Teatro Studio, the playwright Taoufik Jebali.

Bouchnak classifies film directing as easier than theatre directing, where mistakes are not tolerated (Bouchnak, 2018): when directing a film, the filmmaker can count on several takes of the same shot, and then choose the best one at the editing stage; as for mistakes made on stage, they can even lead to a partial or total defeat of the play in front of its audience, and thus the impossibility of deciphering the cause that is dealt with in it, or the message that its playwright believes to be conveyed. And given his experience in role-playing with his colleagues, whom he has perfectly invested in his embroidery of the roles to the point of a cross-stitch, according to the

imprint of each of them, Bouchnak reminds us perfectly of the Italian director Federico Fellini, who, while shooting his films, gets into the skin of all the roles of his script, to the point of playing some scenes in front of the actors, aiming that they transmit his ideas identically (RIDENE F. , 2016-2017).

Through his choices, Abdelhamid Bouchnak scored two goals with the same ball: first by immersing the audience's concentration in the film's story, to the point of believing that these are real situations being experienced during the screening, given that they do not know the actors, and having the confidence to make them headliners after the film's release; and then by being willing to falsify the formula of failure of the theatre actors in front of the camera, while replacing it with a confirmation of their dazzling interpretation, the fruit of their extraordinary experience on stage! (Bouchnak, 2018). Already, an actor whose experience is limited to television and film can never touch the perfection of the performance of the theatre's actor. The latter, even when limited by the field of the camera, and given his delicacy and spherical exploitation which is almost always total of the 360 degrees surrounding him on stage, lets the spectators go beyond the said field of the camera, following his movements and especially his gaze, to navigate with his imagination in the off-camera, and this not only to forge the environment of the shooting and predict the backstage of the cinema surrounding the actor, but above all, to push them to absorb his thought in their own brains.

Let's take the example of the shot below, where Yasmine (played by the actress Yasmine Dimassi) is believing that her face is surrounded by the witch's hands: the choice of Yasmine's look in this sequence would never have been abstractly taken!



Figure 8: A theatre actress' view, in front of the camera

It is indeed an escape into the dark, into the unknown, which reflects a loss in a dark depth, and into which the spectators are plunged, who find themselves, unconsciously, following Yasmine's field of vision, thus going beyond the barriers of the shot bordered by the camera, which is called field!

The fear that Yasmine suffers from, and which causes her hallucinations, even nightmares, returns to her childhood without her remembering it. Her subconscious mind pushes her to re-establish shocks already experienced when she was kidnapped for a terrifying reason in black magic: her hand that brings out treasures once her throat is slit in order to make use of her pure blood, given the simian line it possesses, and which represents a key to facilitating contact with the djinns!



Figure 9: A fierce cannibale coming from theatre

The comedian Hedi Mejri, on the other hand, playing the role of Saber the cannibal, and in a scene that illustrates the daily family reunion at the food of the ferocious Dachra, based on the human flesh of the kidnapped victims, shows a real exaltation in devouring the human meat that represents his primordial need. The fact that this meat is part of the bodies of the treasure hunting victims in Dachra, perfectly flavours Saber's dishes where he finds a ferocious taste, which he testifies to by his snoring and the wrinkles that cover his face, even the veins in his hands that are in danger of exploding thanks to the blood that circulates there vigorously while eating.



Figure 10: Hallucinations of Bechir imagining himself in contact with the Djinns

When the djinns know that someone is capable of removing their diabolical wills, they define him as an obstacle that hinders their evil plans and use any means possible to disrupt him, to show that evil is pursuing him (Bouchnak, 2018)

This is what Bouchnak testifies by choosing Bahri Rahhali to play the role of Bechir, given his fertile theatrical experience, which has allowed him to flexibly embody this character, who will have faith, and who varies between quiet and frightened. This same man who reads the Holy Quran over the bodies of the Muslim dead while performing the purification rituals that precede their burial, extremely believes in Djinns and black magic. And Bechir's fright of losing Yasmine pushed him to keep the secret, while oscillating between fear and faith: the fear that invaded him in Dachra when he saved Yasmine, the little girl in the past when she was kidnapped, and the faith he proved by reading verses from the Holy Quran to escape the diabolical thoughts and spirits that followed him. This fright was well proven through its truthful interpretation in the three very close-up shots in figure 10, all taken from the same spatial axis: the interior of the collective taxi, that Bechir took to reach a rural zone, find the kidnapped Yasmine and try to save her. These three shots were perfectly taken by joining together : the very close-up scale that focuses the viewer's eye on the narrowing of the actor's face, witnessing his good performance, the lighting with a dark tone, stimulating his fear and stress, the angle of the shot, slightly sideways, including a blackish part to Bechir's face, sign of a dark world, which invades him to the point of proving his fear by obstructing his eyes and ears, thus trying to escape from the hallucinations that cover him thanks to the laughter of his travelling neighbours, whom he imagined haunted by evil spiritual entities.

