

REVIEW: Red Sea title 'A Summer in Boujad' examines a teen's struggles in an alien country



JEDDAH: Teenage years can be difficult, but for 13-year-old Karim, played by Yassir Kazzouz, the challenges are magnified when his father takes him from Paris to the small rural town of Boujad in Morocco for a holiday.



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This is the outline of “A Summer in Boujad” by Paris-born Omar Mouldouira, who began his cinema career as a sound engineer before making short films set in Morocco and a television documentary series.

“A Summer in Boujad,” his first feature, shows signs of the director’s confidence throughout its 80 minutes.

Karim's father, Messaoud (Hatim Seddiki), was born and raised in the decrepit desert town of Boujad. He migrates to Paris to make a living and provide for his family, but does not abandon his roots. Every summer, he returns with gifts that delight the townsfolk, who nickname him "Summer Santa Claus."

But his son, raised in France and sent to a French-speaking public school, has little affinity with Morocco. He feels hopeless with his poor knowledge of Arabic, and there is a touching scene when the boy struggles to find his mother's grave in the local cemetery, where tombstone inscriptions are in Arabic.

Karim's brief friendship with a group of local boys comes to an abrupt end when he inadvertently crosses social lines. Torn between the need to communicate with his father and the urge to rebel, Karim feels like a pendulum swinging between bad decisions and terrible choices. His summer holiday turns out to be a disaster.

"My father does not see me, but watches me," he complains.

The boy finds an older role model in rebellious Mehdi (Ahmed Elmelkouni), who teaches Karim in the ways of lawlessness, but soon realizes that he has to take the rap for their mischief. The movie's conclusion may seem too blunt, but there is room for hope and optimism.

Mouldouira has an eye for detail, and draws a vivid contrast between father and son. This is seen in a dramatic moment during the football World Cup. When Morocco scores against France, the older man is jubilant. Not Karim. A wonderful study of the implications of social dislocation.