Dachra: a scary colour! An image, as disturbing as a storm

The choice of the north-western forests of Tunisia, which Abdelhamid Bouchnak made with his director of photography Hatem Nechi, from the location scouting stage, was amply in favour of Dachra's narrative on an aesthetic scale. Given the additive role played by the breathtaking combinations of depth of field, camera angles, and light and shade, highlighting the splendid

beauty of our north-western wooded areas that bring together the greenery of the forests with high mountains overlooking the sea; as if Bouchnak establishes through this choice, a double appeal: the first one being touristic by inviting the audience to inhale the refreshing air of this forest of Eden in Aïn Drahem while contemplating its natural beauty where a labyrinth of trees, hills and rivers replaces that of houses, buildings and streets; the second one is then a professional appeal to the benefit of the natural studios that Tunisia has, and where national and/or cosmopolitan films can be shot.



Figure 11: Choice of cloudy weather and grey skies to amplify the mystery of Dachra

The degradation of the colours chosen for Dachra seasoned its terrifying tone well. Bouchnak felt he could ensure stunning contrasts and cold tones, insisting during the shoot on filming during the afternoons, in order to achieve a darkened location, ensured by a chase of cloudy skies that add an aura of fear and uncertainty to the various scenes (Bouchnak, 2018). Similarly at the post-production stage, Bouchnak sought to densify this choice, by inviting the colourist Hamza Ksontini to "darken the forest part and accentuate the blacks" (Ksontini, 2019). The aim of such a choice was "to give a heavy and disturbing atmosphere" (Ksontini, 2019) for the spectators, which later became heavy and disturbing for the team itself; and this is what the colourist felt, saying: "It's depressing even spending time working on the project but afterwards the result is fabulous" (Ksontini, 2019). The excellent juxtaposition of energising warm colours and the cold brutality of

the evil locations and characters, distinguishes the aesthetic of Dachra. Red and black are the main hue of the film: two dominant colours whose chroma particularises the scenes that contain bleeding, or even parts of boiling human flesh, or all those where the 'adult girl' Rebh appears, wearing her red coat throughout the film that burns the scene. And implicitly with this colourful boiling, Bouchnak seems to be shouting at the audience, hoping to raise awareness; as if he were saying to the audience: this is what the danger that invades our societies looks like: be careful! Protect yourself and your children!

Dachra: an amalgam of cinematic schools, with a 'Bouchnakian' fingerprint

Since his youth, having seen and re-watched many films made by international directors, considerable as schools of the horror genre that he 'devoured' and digested well, and while refusing to imitate them, Bouchnak was at the same time inspired and giving birth to something new, a Tunisian film, with world-class standards, that excels in the aesthetic, technical, narratological, and dramaturgical axes. And among the cinematic 'adrenalin' that tapped into his memory, and which he wanted to follow through Dachra, trying to dose his audience in the same way, was David's horrific film *The Fly* (Cronenberg, 1986). The implicit resemblance between this movie and Dachra may well be between the scientist Seth Brundle's need for sugar, being contaminated by the DNA of a fly, and the cannibals' need for flesh and blood in Dachra, both indexing in their ferocious, animal-like tone!



Figure 12: The dominance of the chromatics of fire, a sign of fear and anxiety

Stanley Kubrick, the perspectivist, is also among the cinematic schools that constantly contaminate Bouchnak aesthetically, and inspire him, to the point of making *Dachra* a terrifying film with all its simplicity like *The Shining* by (Kubrick, 1980). We can well distinguish several depths of field in *Dachra*, while differentiating from Kubrick by his concentration on thirds of the shot, instead of making the middle his vanishing point (Bouchnak, 2018). And when questioning him about his perspectival choices, Bouchnak said:

In our stories, yes! There is depth, as a purely aesthetic choice, and misalignment, but there is no middle ground; there is depth but no balance, it's all about loss, wrong and through, in all directions, since we are afraid of everything! In *Dachra*, nobody is safe (Bouchnak, 2018)

We can then clearly confirm the existence of the Bouchnakian imprint, despite his inspiration from Kubrick, clearly appearing in two axes: firstly the light, where Bouchnak uses the Kubrickian perspective, while contradicting its brightness, and this with the aim of amplifying the fear felt in Kubrick's luminous shots; and secondly and as Bouchnak declares, fleeing from Kubrick's symmetry, as he densifies the appearance of his actor: in the right or left third of the shot, or in the middle of the shot but in the deep background of the perspective.



Figure 13: Bouchnak's Kubrickian inspirations in Dachra, with reference to The Shining

When Yasmine or Bechir or any other character in *Dachra* occupies only a part of the shot, it is a call to the audience to guess the mysterious situation that the character in question is experiencing! The audience then intuitively finds itself wondering: what would happen to Yasmine? Who does she see in the basement of the archive? All these labyrinths launched abruptly in the narrative construction of *Dachra*, were reinforced, in addition to the partiality of the shots, through a real exploitation of the announced weather slots (Nechi, 2018) in Aïn Drahem during the days of the shooting, where the film crew took advantage of the morning fog as well as the clouds, as reinforcing assets, which ensure the veracity of the terrifying situations experienced by the different characters, by following their emotions which adapt to each scene, 'a bit like delicately capturing the scent of a flower' (Nechi, 2018): The film was made sure by choosing the Arri Mini Alexa camera, which provided an extremely subtle rendering, 'with a lot of nuances, thus making it possible to shoot a film in colour...but almost without colour!' (Nechi, 2018)

Alfred Hitchcock the philosopher (Yanal, 2005), is also one of Bouchnak's idols, to the point of admitting that he paid homage to him through the scene in *Yasmine's Shower* (Bouchnak, 2018), during which she imagined herself bleeding, by going back in recall - through her subconscious at the moment when Mongia saved her from the cannibals - to the blood scattered in *Dachra*, which flowed from the meats spread out to be dried in the middle of the forest, thus calling upon the cult scene of Alfred's film *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960): the shower where the heroine Marion Crane was murdered.



Figure 14: A tribute to Hitchcock based on his cult scene in *Psycho*

The Bouchnakian imprint is quite distinct from the Hitchcockian one despite being inspired by it: the blood goes from a few lines when it runs over Yasmine's feet taking up a third of the shot, to almost half the shot when Bouchnak films its evacuation, thus escaping the murder scene of the Marion Crane character in *Psycho*.



Figure 15: The Psychopath in Psychosis and The Witch in Dashra: both mysterious

The partial appearance (hands or silhouette) of the mysterious witch several times in Yasmine's mind, also implicitly appeals to Norman Bates, the fictional character in *Psycho*, who disguised himself as her mother during her murder of Marion Crane when she was showering at the motel, not to mention the motel itself in *Psycho*: that isolated spatial setting full of mystification, to which Bouchnak appeals through the lonely house of Dachra, where Yasmine and Bilel were taken in, as well as Walid who was doing nothing but watching them, and through whose location he clearly reminds us of Hitchcock's location at the Bates Motel.



Figure 16: A motel lost in a forest in Dachra like in Psycho

Tarkovsky also represents a film school that inspires Bouchnak, through his philosophical visions in his work *Stalker* (Tarkovski, 1979). Whether in *Dashra* or in *Stalker*, there is a zone, the nature of which nobody knows, and which represents an enigma to be deciphered.



Figure 17: In Dachra as in *Stalker*, a trio discovers an area

The difference between these two works is the heritage aspect that distinguishes *Dachra*, given the secret of black magic that it hides, a deeply touching reality that differs greatly from the fictionality of the aliens who come to the protected area by the stalkers who help the writer and the physics teacher to enter it, whereas if these stalkers drop their masks, they show us that they were indeed fakers, as was Walid who lured Yasmine and Bilel to their murders in *Dachra*, using the pretext of his brotherhood as a journalism student with them.

Conclusion

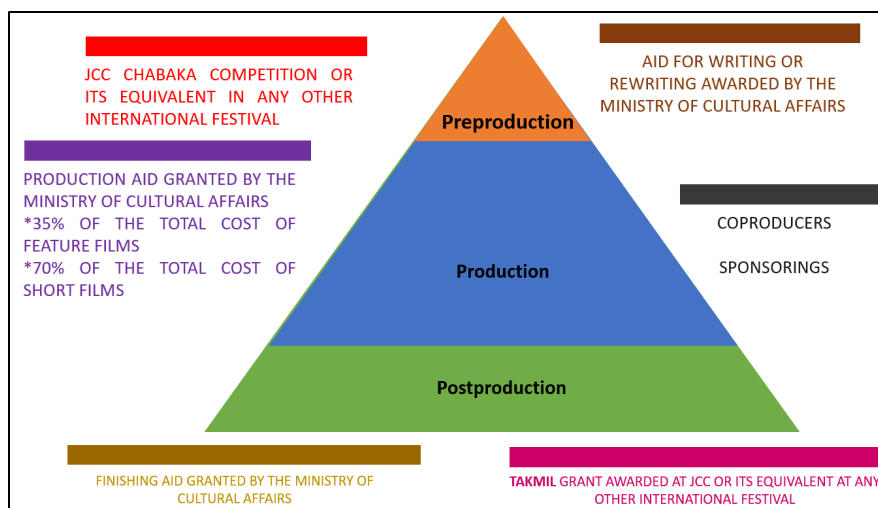


Figure 18: Variation of funding sources, according to the life cycle of a film (Tunisia Case Study)

Given the path that a Tunisian film takes, with what the production and support conditions available in Tunisia or abroad provide, through co-productions or through festival funding competitions, we can well consider Dachra as a won challenge, even a new page in the history of the Tunisian film production. This is proven by the good quality of Abdelhamid Bouchnak's first work, added to the fact that the director did not apply for either the annual competition organised by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, which takes a long time to study the competitors' files and then publish the results, or for any of the festival support prizes.

Bouchnak's aim in making this decision was firstly to challenge the widely held view that film production in Tunisia must cost a fortune to be of professional quality, and secondly to contradict those who mistrusted his artistic and technical vision and ability (Bouchnak, 2018). And despite the absence of such sources, Bouchnak has proved his independence flavoured with innovation, by simply selling his personal car and photographic equipment, and relying on the collaboration of his co-producer Elyes Ben Saber, thus giving birth to such a terrifying film, which

is characterized, not by zombies or fantastic 3-dimensional creatures, but by a simple aesthetic concept, with a strong identity, which is the result of his digestion of several cinematographic schools including Kubrick, Fellini, Eisenstein, Tarkovski... *Dachra* represents, and deservedly so, a pioneering film, which transcends all the hurdles it may have encountered throughout its biological production clock.

In addition to having broken the rule of obtaining poor quality film with the absence or reduced number of funding sources, this film distances itself from the false principles established by previous Tunisian film production trends, while falsifying the idea that the guarantee of good quality of a cinematographic work can only be achieved by ensuring a funding superior or equal to one million Tunisian dinars (the equivalent of \$328.030.17) per film.

Similarly for distribution, *Dachra* also launched a new breath in film distribution in Tunisia, by falsifying the cultural regionalism bias so much demanded by audiences in Tunisia's various interior governorates. This falsification began to be ensured through a simultaneous screening in 33 cinemas spread over 13 governorates (out of a total of 24) and with a growth that continues to be proven by Hakka Distribution, with locations ranging from cinemas, cultural complexes, cultural centres, youth centres, and even universities, thus breaking the barrier of distance that kept culture away from the different Tunisian regions.

Dachra, a film that was totally independent of any type of production aid or sponsorship, represents the first Tunisian film mixture between the horror and social genre, and of the film d'auteur, which we call sociohorreur, being so embellished by the harmony, simplicity and fluidity of its script language, to the point of having established a huge reconciliation of the Tunisian public with the movie theatres which had long suffered from the boycott of the

spectators, and this by beating the Tunisian record of the number of tickets sold which exceeded 150K (Zayed, 2019) in only twenty one days of projection, thus writing a new page in the history of the Tunisian cinema.³.

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ENDNOTES:

¹ This is our own translation of this French quotation : 'qui explore les marges de l'ethnologie' (Lamontagne, 2005, p. 339)

² This is our own translation of the dialogue extract in Tunisian dialect during the scene of the child's throat being cut: هاوكة عنود المفتاح في عينو: