

Immigration, Space & Identity Transformation  
In Contemporary French War Film

by

Carlos Josué Amado

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Approved:

Lynn Ramey, Ph.D.

Paul B. Miller, Ph.D.

Andrea Mirabile, Ph.D.

Daryl Lee, Ph.D.

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## Introduction

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a significant change occurred in the French film industry: a culture that typically shied away from producing a notable amount of war film began suddenly to premier a higher quantity of bold pictures treating wars in which France had a central role. These new films addressed war film in two novel ways regarding French war films. First, the wars proper were depicted in a much more direct and open fashion, showing subjects that had been largely avoided, such as the brutal tactics employed by the French army during their colonial wars of independence. Second, these works began to portray, and even center the narratives around, protagonists of minority origins.

This dissertation proposes that the new interest in war film is the result of changes in the political landscape of France and in the social makeup of the Hexagon, where minorities of colonial origin are beginning to claim their place with more authority than in the past century and demanding that their history be incorporated to modify a historical narrative that has been whitewashed through government control and censorship. The films constitute a new form of dialogue in which these minorities and the French majority of European origin discuss themes of recognition, acceptance, guilt, responsibility, immigration and integration. They also form a vital part of the redefinition of the identity of these groups. Already in 1995, Faye Ginsburg noted this form of communication on her work on indigenous and ethnographic media<sup>1</sup>:

Over the last ten years, indigenous and minority people have been using a variety of media, including film and video, as new vehicles for internal and external

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<sup>1</sup> Ginsburg's study is primarily concerned by media produced by peoples who have been colonized by Western Cultures and marginalized in their own lands. Examples constitute those who identify themselves as belonging to the "First Nations" and Aboriginal Australians (Ginsburg 257-258).

communication, for self-determination, and for resistance to outside cultural domination (Ginsburg 256).

A few decades earlier these types of film were virtually unheard of in the Hexagon. In an article that commented on this phenomenon, Journalist Pierre Jeancolas remarked:

Timidity, censorship, or pressure put upon producers by those in power have had remarkably consistent results – no films were made about World War I during World War I, no films were made about World War II during World War II, no films were made about the Indochina War during the Indochina War and, obviously, no films about the Algerian War were made until long after the war was over (Jeancolas 44).

Political and cultural reasons limited an industry that would have been well positioned to portray and comment on significant events by using a medium that could readily and easily reach large segments of the population, but reasons ranging from the shame of occupation and collaboration in WWII, to the failure of recognition that a conflict even existed such as the Algerian independence war, caused members of the government to censor any material that could cause further embarrassment to a fragile republic mired in the process of losing its colonial empire after the debacle of WWII.

Governmental censorship became the heaviest weapon wielded against the open portrayal of war in a century in which France found itself at the wrong end of most of its armed conflicts, while attempting to maintain a functioning government and rebuild its fledgling economy. A study on the French New Wave film school noted some of the difficulties these filmmakers experienced while attempting to address the topic of French war on film during the Algerian War:

Given the climate of censorship which reigned at this time, it is not, perhaps, surprising that those who financed and produced feature films should have been weary of representing the Algerian conflict on screen. If any further incentive was needed, the banning of the one film which did tackle the war directly (albeit in a highly implausible and morally ambivalent fashion), Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* (1960) ensured that self-censorship would exclude the war from mainstream features until 1962-63 (Dine 59-60).

In the decades that immediately followed WWII this censorship, internal or external, became too hard to overcome for any type of media, from literature to film to the news, but it was not the only obstacle to vanquish. Another type of suppression was that of the information available with regards to the wars. Obtaining data on the extent of the of governmental collaboration with the Nazis during the occupation was understandably a large source of national embarrassment and such information was not always readily available. Later, accurate reports with relation to the war of Algerian independence were also highly sanitized by the government, making it difficult for reporters or filmmakers to obtain relevant intelligence with regards to the topic. Kuby explains:

few scholars have focused on documentary visual representations of French acts of violence in Algerian territory. This is in large part because such representations are scarce. As a result of censorship, self-censorship, and the military controlled journalistic access to troops, violence committed by the French is by-and-large absent from the photographic record of the war (Kuby 47-48).

Kuby was specifically referring to an example of some graphic photos of a French soldier shooting -unprovoked- an Algerian civilian during the war. The photos circled the globe in

different news outlets but were not seen in France. This type of restriction exemplified a powerful governmental censorship that included and affected all types of media, from documents, photography, news and reports, to fiction such as books and films with materials related to the war.

In addition to the difficulties emanating from the source material related to wars -and any political implications deriving from it-, post-war economy also played a significant role in limiting war movie production, due to the constraints on budgets from studios and producers. In the immediate decades that followed WWII many film projects ran on smaller budgets due to the limited availability of resources; the economy affected the industry as a whole limiting the scale of productions if not their quality, as evidenced by many of the historically significant pictures created during the years of reconstruction and recovery (Neupert 140). Fortunately, many filmmakers used these challenges to create meaningful and beautiful work with outstanding actors -professional or not- even on shoestring budgets.

A noteworthy omission from the commentary of Jean-Pierre Jeancolas is that the subject of war was still addressed in film during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Creative directors found ways of depicting the subject in alternative manners, such as references or stories of people who were related to these conflicts but portrayed in substitute settings -like soldiers on leave or returning servicemen who had finished their tours of duty-. The different wars remained present, but only their shadows could be felt through the industry of film, as argued a study on the Algerian war: “in a number of French new wave films of the 1960s in which the Algerian War is screened obliquely, the conflict is present above all by its absence” (Langford 358). Although Langford is correct in pointing out that the New Wave was an important movement addressing the topic of war, they were not the only filmmakers portraying this problematic, and a



few films were produced that did much more than make the war present through absence. Austin went further than Langford on this topic when he explained:

The conflict was often left to occupy an off-screen space, so that it remained in a sense unrepresented (indeed, unrepresentable according to Resnais's *Muriel*) and only its impact on French veterans was shown on screen). [...] Algeria remains largely invisible behind the stories of returning soldiers, a traumatizing absence that haunts the French settings of *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (*Elevator to the Gallows*) (Louis Malle, 1957), *Les parapluies de Cherbourg* (*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*) (Jacques Demy, 1964), and *Le boucher* (Austin 116).

The Algerian war was not a small incident that could be ignored in spite of the efforts of the French government. Its effects were ubiquitous in the France of the sixties and seventies, even if the French who lived through it, with a degree of distance between them and the conflict, could only find bits of information with regards to the details through the official news outlets. Austin accurately points out that the war was represented by more than New Wave films and highlights the fact that the war became present through its effects on the people who had lived it. Films such as *Le boucher* or *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* illustrated how returning servicemen were affected by the war, and some of the negative impact that their trauma could have on the population they were attempting to re-enter.

As significant artistically and socially as all of these films are, and in spite of their effectiveness or representing war through its absence or its devastating effect on those who participated in them and their loved ones as they re-entered society, French war film failed to include in any of its representations one of the most important actors in this drama: minorities. These pictures revolve around the effects of war on the French population of European origins

while neglecting to mention the important role played in all of the different war theaters by the minorities involved in them. Very few films include the inescapably significant role that people of various minority groups played during the conflicts. There is little or no mention of the migrant Indochinese workers brought to shore up the industrial effort in support of the French economy during both world wars, nor the large numbers of voluntary and even larger quantity of conscript soldiers of African origins that fought in them. There exist almost no references to the large waves of immigration of North Africans to the Hexagon directly caused by the wars. This invisibility situates the challenges caused and suffered by immigrants in France in a societal blind spot, as immigrants struggle to adapt to life in France, while enduring intolerance from the European French majority.

France is one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse nations in Europe. However, since the end of WWII, the French Republic has continually experienced difficulty coming to grips with the notion of cultural diversity due to its socio-political ideals<sup>2</sup>. The French Republican model is based on communitarianism, a concept that provides a definition of French democracy in these terms: a “community as composed of one unified group guarding against the politicisation of separate communities” (Montague 220). The French Republican model aspires to prevent discrimination and unfair advantages of any particular group of individuals by asserting it is a color- and culture-blind institution. Dena Montague explains that this Republican

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<sup>2</sup> In a study of cultural plurality and discrimination in France Doytcheva and Helly noted the following: “*La notion de diversité connaît ces dernières années en France une popularité croissante. Dans le monde du travail, de l’éducation, dans le champ politique ou de l’action publique, ou lors de mobilisations associatives et militantes, le terme est très souvent utilisé pour parler de l’intégration des immigrés et du caractère pluriethnique de la société française et de la discrimination ethnique et raciale*” (Doytcheva and Helly 391). The debate that they highlight began in the 1990s when the government and private sectors were seeking on how to address the notion of cultural plurality and discrimination in a society which attempted to avoid the recognition of ethnic differences in order to preserve the republican model of egalite, which attempted to eliminate differences between peoples to prevent discrimination. In practice this model had been failing and anti-immigrant sentiment had gained political traction, especially in the 2000s.

system is designed to prevent “minority groups to create distinct and separate communities and specific racial/ethnic political demands in violation of Republican norms” (ibid). Montague cites Stuart Hall’s summary of Foucault’s definition of discourse to illustrate how important this type of discourse is in societal matters of inclusion and exclusion. Hall’s summary on Foucault says:

[Discourse] governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write or conduct oneself, so also by definition, it ‘rules out’, limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it. (Montague 221)

The discourse of communitarianism specifically targets immigrant groups, as well as Muslim, black, gay and Jewish communities. It regulates their identity within French society and goes as far as defining and limiting their existence. A problem with communitarianist discourse is that it admits the presence and visibility of minorities and, by consequence, of difference and diversity.

According to Montague, anti-communitarianism is an opposing discourse developed to counter this admission. She posits that “Anti-communitarian discourse asserts that recognising group demands would fracture the Republican community and create discord within the nation itself. This idea is grounded in the notion that France lacks any institutional bias towards visible minorities” (Montague 220). If one favors communitarianism, one cannot accept that France is a color-blind society. Republicanism without social or ethnic distinctions differentiates French democracy from the American and British models that not only recognize, but allegedly celebrate, diversity. The recognition of diversity also forces these other societal models to acknowledge the existence of problems such as racism and discrimination. In particular, they

must recognize the existence of institutional racism, which is one of the main trials faced by French minorities.

The challenge visible minorities face in France consists of the whitewashing of institutional racism generated by anti-communitarian discourse. Communitarianism and its opposite doctrine are but the reverse sides of an ideological, Manichean socio-political currency that generates institutional racism. Regarding institutional racism, Sophie Body-Grendot explicates that while The United Kingdom and the United States attempt to address this problem, France also diverges from their models in this matter by dismissing or minimizing this issue (Body-Grendot 656). Although minorities and immigrants are not at odds with the whole of the French population, they face an uphill battle regarding social acceptance due to the lack of recognition, by institutional France, that there exists a challenge in welcoming and absorbing large groups of immigrants and their descendants. The difficulty stems in large part from the fact that these groups are, along with their particular socio-cultural and economic challenges, unrecognized.

While the official existence of minorities and their social difficulties go officially unacknowledged by governmental institutions and ideals, a new type of discrimination has evolved in most Western societies. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva explains that racism has morphed from a discourse based upon biological racial superiority to one centrally rooted on cultural difference. Bonilla-Silva asserts that the new racists claim: “they are not racists since their main concern is the maintenance of the culture and values that have made their respective countries great nations” (189). In France, when minorities and immigrants face groups or entities who discriminate against them, minorities and immigrants have little recourse for justice since the

system claims that, officially, neither minority groups nor the discrimination that they experience exist.

Some of the roots of this challenge stem from the long history of cultural, economic and political prominence that France enjoyed globally due to its colonial empire. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, all the way up to the immediate post WWII period, France projected its political clout in the form of an empire with possessions scattered around the world, from islands in the Caribbean and the Pacific to large expanses of land in Africa, the Americas and Asia. Inevitably, as the French colonized and exploited these foreign lands and its peoples, groups of these people immigrated to the French metropolis, either brought by their conquerors or in search of better opportunities. The arrival of these minorities in different waves, such as foreign workers from Indochina who supported the military efforts of WWI or the large number of North Africans who settled in the urban areas of the Hexagon through most of the twentieth century, created spaces within France inhabited by growing numbers of visible minorities. These groups of newcomers are ethnically and culturally divergent from the more traditional Christian European French whose ancestors have resided in France for centuries. Stovall researched the economic contribution to France by people from China, North Africa and Indochina who immigrated to support the French war efforts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He remarks:

The introduction of a group of laborers who differed so strikingly in language, customs, and skin color from French workers raised the possibility of a fundamental shift in what it meant to be working class in France. Like colonial soldiers, workers from the empire and China made a crucial contribution to France's war effort. However, these contributions often went unrecognized and in general their experiences in the metropole were not happy (Stovall "National Identity" 55).

The differences between the French majority of European descent and the different immigrant groups, ranging from religious practices to language, have created friction between the latter and the European incumbents. WWII, the war to which Stovall's statement refers, brought another wave of migration, most notably from North Africa. As immigrants settled in France and had children, significant new minority groups were created. They constitute the children of the newcomers, who consider themselves French by virtue of their birth, but who also preserve many of the cultural and ethnic traits of their forefathers. When the topic of the movement and acceptance of minorities is addressed in France, notably from a political and cultural viewpoint, it is North Africans who typically find themselves at the center of the discussion. Already back in 1990, Azouz Begag remarked:

When the French speak of immigration they refer almost exclusively to the 1.5 million Moslem immigrants in France from three North-African countries who have settled in France in the last generation. "Integration" generally refers to the assimilation of their children, popularly known as "Beurs". (Begag 1)

Begag points out that this immigration was originally planned to be temporary, but the temporary workers turned into permanent immigrants in many instances. This change significantly affected the makeup of French society when immigrants further increased their cultural presence through having children that became French citizens. Many of the French of European descent still have difficulty accepting them as French citizens and continue to pejoratively refer to them and to treat them as immigrants. In a study of *Beur* authors and the production of literature by this marginalized group, Brinda Mehta explains that children of immigrants are racially profiled and unfairly treated by social services and the education system alike. The subject of works by

authors of these ethnic group reflect these struggles in the themes that they address in their writings. Mehta states that

children and young adults (...) expose the two mutually exclusive realities of France. In these fractured spaces, second-generation beur children must negotiate their biculturality as Franco-Maghrebi citizens amid racism, social marginality, and antiquated French and Maghrebi patriarchal ideologies. (Mehta 174)

The films in this dissertation follow this pattern of reflection, since authors, directors, writers and actors in each movie have direct relations to marginalized groups. The primary difficulty for French-born people of North African descent is that they have found themselves in a sociocultural dilemma, intersecting of both groups but not fully integrated by the incumbent Europeans and already removed from the lands of their forefathers.

The wars of colonial independence were different for France compared to the World Wars because in the former they were considered the oppressors. WWII especially brought a complicated mix of shame of the initial surrender to the Germans and collaboration with the invaders by large sections of the population to varied degrees (Draper 24). These feelings were mixed with some sense of national pride that emanated from the survival and liberation from the enemy. Those who lived through this conflict have had a difficult time accepting, admitting and attempting to repair the damages done to their own (from members of the resistance to French Jews and other minorities) during the Vichy regime and the occupation (Maier M2). The collective sentiment of the French towards the colonial wars remain to this day a more unsolved, delicate topic, especially for those who lived them and were involved in them. The fact that so many immigrants came to France as a direct result of these wars, and from the places which fought France for their own independence, only perpetuates the status of these minorities either

as adversaries or as painful reminders of shameful historical episodes that many would rather, and have gone to painful lengths, to forget.

The government and the military in particular have attempted to sanitize the history of these wars even as they were being carried out, a policy that only hardened with the loss of Indochina and Algeria:

The French state has pursued willful forgetting as its primary strategy toward the Algerian War and, one might add, much of the imperial past. Textbooks and memorials, commemorative dates and appellations used to designate the war—all of them lend evidence to successive French administrations' preference for silence over recollections of its memory. (Derderian 29)

While the government attempted to erase the wars of independence, waves of immigrants from these colonial territories came to France. Some were brought by the government during the World Wars to shore up the war effort while others arrived in search of better opportunities and escaping the violence stemming from the wars of independence. Even more people came later, as those who had been already relocated sought to bring their families from their ancestral lands to France where they were already settled and working. It became impossible for the French to forget about the wars, especially the one waged in Algeria, with so many Algerians and other North-Africans settling in France and allegedly competing for French jobs.

The French government has for decades attempted to create a sanitized, uniform historical past in order to unify a nation created out of diverse cultural groups. Ronald Koven explains that in France accusing each other of forgetfulness of embarrassing historical chapters in their history is common. However, the real challenge is not remembrance, but rather choice of



which version of history to promote as the one, official version. Each person or group naturally volunteers a self-serving version of historical events. Koven states that

This struggle over which memories should make up the French psyche reflects a hard-to-accept historical reality: Throughout much of its past, France, more than most other countries, has been engaged in actual or cold civil wars punctuated by more or less long periods of national reconciliation that have required a need to forget. (Koven 52)

The Vichy government is a poignant example of this historical debate. The collective trauma created by WWII and the humiliation of the loss of the colonial empire only strengthened the resolve of those in charge to create and solidify the myth of a uniform, lineal, monolithic history of a glorious France. Four post-war regimes, each led by a leader with very different political background and agenda than the next, tried to produce its own version of the role of Vichy regarding French survival under Nazi rule. Charles de Gaulle, Georges Pompidou, Valery Giscard d'Estaing, and François Mitterrand all attempted to reconstruct national unity by providing different apologetic versions of the crimes committed by Vichy. Each met with opposition by groups who felt targeted or neglected by each different version (ibid). The consistency shared by each approach is the fact that no matter which government assumes power, it attempts to control the narrative of the past in a self-serving, uniform manner alienates or undermines the rights of the opposition or minorities.

Each one of the four government shared a commitment to build a uniform historical discourse. They considered that a unified sense of identity was paramount to the reconstruction and prosperity of the future France. Jo McCormak explicates the reasoning behind this approach:

The renewed interest in historical memory is perhaps a particularly significant issue in France for several reasons. Firstly, the French nation has traditionally drawn heavily on

historical references for its support. Such historical references helped to draw together what has always been an extremely divided and diverse nation. (McCormack 1129)

The danger stemming from the effort to create an artificial memory of a uniform European France is the exclusion of many groups that have contributed to the creation and evolution of the Republic, groups of both European and non-European origins. These groups are left with an uphill battle in order to gain acceptance and recognition for their contributions in a society that continues to systemically attempt to disregard and suppress their existence. Homi Bhabha defines the acceptance minorities and immigrants seek in these terms: “Recognition, in the realm of minorities, is most often a claim to authority for an emergent subject, or a group that seeks to empower its new collective identity” (Bhabha 4). The search for recognition has and continues to pit the majority against the growing minority groups ideologically, socially and at times also physically. Dating back to the 1960s the first violent confrontations between minorities and the authorities created periods of heightened social unrest. Most notable was the October 17, 1961 clash between Algerian immigrants and the Parisian police where the authorities are estimated to have killed up to 200 protesters, throwing many of the bodies into the Seine river (Cole, “Remembering the Battle of Paris” 24). Hundreds were beaten and thousands detained in a terrible incident that has, like other incidents of this nature perpetrated by the French authorities, been much suppressed from public records.

An important shift occurred in the 1990s that has a direct link of the latest rounds of unrest and the production of films that we are discussing in this work. I propose that there are two significant occurrences that shifted the interest of France in dealing with WWII to opening the discussion of the Algerian war and its effects. The first point is presented by McCormack who argues the following with regards to an infamous collaborator during the Vichy regime:

The 1990s have witnessed an end to what Henry Rousso called the “obsession” with the Second World War, a shift that has occurred progressively over time due to a number of factors. A key turning point was undoubtedly the trial of Maurice Papon. In 1997 Frenchman Maurice Papon was finally tried in Bordeaux for his role as a civil servant during the Second World War (McCormack 1131).

Papon is a vital link between the two conflicts because he initially collaborated with the deportation of Jews during WWII. The trial mentioned, argues McCormack, was the last ‘great memory trial’ related to WWII in France. After the end of the War, Papon became colonial administrator of Algeria. Upon his completion of this post he returned to France to serve as the Paris Chief of Police. He was in charge of this administrative body during the aforementioned infamous 1961 riots where many Algerians lost their lives but remained adamant until after the trial at maintaining that “nothing improper had occurred” (Vinen). This incident is one of the central themes discussed in one of the most celebrated French films of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which deals with Algerian immigration and French colonialism: *Caché* (Haneke, 2005). Although the Papon trial centered on his *collaboration*, his role in the 1961 riots received much coverage, and this attention allowed the beginning of a transition of the public interest from WWII to Algeria. As some closure began to occur when dealing with France’s shameful WWII collaborators, a bridge became apparent towards addressing the much-suppressed relation of the government with Algerian immigrants and the Algerian war.

An even more significant event took place in 1999 when the French Parliament finally recognized the Algerian war as an official armed conflict (Bacholle-Bošković 234). Where the government had censured the press and media (books, newspapers, magazines and film all included up to this point), the door swung in the opposite direction allowing a more open

discussion of this conflict as what this was: a war, even though Algeria had continually referred to the occurrences as the ‘Algerian Revolution’ (242). What had previously been a monologue in which Algerians and their descendants had been talking to French deaf ears at best, or being violently silenced at worse, could now be turned into a dialogue, and turn it did. The films discussed in this dissertation become a vehicle that Algerians, French, and French of Algerian descent utilize to revise French history, to begin to crack the monolithic historical discourse sculpted by the French government during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This new opening was never going to be facile; repressed national trauma never is. In this particular instance, the revision of a revolutionary war and the injustice with which immigrants have been treated for decades became compounded in their second and even third-generation descendants, who grew up in a nation that attempted to minimize their importance and erase their history. The Papon trial and the recognition of the war brought to the forefront of French interest the complexity of trying to deal with this conflicted past while attempting to absorb a sizeable minority with a conflicted identity, one which would now have a chance to speak much more loudly. The revision of history and the airing of past grievances is still not a subject welcomed by all sections of French society, and new friction between the majority and minorities of North African origin would come to a head at the turn of the century.

This friction escalated to violence at different points in time during the first decade of the 2000s, with the most notable incidents taking place in the forms of riots in which the great majority of participants were youth of North African ethnicity. The escalation of protests into riots in France in late 2005 were provoked by the violent actions of the police. Three youths of North African descent were electrocuted while being chased by the authorities. Two of the teenagers passed away as a result of the accident, which triggered a three-week period of violent

protests in various of the most important French urban centers, including Paris, Lyon, Lille, Marseille and Toulouse. A report stated that “more than 6,000 vehicles have been set alight in nearly 300 towns; over 1,500 people have been arrested” (“An Underclass Rebellion” 25) during this prolonged period of civil strife. Although there have been significant episodes of unrest dating back to the 1960s, these new incidents are significant because they constitute violence not from French (authorities or civilians) towards immigrants, but from French towards other French, in this case second- and even third-generation minorities stemming from former colonial territories who continue to be regarded as *immigrants* despite being born and raised within France.

Parallel to this unrest, the film industry in France had begun exploring the war film genre in innovative ways. As we stated previously, the French film industry, unlike the American, has been historically reluctant to portray their conflicts on the silver screen, especially as they are taking place. Austin, who was one of the first to notice the shift in depiction of the Algerian war in film, concentrated on the study of these films as a representation of suppressed trauma. Noticing the reference of Algeria as a forgotten war, Austin highlighted an important argument by historian Benjamin Stora: in the first twenty years following the end of the war, over 30 films treated the subject of the war implicitly (Austin 116). But in the 2000s this timidity finally stops, and bold pictures portray the conflicts explicitly. Leffler states in her review of war film *L'ennemi intime* (2007): “French filmmakers have taken close to half a century to bring to the big screen the horrors of Algeria's fight for independence from French colonialism” (Leffler 66). The official recognition of the Algerian conflict as a war by the French government in 1999 (Austin 117), coupled with the coming of age of generations of French citizens of former French colonial ethnicity, created a climate in which the challenges of acceptance of these minorities

could be explored. There is a correlation of social commentary between the emergence of these pictures and the public manifestations, since these films are in many ways a reflection of the conflict for recognition and acceptance of these immigrant minorities in France. The correlation may be drawn since these movies have been brought to life by directors, producers and writers with direct relation to the wars of decolonization, or who are of immigrant descent themselves.

This study explains that these war films create new spaces in which the contribution of minorities to the culture and history of the Hexagon can be revised. These films illustrate that immigrants and their descendants form an integral part of French culture and that they have legitimate claims to being called French and should be accepted as vital components of the French republic. Speaking of *Indigènes*, one of the films that will be analyzed in this chapter, Nina Sutherland asserts that the film re-examines

not only the role, the motivations and the legacy of the war among the first generation – those who experienced the Second World War first-hand – but also the resonance of this period in the lives of their children and grandchildren who now live as part of the North African diaspora community in France as full French citizens. This is an issue that was extremely pertinent when these works first appeared, when France was desperately looking for explanations in the aftermath of more than three weeks of urban violence in its most deprived and multiracial housing estates in the autumn of 2005. (Sutherland 193)

The six motion pictures in this study do more than shed light on the reasons behind the riots.

They accomplish two main purposes. First, they add legitimacy to the historical contributions of these minorities to France. Second, they help define the identity of certain minority groups.

In order to illustrate the manner in which these films depict the struggle of immigrants and minorities for acceptance into mainstream French society, as well as their contribution to the

French nation, the pictures will be analyzed from two main perspectives. First, the shooting locations and the role that these places play in the films are vital. They support the action of the films and assist. The spaces filmed help explain the relationship between the French of European descent and the people they had colonized, as the colonized struggle to gain recognition, acceptance, and independence. Even though these goals may on the surface seem contradictory, especially the latter two, it may be argued that they are in fact complementary because there can be no acceptance or recognition without the equality that independence provides.

This dissertation uses the concepts of Places and non-Places posited by anthropologist Marc Augé and that of heterotopias as proposed by Michel Foucault. The term Place will be capitalized to identify a place as defined by the anthropologist, while the spaces that were perceived by the European French as exotic and in need to be tamed were viewed as non-Places. Augé himself did not capitalize it in his writings, but we will in this work to make the anthropological term distinguishable from the more general use of the word place. In Augé's studies of the evolution of modern society into Supermodernity, he distinguishes two main groups of spaces at odds with one another based on the roles these spaces play in the lives of people. He springboards from the ethnographic notion of a defined space that can be constructed by a group of people based on two basic premises. The first one is how a place is defined by the people who inhabit it. In other words, a space gains significance by the functions of everyday life that it fulfills, such as a place of inhabitation, a place of work or one for worship. The spaces in which people live, work or perform religious rituals facilitate the creation of the meaning for the existence of the persons who use them. The second notion is the manner in which a space is organized. The organization refers to how the space is delimited by geographical boundaries. These boundaries are arbitrary and are assigned by the people who utilize the space; they are

frontiers that separate a determined space from every other and therefore define it as a place that possesses a specific function (like the limits of a property such as a church or home). The boundaries also separate the space in which a particular people operate from the rest of the world. These frontiers include the edge of a people's space that borders spaces defined by other peoples or simply spaces that are unclaimed by anybody - like a wilderness that goes beyond the cultivated lands of the people in question (Augé 42-43). Examples of these boundaries are the limits of a town or region, or the borders of a country.

For Augé, a Place can be defined by fulfilling certain basic criteria: "These places have at least three characteristics in common. They want to be – people want them to be – places of identity, of relations and of history" (Augé 52). In other words, a Place is a space that helps define and is in turn defined by social order, a space which contributes to the creation and definition of meaning for the people who inhabit it and use it, an ontological space. Examples of Places are spaces of work, spaces for worship and the home. These spaces allow people to conduct rituals and perform activities that give meaning to their lives both as individuals and as parts of a collective, such as a tribe or a nation. The element that will be of particular importance to our analysis will be the relation of Place and identity in order to better understand the role played by the spaces portrayed in the film, and how they echo the relationship between the European French majority and their colonial vassals.

The spaces beyond Places are seen as non-Places, as Augé explains: "If a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (Augé 78). The anthropologist goes on to clarify that in opposition to Places, non-Places are spaces of transition and which are temporary in nature. Examples of non-Places are clinics and hospitals,



hotels, airports, roads and cemeteries. In such spaces, the existence of a person is not defined nor gains meaning or relevance, but this existence rather runs the risk of losing its meaning as it has been defined by a Place, since this type of space may confound or transform it. These are also spaces in which people transition from one Place to the next.

The anthropological approach of Augé is of particular importance to give a fresh approach to better understand these films as conversation vehicles. Anthropological theory can offer a new perspective to discuss colonialism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a time where important European colonial empires fell apart. Besides economic and political reasons for their failure, we may also look at theoretical discourses that challenged the colonial system. French intelligentsia provides a prime example of this anti-colonial movement, with prominent authors such as Sartre and Fanon openly challenging the justification of maintaining an Empire and subjugating other cultures for the political and economic benefit of France. This criticism came from members of the colonizer cultures as well as the colonized. In his work on ethnographic writing and cinematic montage, George Marcus says in this regard:

Anthropology is both addressing subjects new to it and recasting the space-time identity of its conventional ones. This is in response, I believe, to a fin de siècle phenomenon marked by an exhaustion of concepts and frameworks, or at least by an inability to choose critically and decisively among them. Thus, witness the symptomatic loss of authority metanarratives. (Marcus 36)

The anthropological spatial concepts defined by Augé permit an examination of the spaces utilized in the films as a diegetic component of the language of film. This component serves to convey an idea or support arguments presented by the narratives of the motion pictures,

particularly since all of them premiered during or immediately after the timeframe described by Marcus.

To complement the notion of a non-Place as defined by Augé, we will utilize the similar concept of a heterotopia proposed by Michel Foucault. Spaces which are unlike utopias because they are real, but which are not quite like places, Foucault defines as:

real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—  
which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the  
real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously  
represented, contested, and inverted. (Foucault 3-4)

The theme of non-Places is echoed in a heterotopia, which is a space where the meaning of the existence of an individual may be metamorphosed. These spaces occur beyond the existential safety of the Places. For Foucault various types of heterotopias exist, but he believes that in modern society the most prevalent type are heterotopias of deviation, which he describes as “those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed” (Foucault 5). These types of spaces proliferated in Algeria during the war of independence, which saw an alarming transformation from a Place to a Non-Place for vast numbers of its native inhabitants. Henni states that the French military implemented a massive relocation project for the local population in order to control them: “3,525,000 persons were compulsorily displaced in Algeria under French colonial rule” and “3,740 camps de regroupement had been built in French Algeria since the outbreak of the revolution in 1954” (Henni 44). These camps were built in an attempt to control the locals and prevent them from giving aid to the ‘insurgents’ between 1954 and 1962, and the French uprooted over a third of the total population of Algeria in this effort, relocating them in temporary spaces that resembled

more concentration camps than villages, breaking the locals from their ancestral lands with which they identified. It is in this state of flux that several of the texts in this work are set.

We do have to consider that non-Places, due to their ambiguous transformative nature, cannot be unequivocally pinned as places of loss of meaning that are diametrically opposed to Places. For example, Michael Gott used Augé's concept of the airport as a non-Place in quite the opposite manner. In a study of the relation of 21<sup>st</sup> century European travel film and identity, he utilizes the film *L'italien* (Baroux 2010) to illustrate how airports are more than a non-Place where life loses its meaning. In the picture, a French man of Algerian descent who lives in Nice tries to pass for Italian in order to sell Maseratis and climb the French social ladder. He uses the Marseille airport to fool his family and friends making them believe that he is traveling to and from Rome, when all the while he has been working a few kilometers away. Through the airport, and thanks to the Shengen European Union travel agreements, he is able to forge a new identity due to the porous nature of travel restrictions within the EU. The comedic narrative inevitably leads towards a crisis and near failure of his experiment when Mourad, the main character who is French by birth, gets caught by the authorities without his documents and is deported to Algeria, the land of his father's birth, prior to the happy ending. What is relevant is the role of the airport with relation to the man's identity. Gott states about the Marseille airport: "More than simply a non-place (Augé 1992), the airport here becomes a literal and symbolic border zone between Mourad's different identities. This zone of transit and transformation represents something similar to what Balibar theorizes as (...) a space with inherent potential for 'hybridity and intention' and 'multiple citizenship'" (Gott 193). Rather than having a destructive, negative connotation, Gott contends that a non-Place can have a positive transformational effect on the identity of an individual. In our analysis of the war films, this interpretive possibility will be also

taken into consideration to explore how a non-Place, while viewed primarily in a deconstructive light when it comes to an individual's identity, may be considered to assist in the re-definition of the meaning of the life of a person.

Through the war films in this work, the spatial-defining terms coined by Augé and Foucault will be utilized to study the manner in which the spaces that the French inhabited or conquered in Algeria were viewed by them as Places. When speaking about colonial spaces, is necessary to note a factor that Stovall points out in his migrant labor study: "Traditionally, historians of modern France have seen the nation's colonies as a separate space with a separate history" (Stovall "National Identity" 54). Under such considerations the French delegitimized the cultures of the peoples they colonized, permitting the colonizers to dehumanize them and utilizing this dehumanization as an excuse to exploit their colonized subjects while denying them the privileges of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* (liberty, equality and brotherhood) that the French Republic alleges are inalienable rights of humankind. The spaces which the colonized occupied became de facto non-Places to the French because they were spaces with no particular meaning to them, except as places from which to pull material and human resources to be exploited. The studied films depict how the conflict between the Places and the non-Places underlines the tension between the people that each particular space represents. Just as important, they also overturn the use of these spaces to debunk the view that colonized people reside in heterotopic spaces, by giving them legitimacy as Places in their own right in the way that Gott presents.

The second part of each film study constitutes the analysis of the relationships between the combatants of European French origin and those foreign origins or French minorities. In some films, soldiers of different ethnicity fight in opposing sides, while in some of our examples they serve alongside each other in the French military and in the French resistance. The

advantage of the war film genre is to highlight, from the outset, that the predominant French culture and the conquered foreigners and subservient minorities are locked in a conflict that the battlefield exemplifies literally and metaphorically. The war which these films represent is two-fold. The first and obvious is the military conflict of political and economic interests at odds, as France attempts to maintain its dominance over a crumbling empire. The second one is of a cultural nature, as the conquered people rise to claim their rights as equals to the French, and either gain independence from France or to be admitted as full citizens of the Republic. In order to examine this struggle, we will study the relationships of the protagonist of European French origin, such as French officers, with the local populations of the colonized lands, as well as the relationships of the French soldiers vis-à-vis the enlisted or conscripted men of colonial origins who served in the French military, or with French people born in the Hexagon or in the colonies. These relationships serve to illustrate a conflict that involved nations on a much more personal level. Each film will be briefly introduced from a plot and narrative viewpoint, and then the spaces and relationships will be studied to provide insight into how they illustrate the struggle for recognition and equality of the French population of immigrant origins.

The social unrests of 2005 helped underline the relevance of the study of the first two films analyzed in this dissertation, especially since they premiered with some immediacy of the incidents. The fact that these unrests were brewing at the same time that the initial films of this genre were being produced suggests that the political changes of the late 1990s created an opening for France to re-examine its previously ignored colonial history. The continuation of production of films of this genre in subsequent years, production that continues at present, shows that the conversation has retained its importance at the forefront of French social transformation. What the pictures also show is that the descendants of the immigrants are now at the forefront of

this re-exploration. This new generation is both forced by its untenable social situation, but at the same time are proving eager to take on the role to review colonial history (Sutherland 189).

However, it would be incorrect to assume that a completely new history will be written, but that instead, as notable historians propose, this new discourse is becoming an addition that will exist parallel to the incumbent History in order to augment it and modify because grand, uniform historical narratives are obsolete (McCormack 1129). The missing narrative will co-exist and challenge some of the notions of the old mythology but will not efface it, just like the existence of minorities in France will not supplant the prevalent majority, but rather enrich and oppose it in cultural and ideological ways.

The immigration of North Africans to France is finding a way, through all of its hardships, to co-exist with the majority despite being culturally and ethnically further removed from it when compared to previous immigration waves of European Christian provenance. Tribalat noticed a sociological phenomenon when reviewing the results of the 1990 French census:

*L'apparence physique occupe une grande place et amène à grossir l'importance des populations les plus visibles. Une femme originaire d'Algérie habillée en costume traditionnel qui conduit son plus jeune enfant à l'école se remarque plus qu'un couple de retraités italiens qui fait une promenade matinale. (Tribalat, "Les immigrés au Recensement" 1912)*

This study shows that physical and socio-cultural differences play a determining role in the degree of difficulty perceived by the majority in accepting and absorbing a minority group. It has become harder for the French to embrace North African immigration than it was to absorb previous groups such as Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Poles or Russians who had physical and

cultural traits that more closely resemble those of the European French. Tribalat continues by noting that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century a significant shift occurred with respect to the provenance of the groups of migrants to France:

Le nombre d'immigrés européens a régressé de 7%. Cette baisse a touché les pays de la CEE (- 9 %) et surtout les pays de l'Est (- 16%). On assiste au vieillissement de populations formées à partir de courants migratoires pratiquement taris (Pologne, Espagne, Italie et même Portugal). (Tribalat, "Les immigrés au Recensement" 1915)

She continues by underlining that while migration from other European territories has waned, the number of immigrants from Asia and most notably from African countries significantly increased during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (ibid). The notable increase of minorities that are visibly very different from the majority has augmented the problem of assimilating them in a country that by principle does not recognize socio-cultural differences. This ongoing struggle is the reason why war film is particularly effective as an instrument to revise traditional historical narrative, since "the Algerian war remains highly relevant to an understanding of contemporary French society due to its legacy" (McCormack 1131). War film becomes a vital tool to scrutinize both the sources and the current status of the coexistence of the majority alongside of its former colonial subjects and their descendants.

However, we must consider as well that the goals of these films have problems of attainability from both a theoretical and practical viewpoint. When the first of these films premiered, the directors had clear agendas, and the films had two principal goals: historical revision and cultural acceptance of minorities. Bouchareb produced not only *Indigènes* in 2006 but followed the pattern of the narrative of this picture, using the same four protagonists in similar storylines only this time set as a gangster-style film: *Hors-la-loi* (2010). Named 'Outside

the Law' in English, it had similar aims as the 2006 picture but depicting the struggle of Algerians living in the *banlieues* of Paris. Segarra notes about these works: "Rachid Bouchareb, born in 1953 near Paris, of Algerian descent, intends in these two films to create a historical reconstruction of the past, while aiming to restore a forgotten piece of recent French history: the participation of the Algerian people in it" (Segarra 178-179). Two important questions that may be raised concerning these films are: should Algerians be so invested in being recognized and accepted as French by the European majority, and second, are any of those aims possible?

Let's first consider the latter question because the social construction of France is historically built to resist the acceptance targeted by these films. The relocation and exploitation of a colonial workforce to shore up the economy during times of war was not new to WWII, nor the recruitment and conscription of colonial subjects into the military. However, contrary to the Second World War, in WWI the great majority of these colonial laborers were sent back to their places of origin (Stovall "National Identity" 53). Although the reasons may have been primarily economic in nature, the justification for the repatriation was given in racial terms. Stovall explains that although foreign workers had been brought from both the colonies and from parts of Europe less affected by the conflict, workers of European provenance were received and treated in a much more positive light than those from the Empire (Stovall "National Identity" 58). In fact, those of European provenance were able to stay back. Stovall further explains the reason:

Above all, administrators argued that France was simply not ready to become a multiracial nation. A Labor Ministry article early in 1920 used this as a justification for recruiting white immigrant labor, arguing that "[we need] to call upon labor of European origin, in preference to colonial or exotic labor, because of the social and ethnic



difficulties which could arise from the presence upon French soil of ethnographic elements too clearly distinct from the rest of the population'. (Stovall "National Identity" 59)

He furthers the argument that France has constructed its identity as a white nation, and that this notion was allowed to thrive due to the situation in which they saw large quantities of temporary workers of other ethnicities replace what had been a predominantly white workforce during wartime (Stovall "National Identity" 53, 61). During WWII France once again called upon colonial labor, but the situation was much different than in the Great War. European workers were unavailable since the conflict affected most nations that could have sent a supplemental labor force. In addition, most of the Hexagon proper was occupied by their enemy. To aggravate the social situation, large numbers of foreign workers stayed in France with many sending for their families instead of returning home after the cessation of hostilities.

While the economic and spatial circumstances of the minority groups changed, most notably of those of African origins, the attitudes of the French towards them had not. This is evidenced by the resistance to accept not only immigrants, but also their descendants by large sections of the populations even to this day. Segarra shows that even in this century these attitudes continue to be perpetuated: "Nicolas Sarkozy, first as Minister of the Interior, and the President of France, chose to antagonize people of the banlieue, by criminalizing them" (Segarra 178). It is ironic that Sarkozy, a descendant of Hungarian immigrants, may be viewed and accepted as French. At times, he sides with a rejectionist view of other immigrants, notably those of non-European descent. This antagonism from his administration was one of the contributing factors to the 2005 unrest to which we have previously referred, and also for the production of the films in this dissertation.

The critical response to the films was positive by some film critics and people of political liberal tendencies, but this response was not shared across the political specter and by segments of society who do oppose immigration. Segarra continues:

This is the reason why *Days of Glory*'s and *Outside the Law*'s premieres, both at the Festival of Cannes, provoked demonstrations and official protests from some military and congressmen. They claimed that these movies "falsified history" -the verb used in French means also "to counterfeit," implying thus that there is a *truthful* or *original* version of history and a *forged* or *fabricated* one (...) in French, nowadays, "revisionism" is mainly used as a synonym for negationism. (Segarra 179)

The facts brought up by Segarra and Stovall point to a France that is far from ready to accept any significant change to a historical narrative that is built upon exclusion of groups who vary too much from the republican ideal that only included French citizens, in spite of the questionable moral defensibility of this position. They also question whether these films may in fact cause more dissension than harmony within the social and political realms of the present-day Hexagon, since they may in fact contribute to emphasize irreconcilable differences instead of harmonious coexistence.

Beyond the practical attainability of the goals of historical revisionism and social acceptance, others also question whether these goals should be pursued in the manner in which the films do. The literary and philosophical work of psychiatrist and francophone author Franz Fanon is of particular importance due to his medical training and his involvement in treating participants of the Algerian War. In all of his work on and for colonial independence, Fanon vehemently advocated for a total break between the *colon* and *colonisé* (colonizer and colonized). In his writings on violence he explained the necessity of fighting the violence of the

imposition of one culture -colonialism- through an equally violent response -independence- in order to be completely free from the imposition of European culture over North Africans and others who had suffered at the hands of the French. He in fact saw violence as morality in this regard : “Pour le colonisé, être moraliste c’est, très concrètement, faire taire la morgue du colon, briser sa violence étalée, en un mot l’expulser carrément du panorama”<sup>3</sup> (Fanon 47). While this view has valid practical and theoretical points of application, especially with regards to the Algerian war of independent in which Fanon was closely personally involved, one must consider and question how his thoughts apply to French-born citizens of Algerian descent. A film such as *The Battle of Algiers* (Pontecorvo, 1966) is much more appropriate to address Fanon’s type of arguments, because his work appears to apply more to citizens of colonial territories seeking independence from the metropolis rather than to descendants of colonial immigrants who are full-fledged French citizens, whose social goals may be completely different in nature. Although descendants of immigrants, they are French-born and raised. And what about the Harkis, who were expelled or rescued from their own land in order to escape the retribution from their compatriots for having worked with the French? For some people of colonial origin independence from the metropolis may not be desirable nor feasible.

Norindr raises a different type of criticism of the goals of these films when she addressed some of the problems that she saw in the aims pursued by Bouchareb’s work and how it could be read and received. Norindr states:

Given French public resentment toward immigrants, especially those from the Maghreb, Bouchareb’s film may be said to provide a welcome and effective corrective. But the way *Indigènes* accomplishes this formidable task is extremely problematic because it

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<sup>3</sup> For the colonized, to be a moralist is, quite concretely, to silence the morgue of the colonizer, to break his spread violence, in a word to expel him completely from the picture (translation by me).

reinforces the stereotypical image of the good *indigènes* (natives), loyal and self-sacrificing, and potentially ideal candidates for a full and uncomplicated assimilation into French society. (Norindr 127-128)

Norindr juxtaposes Bouchareb's dutiful soldiers to Fanon's "unruly natives" (Norindr 129), claiming Bouchareb is trying too hard to comply to French standards and how his men qualify for acceptance through sacrifice. Norindr adds:

Rather than *reconnaissance*, or recognition, for services rendered or exceptional contributions in areas such as the armed forces, the film's objective could have been more ambitious by focusing on the much more dense and problematic concept of *connaissance*: knowledge of the history that binds France to its colonies, including, of course, the role of the *indigènes* in world conflicts and wars of decolonization. (Norindr 128-129)

Norindr accurately notes that the film focuses on soldiers who volunteered to serve, although they may have been in the minority when compared to those who were conscripted. But all of the films in this dissertation portray minority fighters who are voluntarily fighting for France such as minorities in the resistance or Harkis who have joined the French against their own people. Do they not deserve their own voice and story to be heard as well? What these films are specifically treating is the lives and contributions of those who fought for France rather than those who did so against the Hexagon. In other words, these pictures focus on those who are vying for recognition and inclusion rather than the larger group who was struggling for exclusion and independence. Norindr's views will be revisited in the discussion of *Indigènes* proper because she is correct in pointing out that there may be a morally superior manner in which attain recognition, but the film, in spite of some flagrant flaws, may still accomplish both goals of

*reconnaissance* and *connaissance*. Additionally, all of the aims Norindr suggests are important but feel like something that may be rather difficult to attain with one single picture. It is in fact one of the reasons why this work takes a look at a broader array of viewpoints through six films in order to gain a better understanding of the multiple voices that are and have coexisted in a rather muted tone within the whitewashed historical French narrative up to the present century.

The six films in this dissertation will address the questions of recognition and inclusivity, but instead of looking at a viewpoint that contemplates a qualification to be French measured against European French standards, this work posits that France needs to add minority French cultures to the preeminent European majority which has dominated the historical discourse up to this point. The films show that France is an ethnically diverse, multi-cultural nation, and our argument is that these movies add missing elements to a historical narrative that have been in reality present all along but have gone suppressed and ignored. The recent proliferation of these types of narratives is allowing for a dialogue with some, if not all, elements of the European majority that may allow for a recognition and reconciliation with people who are French but not fully welcomed as such. This dialogue is taking place on the French social sphere, and the films in this study reflect that discussion.

This dissertation is organized in six chapters and with three sets of (two) consecutive chapters sharing a common theme. The first two chapters examine the identity and contributions of North African soldiers who fought alongside French troops in WWII and the war of Algeria. *La trahison* (Faucon 2005) portrays the war of Algerian independence and addresses the relationship between French soldiers with both Harkis, North African soldiers enlisted in the French military, and the local Algerian population. *Indigènes* (Bouchareb 2006) depicts both Harkis and soldiers conscripted to fight for the liberation of France from the Axis powers during

WWII and their relationships with the French military and to a lesser degree the continental French population.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with a filmic response from the French European side in which there is an important recognition of guilt. *Mon colonel* (Herbiet 2006) is organized as a cold case murder mystery of the disappearance of a young idealistic lieutenant. The picture opens up a window in which we can peer at the tactics and procedures of the French military, and particularly at a unit led by a hard-nosed colonel, during the Algerian war. *L'ennemi intime* (2007) is a picture in which we follow the vicissitudes and identity crises of a military unit, comprised of Harkis and their French counterparts. They are fighting the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*), the Algerian political organization which comprised the ALN (*Armée de Libération Nationale*) as its armed branch. The FLN and ALN are the most active proponents for Algerian independence during the Algerian war. Chapters 5 and 6 extend the genre to other (of not-French colonial provenance) minority groups involved in the survival of France. The first two chapters center on North Africans involved with the French military and their French descendants, while the last chapters expand the theme by exploring similar contributions from other smaller minorities during WWII. *L'Armée du crime* (Guédiguain 2009) shows the fight of a small resistance group comprised entirely of European Jewish immigrants. *Les hommes libres* (Ferroukhi 2011) tells the story of Muslims who protected Jews from the Nazis through the Grand Mosque of Paris. Both works are based on real stories and historical figures.

For each film there is careful consideration of the spaces represented, both in France and Algeria, to further underline the complexity of the tumultuous relationship between the European French and their colonial subjects and their fight for independence and legitimacy. Through the use of spaces and relationships, the minorities represented have a chance to reexamine their own

identity with relation to France by considering what it means to be French without sharing the European origins of the majority, and whether independence is a more desirable status. It also examines their perception of the French majority, allowing for a reconsideration of how that majority constructs the identities of the minorities and all of their stories should be added to what has been traditionally a whitewashed grand historical narrative. These films also open the door for a continuing dialogue by all groups in order to better negotiate their cohabitation in France.

## Chapter 1

### *La trahison* (2005)

## **The Harki loyalty conundrum: fighting for country unity or collaborating with the oppressor?**

### **Introduction**

French film experienced a shift in the war movie genre in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An industry that had traditionally shied away from war films that openly depicted stories from the battlefield began to produce more work on that specific style. These films appeared in parallel to civil unrest in which French minorities of North African descent were participants, perpetrators and victims. The first chapter studies *La trahison* (Faucon 2005) and its importance as revisionist tools of history. It is also a voice for minorities that suffer oppression by being of former colonial descent. This motion picture is a story of a group known as the Harkis, a historically overlooked North African minority who fought in the French military during the Algerian war of independence. The Harkis fought in the French army and were largely abandoned to their fate at the end of the war. The majority of the Harkis were left behind in Algeria and suffered from violent retaliation from the FLN. Says Hamoumou with regards to this group: “the festering sores of the Harkis have been largely ignored until recently, since this community concretizes ‘le tabou des tabous’” (Moser 45). After citing Hamoumou, Moser continues explaining that “for these profound cultural scars to heal, disconcerting stories must be told by those who suffered most from this pain” (ibid). *La trahison* was written, shot and produced by people with direct relation to Algerians and the war and constitutes one of the first efforts to have these repressed



voices heard. The film adds their narrative to the complex story of France and cultural integration. It also assists Harkis in defining their identity for themselves and the public eye.

The chapter discusses the following topics. First, it briefly reviews the political and social changes that permitted France to begin the reexamination of the Algerian War. Second, it shows how *La trahison* helps fill a historical narrative void in the traditional French historical discourse of the Algerian war and their dealings with the Harkis. Third, through the depiction of war, the motion picture also functions as a metaphor for the present struggle of Harkis striving for recognition as French. France is ethnically and culturally diverse but, by policy refuses to acknowledge such diversity.

*La trahison* is broken down into two separate types of analysis that show the nature and the evolution of the identities and the relationship between minorities and the French majority of European descent. A first section studies the spaces depicted in the films and how they help to define the roles and identities of the protagonists, and a second part examines the relationships between the protagonists representing each culture.

*La trahison*, although sometimes listed as a 2005 film, officially premiered in France on January 25, 2006, only a few weeks after the prolonged disturbances discussed in the introduction. It is the most fitting text with which to begin this study because it explores the Franco-Algerian conflictive relationship from spatial and social points of view. First, in terms of the study of spaces, the film was shot in the Algerian countryside, providing an accurate portrayal of the view of spaces from the French *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission) perspective. The analysis will show how the French viewed the rugged countryside as an exotic, non-Place that they identified as foreign and in need of being domesticated. Second, the film will provide examples of power-based relationships of an unbalanced nature between French soldiers

and the Harkis, and to a lesser extent, the local population. The narrative of the film will allow us to understand better the continuation of those power-dynamics of the French and the minorities co-existing in the France of today.

As previously stated, the films are also important due to the relationships of the creators with the former colonial territories and the wars of independence of these nations, and with the populations of these places at the time of these conflicts and today. The script of *La trahison* is based upon an autobiographical book redacted by Claude Sales. In 1989 Sales published many of his experiences as a lieutenant in the French army fighting in Algeria from 1958 to 1959. He was thrilled when director Phillipe Faucon decided to adapt the book to the silver screen, due to Faucon's relationship to the conflict. Born in Morocco during the Algerian war of independence, Faucon's father was an officer in the French army who had married an Algerian woman. He was born in a hospital located near the border where Algerian combatants were treated. French personnel continued to operate the hospital, and Faucon's father was one of them. The director's father was later assigned to serve in the French army during the last months of the war. This background caused Faucon not only to be interested in the history of the Algerian conflict but to have a professionally and personally investment in it. *La trahison* is the third film in which Faucon addresses the topic of this war ("La Trahison – Secrets de Tournage").

*La trahison* is filmed in such a way that it effectively permits the discovery of conflict and betrayal between the French and Algerian cultures within the context of failing colonialism. The juxtaposition of dark and bright illumined scenes, night and day, sets a tone for an ambience of mistrust and opposing points of view. Raphaël Le Toux-Lungo notes that from the outset the film plunges the viewer in the dark, showing the lack of vision and the confusion that plagued the troops which at this point had been marred for years in a conflict with no visible resolution

(Le Toux-Lungo). He also compares the wide shots and long takes of the countryside to Monument Valley and the American West, likening the film to a Western. This type of long shots will be a common point between most of the films in this dissertation. In an interview with René Vautier (an experienced French director, renowned for the 1972 influential -and rare- war film *Avoir 20 ans dans les Aurès*), the director remarks that *La trahison* feels very much as a meeting between two worlds. Vautier agrees and thinks that there is a necessity to tell the two stories at the same time (Vautier 6:00-8:21). Some of the running themes through Westerns are the conquering of the wild, the encounter between the European settlers and the resistance and subduing of the Native Americans. The similarity between Westerns and the occupation of the untamable Algerian territory and its natives, its *indigène* people, is apparent.

However, Faucon is careful to avoid simple Manichaeian dichotomizing. Instead, he chooses a set up that allows for the different parties of actors to interact and create art organically, unshackled by a rigid script and *mise-en-scène*. In an interview for the Orange television network (OCS), Faucon cited directors with very diverse backgrounds and styles as his major influences for his process of working with actors. He mentioned Jacques Rivette, John Cassavetes and Robert Bresson, because what Faucon finds that all of them shared an interest in the personality of the actors as well as the characters of the films (Douglas Kirkland et Philippe Faucon 6:30-11:20). They wanted to find an intersection between the two in order to take the written character further than a creation on paper can, and to bestow real life on a created character. Faucon says that, at times, he would just rather watch the actors develop the characters while they interact rather than direct them. He hoped that by allowing his actors input and liberty they may take the characters further than originally conceived by infusing them with some of the personality of the actor.

This approach is caught in the film through a mostly static camera, and longer takes where we see several characters together. There are few shot counter-shot sequences, even as people converse. The avoidance of rapid cuts allows the viewer to absorb the reactions of a couple or a group of people in real time, instead of being guided by the camera to focus on only one person. The longer takes also give the characters time to develop in front of the eyes of the spectator. Just as importantly, the long takes allow the setting to be absorbed by the viewer. Whether the mise-en-scene is set claustrophobically among the walls of an Algerian town, or out in the open of the Algerian Western countryside, the background is allowed to speak along with the characters of the film.

During the early 2000s, a few documentaries brought to the public, in a much more open manner, some of the most gruesome details of the atrocities committed during the Algerian war. Not everyone welcomed the recognition of the war, nor viewed the independence of Algeria as a positive, like personnel directly involved in the conflict. One of the best examples of this resistance to historical revision are former high-ranking French officials such as General Paul Aussaresses, who spoke out about the war in clear terms. Robert Aldrich informs that in the year 2000, interviews given to the press by a superannuated general, Paul Aussaresses, offered shocking revelations about the practice of torture by French troops in the Algerian War. Although writers at the time, notably Henri Alleg in *La Question* (1958), had alerted the French public to such practices, Aussaresses's fresh revelations, coupled with his own seeming lack of remorse, led to much public debate and historical investigations on torture in the colonies (Aldrich, "Remembrances of Empire" 9). Aussaresses became the face of a group that was unapologetic about the preservation of the colonial empire by any means necessary, especially with regards to the Algerian territory. This attitude included

not only the land but the treatment of its inhabitants as subjects and, therefore, inferiors to the European French.

Politicians in the Hexagon granted a series of amnesties to those involved in the war effort to allow France to heal and move forward from the conflict. Many considered the amnesties as a feeble attempt to sweep the tragic events under the proverbial rug; this goal was never achieved. The Economist highlighted some of the problems caused by these policies:

So why was the disgraced soldier, along with two publishing executives, brought to trial for admitting his actions rather than for the actions themselves? The legal reasons are that in 1968 the French parliament declared an amnesty for all crimes committed during the Algerian war of 1954-62 (“Europe, an awkward case” 48-49).

President de Gaulle spearheaded the efforts of these amnesties, and these policies lasted until the administration of Francois Mitterand. Aussaresses undermined the efforts of these amnesties by bringing up the subject of how torture was a viable military tactic employed to maintaining control, obtain information and intimidate the local population. Even though it may be argued that today his methods would be considered acts of terrorism, the general defended their usefulness and practicality. Aussaresses ascribed to the philosophy of another French military man, Roger Trinquier. Trinquier had worked in France and also in the US advocating the purported advantages of torture as a means of obtaining intelligence and the subjugation of insurgency. Trinquier and Aussaresses were both involved in Indochina and Algeria. Aussaresses had the dubious distinction of acting as the right-hand man of Colonel Massu<sup>4</sup> in Algeria. Massu

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<sup>4</sup> Systematic torture in Algeria was the subject of widespread public comment at the time—one French general was relieved of his command after condemning it in the press—and it has attracted a good deal of scholarly investigation since. Several major participants, including the commanding officer in Algiers, General Jacques Massu, have written about it, for the most part unapologetically. Their frankness has been facilitated by the blanket amnesty issued by the French government in 1968, absolving all those who served in Algeria of whatever crimes they may have committed there (Moran 172).

was in charge of the Battle of Algiers and served as the inspiration for the character of Colonel Mathieu in Gillo Pontecorvo's military docu-drama *The Battle of Algiers* (Pontecorvo 1966).

Jacques Chirac was the president of France at the time of the Aussaresses' memoir publication. He received pressure from different human rights entities to organize a trial against the General despite the amnesty that had been extended about Algerian war crimes. Aussaresses was tried and fined in 2004 for the commission of crimes against humanity<sup>5</sup>. The issues of torture, open war, and the status of French Algerians as 'immigrants' were at the forefront of French society in 2005, in spite of their French citizenship and contributions to French culture and economy.

In the early 2000s, French media also began producing full-scale motion pictures that dealt with the war instead of only addressing it through made-for-tv films and documentaries. The production of these films may not be a direct byproduct of the incidents. This is evident since the first films premiered around the same time of the incidents and movies require years of planning. However, their successful reception was related to the topic of immigration. This topic had gained significance after the recognition of the war, and since minorities kept gaining visibility due to a growing generation of French-born 'immigrants' coming of age within the Hexagon. *La trahison* played a spearheading role in this transition from tv to the silver screen.

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<sup>5</sup> Aussaresses was personally responsible for the torture and execution of dozens of suspects, including several senior figures whose deaths have long been officially ascribed to suicide. Aussaresses's book is undoubtedly the most hands-on account of the so-called "Battle of Algiers" to have made it into mainstream print, and its effect on French opinion has been galvanic. Amid much uproar, Aussaresses, his publisher, and his editor have all been tried, convicted, and fined on charges of complicity in justifying war crimes—evidently a crime in France, even if having perpetrated them is not. Aussaresses, who retired as a general, has also been forbidden to wear his uniform and was suspended from membership in the Legion d'Honneur at the demand of President Jacques Chirac (who, like Aussaresses, served in Algeria as a captain). But Chirac's government has rejected demands from human rights organizations that Aussaresses be tried under international law for crimes against humanity, on the grounds that such a proceeding would abridge French sovereignty. (Moran 172-173)

## Film synopsis

*La trahison*, directed by Philippe Faucon, is set in a southern region of Algeria in 1960 and tells the story of French army lieutenant Roque. The officer is in charge of dealing with the local population of colonial Algerians as he tries to fight a guerrilla army in the wilderness. It shows how the French army used public humiliation, torture and executions as methods of control and extraction of information from the locals. The motion picture focuses on the story of four native North Africans. A study by Steven Ungar explains that the film is a portrayal of

a French military unit in Algeria whose 30 include 4 Algerians, whom the film describes alternately as Muslims (*musulmans*, a shortened version of *Français musulman d'Algérie* or FMA) and French of North African stock (*Français de souche nord-africaine*, henceforth FSNA). (Ungar 280)

North African soldiers serving in the French army were also commonly referred to as Harkis. The film highlights from the very beginning the difficulty of defining these men's status in the eyes of the European French. The term Harki carries a lot of built-in history, much of it is painful. Although some contend that Harkis were men recruited specifically for armed combat (Choi 26), most scholars and historians sustain the understanding that this term has diverse uses. Van der Schyff comprehensively summarizes the complex history behind this name:

In France the word Harkis properly refers to the force of supplementary Muslim soldiers engaged by the French during the Algerian war (1957–1962). In Algeria, the term has become synonymous with the words “traitor” and “collaborator”. In both countries the word signifies a social pariah. Perhaps a better way to begin to understand the origins of the Harkis is to consider that the Arabic word *harka* is used to describe, among other things, a defensive position taken up against an external enemy. (Van der Schyff 52)

Harkis participated in the French military, and with the withdrawal of French forces they suffered greatly. Some made it to French shores while most others were left behind. It is important to note that the use of the term Harki extended beyond armed combatants to include people related to the men serving in the military. Moser cites the recent work -published in 2008- on Harki memory by Vincent Crapanzano, who, when referring to this word “asserts that the term ‘*englobe également les épouses et les enfants des harkis*’<sup>6</sup>” (Moser 46). Harkis faced rejection by both societies as well as self-shame for what many perceived as fighting on the wrong side. The new war films explore the origins of what Crapanzano calls “the wound that never heals” (Bowen 464). Before *La trahison*, war films that covered this subject portrayed a point of view based on one of the sides, either French or Algerian (independent). After 2005, the openly war-referring pictures also portray the plight of those caught in the middle. Harkis were caught in a non-Place from the first two points of view and are a personification of this cultural no-man’s land.

The emphasis on the Harki narratives is one of the most innovative themes of the new war films. This emphasis was a significant change from the portrayal of the war in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the films focused on the effects of the conflict on the European population or the *pieds-noirs* (Moser 44-45). In *La trahison*, the North Africans enlisted in the French army are involved in combat, but their primary role consists of translating and providing local intelligence about the people and terrain. They interpret and help the French army with the acquisition of information. Their French commanding officer, lieutenant Roque, is especially fond of the leader of the Harkis, corporal Taïeb. The four men’s allegiance is conflicted and questioned by the French commanders who suspect them of treason and sympathizing with the insurgents,

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<sup>6</sup> ‘encompasses equally the spouses and the children of the Harkis’ my translation; Italics added on citation by me.



noticeably by Roque's superior, captain Franchet. Roque conducts a secret investigation in spite of liking the men. He is hesitant to condemn the Algerians while most of the other European French military personnel are quick to accept their guilt before finding definite proof. At the end of the investigation, the North Africans are found guilty. Lieutenant Roque feels more conflicted when he realizes that the men had chosen not to kill him or any other French officers. The film ends with the four French-Algerians being taken prisoners and carried away.

### **Spatial analysis**

*La trahison* has groundbreaking elements in terms of a French war film, especially when dealing with the themes of Algeria and colonialism. It presents novel elements to this genre, such as having minorities as protagonists and addressing topics traditionally neglected by film narratives. McCormack explains these are visible outcomes of the discussion of the war that begun in the late 1990s:

This gradual shift in the public discourses around the conflict began in September 1997 when Jean-Pierre Masseret, Secretary of State for Veterans, first gave a speech in which he used the term "the Algerian War." The process was, in a sense, concluded on 10 June 1999, when the French Parliament passed a law making official the use of the term "Algerian War" in legal texts. (McCormack 1132)

McCormack has extensively researched the shift from interest in WWII to the Algerian war in the French public consciousness. Neither she nor this work attempt to minimize the interest nor the effects of WWII; they cannot be and will continue to be studied. We are illustrating that efforts -at least partially successful- to deal with the abundance of traumatic experiences of WWII facilitated the recognition of the Algerian war. WWII will continue being revisited in

different lights. Some of the chapters in this dissertation address the role of minorities in that conflict. The partial resolution of some issues, combined with important political shifts in the Republic, allowed the French to open the discussion on the Algerian conflict (ibid). An issue with this train of thought is that McCormack states that the process was, in a sense, concluded. In a sense yes, the official recognition of the war as such has been achieved. However, that acknowledgment was a preamble to a larger discussion rather than a conclusion.

*La trahison* is a fitting example of the consequences of this admission. The title of the picture is already provocative. The film is a story of treason, but whose betrayal is it treating? The story suggests two answers that mirror each other, effectively causing a *mise en abyme* about the topic of betrayal. It points to the spectator that one must go beyond the assumption of the betrayal of one party of French enlisted men towards the other. The first answer may be the most obvious one, which is the alleged betrayal committed by the Harki soldiers by plotting against their white French superiors.

The Harki betrayal may go further, against their own culture. In legal and social terms, the four Algerians are French citizens. They have been promised the same rights and privileges as their Continental counterparts if they serve the Republic. But by pledging their allegiance to France, these men find themselves in social purgatory. They are not quite fully French, but they are also betraying their Algerianness at a time when the independence movement seeks to break completely from the French empire. The alleged betrayal by the Harkis is double. As long as they remain part of the French army, they are betraying their native culture since Algeria is struggling to become a self-functioning Place by Augé's anthropological definition. According to the French anthropologist, a Place is "the one occupied by the indigenous inhabitants who live in it, cultivate it, defend it, mark its strong points and keep its frontiers under surveillance" (Augé

42). The Harkis are caught between fighting for a country that oppresses them against an emerging nation of their own, but which may never materialize.

The Harki conundrum is represented in a scene of the film quite poignantly. While on patrol in a small town, the Harkis have been collecting intelligence for the French. At the edge of the village they come across a group of ALN cadavers, lined up in a row with their weapons also carefully stacked in a line. Without a word from the men, the camera does a series of close-up shots of the faces of the dead combatants, all dressed in local garb. These shots are juxtaposed with close-ups of the Harkis, alive and dressed in French military fatigues. While they contemplate the results of their collaborative work with the French, an elderly local woman dressed in black approaches. She screams at them in Arabic, instructing them to take a good look at their brothers. She questions what they did to help the men who are now dead, and what are they doing to help the Algerian people. The Harkis keep silent, which is an answer in itself, as it is obvious that they are pondering those questions already in every sortie and with every interrogatory.

Augé continues explaining that a Place and a non-Place can be distinguished by the frontier that marks a separation between “wild nature and cultivated nature” (Augé 42-43). To the French, France is a Place. The colonies became non-Places to be transformed into a version of France, much like a wilderness could be designed into a garden organized in orderly, geometric spaces and shapes. To the Algerians, it is the Algerian spaces which are Places, in spite of being organized in a different manner than the French spaces. The French see their towns as an imposition of order, in opposition to the disorganized and undeveloped Algerian dwellings. The locals feel at home in villages that look more organically evolved and assimilated to their particular environments, while the symmetrical French cities disrupt nature with a much more

invasive footprint. However, this study is not concerned with the civil engineering merits of one particular culture over another; they each have their virtues and shortcomings when it comes to organizing space. Instead, it looks at the noticeably opposing way in which the cultures organize it. The French were guilty of turning these opposing philosophies into exclusivity to justify their oppression. They erased any merit of the colonized culture by effectively considering their spaces as non-Places. The imposition of the French philosophy of space organization turned into destroying the local one, as evidenced in the scene previously discussed.

In a later sequence, the Harkis question a local man and learn that the village is dying. The conflict has complicated the opportunities of the locals to find work due to the recent violence and forced displacements. Since the French conception of a Place does not encompass Algerian culture, the marginalized Algerian Places are now being destroyed through the violence of the war along with their native occupants. The only possible survivors may be the Harkis, who cannot claim a place of their own. They may not even claim Algeria since they are in the process of losing their attachment to the land.

Much of the typical war film narrative is written as a Manichean discourse supported by the spaces filmed. Places represent the spaces occupied by the protagonists. The spaces occupied by the antagonists represent uncivilized non-Places that are as much of a puzzle to be solved, or as much of a rival to be conquered, as the people the protagonists are fighting. This type of discourse is evident in American war films, particularly in examples that portray conflicts in spaces exotic to Americans, such as Vietnam, Iraq and more recently, Afghanistan. *La trahison* moves away from that type of discourse. It places the Harkis in spaces that can be read as Places only marginally, supporting their status as societal in-betweeners. The French portrayed in the film are isolated from their Places. The use of native Algerians is even more marginal, relegating

their Places to the background. In this war film, the protagonists are almost perpetually trapped in non-Places as they question their allegiances and their identities as a whole. The focus of this picture is set away from the traditional good vs. evil combat binary into a space where the conflict is more of identity and conscience.

The Harkis float between the French Place and the French non-Place, which is seeking to become a Place all of its own through the independence war. The three departments of Alger, Oran and Constantine (along with more territories to the south) are attempting to become Algeria, rather than a non-France. By collaborating with the enemy, the Harkis are an obstacle to this progression for Algerian natives to assume an autonomous identity of their own. The French saw Algeria as part of France, but only insofar as it became more French and less native, and therein lays an important explanation of the failed experiment. The civilizing mission attempted to transform the colonies into the metropolis, but the French were unwilling to accept the natives of these lands as French. Fanon contends that this approach is flawed because a land cannot be separated from its inhabitants. He explains the impossibility of the French to accept them even when the imposition of French culture became complete. In *Les damnés de la terre* Fanon clarified how the French viewed the colonized Algerians and why colonized could never inherit true French citizenship:

La société colonisée n'est pas seulement décrite comme une société sans valeurs. Il ne suffit pas au colon d'affirmer que les valeurs ont déserté, ou mieux n'ont jamais habité, le monde colonisé. L'indigène est déclaré imperméable à l'éthique, absence de valeurs, mais aussi négation des valeurs. Il est, osons l'avouer, l'ennemi des valeurs. <sup>7</sup> (Fanon 41)

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<sup>7</sup> The colonized society is not only described as a society without values. It is not enough for the colonizer to affirm that his values have deserted, or better, have never inhabited, the colonized world. The native is declared impermeable to ethic, absence of values, but also negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values. (translation by me)

France was not inclined to exterminate nor to displace these populations. The goal was to exploit them, making the only workable solution not to recognize the colonized as equal through the negation of their humanity. No *égalité* was ever intended. The poor soldier's conundrum, in this case the Harki, is to be caught between a rock and a hard Place in anthropological terms. For the Harkis, this binary concept is even worse than for the local villagers. In this French dialogue of culture vs. non-culture, the French are the proponents of value, and the Algerians are its enemy. But where are the Harkis situated? They have become the parenthesis with ellipsis of a voice that has been omitted.

Algerian identity was always much more complicated than just French vs. Algerian, as Lizabeth Zach explains in her study of the imperial formation of identities in this conquered territory: "the state ended up instituting a set of discrete categories and lines of demarcation - between the "French", on the one hand, and the "Algerians," Jews", "natives", and "neo-French/foreigners," on the other within the political culture of Algeria" (Zach 64). The study underlines a marked binary construction in which the European French enjoyed a totality of privileges, and the rest of the groups suffered from progressively descendant civil and societal rights. Ethnic background determined the status of each person. Harkis did not feature on this scale. Their exclusion feels particularly unjust since soldiers of Algerian provenance have been part of the French military dating back to the Franco-Prussian war. The matter of their identity would become more complicated during the Algerian War and worsen with the end of the hostilities. The war changed the spaces in which Harkis served and lived. *La trahison* illustrates this shift. It sheds light on a group that was neglected in terms of representation, memory and also misunderstood in terms of identity. Choi explains some of the difficulties endured by those who made it to the Hexagon after the war: "the most significant problem confronting the Harkis

in France was the pervasive ignorance about the French status of the veterans: Certain administrative functionaries were greatly confused and could not tell the difference between the Harkis who are French nationals of the Islamic faith, and immigrants, who are Algerian nationals” (Choi 33). Some scholars are now researching the fate of the Harkis, although the general public mostly neglects it. The largest memory hole lies in their role during their involvement during the war: “Encore largement inexplorée, l’histoire des harkis pendant la guerre d’Algérie s’est essentiellement focalisée sur leur devenir après le cessez-le-feu et l’indépendance”<sup>8</sup> (Hautreux 33). *La trahison* helps feel the void identified by Hautreux by focusing on their experiences during the war rather than after the outcome of the conflict. It shows that this group has a particular identity based on the peculiarity of their experiences.

The four servicemen split their time primarily between two spaces: the army barracks and on the road visiting villages. Both of these spaces fit the description of heterotopic non-Places and signal the state of being of the Harkis. We will first examine the military installations portrayed in the film, and second, we will look at the men on their sorties on the road.

The military barracks where the men leave are cold, austere and spartan. Military installations are minimalistic, designed to be practical and to the extent possible, movable. By design, just like the clothes men wear, barracks are pretty uniform, built with the purpose of physical and mental standardization of the users. Individuality is the enemy, the good of the many at stake, and to be chosen above the interests of the few or the one. The living quarters of the men in *La trahison* are particularly derelict and dark. To emphasize somberness, some scenes are shot at night when the men are conversing with each other under the harsh light of a bulb as the only source of illumination. An important separation exists in the living quarters. The French

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<sup>8</sup> “Still vastly unexplored, the history of the Harkis during the war of Algeria has been essentially focalized upon their fate after the cease-fire and the independence” (translation by me)

do not share the same living spaces with the Harkis. The film rarely includes the two groups of men in the same shot to underline this separation of space. Instead, when there is an interaction between European soldiers and Harkis, the editing often resorts to very spatially conscious shots and counter shots that evict the Harkis from what could be construed as a French space. The military space in the best condition that the film shows is the local headquarters where *sous-lieutenant* Roque is called to receive the news of the imminent assassination attempt. Harkis have no chance at becoming officers over European servicemen, and their access to better installations is therefore restricted.

The film uses the non-Places of military installations to speak of the past, present and future of the Harkis. The headquarters represents a level of French acceptance that the men have to receive, but which unattainable through their own efforts. The barracks are the space assigned to them, or rather to which they are condemned. Most Harkis volunteered in the army out of the necessity of a paycheck or the hope of elevated French citizenship (Choi 26), but their service still felt thankless. The scenario of citizenship and relocation to France came for the lucky few who were not abandoned to their fate at the end of the war. Unfortunately, those lucky few would encounter the strangest of lives once they made it to the Hexagon. The majority of relocated Harkis were situated in camps that would perpetuate the (under)development of their lives in non-Places. These camps became extensions of their living situation towards the end of the French rule of North Africa. The military headquarters may be understood in the film as the unattainable France -or French citizen status, making it a place or an identity-. In contrast, the derelict living quarters of their Algerian outpost represent the truer present and future status of the Harkis, who dwell in a constant state of suspension and effacement.



The concept of heterotopias assists in understanding the role that barracks play in the film. Foucault proposes the following in the fifth principle of heterotopias: “Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications” (Foucault 7). He also states that heterotopias are “forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis” (Foucault 4). Foucault calls these spaces heterotopias of crisis. He lastly explains a different type of heterotopia: “heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed” (Foucault 5). Foucault has already noted that barracks fit in his earlier description, and they also fit somewhere between places of deviation and crisis.

For the Harkis, the barracks portrayed in the film -and any French military installation- were of compulsory entry, whether they were obligated to join the cause consciously or subconsciously. Not one of them joined because of convenience, but rather obligation or necessity, or desperation. The barracks shown in the picture are isolated, but poorly built and very penetrable. The barrier that separates those installations from the outside world comprises in large sections of no more than poorly installed barbwire fences. Most of the strength of the soldiers rests on the trust they have on the man fighting next to them, but trust is precisely the virtue in question throughout the whole of the narrative. This mistrust deconstructs the myth of military comradeship and brotherhood, which in this particular case may be reduced to the men with whom a soldier shares a cultural identity. The French soldiers mistrust the Harkis and vice versa, while the French officers do not share this feeling toward the Harkis. For the officers,

mistrust is a double-edged sword: they cannot trust their men to keep their composure around the Harkis, nor can they trust the Harkis who are being investigated for treason.

An important scene late in the film shows one of the European French soldiers throw dirty water on Ali, one of the Harkis. At this point in the film, many of the soldiers are openly questioning the allegiance of four protagonists. In the scuffle that ensues, the French soldier utilizes the derogatory term *Fellaga*, that in the context of the Algerian war designated a sympathizer or fighter in favor of the war of independence. The term descended from the Arab term that was utilized to name highway robbers, thus designating advocates and fighters for independence as outlaws and criminals instead of combatants. As the soldiers confront each other, it becomes hard to tell the men apart. The filmmaker then emphasizes the difference between them in other ways. One is the language, beginning with the insult of *Fellaga* that separates the two fighting men as violently as their friends attempt to pull them physically apart. The second and more important linguistic distinction is observed in the discussion that follows the interview with Ali's superiors. While the Harki is questioned in his room, two groups of men discuss the aftermath of the fight outside. The Algerians discussion is in Arabic, while the European soldiers speak in French. One of the Europeans complains that the Algerians do not even hesitate to speak Arabic in their presence, arguing that the choice of language proves that the Harkis do not care about hiding their true intentions of dissension any longer.

Cinematographically speaking, the mise-en-scène and the editing also accentuate the alterity between the Algerians and the French in this sequence. The only time French and Algerians are shown in the same frame is when they are antagonizing each other. First, the French soldier throws the dirty water to provoke the fight and the Algerian soldier takes the bait. The men roll around in the ground hitting each other. Later, Ali is berated by his superiors for

having taken the bait. The Algerian argues that he is losing sight of what is the truth as if the rude statements spoken by his French counterparts carry more to them than mere bait. Ali is questioning whether he does belong in the French army, siding by the French. He is hinting that the bait he took was the questioning of their 'Frenchness', their standing as soldiers and of equality vis-à-vis the other French military personnel. The words of the Harki carry more weight based on his position in the shot. He is the only character facing the camera during the reprimand, while one officer sits quietly sideways, and the other gives his back to the audience. Ali's words are spoken to the public as much as they are to the officers in what is a nuanced 'return of the gaze' shot construction. He is the only person in the room facing the truth of the matter.

The rest of the sequence shows the separation between the Algerians and the French as the two groups of friends speak of the scuffle. The camera guides the public back outside, where we do not see the two groups together in the same shot again. Instead, the camera takes us through a shot-counter shot sequence where the two groups of men suspiciously eye each other from a distance. This shot-counter shot sequence is not a conversation from a traditionally staged dialogue sequence, because the communication between the two groups has become an impossibility. There is both dialectic and non-dialectic space between them as well as a linguistic and cultural barrier. After the fight, the two groups have been tasked to fortify the protective fence of the garrison while the discussion with Ali is still ongoing. The building of the fence is a symbolic reinforcement of the communicative barrier between the two sets of soldiers. They are both an Other to the opposing group, and they will not succeed at solving their differences. This reparation is not a mending of fences between neighbors, but the building of a wall between enemies.

This situation shows that the Harkis are in a constant state of crisis, both inside and beyond the porous security of the barracks. The life of a soldier is in a perpetual state of crisis due to the constant danger in which they live. They experience danger as they venture out on sorties and as they stay within the confines of the garrison. Having separate quarters only compounds the feeling of isolation that these men have from both Algerians and the French. The composition of the shots, the editing and the places where they stand during the fight as well as where they usually stay inside the garrison adhere to the proposition by Foucault that this is a heterotopic space. The film turns the spaces within the barracks effectively into a visual representation of men in crisis not only of a physical nature but rather of a deeply socio-cultural one. Ali, who was quieter at the beginning of the narrative, has now unwittingly admitted that his allegiance to the French cause is in tatters.

The discussion about the Harkis shows the negative impact represented by non-Places, or that such spaces impose on an individual. However, Augé acknowledged that an alternative, positive influence from such spaces was possible. Augé studied Michel de Certeau's definition of Places and non-Places -which preceded his own work- and observed: "when Michel de Certeau mentions 'non-place', it is to allude to a sort of negative quality of a place, an absence of the place from itself" (Augé 85). Certeau seems to have proposed binary terms in direct opposition to each other, such as light and darkness, where the latter is the absence -with a negative connotation- of the former. Augé suggests a different alternative. He acknowledges the potentially destructive nature of a liminal space such as his non-Places and Foucault's heterotopias. However, he also proposes that non-Places are spaces that may facilitate the creation or redefinition of identity. Augé looks at this non-Places as a potential journey rather than a cul-de-sac. If a non-Place is transformational, this process in itself does not necessarily

imply destruction at every outcome. Even if, in most cases, the use of non-Places results in loss of identity, this loss may also open the door for such spaces to modify the existing identity or create a new one out of the modification or deconstruction of the old one.

The possibility of identity redefinition through the use of heterotopias applies to the experiences of the Harkis as portrayed in the army barracks, and perhaps even more so in the backcountry Algerian roads. The four men are portrayed mostly as a group although in some scenes, especially when they visit villages, they are shown by themselves when they interact with the local population. The takes are usually long, emphasizing the typically slow pace of their life and a sense of loss and sadness, not only from the Harkis but also the locals and even the French soldiers. These particular montages go against the grain of other war films that emphasize action. Typically, the editing consists of faster cuts to produce a sensation of accelerated action through the bombardment of the senses, based on capturing fast movement, dialogues with shorter replies, and fighting scenes depicting danger or loss of life. This has been particularly true since the premiere of *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg 1998), a film that allegedly brought a sense of realism rarely seen before it. Richard Schickel reviewed Spielberg's movie for *Time* and wrote:

Spielberg's handheld cameras thrust us into this maelstrom, and his superb editing creates from these bits and pieces a mosaic of terror. We see as the soldiers see, from the belly, in flashes and fragments, none more vivid than the shot, rendered almost casually, of a soldier staggering along, carrying his severed arm. It is quite possibly the greatest combat sequence. (Wetta and Novelli 846)

Many critics concurred with Schickel's opinion at that time. This style of filmmaking influenced the war movie genre from a filming and editing standpoint. The editing style of Faucon for *La trahison* is as different from Spielberg as the Harki missions are from that of Captain Miller and

his squad. Very little fighting is shown, with the notable exception of the scuffle between Harkis and French servicemen. This war film is more concerned about the social and psychological effects on the people portrayed than exploiting action to provide the audience with thrills. Many war movies are much more conscientious than that of course. In 20<sup>th</sup> century America for example, Slotkin argues that Hollywood produced war films to actively promote unity on the backbone of the creation of national mythology (Slotkin 469-470). *La trahison* is not any of those films either. The desolate roads and dying villages captured on long takes underscore a different type of goal altogether. If war film in America stressed myths that led to nation-building, Faucon's picture explains the deconstruction of colonial Algeria. The roads in which the Harkis slowly tread their feet open their eyes to the reality of the destruction of a people. They encountered bodies of dead insurgents and live bodies of humiliated locals who are afraid even to look up when they see anybody in uniform.

Roads are non-Places in the sense that they are connectors between Places. In the current life that the Harkis are leading, they are non-Places that only connect other non-Places to other similar spaces. Harkis sortie from their barracks to walk the roads that sometimes lead them to moribund towns with dying people (both literally and figuratively in cultural terms). They feel some connection to the locals, like when the Harkis encounter an Algerian woman and warn her to go home -for her protection-, but they also feel a partial allegiance to the French. When the Harkis are on the road in the film, that is the space that represents them the best. The road is also a foreshadowing of what would come after the war when they would effectively become a people without a country. They would be either abandoned to the atrocities of the FLN and people who would want to ingratiate with the Algerian army or to be thrown and forgotten in camps in France.

However, there is also a positive -if rather overlooked- outcome from what the road, the barracks, and their military involvement as a whole bestow on the Harkis. It may be argued that these liminal spaces created the Harki identity, at least in the way that it is understood since the war. Harkis were not a homogenous people with a common ethnicity or history, as Choi clarifies:

Some men became harkis by following in the footsteps of their fathers or grandfathers (...) Although a large proportion of auxiliaries were recruited from the traditionally Berber-inhabited hinterlands of Kabylia and the Aurès, it would be misleading to claim an exclusive ethnic identity for the harkis. Many were considered Arab, just as Berbers could also be found amongst the highest ranks of the FLN. Nor was there any real ethnic Kabyle identity. (Choi 26)

The current definitions of what a Harki is all stem from the result of the war. The term has changed over time, and who it applies to as well. Hauteux takes us through three of the major changes that this term underwent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Pendant la guerre de l'Indépendance algérienne, ceux-ci formaient une catégorie de supplétifs de l'armée française, des soldats « irréguliers », recrutés à la faveur de la guerre. Avec l'indépendance, le mot prend deux sens nouveaux : traîtres en Algérie, « Français musulmans rapatriés » en France.<sup>9</sup> (Hauteux 33)

As stated earlier the term initiated by being exclusively applied to supplemental military servicemen, but by the end of the war, it blanketed their relatives and other close associates. Unfortunately, the societal outcome was largely negative for the Harkis on both sides of the Atlantic. However, the identity in itself was not pejorative, but instead, it was the way in which

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<sup>9</sup> "During the war of Algerian Independence, they formed a category of complements for the French Army, 'irregulars', recruited for the benefit of the war. With the Independence, the word takes on two new meanings: traitors in Algeria, 'repatriate French Muslims' in France" (translation by me).

the majority in France and Algeria treated them based on the role they played during the conflict. The crucible of the non-Places of war to where these people were conscripted ultimately created the concept of Harki and gave them, and their descendants, the distinctive origin mythology to which they adhere today. This mythology, this new common history, although relatively new, is what makes them recognizable as a distinctive cultural group. Non-Places can effectively, whether it be the barracks or the road, do more than destroy identity. Non-Places may also amalgamate individuals originating from diverse backgrounds into a new people with a common history.

*La trahison* illustrates the creation and almost immediate ostracizing of a new people, which up to date are still largely culturally mute. The film does it through long takes of the roads of rural Algeria and through almost claustrophobic close-ups of the men walking the small streets of the villages they visit or of interrogations of locals in their homes. Long silences and slow dialogs are set against nearly monochromatic backgrounds (whether in the villages, barracks or roads). This slow pace combined with subdued acting performances symbolize a voiceless people. Massart, in his critique of the film, observes the following:

La guerre de suspicion qui se joue alors à l'écran devient guerre de position, qu'une mise en scène de proximité rejoue en creux. De tout l'art sec de Faucon (pondération des effets, importance des silences, neutralisation des performances d'acteur), c'est en effet le découpage qui impressionne le plus. Jamais bavard, *La Trahison* procède pourtant sans cesse à des échanges de sens avec le spectateur. Savamment disposés sur l'échiquier de l'écran, les personnages vont par groupe selon les nœuds du récit : telle scission narrative imposera telle séparation spatiale.<sup>10</sup> (Massart)

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<sup>10</sup> "The war of suspicion that is played on the screen becomes a war of position, that staged in proximity replays implicitly. Of all the dry art of Faucon (ponderation of effects, importance of the silences, neutralization of the



Massart recognizes the subtle editing and script that Faucon utilizes to illustrate the isolation to which both French and Algerians had condemned these men. The spaces in the film are filled with physical and emotional emptiness, and the further the narrative of the film progresses, the further the Harkis become disjointed from the other cultural groups.

Earlier in his critique, Massart incorrectly misidentifies the protagonists as not being Harkis since they were ‘mobilized Algerians’. However, all of the functions that these men perform are exactly those that the Harkis were charged with. By the time of the Algerian conflict, Harkis were distinct from local combatants in that they voluntarily joined the cause. Scheipers clarifies this:

The French were careful to depict the Harkis as being driven by noble motivations and as having joined the French in their fight against the ALN deliberately, rather than being coerced into making opportunistic choices, which are typical for situations of irregular warfare. (Scheipers 21)

But there existed diverse types of manipulations and motivations that led these men to join the French ranks. This confusion still exists in the present. It illustrates how puzzling it may be to define what a Harki is based on motivation for serving with the French. It also shows that the most efficient way of defining them is by the role they played during the war and their alleged allegiance to the French cause. More importantly, Massart points out that before this movie “l’Algérie ne dispose pas encore de son film de référence, faisant suffisamment autorité pour qu’enfin l’on considère que le sujet a été effectivement traité”<sup>11</sup> (Massart). At the time of its

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performances of the actors), it is in fact the editing that impresses most. Never talky, *La trahison* nevertheless proceeds however incessantly through exchanges of meaning with the spectator. Wisely arranged over the chessboard of the screen, the characters move by group depending on the knot of the story: a certain narrative split will impose an equivalent spatial separation” (translation by me).

<sup>11</sup> “Algeria does not have yet her film of reference, generating enough authority so that it may be considered that the subject has been treated with efficacy” (translation by me)

publication, *La trahison* becomes the historical film of reference for the Harkis in Algeria. The title effectively links their identity with the treason from which they had been victims, rather than a crime that they had committed. When we apply this lesson to the present, the film points out they continue to be victimized. To further understand the complexity of this treason, we will analyze more closely the interactions of these men to their French counterparts.

### **Relationship analysis**

The dilemma of where the loyalty of the Harkis lies is the primary theme of *La trahison*. It is also at the issue that will cement their identity as a distinct group. The war defines them as a minority within a minority - a people discriminated, formed out of elements of other already colonized peoples. The liminal space between the Algerians and the French molded the Harkis as they moved between them. The film deepens our understanding of the circumstances of the creation of this troubled identity. It demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between them and the French on one side and the Algerians on the other.

Their interactions with these two groups primarily illustrate the Harki identity. Originally, a Harki was an Algerian with allegiance to the French, and more specifically, to the French military. At least in part, their beginning can be traced to an inherited tradition of men who volunteered for the French Empire. However, this is too simplistic a view, especially when considering their present status. The film helps with illustrating some of the processes that helped redefining the present Harki identity, and the relationship to the identities that preceded the current one lies at the heart of it. Although their allegiance seems to be attached to France, the historical background in which the Harkis of the 1950s and 60s find themselves is changed. In the past, Harkis have been called upon to fight for the perpetuation and the protection of the

Empire. But the previous times their forefathers fought for what was an uncontested imperial power -where the relationship of North Africa and France were concerned-. This new fight is internal. The enemy is not an outsider European force, such as the Prussians or the Axis, nor a distant colonial independent movement like the one in Indochina. This time the movement is local, and this leaves the Harkis in a precarious situation, in direct opposition to their countrymen.

The French, who define themselves as the victims of the German attack and occupation during WWII, are now being characterized as the occupying force. By association, Harkis are seen by many Algerians, especially the FLN, as the equivalent of traitors and collaborators -the French who collaborated with the Nazis during the occupation-. To better understand the complicated relationships, the film does well to concentrate on four protagonists rather than just one. Although the Harkis have a de facto leader who tends to speak out more than the others, their screen time is shared rather equally since they are mostly shot as a group rather than individually. Some French characters have important supporting roles, most notably sous-lieutenant Roque, but the film focuses on the Algerians. Having four points of view allows the narrative to show different valid positions within the Harkis rather than focusing the story on just one arc. Their stories are indeed similar, but having four different characters allows for nuances, not only to portray the Harki relations to the French but also to the debate that existed among themselves. The film gives their differences more profundity and adds more depth to their challenges through the use of clothing and language that echo the interactions of the characters and the use of space that was previously analyzed.

Concerning language, the picture shows the French soldiers speaking exclusively in French and the Algerians Arabic. The Harkis speak both, depending on who they are addressing.

When the latter speak among themselves, their choice is Arabic. Most of the French servicemen did not speak the local language, making the role of the Harkis as interpreters vital. The difficulty and French reluctance of learning the local tongue(s) creates a space, both in reality and in the film, of linguistic separation that only underlines the physical and cultural distance between the colonizer and the colonized. The Harkis formed the bridge between the two cultures while unintentionally managing to lose the trust of both sides. The linguistic bridge built by the Harkis becomes a space that neither party is willing to cross.

This verbal impasse effectively places the Harkis in no man's land between the French and non-combatant Algerians, a linguistic non-Place where their cultural identity is blurred. Due to their present situation, they are stuck on the bridge, walking from one end to the other, but deprived of the ability to cross the threshold into either side fully. The first half of the film focuses on the French efforts to obtain information from the locals and their struggle to fight the FLN insurrection. Whether out patrolling or performing duties at the garrison, they rarely mingle with the French servicemen, who see them with constant suspicion. One of the French soldiers remarks that the Harkis no longer attempt to hide their imminent treason, and as proof to his argument, he mentions that the 'Muslims' don't even bother to speak French any longer. To the French soldier, the use of language is a way of proclaiming your allegiance. Interestingly, the majority of the instances in which the Harkis use French is when addressing their officers, to give them a report on their duties or to pass intelligence obtained while questioning. The use of French highlights a vertical relationship, here portrayed in strictly military terms, which is a metaphor for colonial dominance and imposition.

The use of Arabic is more ambiguous. When the Harkis speak to each other, they do so in their native tongue, and the same is true between native Algerians in their villages to speak

among themselves. This communication pattern shows a horizontal relationship between equals rather than a dependent relationship between subordinates like the one expressed with the use of the French language across cultures. However, when the Harkis question the locals, they do so in Arabic, which shows that the language -and the Algerian servicemen- can also be used vertically when under the orders of a directive given in French. In other instances, The Harki-French interactions represent a diagonally marked relationship, since they use their native tongue to warn the locals of danger or to interact with them. Also, when confronted with the bodies of FLN fighters, a woman antagonizes one of the Harkis, showing that even though Algerians are presently conquered, Arabic has become the language of protest and insurgency. The film relays verbal exchanges between Algerians in Arabic rather than in French. This portrayal allows the audience on both sides of the Atlantic to understand the role of Arabic so that it may have a more empathic understanding of the situation experienced in the field during the war. The use of language mirrors the use of the space filmed and situates the Harkis in a linguistic heterotopia where they are excluded from the Places of the two cultures at odds. If we can conceptually represent the French and the Algerians by a closed circle, one blue and one red, colonialism would be represented through a section where both circles intersect. The Harkis would be the purple space where the circles cross each other during the war. This intersection creates a space with characteristics of both cultures, but with common points and differences from both. It becomes a new space of neither the same color nor shape as either circle from which it originated.

Speaking of color and shape as a form of visual support of the relationship dynamics of the Harkis and the French, the picture also pays particular attention to the clothing. The men of the garrison wear monochromatic army uniforms. These clothes visually deprive the soldiers of

distinguishable identities except for the protagonists. The *paras* -French paratroopers- wear green foliage camouflaged uniforms, which ironically do not blend at all with the arid Kabyle background, exemplifying how the French did not blend with the local culture. The European French always looked out of place, especially the farther removed they are from the main cities that they had built in the Cartesian image of France. A study of French colonial architecture projects from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century states:

During this period, some florets of French architecture have been erected, particularly those representing neo-Greek and neo-Renaissance vocabularies characterizing restoration and the Second Empire (Oulebsir 2004, p. 251). Public architecture was supposed to be the mirror of colonial strength. (Khelifa-Rouaissia and Boulkroune 412)

French architecture and symmetric civil design always looked foreign in a territory where towns and other habitable spaces grew in a more organic fashion adapting to the territory that they occupied rather than attempting to transform it. French military clothing becomes a visual extension of these designed, symmetrical, controlled French spaces. French military attire was as different from the garb of the locals as symmetrically designed French Places were from the more organically developed native Places. The native garb was practical to live in the conditions of places like the Kabyle. Daily military attire is quite practical. However, it is designed to be practical when it comes to maintenance and combat, as well as being designed to provide -or deprive- the bearer of a distinct identity. Military clothing homogenizes all the bearers into parts of a fighting unit, with each part serving a higher purpose than their individual needs. The clash of the native garb versus the military attire is quite evident, as well as what it means for those who wear it, and it affects the image of the Harkis in a particular way. In contrast to the European French approach to architecture and clothing, the FLN combatants dress in local attire,

identical to that of the native population. This strategy makes them indistinguishable from the villagers who may not have been involved in the conflict until they engage the French in combat.

In the rare armed encounter scenes depicted, the film provides the starkest of contrast when it comes to defining the roles of the protagonists through clothing further. The French prevail in a violent exchange: the local garrison confronts the FLN while the *paras* perform a flanking maneuver that ultimately wins the day. At the outset, the soldiers line up the corpses of the dead natives. The Harkis look at the row of dead countrymen with mixed feelings of relief and sadness. The scene effectively situates the Harkis in a non-Place, because while they wear French military gear, they still speak in Arabic between themselves even in the presence of other European men. They are visually French but linguistically Algerian, caught in the purple bridge they are unable to cross fully. The contemplation of the lined-up cadavers is an ominous reminder of the likely future of their old culture should the French attain victory. Even in death, the orderly arrangement of the lifeless emphasizes the French obsession with ‘putting things in order’. This French understanding of order may prove the demise and disappearance of the local culture’s uniqueness. The bodies laid out in front of them have a visible effect on Harkis’ convictions.

Finally, the dynamics of the relationships between the main characters need to be considered. The principal tentpole of the narrative is the discovery of a journal with the plot to kill lieutenant Roque, which throws the garrison into disarray when the carnet is presented to the officer by his captain. The film has established the firm convictions of Taïeb and the reluctant loyalty of the other men towards France, before throwing the plot twist in the spectator’s face. By this point in the narrative, the public sympathizes with Roque when he states: “excusez-moi mon capitaine mais je vous crois et je vous crois pas” (excuse me my captain, but I believe you

and yet I don't). This statement summarizes the film. Just as the first half of the story has offered us reasons to believe in the men, the second half will present an argument to doubt them, and yet neither half is black nor white. Roque could understand if the Algerians defected, but he has difficulty accepting that they would cut his throat and deliver the rest of the *section* -the unit- to be butchered by the FLN while they sleep. While the captain admits that there is a small chance of this being an enemy plot to discredit the men, he is more convinced that the murder plot to be true. He thinks it is a price to be paid by the Muslims Harkis to re-enter the ranks of their people who already consider them as traitors. He states that for the Muslims, this is a matter of life and death; in fact, this is a matter of life and death for both sides.

The movie remains careful not to demonize either side. The French officers, as they condemn the Harki collaborators, are both controlled and willing to give the men some benefit of the doubt while deciding to investigate the matter cautiously. I use the word collaborator deliberately to invoke the WWII French concept of the word the Harkis are being viewed in this guise by both sides. From this moment on, the talk of treason mounts, and the film does a careful job of showing these discussions in scenes where night and shadows are prevalent. In a rare French-Algerian scene, Taïeb and Roque are shown patrolling together during the day, but it is evident to the Harki that the pairing is done out of mistrust. He asks his commander for a reason why he is no longer allowed to patrol or to perform guard duty with any of his compatriots. The tacit answer reveals that the order has been given to separate the men and pair them with French soldiers to keep an eye on them. This scene is framed differently from the rest in the film, where the crumbling communication bridge between the French and the Algerians is exposed through a rare shot where the men from different cultures are not only framed together but shown speaking to each other frankly.



Frank communication is rare but is evident between the Harkis and the French officers. Late in the film, Roque attempts to console Taïeb concerning the mounting alienation of the Harkis by the rest of the men. He assures the Algerian that all will be equal, as promised by de Gaulle, when the general assured that they would become French '*comme tous les autres*' (like all of the others). The use of *autre* (other) equated to the French reminds the spectator that to the Algerian, the French are the Other and not the Self. As the *paras* and the garrison detain more people and question them, the population becomes increasingly uncooperative. Taïeb remarks morosely to Roque that the reason behind this resistance is that, to the natives, '*je porte l'uniforme francais, je suis avec les francais*' (I wear the French uniform, I am with the French). For the locals the clothing defines the allegiance. The remark is also careful not to say that Taïeb is French, but that he is merely with the French, which emphasizes his status as a local turncoat. On the other hand, the French servicemen refer to the four military interpreters more and more as 'the Muslims' to add another dimension of difference between them. Muslim, in this instance, is used to differentiate culture rather than religion, and the men define 'Muslim' in opposition to 'French' rather than contrasting it to Christian -or any other faith-.

Clothing provides another significant commentary in the next interrogation scene. The FLN has been targeting the locals for monetary support. The French retain three local informants to gain intelligence on the matter. The French force the informants to switch their traditional Algerian outfits for French military clothing to protect their identities from their neighbors, who likely sympathize with the insurrection forces. They then cover their heads with holed hoods to hide their faces. The three local informants may be a reflection on three of the Harkis. The film suggests they may be double agents and could be obtaining intelligence for the FLN about the garrison and working with them on the assassination ploy. Towards the end of the narrative,

Taïeb remains as the lone staunch defender of the loyalist adherence to France, while the other three Harkis show increasing disassociation with the French cause. The hood covers single out of Taïeb as the distinct leader of the foursome. He is the only one who can see the French point of view, while the other three are passive followers. The hoods suggest that they may be susceptible to treason through their loss of faith and vision. The clothing articles also suggest that the Harki protagonist has become a victim of his inflexible choices. Taïeb is portrayed as the one remaining element of true duality as he could be seen in two lights: he is either the only real traitor or the only true unflinching loyal, moral man. The film holds off the answer. By the end, it does not provide a satisfactory resolution either, underlining the lack of solvency of the Algerian colonial debacle as a whole, especially where the fate of the Harkis is concerned.

As reviewed earlier, one of the last and most important scenes of the film is the fight between Ali, one of the Harki corporals, and a French counterpart. The French soldier insults Ali by throwing dirty water on him. A quick dust-up ensues: the men wrestle each other and roll around on the ground briefly before being separated by their peers. Roque and another French officer then call the Harki and tell him to avoid giving in to the teasing of the white soldiers. The officers understand the rift between the men and are attempting to stay above it, but the gravity of the situation becomes more obvious by the response of the Algerian. The lieutenant asks him whether he realizes he is being provoked, and the soldier answers that he doesn't know anymore. He is, at this point, doubtful that the insults are only teasing, hinting that they are the manifestation of a deeper mistrust and that he is unsure of his allegiances. The officers have no response as the truth becomes evident to them as well. They decide to let Ali go. More than a simple scuffle, the scene represents the point of no return for both sides, signaling that the only possible outcome of this relationship is confrontation and break up. The Harkis have become

permanently stuck on their bridge, which now has seen both of its ends, the links to either possible world, collapse. Every party shares a responsibility, but the Harkis take the brunt of the hit in a plot where all parties are losers.

Finally, while the Harkis eat together, their quarters are searched for evidence. Roque is called back to Franchet's office, where he is informed that the suspicions are confirmed. One by one the men are treacherously led into a truck to avoid resistance and then handcuffed. As they are taken away, Taïeb screams to the lieutenant: "*Vive l'Algerie, vive la liberté*". The shout is a confession as much as a confirmation of his allegiance, not one of guilt, rather of where his devotion now lies. And yet there is as much sadness as there is defiance. Not at being caught, but at the deepening of the gulf that stretches between him and the Roques of France. By the end of the film, several answers to the treason question are plausible. First, Taïeb may have been playing the French all along and never quite found the opportune moment to carry out the plot. Another possibility is that he never believed in the plot and never intended to consummate the deed. It can also be argued that he had a journey of change of heart, but again two developments are possible. The Algerian could have begun the narrative with hate towards the French but experience a change of heart. Through his service he could have developed love and respect for at least some of the European due to his relationship with Roque. The development could read as going in the opposite direction where the Harkis increasingly felt alienated, betrayed and inexorably pushed towards betrayal. Four possibilities, each with supporting evidence and just as much plausible deniability based on the film. The four possibilities, at the very least, justify the portrayal of four protagonists. Each answer is unsatisfactory on its own but much more viable once combined with the other three.

But before we attempt to reach any conclusion, it is paramount to examine the other side of this treason. The more (and yet not so) subtle betrayal is that of lieutenant Roque. The picture does a fairly good job of establishing a friendly relationship between the French officer and the Harki corporal. When the plot is discovered, Roque is shown as very reluctant to accuse Taïeb and only pursues the investigation *à contrecœur* when ordered by his superiors. Roque had originally advocated the innocence of his Harkis. He is later persuaded to scrutinize the men by captain Franchet secretly. The commanding officer tells the lieutenant that the army would rather be wrong and a little embarrassed than risking the lives of French soldiers by ignoring the evidence obtained. Roque is aware that in the mind of most white soldiers, the natives have already been condemned. Journalist Jean-Pierre Jeancolas observes that this adaptation:

is not so much a story as a meditation on the impossibility of a particular relationship, on a war that causes an incipient friendship to be destroyed by a murder plot. Faucon's film is faithful to this problematic of doubt, replacing the narrator's voice with the eye of the camera. (Jeancolas 45-46)

From his point of view, it is the tortured dilemma of Roque that should connect with the French audiences to highlight the problem of viewing Algerians as foreigners and as traitors. But Roque is not at the heart of the story. This character has two principal purposes. First, as a guide to the story, and second, as a way to access the real protagonists. He also represents a point of view that was prevalent in French circles with regards to the Harkis. Many in the military saw the employment of Harkis as beneficial and necessary. Roque did have the intention of helping them back when the conflict would over. Therefore, the veritable treason may be that the Harkis were either abandoned in Algeria or encamped and isolated in France.

The film slowly builds the tension between the French and the Harkis by mounting the confrontations between both groups of privates from small snide remarks made under the breath and suspicious comments towards insults and physical altercations. In the beginning, this enmity is not shared between the Harkis and the officers, but rather only by the men that share the same rank. As the story progresses, Roque becomes increasingly isolated in defending the Harkis to the point where the spectator notices a seed of mistrust growing within the man. Taïeb, the leader of the Harkis, mirrors Roque when he begins to doubt his allegiance towards a nation that increasingly questions the standings of him and his men. The French officer embodies this mistrust through his questioning. Roque personifies the relationship that the men hoped to have with the French, while the other servicemen exemplify a relationship much closer to the reality that their situation had produced. Roque and Taïeb are the closest points of contact between the two sides. The resemblance of their moral dilemmas underlines the ridiculousness of this war and the similarity of the humanity they share. They represent a group of people with a weak will to work things out but who ultimately lack the conviction to enact real change in others. But they are also the only ones who share common ground, both figuratively and within the narrative of the picture.

Throughout the film, the exchanges between the lieutenant and all his men seem sincere and straightforward. The officer's main role in the film is to keep the peace, which ironically was what the French originally called the Algerian independence war -an effort to preserve and establish order-. Roque personifies the failure of the mission as the embodiment of some of the most important flaws of the plan. First, his love for the Algerian land and people is genuine. He seems to have gained some understanding of the plight of the natives. He can sympathize with those who support the FLN (civilians and fighters alike) and also those who support the French

(Harkis and those who could be called ‘collaborators’). However, in spite of all his empathy, he still symbolizes the attempt of violent subjugation of other people. Second, his efforts are well-motivated, but never have enough conviction or power behind them to satisfy either side. He fails to convince his superiors, or any of the European French troops for that matter, to give the Harkis the benefit of the doubt. He also fails to obtain much significant intelligence from the locals regardless of all the interrogation efforts or scorched earth tactics he carries out under orders. Third, Roque manages to lose the trust of the Harkis in the process. He may represent a critique of the likes of President/General de Gaulle, who famously suffered attempts to his life while promising to solve the crisis. Proponents of a French Algeria felt betrayed by de Gaulle once he began to champion the rights to self-determination of the French colony openly after promising to keep it. The suspects of the attempts on de Gaulle’s life were *pieds-noirs* and European French invested in a French Algeria (“Five who failed”). De Gaulle’s shift in philosophy felt like a betrayal to the military and para-military personnel who considered that de Gaulle was weakening France through his tepid policies. The policies of de Gaulle are quoted in the film by Roque while attempting to appease Taïeb. Although both men survive, they have been betrayed by those who were supposed to be fighting on behalf of France.

## **Conclusion**

The film underpins the weak position of Roque through places and locations. If France is a representation of order and mastery, that representation on the remote Kabyle region is embodied by the weak infrastructural presence of the Republic. Jeancolas states: “The tormented trajectory of Lieutenant Roque is set within the daily routine of a war that has been reduced to the activities of an infantry platoon holed up in a farm converted into a fortress with fragile

strands of barbed wire” (Jeancolas 46). Beyond the roads shown in the film, the best representation of the physical inroad that France has left in this desolate part of the territory is this decaying makeshift outpost. No grand palaces and manicured gardens are to be seen there, only a bleak, monochrome crumbling structure surrounded by porous barbwire fences. This makeshift fortress is the closest thing to France upon which the local military detachment relies to feel some measure of protection and familiarity to home -from daily military life to the reception of letters that symbolizes a lifeline to ‘civilization’-. It is also the image of France that most of the local villagers will have: neither the Louvre nor the Champs Elysees, (not even downtown Algiers) but rather a poorly transformed structure of earth and block inhabited by men that seemingly mistreat the locals at every turn. It emphasizes their lack of permanence and their strangeness to this space. France’s role of Place, of a space where order and meaning are created and from which reason and civilization emanate, is re-presented as sterile and oppressive. It can be catalog as a crisis heterotopia, according to Foucault’s proposition of these unique spaces. In the first principle, he defines it as such:

there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc. In our society, these crisis heterotopias are persistently disappearing, though a few remnants can still be found. For example, (...) military service for young men, have certainly played such a role. (Foucault 4)

This makeshift military installation becomes the focal point, the ultimate non-place due to its lack of permanence and its harboring of young military personal in a perpetual state of crisis, both with regards to their personal safety, but more importantly, to their cultural identity. The

villages in which the French military ventures in their sorties, the roads they travel and the rudimentary quarters in which they live are nothing more than temporary non-Places for them. They are spaces that they use to assert their dominance of the locals, but which they ultimately hope to leave as soon as the opportunity arises. However, these heterotopic spaces are far less threatening to the French -at least to their identity as a people- than they are to the Harkis, the men assigned to help them win this conflict.

For the Harkis, these spaces become heterotopias of crisis and deviation. In these non-Places, their identities metamorphose in a rather unexpected fashion. The purpose of military barracks, training and uniform goes further than to facilitate men with fighting abilities. To form then into a cohesive unit, boot camp, barracks, mess halls, are all spaces designed to reshape the men's identities, to at least partially eliminate their individuality to serve a greater purpose. The Harkis suffer all of these consequences in a much deeper sense. They lose their identity as Algerians and experience a cultural break with their native societies. The dissolution of their former identities forces them to create a new one, but the danger is that this identity springs from a non-Place rather than a Place, formalized on shaky ground. Augé explained: "anthropological place – is a principle of meaning for the people who live in it" (Augé 52). But what type of meaning can a non-Place create when it has supplanted a Place? Whatever it is, these heterotopias create the new identity of the Harkis through crisis. Therefore, it is an identity in crisis. They are people without land or cultural relation to a greater society, whose future looks as uncertain as the safety provided by the spaces in which they currently move. *La trahison* illustrates this genesis and a metaphor for the predicament in which they and their descendants will grow up to the present day.



## Chapter 2

### *Indigènes* (2006)

#### **A revision of the historical contribution of African French Army**

#### **WWII veterans**

##### **Introduction**

Among all of the French war films to come out in the aftermath of the 2005 riots, none has arguably had a stronger political and social impact, nor reached more people, than Rachid Bouchareb's *Indigènes*. In its online "Indigènes" statistical metrics page, JP's Box-Office reports that the movie reached over three million viewers and grossing over twenty million Euros in France after premiering in the summer of 2006. But arguably the most important person it impacted was President Jacques Chirac, who upon seeing it changed the policy of compensation for Algerian veterans of the French Army. The Policy had been all but suspended after the Algerian war of independence (Jaafar 9). This film takes us further back in history, to the use of African conscripts and recruits during the liberation efforts of WWII. The film explores the relation of the four main characters to the spaces of continental France as opposed to colonial France, as did *La trahison*. In that movie, the spatial study focuses on the definition of Algerian spaces and their boundaries. It shows how the French saw those spaces as non-Places, but it also helps the present French viewer to discover the formation of a new identity for the Harkis. In *Indigènes*, the focus shifts from how the French viewed Algeria to the view of France from the eyes of North Africans. The spatial study of this chapter will analyze this view, while the second half of the study will explore the relationships between French and North African military

personnel. Before beginning the analysis of spaces and relationships, we will briefly review the writings of Franz Fanon. Fanon was a francophone writer involved in the war of Algerian independence and was uniquely positioned to educate the world on the details of the unique Franco-Algerian relationship.

Fanon was one of many Francophone intellectuals who became involved in the Franco-Algerian conflict, undoubtedly more than most. Of Antillean origin, his medical training in psychiatry took him to Algeria, where he assisted and treated war victims (including military). He wrote about his experience in the war, and an unequivocal repudiation of colonialism marks his writings. His condemnation of the system and of the European societies, which took advantage of their colonies, was sharp and compelling. Jean-Paul Sartre volunteered to write a preface for the publication of one of his most renowned works, *Les damnés de la terre*<sup>12</sup>. The very first paragraph begins with:

Il n'y a pas si longtemps, la terre comptait deux milliards d'habitants, soit cinq cent millions d'hommes et un milliard cinq cent millions d'indigènes. Les premiers disposaient du Verbe, les autres l'empruntaient. Entre ceux-là et ceux-ci, des roitelets vendus, des féodaux, une fausse bourgeoisie forge de toute pièce servaient d'intermédiaires<sup>13</sup>. (Fanon 9)

From the outset, Sartre explains the colonial phenomenon as a separation of two worlds, the European, and the Native or Indigenous world that he calls *indigène*. This term is typically used in Francophonie to designate people within the French empire who are not '*Français de souche*',

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<sup>12</sup> The title given in English is "The wretched of the earth" although one could argue that 'The damned of the earth' could be a closer and more appropriate translation.

<sup>13</sup> "Not so long ago, the earth counted two billion inhabitants, about five hundred million men and one billion five-hundred million natives. The first had at their disposal the Verb, the others borrowed it. Between these ones and those ones, sold wrens, feudals, a false bourgeoisie forged from scratch served as intermediaries" (my translation).

in other words, individuals who are not French of European ancestry. Sartre extends this definition to include the rest of the world who is not Europe or the West, the part that is not an active colonial metropolis. With this extension, Sartre inadvertently catalogs Europe as a cultural Place and the rest of the World as a Non-Place. He is not advocating this point of view but rather recognizing its existence from a French point of view.

Sartre supports the anti-colonial agenda within the Metropolis and to stamp his approval on Fanon's work. His understanding of colonialism reveals that even among the intellectual intelligentsia, this separation of worlds was understood. The principle of *universalisme* never operated effectively in France. He also points out that what occurred for those who made some 'progress', (for natives who learned well the culture and the language of the oppressor), a special class was created. This class was a social no man's land that transformed them into Europeanized exploiters of their own kind.

As seen in *La trahison*, the four Harkis were part of this group, albeit at the bottom of the pecking order. In the introduction to Fanon's work, Sartre is rather referring to local (*indigène*) public officials and private administrators of businesses with whom the French dealt. These locals served first, to exploit the physical and human resources of the colonies, and second, as a buffer between the metropolitans and the colonized, in spite of being in many cases officially recognized as French. Colonization was much more than the exploitation of others. It was in many ways the effective creation of this Other, inferior to the metropolitan, to justify this exploitation. As long as this Other identified as an *indigène* exists, *universalisme* cannot work. The problematic is best understood by making an important difference in the way that *indigènes* were regarded vis-à-vis the republic. They were French nationals, but not French citizens (Spire 48). This differentiation of status prevented them from having the same rights and privileges as a

French citizen of European descent. This differentiation of status had already affected other minorities at its inception. For example, a difference existed between men and women. The former received *citoyenneté* (citizenship) at birth, with the latter only inheriting *nationalité* (nationality) while being deprived of rights such as suffrage (Spire 47). In the social stratification of the French Empire, Algerians were already a step above other colonial subjects. They were considered citizens, above other colonial subjects such as Moroccans, Sub-Saharan Africans or Indochinese because Algeria was considered a French department rather than a territory. Still, they were legally referred to as Muslim French until the end of the war:

Dans le cadre d'un projet de sociohistoire de la citoyenneté visant à étudier les conditions d'accès aux droits généralement dévolus à la qualité de Français, le cas algérien apparaît exemplaire : tandis que la frontière entre Français « citoyens » et Français « sujets » a perduré pendant plus d'un siècle, l'ordonnance adoptée le 7 mars 1944 instaure un principe d'égalité des droits et des devoirs entre Français musulmans et non musulmans<sup>14</sup>. (Spire 49)

When the World Wars broke out during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the European empires called upon their colonial subjects to support the war effort. This aid came in various forms, from factory workers to conscripted and voluntary soldiers to bolster the armies. *Indigènes* is set in this context to revise the largely and deliberately obscured and overlooked contribution of these minorities. This chapter analyzes how the film aims to rectify the omission of their contributions from the history of France.

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<sup>14</sup> Within the framework of a sociohistorical project on citizenship aiming to study the conditions of access to rights generally bestowed upon the French, the Algerian case appears exemplary: given that the boundary between French 'citizens' and french 'subjects' has endured for over a century, the ruling adopted on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1944 establishes a principle of equality of rights and duties between Muslim and non-Muslim French (Translation by me).

## Film Synopsis

*Indigènes* is a 2006 French-Algerian war film that follows the story of –as in *La trahison*– four North African soldiers who enlist in the French army during the Second World War. Their primary mission is to assist with the deliverance of the French fatherland from the Nazi invasion. The use of four protagonists, as in *La trahison*, allows the viewer to explore more than one point of view based on the experience of the Natives. The viewer can see the reasons different Natives had for joining the war effort different types of relations to the French and with their own land and people. The men’s military service derives from different motivations for participation. Abdelkader is the idealist who unconditionally loves France and aspires to become a citizen equal to the Europeans. Yassir and his brother Messaoud are simply looking for a job and steady paycheck, as are some of the secondary but affable characters. And finally, Saïd, who is likable but naïve and initially servile. The story follows these men and others who fight alongside them. It starts with their recruitment and training in North Africa, passing by their first battles in Italy and the French *Midi*, up to the last fights in northern France. In the final campaign, all but Abdelkader will lose their lives.

These colonial fighters sacrificed most during the efforts of Free France -the exiled French government of WWII- led by De Gaulle from England. Martin Thomas explains:

The estimated 16,500 Free French military losses during campaigning in North Africa and Italy were primarily colonial. Villages in Morocco, Mali, and Algeria, not Brittany, the Ardèche, or the Pas-de-Calais, mourned the largest numbers of soldiers killed in French uniform after June 1940. (Thomas 49)

The final scene of the picture shows the solitary survivor five decades later, living in France in poverty and crying during a visit to the military cemetery tombs of his comrades. He questions whether his fight was worth the sacrifice since the veteran survivors of minority origin received neither credit nor fair treatment for their vital contributions to the rescue of the Republic.

The title of this 2006 motion-picture is charged with meaning. The film emphatically established the significance of the contributions of the *indigènes* to the survival of France, as French people themselves. It also reveals the inefficacy of the pretention that they were considered fully French. The film shows that France may be a country made up of a diversity of cultures, but that many within the Metropolis still consider the minority components of this culture as foreigners. The majority will continue to label as immigrants regardless of how much of traditional French culture these outsiders adopt, or what sacrifices they give to be accepted. The film illustrates the impact that these African servicemen had in the liberation of France while finding themselves part of a country that claimed them as subjects while rejecting their citizenship rights. The liminality of the non-Places in which the war places them allows these men to define their identity better. They are more than not French enough; they become French of Algerian origin.

Rachid Bouchareb spoke repeatedly, in relation to his films, on how, as a storyteller, he intends to illustrate the journey of meeting of different peoples. *Indigènes* premiered and garnered much attention during the 2006 Cannes Film Festival. In an interview during the festival, the director mentioned that he wanted to “really show the encounter between the French people, the North-Africans, the Africans and to show all the partners that had in common this history. With scenes of war, fully heroic characters, so it was a very wish to be both epic and very popular but in a good sense” (Barlet). In other words, Bouchareb wanted to transmit the

feelings and emotions of those who lived the stories through vivid storytelling. This is one of the reasons why he chose to film *Indigènes* in the epic styles of movies such as *Saving private Ryan* and other popular WWII movies shot in a grand scale. To achieve this, he spent time during the years of pre-production interviewing veterans (Plateau Extérieur Invité: Rachid Bouchareb) and putting together a team who, through families and acquaintances, had first-hand and secondary knowledge of the participation of colonial troops in French Wars.

During the premiere of the film in Cannes, he invited veterans to the screening. Some of them accompanied the stars in the subsequent public appearances to discuss the film. Bouchareb also arranged for a screening for President Chirac accompanied by Jamel Debbouze and other cast members, who co-starred and co-produced. Debbouze recounts how productive was discussing the film, not only with the President and his wife, but with other ministers and high-ranking politicians as well (Interview with Director of *Outside the Law & Days of Glory*: Rachid Bouchareb 3:33-4:10). Debbouze stated that he was impressed by the response of that select audience, and how receptive they were to the plight of the colonial veterans (Jamel Debbouze "Indigènes a changé des choses"). In latter interviews, he manifested his satisfaction with the policy change that the film had caused regarding the restoration of pensions for colonial veterans (Interview Rachid Bouchareb). Both Debbouze and Bouchareb, along with the other protagonists, spoke about the film as an illustration of a forgotten past, and as a part of a conversation on acceptance and identity. This conversation is especially relevant for the descendants of the colonial soldiers who sacrificed for France, but whose sacrifice remains forgotten.

To achieve such goals through the film, most of the camera work consists of medium shots and close-ups of not only the protagonists, but of a large and diverse supporting cast. This

diversity illustrates their plights in detailed, intimate fashion. Lots of attention is paid to the expressivity of each character, illustrating the different motivations every one of them had for joining the fight to liberate France. Jim Emerson, reviewing the film for Roger Ebert's website, notes that the camera follows the men up-close even during most of the fight-scenes. He notes how they are surrounded by explosions but are covered in dirt rather than fire or blood. This remark may be a suggestion of the future interment of the majority of the men, who, later in the narrative, will eventually pay the ultimate sacrifice for the liberation of France. There are rare exceptions to this shooting approach, as Jim Emerson notes something interesting about the camera work during the first battle scene. Says Emerson:

Bouchareb cuts from ground-level action to the position of officers watching from afar.

It's a moment out of Tolstoy, in which the men really do resemble ants scrambling over a hill. Scores of them drop dead in their tracks, but the waves of specks keep advancing until they seem unstoppable. (Emerson)

That distant-shot type of camera movement does not come back until the latter battle scenes in Alsace, and never quite to the far-out observation level displayed on the Italian mountains described by Ebert. Bouchareb is deliberate in keeping us up-close and personal so that we can experience the journey with his protagonists, with the rare exception of the European French point of view, which seems more detached. The camera takes us with the men rather than make us contemplate them for far. We get a sense of how these men are being used by the French military, which is not as invested in them. On the contrary, the film is; it shows us their humanity through their experiences. The film brings us closer to the past and brings the past of these men up to the present to produce the encounter that Bouchareb's narrative philosophy pursues in his films. This chapter analyzes how the film aims to rectify the omission of their contributions from



the history of France, and how the meeting of these two cultures was indispensable to preserve the present-day Republic.

### **Spatial Analysis**

The primary spaces in this picture are French, but Algerian spaces play an important secondary role. Because this film is shot primarily from the perspective of the *immigrant*, the Algerian space is from the outset filmed and viewed as a Place, in the meaning proposed by Augé with the following parameters:

These places have at least three characteristics in common. They want to be – people want them to be – places of identity, of relations and of history. The layout of the house, the rules of residence, the zoning of the village, placement of altars, configuration of public open spaces, land distribution, correspond for every individual to a system of possibilities, prescriptions and interdicts whose content is both spatial and social. To be born, is to be born into a place. In this sense the actual place of birth is a constituent of individual identity. (Augé 52-53)

*La trahison* established that the immigrants consider a Place the space that they occupy. The French servicemen, on the other hand, do not (through the camera we enter the natives' homes and towns through the eyes of soldiers, ergo, as invaders who don't belong). The film allows the viewer to turn the exotic space (from the French perspective) into a Place in its own right. The French use Algerian spaces to exclude the Harkis from both French and Algerian Places, but the film permits the public to see their spaces as Algerian Places and gives them a sense of validity. *Indigènes* begins its journey in North African Places and deconstructs the position of France as an established Place by draping it in ambiguity. The film portrays France as a path rather than a

destination (which is how the naïve Abdelkader constructs it at the beginning). It reconstructs France as a Non-Place by definition -again, as posited by Augé: “Clearly the word ‘Non-Place’ designates two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relation that individuals have with these spaces” (Augé 94)-. The temporality and danger that the North Africans experience in France identifies the whole country as a heterotopia of crisis and deviation. Except for the idealist, the relation of the Africans to France does become permanent, but rather one of transit. This distinction is also evident through the spoken word, which is an extension of the space<sup>15</sup>. The famous (or infamous) song ‘*Nous sommes les africains*’ (We are the Africans) plays the role of a unifying battle cry for all African troops. The song states that they are ‘leaving behind their homes in the colonies to save the fatherland’. Those lyrics point out how different these two spaces are for both colonial and metropolitan Frenchmen -and that the home, the Place, is Africa rather than France.

The editing of *Indigènes* also emphasizes the spatial and time separation. The same filmic device marks every change in space and lapse in time as a separate chapter through an aerial Black and White long shot of the countryside crossed over by a dark cloud. As the cloud passes over, the space that clears behind the cloud appears in color, and captions, such as ‘*Algérie 1943*’ or ‘*Italie 1944*’, announce the new time and place setting. Those shots remind the viewer of the turning of a page in a book. Each turning of the page takes the viewer to a new non-Place and defines visually the temporality of the space and time spent there by the men. Each turning of the

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<sup>15</sup> Augé explains how the word complements the space that helps define the identity of an individual: “... and the words too, of all who speak the same language, and thus recognize that they belong to the same world. Place is completed through the word, through the allusive exchange of a few passwords between speakers who are conniving in private complicity” (Augé 76). We see this come to the fore in the films in question. Language as a definer of provenance and belonging is one of the main features in *La trahison*. Also, in *Indigènes*, the ‘we are the Africans’ hymn serves as an identifier of all of those whose native land is the colonial Fringe of France, and whose lingua franca is French but not likely their mother tongue. It is an imposed complicity that separates them from the European French and is ironically sang in French.

page is a deliberate break with the previous non-Place. It also takes the protagonists and the viewers farther away from home, the Place of origin. The narrative uses these breaks to stress the further isolation of the soldiers as well as the arc in the transformation of their identities.

Italy is the first European campaign, and the first of this country -or of Europe altogether- that most of the *indigène* soldiers have seen. It is the least ambiguous of all the places visited, as Italy is never portrayed nor perceived as a destination by the French, the Africans, nor the spectators. Italy is the truest and easiest identifiable non-Place in the whole film. To any non-Italian soldier, the Italian countryside is similar to a highway towards France instead of a place of permanence. This conceptualization would be different for a local, but the film does not depict any Italian combatants since any Italian military would have likely been part of the axis rather than the allies.

The first shots of the men in Italy take place on the road. It happens when the troops are walking towards the destination of their first mission. The pervasiveness of road shots emphasized the danger in which the men live. In this mountainous country, they are commissioned to charge and take the positions the Germans hold in the heights. It becomes quickly apparent that the troops of Africans will serve as cannon fodder. Eager to prove their worth (either through their own devices or those of their commanding officers), many Berbers lay down their lives to help the cause succeed. They beat the Germans at a high cost. The European French officers state that this is a great victory for the Free French army. The visibly upwards physical motion of the troops, the portrayal of death and the short time spent in these hills underline the space as a decidedly transitorily Place, from the nature and objectives of the mission to the loss of life. This sequence of events constitutes a unit we may call the Italian chapter.

The Italian chapter could easily be overlooked in a film about the relationship between France and its North African subjects. However, this section serves as a foreshadowing of the end of the narrative and is an important illustration of the liminal spaces that influence the identity and the lives of the protagonists. Italy has little relation socially or historically to the North African soldiers, as opposed to France, which allegedly is the fatherland. But what the film shows is that France is, in reality, closer to feeling as distant as Italy to the men rather than any of their places of origin. France is much more a non-Place than a Place. The men have never been to France, most of them will only transit through that space and many will lose their lives in it. For those who do survive and remain in Europe, France will permanently transform their identity into that of an immigrant even with the obtention of citizenship. They will never be home in France. The Italian space and the experiences lived in it are more than a foreshadowing; they are a warning to the men of what is about to befall them in the colonial metropolis. While in their minds France exists as a utopia, it is, in reality, a heterotopia of crisis. They find prejudice and rejection and the only finality will come in the form of death.

After the short but eye-opening atrocities of Italy, next page turns and the picture takes us to Provence, the first French space. The entrance into France is utopic: southern France has been relatively spared of destruction due to the Vichy regime. Soldiers walk around in beautiful weather through green groves. Saïd, one of the four protagonists, kneels to grab a handful of dirt, smells it and states to Messaoud, another member of the four Algerian musketeers, that this soil is not like 'at home', to which the Algerian replies: 'no, French soil is better'. The handful of soil serves as a synecdochal representation of France, and its relationship to the men and their colonized spirits, as both a positive and negative critique of colonialism. This debate continues to this day, and events like the riots of 2005 and the production of this film are at the core of it, and

they greatly depend on who is speaking. Films such as *Indigènes* are a vital part of the ongoing debate of the impact that French colonial policies continue to have on the population of France, its former colonies, and those caught in the non-Places between them, such as the Harkis.

When the men pass into southern French territory, there is a small and yet significant scene that depicts a curious exchange between two North African soldiers as they enter a church. Yassir prevents his companion from stealing the alms left inside a small donation box. Paintings on the wall portray acts of subjugation and European conquest. Yassir reacts by telling his friends that when the French massacred his village, they called it '*Pacification*'. The dialogue is conducted in Arabic, by Muslim soldiers, as they stand in a barren catholic space that begs for silence. The movie here illustrates once more the contrast between a foreign, linguistic representation of an Other space that is at odds within the physical, local French space. Language is a vital part of what constitutes a Place, as Augé explains: "the words, too, of all who speak the same language, and thus recognize that they belong to the same world. Place is completed through the word, through the allusive exchange of a few passwords between speakers who are conniving in private complicity" (Augé 77). The chapel, by virtue of its cultural function, is one of the paramount anthropological Places, and in this scene, it provides a convenient representation of France as a space in which the immigrants are in transit. In this church, the French Muslims carry the anthropological Place within themselves through their persistent use of Arabic. Their language becomes a live Place that contrasts with the silence of the French church, which should be the Place. In this instance, the church becomes a representation of loss and absence rather than the creation of identity. The church is as vacant as France's moral superiority and the failure of its civilizing mission. For the immigrants, France is empty, and within them, they already carry a debate on their role vis-à-vis a nation they are finally discovering first-hand.

Each character acts in this scene through an internal monologue of the North Africans. It is a reflective discussion on what to do and what to expect from a nation that is taking so much from them while giving so little back.

The closing scene of what we may call the Provence chapter underlines the near-insurmountable differences between French and Algerians. The differences are exemplified when Messaoud bids adieu to Irène, a local girl who he has befriended and with whom she hopes to have a future. Due to the transient nature of Messaoud's presence in the south of France, his relationship with the local woman adds more instability to the existence of the soldiers. She takes up the role of the church of the previous scene, giving life to France in the film for the first time and a different perspective than the one suggested by the empty ceremonial building. The unit does not linger in the south since their mission is to liberate the north of the country that the Germans have occupied since the beginning of the war. After what is presumed to be a fast and torrid affair Messaoud must continue northward.

At his departure from her place, Irène is positioned on her balcony on a high floor while Messaoud shouts his goodbyes from a lower position down in the street. The camera, which does a shot/counter-shot sequence to follow the dialogue from the point of view of the listener, accomplishes visually two things. First, it emphasizes the imminent separation of the two characters, the inescapable fate of the doomed relationship, and of Messaoud's life. He is positioned right in the center of an old cobblestone street flanked by the front walls of houses. The street has a central ditch, and as Irène promises to correspond with him, he runs off in a straight upwards line following the ditch. The sense of perspective is markedly pronounced in the perfectly symmetrical upwards panning shot that announces parting and passing, just as the soldiers going up the hills in Italy towards battle (and for many to their demise). It is as if they

are ascending to heaven rather than heading to battle. Second, by separating the planes in which the two lovers talk, the film places them in separate spaces to break the union that has just taken place. Irène (France) is still situated above Messaoud (North Africa), both socially and politically even in the act of being rescued, and also of being penetrated physically by the colonized Other (the sexual relationship of Irène by the *indigène* soldier becoming an image of the territorial space of the Hexagon being penetrated by the African troops). This penetration is a reversal of the traditional colonialist view of France controlling its colonies through a traditional phallogocentric dominating role, as explained by Helene de Burgh: “the colonized were symbolically demarcated by the indigenous woman as ‘feminine, receptive vessels of the advancing colonial presence’ (...) the oriental woman was gazed upon, penetrated and denigrated during the process of French colonization” (de Burgh 122). Here, the gaze is returned by the colonized male upon France, but the reversal of roles is truncated. The colonizer has been brought upon these shores by France, and it is at her bequest that he is penetrating her.

Furthermore, the penetration is not fully achieved, which adequately portrays the non-Place in which the colonized find themselves while initially entering the colonizers’ space. The road has already been identified as one of the most important non-Places by excellence. Placing the soldier on a road, while the woman remains in her home -the most sacred of Places- also underlines the differences in both their social statuses and the directions of their lives. While the North African finds himself in a precarious state of crisis, the woman is at home -both in her house and in France-. She is safe while he is in danger. The scene through the spaces in which the characters are placed once more foreshadows their futures.

To conclude the story, as the last ‘page’ turns, the film takes us sixty years into the future. A now old Abdelkader lives in present-day France, alone and almost invisible to the locals in the

crowd, in the tram and the street. He visits the military cemetery in Alsace. He first visits the rows of crosses where he finds Martinez's grave. Then he heads to the Muslim section where all his old brothers in arms are buried. The cemetery has a particular significance in the spatial discussion that concerns these films because of its nature as a space of transition. As the film shows, it is a space of identification and separation identified by Michel Foucault as one of the most important heterotopias. Foucault coined the term heterotopia as he discussed the emergence of the importance of transitional spaces within the rise of modernity. Heterotopias are spaces that exist in opposition to Utopias, which are spaces that do not exist. They also oppose real Places (such as the home or the church, places that adhere to the definition of Augé), as the traditional concepts that linear time and history begin to break down. War film provides a unique opportunity to illustrate how the cemetery becomes a significant space that mirrors the societal conception of space assigned to different ethnic groups. To better understand how this cemetery space is a commentary on the identity of the men, it is helpful to make a comparison to the cemetery scenes of *Saving Private Ryan*, which partially served for inspiration in the conception and style of *Indigènes*.

The changing role of the cemetery in western society is evident in France. Foucault explains how this space consigned to the remains has moved from the center of town to the outskirts, becoming a marginalized space appropriated by common people, reclaimed from the Church. Cemeteries in Europe used to be located next to the Church in the town centers while Europe was more involved in devout religious practice and concerned with the eternity of the soul and resurrection (Foucault 4-5). Cemeteries became geographically marginalized as the prominence of religious devotion waned. These spaces reveal the cultural attributes of the state of the culture that produces them. Due to the significant presence of death in war films, scenes of



burial and shots of cemeteries are common happenstance but contribute to revealing important details about the people who occupy them.

Foucault's heterotopias have marked commonality with Augé's anthropological Non-Places because of their transitory nature. They do not conform to the definition of Places as spaces where one finds the creation of meaning of an individual's life, such as the workplace or the religious place (such as a church or temple). It is not in a heterotopia where meaningful relationships with co-workers, co-religionaries or family members develop. We have already seen how Foucault's 'other spaces' or heterotopias are organized in principles and how they apply to some of the non-Places that the films have previously portrayed. In his Third principle Foucault posits that "the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 6). In his fourth principle, he moves on to a discussion of heterotopias as 'heterochronies' due to what he says is the ability of these spaces to represent slices of time as well. As heterochrony, the cemetery can take what is perhaps the shortest slice of time of a human being (the actual moment of death) and perpetuates it through a permanent place in space. Says Foucault:

The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time. This situation shows us that the cemetery is indeed a highly heterotopic place since, for the individual, the cemetery begins with this strange heterochrony, the loss of life, and with this quasi-eternity in which her permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance. (Foucault 6)

In closer examination, the importance of these heterotopias as non-places in the films of this study challenge the continuity of French historical discourse when it comes to the inclusion, and especially absorption, of minorities. When speaking specifically about the scene in *Indigènes*, it

compares France as a cemetery for the previous identity of the colonial soldiers who came to her aid. They will leave with their lives transformed or without one. In this case, as opposed to the creation of a new identity as a potentially positive outcome that was suggested in *La trahison*, neither the identity nor the outcome is viewed in a positive light.

The cemetery scenes in *Saving Private Ryan* bookend the picture, making it clear from the beginning that it is a retrospective work. Both sets of cemetery shots show the long rows of crosses, sprinkled with scattered Stars-of-David headstones. The cemetery scene in *Indigènes* comes only at the end. It is shot similarly to Spielberg's bookend scenes. An older man walks through the headstones that are guarded by the American and French flags flying in the wind (in *Indigènes*, we only see the French flag since we are in a different resting place). The protagonists in both films are overcome with emotion and grief as they think of their fallen comrades. The difference is that John Ryan is accompanied by his family and has been shown on the battlefield with friends who survived. On the other hand, Abdelkader is portrayed as the lone survivor of his unit as he visits the graves by himself. One film celebrates victory and glorifies the cause and the manner in which the war was fought and won. The other film questions that victory and the outcome for a particular group of individuals; in fact, it questions whether for the 'natives' the war was a victory at all.

The two cemeteries are organized based on the cultural philosophies of each country. The United States prides itself on being a melting pot, at least in principle. The takes in the Normandy military cemetery show people of different faiths buried together. *Indigènes* clearly shows that the space where the French soldiers are buried is segregated. The French separate the European French tombs from the others, showing that the combatants who came to rescue the *patrie* may not even be considered as French soldiers at all. Abdelkader visits sergeant

Martinez's -his commander officer- grave first. The headstone, as may be expected, is a cross with the soldier's name inscribed on it. The staff sergeant's grave is surrounded exclusively by crosses. In the next shot, the Algerian kneels in front of a different set of headstones, all with Arabic inscriptions. A cross does not adorn the top of the stones. Instead, it is fashioned in an Arabic-styled headstone topped by that looks like the dome of a mosque, containing a simplified Muslim inscription as mandated by their religion. The white Christian soldiers have been buried separately from the Muslim colonial soldiers. In reality, this separate burial space accommodates religious differences and respects Islamic burial practices, which differ from other religions. A study about acceptance and recognition of Muslim culture and practices in Europe alleges the following:

In Rosmarie van den Breemer and Marcel Maussen's comparative analysis of state responses to Muslim claims-making regarding Muslim cemeteries and mosque construction in France and the Netherlands, the authors conclude that despite differing church-state models and differences regarding policies regarding cemetery ownership, both countries have sought to accommodate Muslim claims. (Kivisto 133)

The heterotopia of the cemetery underlines that not all of the segregation in France derives from racism or incomprehension. Some of it is self-inflicted or self-determined. In the post-war era, the French government has attempted, even if insufficient, to accommodate religious differences even when it goes against their cultural makeup.

Overall, the use of non-Places in the film underlines the story of the North Africans in France as a thankless, complicated, and still misunderstood part of French history. The picture argues a missing, significant historical narrative needs to be added to the existing official monolithic French version. This proposition is argued through the deliberate use of heterotopic

Non-Places that shed considerable light on that parallel reality lived by the French of colonial origins. Bouchareb's primary aim may have been vindication and cultural acceptance of these minorities. By proving his point, he also showed, through the uses of space in the film, that the umbrella of universalism did not effectively cover the French citizens of non-Metropolitan origins. They have a history of their own, as valid as that of the French of European ancestry. To further grasp this other narrative, the film brings other salient points through a personification of the association of the North Africans to the continental French. This personification revolves around the portrayal of relationships between the subaltern colonial troops and their commanding French officers, among others.

### **Relationship Analysis**

*Indigènes* portrays various relationships that exemplify the rapport between the European French and the colonial French. The primary associations deal mostly with military order because the chain of command makes for a relationship that can be defined as vertical. Since all of the officers are French and the African servicemen are of colonial origin, the film sets a straightforward metaphor for the relationship existing between the metropolis and the colonial periphery. No officers and few non-commissioned officers come from the colonial ranks. This situation is reminiscent of films such as *Glory* (Zwick 1989) in which only white officers were appointed to lead the first battalions of African American soldiers during the American Civil War. The organization of the French military feels very similar in a representation of this organization that is rather factual. However, two of the relationships portrayed in *Indigènes* add depth to an apparently simplistic setup and allow us to better understand the dynamics between the European French and those of colonial origin. The first is the interactions between the

protagonists and the local French women they meet in Provence; this topic was partially covered in the previous section. The second and much more significant is the relationship between the most servile of the main characters and a sergeant of mixed ancestry.

As an introduction to the relationship between the soldiers and France, personified by the local women, the picture presents the army's entrance to southern France. During what we referred to as the Provence chapter, the first oral exchanges between the Algerian deliverers and the local French population highlight the visual clues of territorial differences. It is noteworthy that Saïd, one of the main characters, exaggerates his bravery to the local girls. He states that although he has never seen this place, France is his country. This short statement presents the ambiguity of the north African's relation to the fatherland. As liberators, they feel entitled to claim as their own a territory which they have never seen. It is a play on the reversal of roles that the picture establishes, as it is typically France that claims the colonial populations as belonging to the metropolis. It is also this entitlement that would become a major spark to the independence movement of Algeria. African troops realize that perhaps France needs them more than they need the metropolis.

The best example the picture provides is of the North Africans' relationship to France through the personification of one of the men's interactions with the local girl Irène. The *indigène* Messaoud meets her in southern France when the troops arrive. The young woman turns out to be quite aggressive in pursuing a liaison with him. She invites him to her room, just like a teetering France has invited the Africans to come into its bosom. The colonials are now aggressively being ordered to going deep into France, to the heart of the most sacred Place, the home -in this case, the homeland-. When Messaoud and Irène begin to undress each other, a woman interrupts the couple and the soldier jumps back, scared and embarrassed. Irène tries to

put his mind at ease, thinking he is afraid of the Germans. He clarifies that the enemy is not what scares him. Instead, he explains that in *his country* he cannot touch a French woman. The soldiers had even previously been warned to keep their hands off the local girls. Messaoud's utterance reveals that they still view the Hexagon as a foreign space. As much as the colonial soldiers want to feel part of France, and in spite of all of the speeches delivered by the French officers about delivering the Fatherland, they remain foreigners. The restrictions with which they have dealt from their birth in their home country are perpetuated in this new space. This situation reveals that the French transformed all their colonial subjects into foreigners in their homeland through restrictions of access to the people and the spaces that the French claimed as Places in Algeria.

The relationship between Messaoud and Irène, although brief, is significant because it is representational of testimonies from African servicemen. Some stated that their reception in France was often much more positive than their treatment in the army. Scheck shared some of these testimonies in his research and concluded:

After arriving in France, many Africans felt that the French population was welcoming and relatively free of racism and prejudice; yet, discrimination was tangible in the army itself, as in the lower quality of food for the Africans and their lower pay. (Scheck 508-509)

Irène allows Bouchareb to show another level of complexity that is traditionally not addressed by the colonial discourse. She shows that the totality of the French population was not in favor of French colonial practices. By comparing the treatment of the Army to that of Irène towards Messaoud, the picture allows us to understand the difference between the institutional treatment and the individual reception of colonial soldiers. Different levels of acceptance existed in France

towards them then and now. The disparity of both relationships also illustrates that interpersonal relationships mattered more to the men. However, despite the good intentions and positive reception of some of the civilians, governmental and institutional control had more influence on the existence and the identity of the North Africans.

Finally, the organization of the narrative strongly suggests a relationship of dependence between an occupied France and the colonial forces fighting for French freedom. We may call Irène Marianne for all intents and purposes. The dominant position of France concerning her colonies and the saving force constituted of colonial troops is substantially weakened. From an Orientalizing viewpoint, the film feminizes France and masculinizes the Africans. De Burgh further explains:

The construction of the East as feminine also had the effect of elevating the status of the male coloniser, affirming yet again his dominance over the feminised Eastern subject. But the indigenous male was maligned during the colonial process, because of his inability to halt colonisation and seize back the reins of power from the all-conquering Western man. Powerless, eroded and humiliated, the *homme orientale* was portrayed as impotent through his failure to maintain possession of his culture, territory and women. (de Burgh 122)

Although *Indigènes* turns the tables on this conceptualization of the ‘*homme orientale*’ by showing their prowess as saviors of the ‘all-conquering Western man’, it fails to complete that turn. The outcome of the interpersonal link between Messaoud and his Marianne illustrates that despite his prominent role in the saving of the mother/father country, the weight of the colonizer point of view still erodes the power of the colonial man. *Indigènes* criticizes the French attitude of attempting to maintain this colonial control. This feeble and condescending attitude becomes

more obvious to the men as they go deeper into the Hexagon. The might of France transforms into an illusion.

The study of spaces establishes the existence of a partial reversal of roles, of a return of the gaze from the Orientalized to the Orientalizer. However, it is only a partial reversal. Its fullness may not be attained until a further degree of independence is achieved by the colonies. The link between the North African soldier and the French woman echoes this viewpoint. Irène personifies the impossibility of relation in equal terms in spite of the present weakness of the colonial oppressor, a promise and a desire that cannot be fulfilled under the existing circumstances. Yet, the creation of this relationship is already a beginning, in which the empowerment of the oppressed becomes a palpable future through a partial reversal of roles. This reversal is also evident in the next rapport examined.

Of all the relationships in the film, the most significant is arguably that of Saïd and sergeant Martinez. The film focuses on the four protagonists, who do spend the majority of the picture interacting with each other. Their interactions with their officers tell us more about their relation towards the Hexagon as a whole and how it affects the arcs of their character development. The two soldiers exemplify a version of the relationship between an important section of the French empire and its colonies that the spatial composition of the film underlines. Martinez is a *pied-noir* (a person of European French descent born and raised in North Africa) with a secret. Martinez has only a supporting role in the film, but he is crucial to the development of the story and the progression of the narrative. He also helps the viewer gain a better understanding of the ambiguous position in which many French people found themselves during and after the war vis-à-vis the rights of the colonies.



The rough Sergeant fits the stereotype of the hard-disciplinarian military man that is so common to Hollywood war films (examples of the tough, battle-hardened and experienced staff sergeant can be seen in a wide variety of examples such as *Platoon* (Stone 1986), *Full Metal Jacket* (Kubrik 1987), *Casualties of War* (De Palma 1989), *Jarhead* (Mendes 2005) to name a few). He trains the men and constantly berates them for their lack of military wherewithal. He transmits the sentiment from the officers that these men are inferior, not just because of their lack of experience, but also due to their provenance. He serves as the public mouthpiece for the private thoughts of the European French. One of the reasons for his treatment is to toughen the men up and get them ready for battle. On the flip side, he speaks up for the North Africans when addressing the officers and advocates for their fair and equal treatment. His relationship with Abdelkader is the best example of his behavior because Martinez recognizes leadership capabilities on the Algerian. Martinez becomes a voice for the oppressed, at the same time that he functions as the primary vehicle for the oppression of the men, and this is why his role is pivotal for the picture.

The interactions of Martinez with the more servile Saïd are the most interesting and create the space for the development of his character. Saïd, played by the then very popular actor Jamel Debbouze, is an illiterate recruit with petty aspirations. He is ridiculed by most of his peers, although esteemed by his closest fellow Algerians -the other three protagonists-. Martinez takes him under his wing and appoints him as his orderly after the sergeant saves his life in Italy. The North African, eager to show his gratitude, gladly becomes the servant of the *pied-noir*. This first stage of the relationship is a critique of France's 'civilizing mission'. The arc followed by the evolution of the relationship between these two characters is no more than a metaphor for the evolution of the relationship between France and her colonies. Placing this

relationship at the heart of the picture tells the audience it must closely pay attention to the criticism of French colonial relations and their evolution.

The relationship between the two soldiers progresses from the servitude of the north African, who has little personal regard towards his superiors, to a genuine relationship of mutual care. The distinction of unequal roles remains clear. The twist on Martinez's character comes in the form of the accidental discovery by Saïd that the sergeant's mother was Algerian. The servant naively attempts to strengthen the amical bond with his master by revealing his accidentally acquired knowledge. Taken by surprise, Martinez reacts violently. He beats and threatens Saïd never to reveal his secret. Martinez personifies what the French empire has become: a disabled bully ashamed to recognize the richness of its internal cultural diversity. Although he is considered white, his name already suggests Spanish family ancestry, so he is not quite as French as most of the other officers. The character is the personification of the addition of different waves of immigration mixed with those who may identify themselves as white European French. One could even question whether there is any 'real' French ancestry at all in him.

The film classes the different degrees of 'Frenchness' of the enlisted men and the degree of interaction and acceptance of others by the rank they hold in the military. The commissioned officers are metropolitan French. Sergeant Martinez is a character in limbo, trapped in the middle of the pecking order. He has one foot into a heterotopia of identity crisis while the other is firmly planted in France. The North Africans, Sartre's *indigènes*, remain at the very bottom of the pecking order along with other Africans and colonial soldiers, those who to the French come from the peripheral non-Places of the Empire. The less white European you have in you, the further you are from belonging to what the high-ranking officers refer to incessantly in the film

as *la mère-patrie* (a term that may be translated to English as the mother-fatherland, a strange linguistic expression found in romance languages that combines in a hyphenated word the concepts of fatherland and motherland, like a hermaphroditic Marianne). Many Latin-Americans continue to refer to Spain as *La Madre Patria*, even though the wars of independence were won two centuries ago. Or were they? That connotation of a country that is both mother and father to its conquered soldiers is powerful and has far-reaching effects that transcend generations. France becomes everything to the colonized mind, and for those who are not part of it, they are culturally and socially on the outside looking in.

One wonders if Martinez's may be fearful of losing his toehold on the *mère-patrie* should his Algerianness become public knowledge. Is Martinez a self-hater or is he simply in self-preservation mode? The film never fully answers this question, and the character himself may not have an answer. This question criticizes the reluctance of France to recognize its cultural diversity. Even today, when the principle of *Laïcité* has been debated and revised, it is mostly still as celebrated and staunchly defended as it was over a century ago when it was originally instituted: "in 2005 President Chirac called it "a pillar of the Republican temple"; a century earlier the socialist Jean Jaurès called it "the completion of the work of the Revolution" (de Witt 145). Laicity would rather have France be blind to its diversity than embrace it. But by negating it, it also negates all of these other identities, all of the other voices that do make up its history, and this move aims to break this silence. It aims to return the gaze on the colonizer.

As the film progresses, and as the troops go deeper into the *mère-patrie*, the *pied-noir*'s tenuous 'Frenchness' becomes more evident. France, as a non-Place, does something slightly different for this character's identity than for the others. It does serve as a transformational space, but it only does that for the eyes of the spectator and the benefit of the men. In reality, this space

does not transform the identity of Martinez; it simply reveals it. The role of *pieds-noirs* in heterotopic spaces is not the focus of this study, but these spaces show that they do affect the people who occupy them, perhaps in a different way based on the Place of origin of each people. The further the troops penetrate into France, the less French the sergeant seems. When the army reaches the Vosges (a low mountain range situated in northeastern France), Martinez instructs Saïd to learn to fend for himself because one day, the sergeant may not be there to protect him. More than a warning to the Algerian, this utterance is a foreshadowing of the future of the French occupation of North Africa, but it is also a warning of the lasting effects of it. As the mission becomes more complicated, and the sacrifices of the men continue to grow, Martinez reaches exasperation with the unequal treatment of his men. Through sharing some of their vicissitudes as they traverse the non-Place that is the Hexagon, he has gained an increased level of identification with the other North Africans. Reluctantly, he partially admits who he is as well.

Another important issue that the film illustrates is that North Africans are rarely permitted to go on leave, in spite of the length and difficulty of the mission. While the French get to spend time in their own homes, the *indigènes* don't even get to wander too far off of their base of operations. More than a simple and yet glaring case of double-standard favoritism, this is one more example that underscores that to the French this is effectively home, their Place. On the contrary, it will never become one for the Africans. By the time they reach northern France, the *indigène* troops have spent 20 months without leave, and continue to watch the French troops obtain breaks from the front. When he confronts his superiors about this later injustice, Martinez is given the excuse that there are no boats available to provide the men transport to go home. The sergeant sarcastically retorts that the boats were easy enough to find when the matter was bringing the men to Europe.

Eventually, Martinez loses all patience due to the mistreatment of his men. He declares that he just quickly wants to liberate the country, '*et on rentre chez nous*' (and we all go home). This last statement is powerful. *Chez nous* means in French 'at our place' or 'at our home'. It may also be translated more literally 'at we' or 'at us'. There is a tacit admission that France is not the Place of the Berbers and any other African fighters, and it is neither the home of Martinez, the *pied-noir*. In other words, each person's Place is his place of origin, regardless of cultural or ethnic makeup. The film also illustrates that immigrants do not consider France as home; they will always remain in a different place even when occupying the same space as the locals, like a different plane or dimension than those who consider themselves European. Just as it is for Abdelkader or Saïd, the real Place of the *pied-noir*, his home, is North Africa. North Africa does not equate to France regardless of what the political map of the Republic says.

The troops keep their northwards push, and in the process, men keep dying due to more armed encounters with the Germans. In the last battle of the film, where the Africans make arguably their most heroic stand Martinez is gravely wounded in the forest during a bombardment that nearly destroys the *indigène* unit. The few survivors make it to a small town where they discover a handful of French locals who are themselves survivors of the invasion. In this town, the last stand of the force will take place; this is their 'Alamo' -as *Saving Private Ryan* would call it-. Martinez is taken to a house where he is practically left alone. Saïd's discontent with his situation has reached its boiling point, and he tells his moribund boss with disdain that he hopes for his death. Martinez is physically broken, completing the metaphoric arc of the imminent break of the French political dominance of its empire. His demise shows the Africans that the hold of their masters is weakening.

In the final part of the last battle of the film, the dwindling force must hold a town with a bridge of strategic importance. Once again, the parallelism drawn from the Saving Private Ryan final scene is quite obvious, but the significance of the space is of a different relevance than in the American film. In the Hollywood film that inspired the last battle sequence, the importance of the bridge and the town are mostly tactical. While the tactical importance is also true of the Franco-North African movie, there is an added element of the significance of the spaces filmed and the connections between them. Interestingly, many *indigène* soldiers do not become acquainted in a more personal way with real French people until the outcome of this final fight. For the first time, they are portrayed visiting French homes and witnessing their daily lives. This slight change of depiction confirms the previous veteran statements noticing that they found the local populations to be less prejudiced than the army. These shots are intimate but on a different level than the previous scenes with Irène. Where the woman was a personification of the land, these scenes are more illustrative of the rapport of the French to their Places rather than the Algerians to France in general. They finally give us a glimpse of the relationship between the French and France in a way that is unoppressive to the Africans. However, it remains exclusive of them, effectively disassociating them from this Place. In this sequence, Messaoud walks through a living room and watches the pictures on the walls. He is in a private space, a real Place –the home– and yet he could not look more out of place. He joins his comrades in the streets, where one of them asks ‘who could live in this cold’, to which the Algerian replies, ‘*les Français*’. This statement effectively negates his Frenchness one more time. A vocal utterance underlines the physical location disparity between the colonials and the French. The separation that has been consistent throughout the film comes to a head and the disparity between the two peoples must be accepted as definitive.

During the last desperate battle to defend the town until they receive reinforcements, the last remnants of the force are spent. Of our protagonists, the only survivor is Abdelkader, who witnesses the deaths of all his fighting mates. Of all the deaths, the one that stands out the most is that of Saïd, who, in spite of his supposed contempt for Martinez, defends the building where the sergeant convalesces, and they die together. When Abdelkader discovers the bodies, he notices they are mirror images of one other as they lie next to each other. He had stated at the beginning of the film that the army meant equality, and to a certain degree, he was prophetically correct. As we noticed in *La trahison*, everything in the army -living quarters, uniforms, weapons, regimented scheduled- is designed to break down individuality. It is meant to reshape the men as a unit who will put forth the needs of the army and the nation ahead of any individual.

Abdelkader was not referring to this type of equality. Instead, he spoke about the one he hoped his service would bring by raising him to the same level of citizenship that the European French soldiers enjoyed. The picture breaks this illusion, and what it teaches the surviving African is that they had more in common with others who were not of European origin. The only latent difference that the army provides is rank, and the effective break is observed at the level of commissioned officers, all of which are European French. Not even Martinez qualified to become one. Ironically, the reason for defending this particular town is a bridge, but where in *Saving Private Ryan* the importance is strategic, in *Indigènes* it is symbolic. The fierce defense of Martinez by Saïd echoes the defense of the physical bridge by the African unit. One of the defenses succeeds while the other fails, and they both cost lives. While the physical bridge is saved, the social bridge personified by Martinez is lost. In spite of rescuing and preserving the territory of the *mère-patrie*, the men lose their lives and figuratively their possible link to the

land. This impasse, while tragic, once again forces them to redefine their future identity when confronted with the impossibility of equality.

Abdelkader witnesses a military cameraman filming the local villagers standing next to a white French soldier as he is unceremoniously reassigned to a fresh newly arrived relieving unit. The propaganda he produces proclaims: 'French soldiers free Alsace'. Although many villagers come and thank Abdelkader personally, the news (and official French History) practically effaces them from the official narrative of French history. The delivering of France is whitewashed, and the sanctity of the Place from the European standpoint is restored. The end of the stories of Abdelkader, Saïd and Martinez each reflect with more accuracy the trials and the end of the life of soldiers of minority origins who fought in France during the war than the official whitewashed French version of the liberation of the Hexagon.

## **Conclusion**

France pretended that Algeria had become an integral part of the French territory through politically organized departments like the rest of the Hexagon and carefully planned European settlements. This purported inclusion only applied to the transplanted European Population and their descendants. Through laws that limited the political participation of the indigenous population and their social recognition as French citizens, France managed to create a place in which the natives lived as foreigners in their own country. *Indigènes* exposes these injustices by taking the spectator on a journey in which soldiers native to French Africa are taken into continental France proper only to highlight their status as outsiders through the utilization of spaces and relationships with locals. Their failed relationships with European French people,



military and civilian, illustrate the social and cultural chasm that separated these men from their own country, transforming them in minorities within both French spaces, native and continental.

The injustices of colonialism have already been extensively highlighted and documented by both academics and historians, especially since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, France proved to be officially resistant to accept the negative light in which its colonial role is viewed from the outside. It has also been reticent to listen and include the voices of their minorities into their larger historical narrative, so much work and change is still needed.

*Indigènes* sheds precious light, especially due to its notoriety, into the plight that African soldiers endured at the hands of their own military and on French soil while rescuing it from other European occupation. Although the film downplays the fact that most of the African soldiers were conscripted into the military rather than volunteering their service, it does not lessen their sacrifices in the defense and liberation of France. Stora explains that “enlistment was forced” in most cases, and further clarifies that “To suggest that these impoverished men volunteered to serve under the French flag seems disingenuous at best” (qtd. in Norindr 136). The picture and its arguments are not without its flaws, and perhaps the most notorious one may be the following:

Bouchareb perpetuates the entrenched French belief of assimilation through reconnaissance (recognition) that unwittingly does more harm than good to the cause of the indigenous subject or "immigrant" who must first be "recognized" in order to exist from the French public's standpoint. (Norindr 128)

Norindr points out that the director’s argument may be flawed from the outset because she sees a misguided search for recognition. However, this point precisely is one of the most telling about the importance of this work. It illustrates the present plight of minorities who have not yet

recovered from the lasting effects of having been colonized. The film unwittingly signals that this problem still exists to this day, while concurrently showing that recognition was and continue to be one of the main goals of these particular minorities who fought for France. Bouchareb is also not dealing with the hypothetical problematic of whether North Africans should qualify for acceptance based on their level of sacrifice. He is, instead, pointing out through a work of fiction that this sacrifice has already been given in a very real way. As Michael O'Riley proposes of *Indigènes* that:

Focused as it is on promoting an understanding of the union of French and North Africans in the establishment of France's historical record of World War II liberation, Bouchareb's film is invested in putting North Africans on the French national map, both literally and figuratively. (O'Riley, "Cinema in an Age of Terror" 52)

Our interest in the picture goes beyond approving of Bouchareb's recognition aim. The film focuses on the creation and addition of this glaringly omitted portion of French historical narrative and highlights that there existed people in France who were sympathetic to these men's struggles and who were willing to accept them and fight for and alongside them. The picture depicts the circumstances that allowed for the amalgamation of a sense of identity for a large segment of the French population that continues to suffer from cultural underrepresentation through the effective use of spaces and relationships in a time of crisis.

Concurrent with the unrest of the 2005 riots, the French film industry began producing more war films than in had in previous decades. War films benefited from a generation of French filmmakers that had a close and personal interest in the wars of colonial independence and the plight of minorities and immigrants living in France. They became a vehicle for portraying the continuing struggle for recognition, validation and acceptance into French society. Even though

the pictures depict past stories, their relevance dwells in their metaphoric representation of the present.

*Indigènes* and *La trahison* have some common elements that allow us to conduct a final comparison of the films. They illustrate the difficulty for men who aspire to be recognized and accepted as French, to keep a foothold in their culture of origin. This difficulty was borne from the French imposition of 'civilization' and their impossibility to assimilate the values of colonial cultures. This imposition made it ontologically problematic for these other populations to accept French culture as well, as it became a non-winning proposition: either they adopted a culture that belittled theirs, losing their own identity but at the same time without enjoying any of the privileges of the adoptive culture, or they resisted their culture and then existing in obscurity outside the society that dominated their lands. The plight of those trying to reconcile these two realities, of the people who were looking for a solution and a middle ground through socio-cultural compromised, is what these two films expose.

The films are set on different wars and different territories. One has a predominantly French -although sympathetic- perspective. The other has a chiefly African point of view, but the structure and the message are essentially the same. These films are vehicles of recognition and change, and they were only the beginning. Due to the notoriety of *Indigènes*, this important debate of identity and acceptance escalated in France, reaching its highest circles with regards to the rights of French ex-combatants of foreign origin -a debate that forms part of the greater discussion of the rights of minorities and immigrants in France-. As mentioned earlier, President Chirac, upon screening the film, was so appalled at the fact that France had frozen the military pensions of the Algerian servicemen due to war of independence that he set out to restore these

pensions and to upgrade them so that they would reflect the value of benefits paid to other French veterans.

Everyone in the government did not share the excitement about the new measures. Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, serving as Minister of the Interior during Chirac's presidential tenure, questioned the quality of the film. He also criticized Chirac's initiative. Sarkozy said: "never has a film been so expensive to France, since it was when watching it that Chirac pledged €100 million to the soldier's pensions" (Jaafar 9). This comment reflects the views of another significant French section of the population, who are either ignorant about the contribution of immigrants to the very existence of France, or who refuse to acknowledge their importance because it threatens the positive view with which they construct the history of France when referring to their colonial role. Films such as *La trahison* and *Indigènes* help illustrate these controversies while allowing for a revision of the facts by reaching the general public in a way that the official historical narrative of public education has traditionally failed to do. The pictures also illustrate, through the use of heterotopic spaces, the creation of new identities for a whole section of the population through their passing of periods and places of crisis. Furthermore, these films also opened the possibilities of treating the topic of the struggle for acceptance and recognition of minorities and immigrants from other angles by other filmmakers that would utilize war film as a way of admitting the wrongdoing of the majority by portraying the internal conflict that many French servicemen faced when attempting to reconcile the propaganda of the civilizing mission on one side with the core republican beliefs of *Les Droits de L'Homme et du Citoyen* (The declaration of the rights of man and the citizen of 1789). This next step in the conversation of acceptance of minorities will be treated through two more films in the following chapter.

## Chapter 3

### *Mon colonel (2006)*

## **French Military *Mea Culpa* viewed through a contemporary murder mystery investigation**

### **Introduction**

The success of *Indigènes* in France opened the door to continue exploring the topic of war, immigration and integration through cinema. *Indigènes* and *La trahison* were the earliest films of a period where the relationship between the French population of European descent and North African minorities began to be explored with more depth. These texts revise the historical, cultural and socio-political contributions of these minorities. After France began to move past their guilt and trauma concerning WWII, the Algerian war became the one looming, repressed war trauma of the French Republic. *La trahison* spearheaded the filmic exploration of this relationship, but it was a much smaller production and box office success than *Indigènes*, which was set in WWII. The two films were successful at one particular point: putting the minority soldier in the center stage and singling out the injustice with which they have been historically treated.

In 1999, the French government admitted after decades of censorship and secrecy (Stora 98) that the Franco-Algerian colonial conflict had indeed been a war of independence, and not just a series of civil unrest and pacification efforts. The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw waves of immigrants originating from the former French colonies overtake migration into France originating from

other European countries<sup>16</sup>. The French brought some of them to shore up the war efforts of WWI and WWII as workers or military servicemen. In post-WWII France, others kept coming during peacetime to improve their situations. Although immigrants arrived from Asian countries, the largest numbers immigrated from North Africa. Their French-born and raised descendants grew up alongside the European French. Many among the French of European descent and the new large minority of North African origins would be and continue to be, affected by the war of Algerian independence.

The French film industry mirrored the attitudes of the general population towards this war as filmmakers reacted to government restrictions through self-censorship. The introduction highlighted how many films referenced the war and its devastating effects. However, most of them avoided a direct approach to the subject and even less a direct representation of the conflict on-screen. Stora noticed this absence of representation:

But a state-sponsored censor, which also brought about a sort of self-censorship as filmmakers avoided forbidden topics, doesn't entirely explain this absence. If we examine the films, we notice that they don't really show the Algerian War; filmmakers evoke events before and after the war, but never those during the war itself. Soldiers

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<sup>16</sup> In her evaluation of the 1999 French census Tribalat observes in detail the changes of provenance of French immigrants : "En France, l'immigration a été un phénomène massif et structurel depuis un siècle et demi qui a connu deux périodes d'activité particulièrement intenses : l'entre-deux-guerres et l'après seconde guerre mondiale. A la fin du XIXe et au début du XXe siècle, les immigrés étaient surtout Belges et Italiens. Puis vinrent les Polonais et les Espagnols. La France comptait près de 500 000 Belges lors du recensement de 1886 et c'est en 1931 que le nombre d'Italiens a atteint un maximum (808 000), devançant celui des Polonais (508 000) et des Espagnols (352 000). Après la seconde guerre mondiale, les courants espagnol et italien ont connu un nouvel essor, tandis que des << Français musulmans >> d'Algérie sont venus travailler en métropole après avoir obtenu la liberté de circulation en 1946. Ils étaient 331 000 à la veille de l'indépendance. La population italienne a atteint un nouveau pic en 1962 (629 000 personnes), tandis que celui de la population portugaise sera enregistré en 1975 (759 000) et celui de la population algérienne en 1982 (805 000). Les courants migratoires se sont diversifiés en s'étendant dès les années 1960-1970 aux autres pays du Maghreb, à la Turquie et plus tard à bien d'autres pays (d'Afrique subsaharienne notamment). Certains de ces courants migratoires sont issus de pays anciennement colonisés (Maghreb et Afrique subsaharienne) devenus indépendants" (Tribalat, "Une estimation des populations" 51-52).

leave for battle (in *Cléo de 5 à 7 / Cléo from 5 to 7*, 1962, by Agnès Varda, *Adieu Philippine* and *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg / The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, 1964, by Jacques Demy) or return from battle (*Muriel* and *La Belle vie*, Robert Enrico, 1963). They wear significant emotional wounds, which suggest the trauma of Algeria and the war. (Stora 99)

The European population had to cope with the trauma brought upon those who directly participated in the conflict and saw the post-Algerian war immigration flow rise. This flow was directly related to the collapse of the French colonial empire.

The increase of immigrants further diversified the French population that traces its origins to colonialism. Through their presence, immigrants brought all of the issues of decolonization home to the Continent. The descendants of the immigrants have been born and raised French, but with a heightened sense of a separate identity from those of exclusive European descent. This sense is due to the -at least partial- preservation of some of their cultural traditions. These descendants of colonial immigrants are commonly called *Beurs* (French-born descendants of North-Africans) in France. When considering the unique style and problems of identity in *Beur* literature, Pinçonat observes that some of the early novels: “illustre le caractère éminemment problématique de l’identité beure qui ne peut se dire que dans la binarité “Français et Arabe” ou encore “ni Français ni Arabe”<sup>17</sup> (Pinçonat 941). Pinçonat explains that many of these novels show that Beurs do not fully master the Arabic language of their parents, but also do not feel completely identified and fully comfortable expressing their experiences through the French language. They have grown in a cultural and linguistic space with intersections to both the country of birth and that of their parents. They feel only partially accepted in either culture,

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<sup>17</sup> “Illustrate the preeminently problematic nature of the Beur identity that cannot be defined within the French and Arab or even “neither French nor Arab” binary” (translation by me).

although they seem to identify further with the country in which they grew up. Their production of literature, music, art and film reflects these feelings.

The official governmental recognition of the Algerian independence war, and the development of a large minority of immigrant descent, have helped shift the approach of French film towards war movies. These movies reflect the changing sentiment of France towards its history, notably towards its attitudes concerning minorities. They also serve to revise its historical narrative. They fulfill the need to review history and redefine relationships between ethnic groups in France, as Stora explains:

The rendering of the war into image and film answers this pressing historical need. The “New French” people who don’t share the same exact history as the  *pieds-noirs*  or French soldiers have a need to see their past in images, documentaries, and fiction. Likely having only heard of the Algerian War from other family members, many of these people desire to see and complete their own personal histories. (Stora 105)

*La trahison* and *Indigènes* spearheaded the effort from filmmakers with direct relation to the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and with minorities of North African origin to inform a new generation. They used film to review the contribution of minorities on behalf of France, sparking debate, and influencing governmental policy. These first two pictures were primarily written from the standpoint of minorities. They were the beginning of what may be construed as a dialogue between minorities of colonial origin and the French majority. Following their success, other movies continued to explore the relationship of France towards its minorities through war film. The first films constitute a statement, to which the next two films of this dissertation form an answer as part of a dialogue. The pairs of films form a shot/counter shot in a montage that



constitutes a conversation between different groups of people within a France who tries to cope with its ever-evolving multiculturalism.

The movies that are studied in the next two chapters shift the gaze of the films in the opening chapters from the *colonisé* back to the *colons*. The colonizers admit and examine their role as victimizers during the Algerian war through the next two films. *Indigènes* and *La trahison* were the earliest films of a period where the relationship between the French European population and North African minorities began to be explored with more openness than in the previous century, and the historical, cultural and socio-political contributions of these minorities to France revised. The war remained officially unrecognized by the government until 1999. However, the official acknowledgment of the conflict, along with other occurrences such as the Papon trial, facilitated an opening for a more public discussion of the war and its effects on France. For this reason, viewing the Algerian war from the French perspective allows the study of the native French and the immigrants (and in this term we include immigrants and their descendants) from both sides of the fence. As with the initial pair of films, we will examine how this immigrant alterity and their relationship to the majority is also constructed through two primary elements: the spaces used in the films and the relationships between the protagonists of different ethnic backgrounds.

The films that constitute the answer to which this dissertation refers are *Mon colonel* (Herbiet 2006) and *L'ennemi intime* (Siri 2007). *Mon colonel* is studied in the present chapter, while *L'ennemi intime* will be analyzed in Chapter 4. When compared to the pictures of the first chapter, there are two important differences. First, the spaces portrayed in the films of this chapter will change significantly, since the introduction of the predominantly European French standpoint will also demand a more pronounced use of French designed spaces in the colonies. In

other words, the movies will contrast the use of organically developed native architecture and the more invasive colonial French civil engineering that reflects European dominance of the colonies. In a study of the design of imperial cities built to exploit colonial resources (and more specifically the design of Dakar), Bigon explains of the pattern followed to develop spaces by the French:

This model, for its part, is also associated with medieval *bastide* towns and the Renaissance tradition, which may create the impression that Pinet-Laprade renewed nothing but the ancient principles of Vitruvius. The orthogonal plan seemed to respond to two general aims: first, to facilitate the arrangement of a settlement, especially when acquired in a faraway territory; and secondly, to foster modernization in the sense of *mise en valeur* as opposed to the indigenous practices. (Bigon 435)

The spaces shown in the films, by the nature of their organization and development, support the old colonial French philosophy. The protagonists in the films will represent people who either supported or challenged this philosophy. The films of these chapters focus on French officers; they will spend more time in spaces occupied by the French and designed to give a sense of order that better serves the interest of the *colons* based on Bigon's argument. The careful symmetrical planning of blocks and streets and the austere functionality of the buildings of the French spaces will reflect the civilizing view of asserting order upon a wild country in need of modernization, most notably in *Mon colonel*.

The films, therefore, contrast and complement the previous works while highlighting some of their qualities and flaws. Second, the protagonists change as well, and therefore the point of view of the film. The spaces complement the stories of the protagonists by emphasizing their backgrounds but also their role as representatives of colonial domination. Where *La*

*trahison* and *Indigènes* mirrored each other by focusing on the experiences of four Harki soldiers, *Mon colonel* and *L'ennemi intime* center their attention on French officers, specifically lieutenants. The films illustrate the point of view of the so-called pacifying forces rather than the perspective of the minorities. They will permit an introspective review of the civilizing and pacifying mission of the French in the former colonies. Through the eyes of the lieutenants, the pictures will allow an intimate look at the state of mind of French servicemen who participated in the conflict as they struggled to reconcile their conscience with the reality of the war. The portrayal will also showcase the failure of the principle of universalism when such values are introduced to a colonial setting and the consequences of this failure. The chapter will analyze this point of view through a freshly arrived lieutenant in the film *Mon colonel*.

In the same year that Rachid Bouchareb gave us the hugely successful box-office and cultural hit *Indigènes*, another controversial Algerian conflict film premiered. *Mon colonel* (Herbiet, 2006) was directed and co-written by a team with experience in political and military subjects related to Algeria. French-Greek cineaste Konstantinos Gavras, better known as Costa-Gavras, worked with newer filmmakers and writers to give us a highly politically charged crime investigation film: “vet screenwriting partner Jean-Claude Grumberg adapting Francis Zamponi's novel about a young lieutenant witnessing his colonel's vicious tactics during the French-Algerian War” (Koehler 52). As with the films in the previous chapter, the involvement of people in the industry with personal knowledge of the war and the people of Algeria was crucial. Laurent Herbiet, whose father served in Algeria in the 50s, was a newcomer director who had enjoyed a long history of collaboration with other filmmakers in a variety of projects for TV and the silver screen. Herbiet said in an interview for British publication Time Out that he had always been drawn to stories of war (Hammond). This long-time assistant director was also

familiar with the military. He worked for the *Cinéma des Armées* (Cinema of the Army – a department of the French Army charged with producing and archiving military media from documentary and testimonial footage to propaganda material for the military) to satisfy his French military service requirement (PeoplePill). This experience allowed the filmmakers to have intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the military and the Algerian war.

The film is set up as a present-day investigation of the disappearance of a lieutenant during the Algerian War. The story spends the majority of the time in flashbacks showing the lieutenant in Algeria, filmed in black-and-white. The rest of the narrative is set in the present, following the investigation conducted by the police in collaboration with the military, shot in color. The relation of the black-and-white and color is the filmic device that brings past history to present-day relevance.

Laurent Herbiet, director of the film, juxtaposes the black-and-white sequences with the color scenes that serve to introduce a new sequence of the story, or to conclude the previous one. Herbiet's stitching of the images together provides cohesiveness and continuity to a past story that was deemed a case closed (the disappearance of the lieutenant). To better understand the effective use of juxtaposition, it is helpful to study how images can be related through this method. For example, Sergio Delgado analyzed the editing work of Soviet director Dziga Vertov. Delgado saw how the juxtaposition of different scenes, apparently unrelated, create a logical link for the spectator of how the small contributions of a common man at work form a vital part of the larger development of the nation. In his film *Man with a Movie Camera*, a section entitled 'manual labors' shows workers performing unrelated bits of labor in different factories. Isolated, one worker is not able to see how his particular, seemingly menial job, contributes to the whole. Vertov takes his camera from worksite to worksite, and then arranges

the takes in a meaningful sequence so that the film shows the manner in which each part relates to the others. His film thus illustrates how every man, through his contribution, “forms part of a larger social reality to which he is vitally connected” (Delgado 5). The work of Vertov, like others of his time, was used to create a spirit of purpose and community in the Soviet Union.

To develop his story, Herbiet juxtaposes black-and-white and color scenes to effectively present to the viewer how the past and the present of France form part a whole. The juxtaposition shows that the past cannot be ignored in order to deal with the present challenges that the French nation faces concerning the effects of the Algerian War. The past and the present also intertwine as a metaphor of Algerians and French mingling to create a common history. This history is incomplete for each party if either one chooses to ignore the other. French history is not only black-and-white or color, it is both.

The relation of black-and-white with color scenes does more than tie past and present, they use of both pallets ties the objectivity and honesty projected by the black-and-white scenes to the emotional proximity portrayed by color in the movie. The use of color in film, since its inception, does not happen by mere happenstance. Often the color of a shot can be manipulated in order to achieve a goal in the narrative. When technicolor established itself as the premier film stock, color film technicians served as consultants to the filmmakers with the purpose to produce a determined sense of reproduction of reality, or to convey feelings. These technicians followed five rules, the fifth rule being ‘narrative functionality’, which stated: “color did not serve merely as surface decoration or accessory but became a significant, overarching factor in the narrative structure. It could be used as a principle of articulation or leitmotif, to mark climaxes, to indicate similarity or contrast, to anticipate, associate, or provide a metaphorical charge” (Brinckmann 35). Although technicolor has ceded its preeminence for quite some time to other technical

advances, the use of color in film is a choice. The choices of color are categorical and deliberate depending on the director, the photographer and other members of the crew who collaborate to create a scene in which color helps convey a certain message, idea or feeling.

The choice of black-and-white film is also significant, especially since the advent of color film. In his article on choice of color for World War II films, Thomas Doherty recalls that Orson Welles said: “Although life is in color, black and white looks more realistic” (Doherty B4). Doherty proposes that because most WWII news transmissions were seen on TV in black-and-white (and many documentaries followed suit), our collective memory of WWII is associated with black-and-white film, even if some of it was originally shot in color, such as John Ford’s extensive footage (ibid). WWII seems more distant now that we are in a different century. Therefore, when filmmakers choose to shoot in black-and-white, they are imbuing their footage with a sense of stark, straightforward objectivity, and of incidents that took place in a more distant past. Many war films at present choose color due of its perceived realism charged with more emotional proximity to the current viewer. However, black-and-white is still a powerful instructional vehicle that transmits gravitas to a topic as serious as war. Doherty concludes that “Color may be truer to the experience of the participants of war, but not to the cultural memory of it” (Doherty B5). While black and white suggest a dichotomy of good and evil of two eternally battling sides, color transmits a more personal, emotional experience than an exposition of factual historical incidents.

Herbiet marries both approaches in his motion picture. The director brings the cultural memory of the past through a black-and-white picture that looks like a documentary but is actually a work of fiction and makes it truer to the present-day viewer through the contemporary discovery of the past crime. *Mon colonel* juxtaposes the seriousness of the war and brings

immediacy to the topic by espousing it to the present. He argues that the crimes of the Algerian War are still unresolved and latent in the consciousness of the contemporary French population.

### **Film Synopsis**

The plot of *Mon colonel* is rather straightforward, but the subject matter rendered the film more controversial at the time of its debut than *Indigènes*. According to some critics, the subject matter complicated the acceptance by the public -aside from an arguably lower artistic quality-. It caused discomfort by exposing the guilt felt by France with relation to the way it conducted the occupation and, most notably, the ‘pacification efforts’ in Algeria (Carlagé 92). The film portrays two plots that developed concurrently, one in the present and one in the past. The narrative describes a present-day investigation of the disappearance of a young French Algerian Lieutenant during the Algerian war conducted by the military. In the present-day of the film, the military receives letters containing fragments of the journal of the missing serviceman that has been lost for over 40 years. Lieutenant Galois (Cécile de France) is appointed as one of the lead investigators, and she is approximately of the same age as the late Lieutenant Guy Rossi (Robinson Stévenin) was at the time of his disappearance. The research leads the investigators to question a retired colonel who turns out to have an unrepentant attitude towards the savage methods he championed to obtain results (information, population control) in Algeria during the war. The investigation unveils uncomfortable, compromising secrets about the military’s brutal control tactics in Algeria, and also the possibility that the disappearance of Rossi may have happened at the hands of the French and not the Algerians.

*Mon colonel* features more time in the past storyline than in the present one but utilizes a somewhat formulaic (Koehler 52) and yet effective way of linking the parallel stories. The

present-day scenes are shot in color while the past scenes are in black and white. To link the stories, each new ‘chapter’ of the storyline begins with the reception, by lieutenant Galois, of a new section of the journal, which she begins to read out loud. While the public hears her voice, the scenes go back to showing the black and white portrayal of the past about the situation that the lieutenant is narrating, and her voice fades to be replaced by the past storyline. Galois is trying to solve two puzzles, one in the past and one in the present: first, what became of Rossi, and second, who is anonymously sending the journal sections to them while they conduct the investigation. In other words, she is trying to reconcile the past and the present and, in a way, amend the official story of the Algerian war with a more accurate portrayal by bringing out hidden and shameful secrets. Judging by Galois’ screen time, her story feels secondary to that of Rossi, like “a modern who-done-it side story from the present” (Betsalel and Gibney 208). However, her storyline should be regarded with the same importance because *Herbier* uses her as a moral gage and guide.

The storyline of Galois is beholden to that of Rossi, since it is his story, through the reception of the journal that is the filmic device used to advance the narrative. In the late 1950s, Guy Rossi was a young French army lieutenant commissioned to serve in Algeria. He is portrayed as a stereotypical naïve and idealistic newcomer about to endure a hard reality check. He is assigned to serve under Colonel Duplan (Olivier Gourmet), who plays the role of the seasoned, pragmatic veteran for whom the ends justify the means. Duplan’s main goal is to subdue the Algerians, especially the rebels and their sympathizers, who hide among the local population. Duplan does not hesitate to overstep the boundaries of his authority. He challenges or disobeys the local and continental civil French authorities and even his superiors to obtain his goals. The colonel resorts to street brutality, lawful and unlawful detention of civilian suspects



and torture to intimidate the locals and to coerce them into halting their aid to the rebels. He also obtains military intelligence through scare tactics that go from physical and psychological torture to public executions.

Throughout the film, Rossi is shocked by Duplan's tactics and opposes the colonel's methods. His resistance is mostly futile at the beginning; Duplan exacts some rough treatment of the lieutenant to toughen him up and to break him down in an attempt to assimilate him into the French military machine. His strategy backfires as Rossi begins to defy Duplan's orders and his modus operandi openly. The lieutenant grows into a threat to Duplan's politics and eventually disappears. The particulars of the confrontations and Rossi's coming of age are detailed in the journal, and Galois begins to identify with Rossi through her reading of the sections she receives, so much so that she becomes emotionally invested in the investigation. She is disappointed with Rossi when he fails to act and proud of him when he stands up for his beliefs. Galois' character grows into a subliminal moral and emotional guide for the viewer's feelings through her reactions. Herbiet takes the public by the hand through the investigation and the reactions of Galois.

At the end of the investigation, the viewer learns that Rossi's father has been sending the sections of the journal to the military to unveil what he considers a cover-up of the people guilty for the death of his son. He holds Colonel Duplan personally responsible for the disappearance and apparent death of the young lieutenant. Since the military and local authorities seem to be moving too slowly, he takes matters into his own hands (or was this his plan all along?) and at the outset confronts the elderly retired colonel at his home. It is relevant to recall that, in reality, the military received a blanket amnesty from the government, exonerating them of all guilt for the utilization of questionable methods during the war. On this topic, Cole explains: "Amnesty

laws passed in the 1960s made it impossible for victims or their families to bring charges of torture in French courts” (Cole, “Answering Torture’s Apologists” 376). This explanation is vital to understanding the frustration of the elder Rossi, who has no recourse other than to take matters on his hands -however legally unjustifiable they may be- when facing the alleged crimes perpetrated by the colonel in Algeria. Duplan is defiantly unrepentant, and his hard attitude and harsh words provoke Rossi’s father beyond any self-control, although it may be argued based on the plot that this is all carefully premeditated. Galois arrives too late to prevent the grieving father from shooting the colonel dead. The film concludes with the authorities finding themselves obligated to prosecute the distraught father for murder, and with Galois’ and her superiors’ condemnation of the military methods that the French used in Algeria.

### **Spatial Analysis**

This film is shot from a European French point of view, and due to the story upon which the narrative is based, there are very few native characters of relevance to the plot. This situation highlights the importance of studying the places pictured in the story because it is through them that the spectator experiences the Other, the exotic non-French. The places effectively become characters themselves. Through the film locations, we discover a heightened contrast between French and Algerian spaces and how they underline the difference between the (mis-)understanding of the other culture. Of all the films, *Mon colonel* has some of the most significant location shooting that emphasizes the difference of the French conception of civilization and order when compared to the Algerian spaces, by characterizing them as a land - and people- to be cared for and tamed.

The film shows two competing conceptions of the Algerian space. It portrays two ways in which this space is utilized to represent both of these conceptions and their physical application: one French and one Algerian or native. There is some ambivalence to the French notion because, as manifested by the French who advocated possession of Algeria, they considered it French soil. Duplan goes as far as to explain to Rossi that “la France sans l’Algérie ne serait plus la France” (France without Algeria would no longer be France) (Herbiet 2006). This view is stated through the dialogue and the presence of the French population -the *pieds-noirs* and, most notably, the military- throughout the film. The competing native ideology is that of North African independence from the French and the desire for Algerian self-determination. The film does not concentrate on the representation of this point of view through prominent native roles. Instead, the plot revolves firstly around the French mis- and manhandling of the independence movement, and secondly, through the actions of the native population, the sympathizers who are tortured, and a few brief scenes of combat between the French and the insurgents.

It is important to point out that this dissertation views the discussion from a standpoint where Algeria and France are separate entities. When considering this argument, it may be viewed as one taking the side of those who favored Algerian independence from France, which is an anachronistic point of view favoring the fact that Algeria did separate from the Hexagon. This dissertation is not advocating the merits of the *mission civilisatrice* nor arguing in favor of 20<sup>th</sup>-century colonialism. Still, we must, at the very least, consider that during the post-WWII period, a large segment of the French population did believe Algeria was France. Loyal explains, “Algeria was colonised by France in 1830. By 1848 it was legally an extension of French territory and therefore theoretically entitled to be ruled under its humanistic and enlightenment principles based on the rights of man” (Loyal 407). This extension applied to the *pieds-noirs*,

who were French of European descent born in Algeria, as evidenced by testimonies on this matter.

Ethnologist Jana Capo-Zmegac cites testimonials of relocated *pieds-noirs* to France, and even questions whether the term used should be expatriation or repatriation. One *pied-noir* said upon his move to France after the end of the war: ““For me, Algeria was France. I was never troubled by this. It was my country, on one as well as on the other side”” (Capo-Zmegac 205). This conceptualization of Algeria should be seen as a logical way of thinking for the *pied-noir*, because “The *pieds-noirs* were socialized into considering the territory of Algeria as a department of France” (ibid). Loyal notes that the practical application of republican principles vastly differed from the theoretical proponent of equality since native Algerians rarely enjoyed these privileges. Still, we are not arguing the application of these principles so much as the fact that the French of European descent of this time grew up with the idea that Algeria was part of France, especially the *pieds-noirs*. To them, this was their homeland, and they felt betrayed by those who favored separatism. Graham states: “After almost 130 years when Algeria was an integral part of France, few accepted that it could, or should, be part of the worldwide process of decolonization”.

Robert Graham continued reporting that “when independence came in 1962 there was an enforced exodus of 1m colonists, the so-called *pieds noirs*, most of whom felt betrayed by their mother country” (Graham). The practical application of the republican principles did not follow the theoretical framework of equal rights that was officially granted to Algerians. If they would have been recognized and treated as full French citizens, the outcome of the war may have been quite different. War may have been averted in its entirety. Capo-Zmegac refers to repatriated *pieds-noirs* as “ethnically privileged migrants”, but their repatriation process was plagued with

difficulties even if they did not suffer to the same extent as the Harkis or Algerians who emigrated to France as detailed in Chapter 1. *Mon colonel* explores, through the antagonists of this film, the reactions of those who believed in a French Algeria but who failed to recognize the necessity to humanize the majority of the native population, and though they tend to be largely demonized, at least some of their arguments need to be considered more closely. I believe that many of the films fail to recognize this complicated point of view while concentrating on the justifications for independence, as valid as they may be.

*Mon colonel* peripherally illustrates the trials endured by *pieds-noirs* during the war, but rather concentrates on the challenges of the French military personnel who struggled while taking stances for and against the permanence of Algeria in France. While the lion's share of the acting represents the French point of view, the principal share of the space depicted is Algerian. Even if it is a space conceived by both parties, it is the effective representation of the two sides of the same Algerian coin. Colonel Duplan manifests a view shared by many in France. It is the necessity to Europeanize the exotic and culturally inferior African space. This view was in many ways supported by the republic, which had proposed a post-war view of France still very much as an imperial power, up until the formation of the Fifth Republic (Turpin 5). The French defeat of WWII and the Vichy government had underlined this point of view. The colonies effectively became a vindicating element of French pride, so much so that maintaining an empire was understood both through its economic impact on the metropole, but also as a source of arrogance that showed the world that France was still, in spite of its humiliation, a world power. Harris remarks:

Paris considered Algeria, with its size and vast oil and gas reserves, the symbol of its standing as a world power. Then, too, France was on the defensive psychologically. It

had been humiliated by the Prussians in 1870, occupied by Nazi Germany in 1940, booted out of Vietnam after the massacre at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. National gloire and the pride of the French army dictated that it had to make a stand in Algeria. (Harriss 47)

The Second World War had a dual effect on the colonial populations. They rallied (voluntarily or forcibly) to defend the metropolis, but they also saw it weakened. According to Cole, French historians saw a correlation between heightened demonstrations against French rule and the end of the War: “Planche acknowledges the disruption caused in Algeria by the Second World War, the Vichy period, and the subsequent allied occupation” (Cole, “Massacres and their Historians” 113). Planche attempted to minimize the fading of French power during the war as a factor that contributed to the appearance of these demonstrations. But the weakened French state and the participation of Algerians in liberating it encouraged the *colonisés* to seek more autonomy and an equal footing in civil rights compared to their European counterparts.

Upon closer examination of the effects of Vichy in aggravating the African relations with France during the Second World War and the postwar period, the native populations of French overseas territories realized that their situation would not sensibly change:

African political leaders [...] hoped to achieve equality within the colonial system, but the French were not interested in absorbing this vast territory in which most inhabitants were devoid of any political rights. When African political leaders realized that full assimilation was impossible, their aim became achieving some kind of autonomy within the French framework. (Ginio 172)

One could contend that all that the Europeans desired to assimilate into the French framework was the territory of the lands conquered. They merely tolerated the peoples who already inhabited them due to the potential of their exploitation rather than their equalization. The

colonizers wanted the natives to adopt French customs without adopting the natives as French<sup>18</sup>. This position became untenable after WWII, and this is the particular point that is driven by the representation of the two conceptions of the Algerian space in this film.

In Algeria, the French (continental or *pied-noir*) tended to occupy different spaces than the native Algerians, from places of dwelling, work, worship or leisure. This segregation became even more marked as the military moved in *en force* to pacify the local uprisings pushing for a 'kind of autonomy', from the city to the countryside. For example, an ethnographic study shows that displacement became a commonly used policy:

Of all the disruptions that rural Algerian society underwent between 1955 and 1962, those brought about by population resettlements (*regroupements*) are, without any doubt, the most profound and the most fraught with long-term consequences. In a first phase, the displacements were tied to the creation of 'forbidden zones'. (Bourdieu et al 446)

The purpose of these 'forbidden zones' was to dominate areas where neither the French nor the insurgents had total control through the extraction of the local population to prevent them from supporting the rebels. According to Bourdieu and his colleagues, this policy resulted in the forced displacement of whole towns and villages and a complete re-demarcation of Algerian and French spaces that became even more segregated than they were before the conflict. The

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<sup>18</sup> Native Algerians were already granted French citizenship by the French Senate on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1865. Other European minorities that resided in Algeria used naturalization as a vehicle into the French empire to enjoy all of the benefits (Spaniards, Portuguese, Italians and Jews that worked or resided already in Algeria when taken by the French). But these minorities of European origin effectively jumped ahead, when speaking of rights and privileges, the natives who received citizenship but only in name. Blévis notes: " il s'agit aussi, avec cette exploration systématique de la naturalisation et de ses enjeux en Algérie coloniale, d'éprouver les discours produits par la colonisation en les confrontant aux pratiques effectives des administrations coloniales. La naturalisation dans sa version algérienne se présente comme la traduction juridique de la rhétorique de la mission civilisatrice qui promettait, aux populations colonisées, l'égalité, mais une égalité différée, conjugée au futur, une fois l'objectif d'assimilation à la civilisation française atteint " (Blévis 26). In other words, citizenship was an unrealized promise, the proverbial carrot hanging in front of the donkey who works for it but never reaches it, only in this situation the work was imposed through colonization rather than chosen.

disruption that the colonizers set in these occupied territories was cultural, political and social. It rose to an extreme level with the further militarization of the war, and French war film emphasizes its importance through spatial representations.

*Mon colonel* introduces the viewer to the Algerian space in the form of a countryside trip. The journey allows us to penetrate the space as an outsider. Right away, the spectator feels like a visitor in a scene where the French protagonists travel in convoy from one French town to another. The countryside is rugged, drier and rougher than most of continental France. This particular scene is shot from the perspective of a member of the convoy with cuts from aerial shots that only emphasize the alterity of the terrain to the French.

A second important representation of the separate spaces is the maps hanging on French installations. The maps are more than a geographical representation of the Algerian space; they are a conceptual illustration of the cultural divide of the two parties. Visually, the Algerian space is divided into two ways on these maps. First, administratively, since France organized Algeria as three departments equal to those found in Europe. Second, tactically: the maps show military positions and operations from both sides, but mostly French. The maps represent the enforcement of the pacifying mission through the spatial redefinition of Algerian spaces. Grabar explains this political arrangement: “Colonial Algiers was home to the largest French population living outside France; it was also a city whose urban design expressed the colonial power hierarchy and enforced the oppression and subjugation of Muslim Algerians” (Grabar 390). The Eurocentric reorganization of spaces underlines the divisiveness of the calculated and systematic French approach. They attempted to compartmentalize, divide, conquer and dominate the natives. This strategy demonstrates how the French military tried to comprehend, and reorganize in a French mode, an essentially foreign space that resisted the colonial *mission civilisatrice*.



To better understand the French organizing philosophy, let's look at how *Mon Colonel* uses maps. The movie shows maps in the French installations that are reminiscent of police headquarters scenes of the celebrated film *Pépé le Moko* (Duvivier 1937), where maps of the Casbah of Algiers hang on the walls. This likeness is relevant because the Casbah was, in Duvivier's film, the foreign, exotic space that the French authorities could not dominate nor comprehend. It was a space of alterity. In the *Pépé le Moko* it serves as a hiding place for the protagonist and other criminals, so the space is characterized as outlaw, as Lefebvre explains: "To exclude the urban from groups, classes, individuals, is also to exclude them from civilization, if not from society itself" (Grabar 390). This understanding of the inextricable link between land and people is quite like the Algeria of the war because even though most of the dwellers of this space are not criminals, a clear separation exists of the inhabitants of this space. The natives live outside the boundaries of French civilization, which by this virtue criminalizes them. The military adopts this position of viewing the natives and each time the French venture out of their installations, it is as if they find themselves exposed to the dangers of urban and rural Casbahs. The film announces, with this type of background construction, the tone that the story takes with concerning the dialogue between the two populations at stake. It also tells us that the narrative is likely to be set in the form of a story of criminal pursuit, which is carried out in two ways: Duplan chases the local outlaws in the past, while in the present-day Galois pursues the criminals responsible for the disappearance of Rossi.

By establishing this link, *Mon colonel* foreshadows a tragic ending and other elements of the storyline. Still, it mainly underlines the inefficacy of the French authorities when dealing with those it deems outside the law and the escalation in violence perpetrated to obtain results. Finally, it presages an uprising of the natives against the authority and complicity between the

French who favored a free Algeria and their treatment at the hands of the military as traitors to their country. It shows them as ‘going native’<sup>19</sup> and the tragic consequences of doing so, emphasizing their criminality and need to be punished for their treason to the establishment. Although the authorities in the film take this stance, the movies themselves advocate the contrary by turning their rebellious protagonist into antiheroes with whom the public may sympathize. If the country looks in theory compartmentalized through the maps, the practical application is even harsher. When the *Mon colonel* begins to show the Algerian space, it is divided. The French military demark the spaces they occupy using walls, barbwire, fences and checkpoints. The French civilian spaces are not much different. Some of the towns show that places where the French and *pieds-noirs* inhabit resemble fortresses instead of cities or suburbs, if not the inside of those spaces, at least the boundaries between them and the Algerian spaces do.

The separation is marked by language as well. For example, the film shows us the town of Saint-Arnaud, where a sign states ‘*ville française*’ (French city). In other words, this is a space designated for ‘real’ French people, a real Place by Augé’s definition. It is hard to categorize the locals as French if such a distinction, reminiscent of the apartheid, needs to be made for them.

The first trip that the protagonists make outside of the French cities is telling because this space is explanatory of the whole history and reasoning behind the French occupation of the Algerian territory. They visit the ruins of an old Roman town, where Duplan gives a speech. As previously cited, he mentions to local civilian leaders that “*ces vestiges nous disent que ce pays a*

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<sup>19</sup> This is a term borrowed from *The fast and the furious* (Cohen 2001), where a detective’s loyalty to the authorities is questioned while he finds himself assigned to an undercover mission. What this means is that a representative of the government or law enforcement may be seduced by the ideals of the law breakers he is combatting, which is a common theme in crime film as evidenced by movies such as *Point break* (Bigelow 1991) and *The fast and the furious*, which was even dubbed by some critics as a remake of the Kathryn Bigelow picture (Rose 2).

There is an important discrepancy because in the American films, the protagonists (heroes or antiheroes) make their escape, while in the French pictures they pay their disobedience (justifiable or not) with their lives.

*toujours eu besoin d'une autre civilisation pour le féconder*"<sup>20</sup> (Herbiet 2006). The French see themselves as continuing the 'mission' of the Roman Empire in civilizing the barbaric spaces of the world, as Dine explains with regards to Eurocentric Mediterranean domination: "The region's Arabic and Islamic dimension is thus reduced to a historical parenthesis, [...]. With the 1830 invasion, the parenthesis is deemed to be closed, as France takes on the civilizing mantle of Rome" (Dine 147). In this scene the location makes the connection between France and Rome stronger than the words of the colonel, or rather, the speech is a vocalization of what the ruins evoke visually. Inadvertently, the film also underlines that this ethnocentric and colonial phallogocentric viewpoint is outdated and itself a ruin; that this manner of understanding the world is obsolete and doomed to fail. The Roman vestiges also highlight the fact that the effects of the colonial domination will linger for generations and its legacy will be virtually impossible to erase.

The Roman space marks the continuous presence of the Other in Algerian soil, of which France is but the latest manifestation. It is interesting to note that the construction of the identity of the other and both French and Roman civilizing missions had striking similarities. Even though Romans had a more tolerant administrative policy towards their conquered subjects, they still asserted their authority through the transformation of spaces as the French did. Wilson shows this "Cities were a defining part of Roman culture; incorporation into the Roman Empire brought an unprecedented degree of urbanization to vast areas of territory, especially in northwest Europe and North Africa" (Wilson 231). Even though Romans allowed other peoples in their empire to roam and interact with them freely, they asserted their control (especially cultural and political) through organized urban development, much like the French. The Latins

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<sup>20</sup> "these vestiges tell us that this country has always had the need of another civilization to fecundate it" (translation by me).

built Roman Places in the spaces conquered. Also, the construction of the Other as Barbarian, one who was not a civilized Roman, showed that they conceptualized other people as inferior. To some extent, this was a danger.

The celebrated work of historian Edward Gibbon extensively elaborated on the role of Barbarians (mostly of European provenances, such as Goths, Vandals, Huns and others) in the fall of the Roman Empire. He also posited that Europe as a whole was an inheritor of the Roman legacy and culture. The Population and Development Review suggests that Gibbon argued that even though Europe did not have to fear European or Asian barbarians any longer as a cultural threat (when he was publishing his work in the late 1700s), others yet unseen existed:

This apparent security should not tempt us to forget that new enemies and unknown dangers may possibly arise from some obscure people, scarcely visible in the map of the world. The Arabs, or Saracens, who spread their conquests from India to Spain, had languished in poverty and contempt, till Mahomet breathed into those savage bodies the soul of enthusiasm. (“Edward Gibbon on Lessons for Europe” 237)

As Dine explains, the French inherited some of Gibbon’s attitude and Roman mentality. What the colonel in the picture does not realize is that the Roman town where he delivers his speech does the exact opposite than legitimize his position; it instead confirms the French as an uninvited outsider occupying force. If Algerians are the blend of local North Africans mixed with the legacies (both cultural and ethnic) of invading empires (from the Roman to the Ottoman to the French), it is not so by choice, like so many other countries in the region.

At different points in the film, Rossi spends time outside of the French Places on military missions. There are camera shots reminiscent of *Band of Brothers* -an HBO miniseries produced by Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg about an American military unit fighting in Europe during

World War II- and Saving Private Ryan as the men go on patrol. That the shots take inspiration on that type of military film only emphasize the alterity of the French military in Algeria, since they look even more out of place than the Americans did in Europe during WWII. On one such mission in *Mon colonel*, insurgents attack the unit to which Rossi is assigned. Although the French come out victorious of the armed encounter, the spectator does not get a sense that they are in control of the countryside. The rugged terrain in which the soldiers are shot sharply underscores how foreign the French military is to this land. After they defeat the insurrectionists, the French line up the bodies of the Algerian casualties in the same way depicted in *La trahison*. This alignment emphasizes once more the persistent failed attempt to arrange the environment in a symmetric order that allows the French to feel in control. They are still trying to organize the locals (even in death); their stubborn persistence to impose their culture is killing the native one. Everything the French military does is systematic. In opposition, the contrasting North African landscape passively resists this order as much as the Algerians actively fight it. After the military lines-up the bodies in front of a public fountain, they hang a sign on one of them that reads ‘il était un terroriste, il a payé’<sup>21</sup> (Herbiet 2006). This statement is a foreshadowing of the French as an invading force in Algeria rather than a comment on the dead bodies. It is also a presage of the ultimate fate of Duplan at the hands of the elder Rossi, as the French spaces and the situation of the movie in the present mirror those of the past in Algerian soil.

Later in the storyline, the French conduct public punishments as a form of deterrence and to attempt to disrupt the local support for the insurrection. The place where the public execution is carried out is quite telling. It is a large square encircled space constructed for open-air events resembling a stadium or bull ring. The enclosure gives a sense of constraint, entrapment and

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<sup>21</sup>“he was a terrorist, he paid for it” (translation by me).

sterility. It is all austere and whitewashed. All of it is simple and symmetric lines that break and exclude anything found in nature. The long shots of the facility also serve to put physical distance between the French military, who are standing in the middle taking center stage and the Algerians, who are sitting at the margins of the spectacle as passive, conscripted spectators. The only active Algerians are the ones who will be executed because they were agents unto themselves because they decided to act. This *mise-en-scène* illustrates the organized manner with which the French envision the role of the Algerians: to sit at the fringes and go along with French policy, to accept it without partaking of its benefits. Rossi, in this instance, is categorically against the execution. He cannot stomach the gore and runs out of the arena through a tunnel, angering the other officers involved in the execution. His escape visually breaks the order of the setup. The montage of this scene identifies Rossi as a visual connection between the French at the center and the Algerians in the fringes. He penetrates the Algerian-occupied space literally and figuratively through his rejection of the violent act. The military sees his reaction as an act of cowardice. In reality, it is an act of defiance and empathy, even if the young lieutenant is a greenhorn when it comes to the shedding of blood.

Of all the differentiated spaces, the most telling may be the French city of Constantine. Rossi drives there, and the camera takes the spectator along by shooting from one of the vehicles. The point of view for the spectator is as that of a passenger going along with the lieutenant. As we enter the city, a sign reads '*Constantine Ville Française*' (Constantine French City). The outside view of Constantine is reminiscent of a fortress rather than a town: it is perched high, walled and guarded. The elevated road that leads into the city is a visual nod to a drawbridge leading into a castle rather than a thoroughfare entering a town. The purpose of Constantine is to

provide a safe space for French colonizers, where they can live and go about their lives mostly segregated from the natives.

The scene inside the walls exemplifies planning and organization. The city is laid out in a grid, the trees are lined up in orderly fashion, and the streets paved, flanked by cafes and opened storefronts, just as in continental French town. This city serves as an exemplar of what had transpired throughout the Algerian territory to accommodate French culture. Of all the spaces redesigned, Algiers provides the best model. Grabar shows that as early as the 1850s, the arriving French had begun to separate and redesign the occupied spaces. He explains that, according to French authorities: “the French settlers and Muslim Algerians required fundamentally different built environments to correspond to their different cultures, and proposed the construction of a new town, designed for European habitation, alongside the old city” (Grabar 393). The French transformed the spaces of Constantine and Algiers into a French Place from the anthropological point of view explained by Augé. Grabar continues: “The French began to build their own city, a city whose wide streets, sidewalk cafes, European apartment buildings, and boulevards were designed to recall the cities of France” (Grabar 394). Here the *Français de souche*<sup>22</sup> are at home, even if an artificially created one. This space has been tamed, conquered. French people appear wearing trendy French continental-fashioned clothes and hairstyles of the time. They contrast markedly with the attires of the locals depicted in the previous towns. The natives have not been

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<sup>22</sup> Scioldo-Zürcher explains the French, notably in Algeria, identified two types of French citizens based on ethnicity and culture. There existed ‘*Français de souche nord africaine*’ or Algerians, and these were people who had the status of citizens but were ‘subjects of the republic’, as opposed to ‘*Français de souche européenne*’ who fully enjoyed all of the privileges of citizenship (Scioldo-Zürcher 47). Michele Tribalat, who has done extensive work on the French censuses and studies on immigration, further clarifies that a ‘*Français de souche*’ (short for the *Français de souche européenne*) is a ‘French born in France from French parents also born in France’ (Tribalat, “Chronique de l’immigration” 197). In other words, a *Français de souche* is a French person whose ancestors have been French born and raised for several generations. In Algeria they enjoyed full citizenship in the Republic, while the French of north African stock, or ‘Muslim French’, were citizens subject to the Empire who did not enjoy all of the privileges of Republican citizenship (such as voting or equal opportunities of employment in public posts, even in their native land).

assimilated; rather, they have been turned into guest workers on their own ancestral land. The French space, shot from the street point of view by the camera, feels sterile and constricted. Even Rossi, when in street clothes, blends in so much that he is not recognized as a lieutenant by some women he had previously encountered.

It is during this visit that a terrorist attack takes place. A bomb explodes in the cafe, and many French people are injured. The scene is reminiscent of the bombings of the French quarters in the Battle of Algiers. The explosion does more than kill or terrorize French citizens; it is a violent visual disruption of the French space. The explosion breaks the order established by the French by scattering things and people randomly, including tables, chairs, windows and bodies. The result of the explosion is the direct visual opposite of what the French soldiers did to the Algerian casualties of the previously described armed encounter between the French army and the Algerian rebels. In death, the French line up the bodies of the killed adversaries. Here in the French town, the ALN leaves the bodies of the French scattered haphazardly on the sidewalks and streets. Gore and chaos dominate the scene. The dead French look as out of place in the ordered French city as the lined-up cadavers of the fallen rebels did in the wilderness. By contrasting the approaches to the war and the results of the attack of both sides, the film accentuates the cultural division that exists between the two ethnic groups and highlights the reciprocal alterity they both feel vis-à-vis their counterparts. This image will be perpetuated throughout the film; the French remain in their walled ordered cities and military installations. Their lifestyle visually opposes the Algerians who live in native towns or neighborhoods of winding streets, or the rebels who prey in the austere, wild open spaces of the rugged Kabyle mountains.



The camera movement, from the outside to the inside, allows the spectator to feel as a nubile in the process of discovering a story, but also as an outsider penetrating a foreign space. The camera takes a French point of view to allow the public to understand the segregation of the two spaces, and how the French attempted to turn what they considered as anthropological non-Places into Places in which they could feel at home, only they did so with very reduced spaces. What they failed to do was to incorporate the people who had previously occupied these spaces into the French national narrative. The French became a de facto occupying force with isolated Places (spaces in which they could work, worship, educate and perform all of the societal functions that according to Augé, turn a space into a Place). Their spaces felt as secluded islands of French culture that awkwardly punctured the native places of the Algerians, who had occupied them for centuries while at times suffering occupations by other ethnic groups. The segregation of these spaces is vital to understand the failure of the application of universalism in a territory that France claimed to be beyond a normal colony, and instead proposed as an extension of France herself.

*Mon colonel* introduces the spectator to the clash between the Algerian and French through the characters of the story and the spaces that they occupy. The film balances well the depiction of Algeria, which is preeminent through the flashbacks, and the French spaces, which are dominant in the present-day investigation. The artificially created French Places of Algeria serve as a liminal passage between past and present, and between what the French understood as an exotic Algeria, speaking from a Saïdian Orientalist viewpoint, to the comfort brought by their familiarity with continental France.

The journal is the last important space of discussion because it is the present-day manifestation of the combination of the French and Algerian spaces of the past. The journal itself

transforms into a space that serves as a repository of memory and the evidence of something that was and is no more. The journal is a signifier of signified French and Algerian places. It becomes a photograph of Rossi in the terms that Roland Barthes posited in *Camera Lucida*. He said the following about the nature of a photo: “what I posit is not only the absence of the object; it is also, by one and the same movement, on equal terms, the fact that this object has indeed existed and that it has been there where I see it” (Barthes 115). More than simple representation or art, Barthes posits that a photograph acts as evidence of the existence of the object that it represents. Like photography, the journal is the present sign of the troubled past existence of the disappeared lieutenant, and each new section of the journal that Galois receives is another snapshot that unveils a further proof of his tormented loss of innocence.

The journal is also a collection of snapshots that evidence the attempted segregation of two spaces that were not able to co-exist. This failure forced one space to overcome and re-Place the other finally, as Fanon explains:

The look that the colonized man has for the city of the colonist is a look of lust, a look of envy. Dreams of possession: to sit at the table of the colonist, to sleep in his bed, with his wife if possible . . . There is no colonized man who does not dream at least once a day of putting himself in the place of the colonist”.<sup>23</sup> (ctd. by Grabar 396)

In other words, both in the film and in real life, the Places are an evidence of the attempt of France to redefine Algerian spaces into French, while these spaces resist their transformation and claim to be Places in their own right. The film is a visual representation of this struggle because it becomes an effective animated version of the journal, a display of successive photographic

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<sup>23</sup> This is Grabar’s translation. The original text reads : “Le regard que le colonisé jette sur la ville du colon est un regard de luxure, un regard d’envie. Rêves de possession. Tous les modes de possession : s’asseoir à la table du colon, coucher dans le lit du colon, avec sa femme si possible. (...) il n’y a pas un colonisé que ne rêve au moins une fois par jour de s’installer à la place du colon” (Fanon 43).

images as each chapter is unveiled, and visually explains through moving images what the words read by Galois mean. The film is the one space where the Algerian and the French Places manage to co-exist, thus becoming a heterotopia in Foucault's definition of a space that transforms meaning. This definition can be applied to both the canvas in which the cinema is projected as well as the images that are projected. To give more depth to the struggling relationship between French and Algerians, we will now proceed to the analysis of the relationships of the characters of the film paying close attention to how they interact with one another and the spaces in which they interact.

### **Relationship Analysis**

In opposition to the two works revised in the first chapter, the protagonists in the two films in this section are mainly *Français de souche*, or “(‘French of French stock’) - the presumably culturally homogeneous core population” (Bertaux 1497). The point of view switches from the Algerian to the French. Yet, the film is effective in demonstrating that the sentiments of the metropolitan French were far from uniform with regards to the war, both at the time of the war and in 21st century France through the eyes of the pair of protagonist lieutenants in the picture and the other people who form part of the investigation.

Because this dissertation focuses on the redefinition of the identity and the revision of the History of minorities in France, it could be argued that the two films in this chapter are somehow out of place even though they belong to the war film genre. The protagonists are French of European descent, and in *Mon colonel*, the subject of minorities does not appear to be at the center of the discussion. No Algerian is cast in a principal or even a secondary role. In *L'ennemi intime* some secondary roles are filled by Harkis and natives, but mainly to allow the

development of the story and character of the protagonists. After a promising debut of films that began to focus on minorities like those discussed in the first two chapters, it could be argued that Europeans are trying to hijack the discussion and position themselves at the center of it.

However, the argument presented here contends that this is not the case, but that these films are the beginning of a dialogue between the two groups. Indeed, the focus shifts back to the French, but it mainly does so as a form of *mea culpa* concerning the role that they played in colonial times. If the first films recognize the importance of minorities, *Mon colonel* (and *L'ennemi intime* as well) are a response that says that the majority acknowledges them and is ready to talk in spite of the difficulty in the discussion. These two films should be considered as a shot-counter shot montage of a conversation between two parties, and this chapter constitutes the first response in this dialogue. This response is the reason why the protagonists of these films and what they represent and say must receive special attention.

In *Mon colonel*, Colonel Duplan is the simplest character of all. As a typical antagonist with few redeemable qualities, the most significant complaint about him is that the film reduces him to a mere stereotype. He has one-sided views, and his character has no development arc throughout the film. He is there as a nemesis and represents the abuse of the French military in Algeria. His presence does serve to underline the Otherness of Algeria as a place and of the Algerians as a people. Duplan's personality is as rigid and Spartan as the military installations in which he spends most of his existence. The film portrays him as the personification of French oppression. It effectively shows not only how foreign Algerian culture and people appear to France, but how much most of the French and their culture remained as outsiders to the people and the territory of a country they occupied for a century and a half. To better exploit the land,

Brebner explains that the French reorganized the Algerian territory for their economic and political convenience, without any consideration to the original inhabitants:

Settlements were intermediaries between surrounding rural areas and capitalist markets, with interaction being almost entirely between inland centres, for example Constantine and Tlemcen, and large coastal settlements, such as Oran, Algiers and Bône (now Annaba), for export to the European metropole. Many settlements also functioned as a base for *commandement foncier*, the management of, and rent collection from, agricultural land controlled by the French urban bourgeoisie. As a response to the relative scarcity of urban centres in pre-colonial Algeria, the French initiated the establishment of many new settlements. (Brebner 44)

Brebner showed “The colonial settlement hierarchy” was a carefully designed pyramidal organization. The farther away from the large coastal urban centers, the smaller the towns and the lesser the number of French settlers and then their descendants the *pieds-noirs* (see table 2).

Table 2 *The colonial settlement hierarchy*

No. & Type	Place Names
1 national centre	Algiers
3 regional metropolises	Oran, Constantine, Annaba
9 medium sized towns	Tlemcen, Mostaganem, El Asnam, Tiaret, Bejain, Setif, Skikda, Tebessa, Blida
14 district centres	Aidi-bel-Abbes, Tizi- Ouzou, Batna...
20 local centres	Mahnia, Cherchell, Relizane...
A variety of semi-urban,	semi-rural and rural settlements

Source: Brebner, Philip, *Algeria: The Transformation of a Settlement System*, Third World

Planning Review, Feb 1982, Table 2.

This data proves that the French reorganized the territory efficiently, in a way that mirrored the organization of their country of origin (with Paris at its socio-economic center). They showed little consideration for the Algerians who inhabited the land. Browne underlines the differences:

away from the cool sea breezes, in the blistering Sahara to the south, the scene was radically different. Seventy percent of the native Arab and Berber population was forced to live in that region, barely subsisting on lands and largely divorced from the rich political, economic, and social life on the European-dominated coast. (Browne 80)

The colonizers remained foreigners to the local Algerians, never adopting Algerian culture while attempting to recreate continental France in North Africa rather than acquiring the local cultural flavor.

Before continuing, we must acknowledge that the arguments presented in this work group the *pieds-noirs* and the continental French together as one half of a colonial dichotomy that opposes French North Africans to French citizens of European descent. However, unlike French settlers of European birth, *pieds-noirs* were, in fact, Africans as well, even if they identified themselves as Africans of French origin and as citizens who arguably enjoyed the exact same privileges as their Hexagon-born counterparts. Evidence points to the contrary, especially when considering the fate of many *pieds-noirs* after the war of Algerian independence. The great majority endured difficult repatriation to France, as Bourgeois explains: “Les métropolitains ont accueilli avec indifférence leurs compatriotes et même avec une certaine froideur réprobatrice à l’égard de ces « colonialistes ». (...) la plupart de ces pieds-noirs ont été traumatisés par l’arrachement”<sup>24</sup> (Bourgeois 454). Bourgeois goes further, showing that the necessity to leave

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<sup>24</sup> “The metropolitans welcomed with indifference their compatriots, even with a reproaching coldness with regard to the ‘colonialists’. The majority of these pieds-noirs were traumatized by the removal” (translation by me).

their land of birth and to adapt to a new life in a country that saw them as a nuisance caused in many of them varying sorts of ailments from PTSD to suicide (ibid).

Although France was their *Patrie*, Algeria was an integral part of this fatherland and the home where they had established the Places that gave their lives meaning. The fate of the *pieds-noirs* may be compared to that of the Harkis. Although their challenges were different, it was their move to the Hexagon and their struggles of acceptance and adaptations that created their identity as *pieds-noirs* much as we understand it today. Savarese states on this matter:

Unlike the French Algerians, whose genesis occurred in the colonial context, the Pieds-noirs therefore constitute recent groups of individuals (Buono 2004; Savarese 2002a), whose existence can be dealt with through the experiences, accounts, and practices observable in metropolitan France. (Savarese 457)

This argument creates a commonality of identity akin to that of the Harkis, as this work posited in the first Chapter. This dissertation is not overlooking this problem nor seeks to oversimplify the plight of the *pieds-noirs* in the post-independent war period. Instead, they have been grouped with the Continental French prior to the independence of Algeria because they formed part of the colonial machine of segregation and exploitation that turned North Africans into minorities in their homeland. The challenges of the *pieds-noirs* upon repatriation is worthy of its own independent study is being examined at present. For those reasons, his work is grouping European French, French Algerians and *pieds-noirs* as a group that not only exploited North Africans through colonialism but who also remained distinct from them to perpetuate this exploitation. It is this complex group of diverse people to which *Mon colonel* aims to assign blame. As simple as the character of the colonel is, he exemplifies the awkwardness of the

European foreigner upon a land that remained, despite the French efforts to ‘civilize’ the indigenous North African people, foreign (from a Western European standpoint).

In Algeria, the French remained Occidental while Orientalizing the native population and the land. The notion of Orientalization is posited by Edward Said as a situation that opposes European Westerners to, among others, peoples of cultures they have dominated politically and culturally. Peoples from those cultures constitute Said’s Orient, and he sums up this opposition as: “On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are ArabOrientals; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things” (Said 49). The films show how the segregation of spaces perpetuated this notion of superiority. The organization of the French spaces such as towns, cities and roads in the Continental model used in France is an attempt to project their rational and logical values, of which the locals are arguably not capable. On this matter, O’Riley opines: “the invisible yet perceived persistence of a colonial past and desire linked to orientalist practice continues to condition both postcolonial and Franco-Algerian relations as well as critical responses to them” (O’Riley, “Specters of Orientalism” 48). O’Riley is correct on this account, as evidenced by the references of Duplan about the civilizing mission of France and how, like Rome, it must fecundate Algeria to make it prosper. Herbiet utilizes his understanding of the notions of Orientalism to criticize the civilizing mission, using it as a familiar theory for discussion and turning it upside down. Even though Algerians are largely absent in terms of portrayal, the film turns the tables of this Orientalizing conception where the French constructs the Algerian as an Other (although Algerians found themselves in their native land). It shows that it is the French who are the Other in Algeria despite their military dominance. Duplan is the proverbial square (French) peg who does not fit in the round hole of



the Algerian world. He is conscious of this fact, which remains a point of pride for him. The colonel goes as far as to tell Rossi that he sets himself (and the French) apart through his violent administration of justice by saying: “*Les indigènes nous jugent sur la manière dont on administre la justice*”<sup>25</sup> (Herbiet). For him, the application of harsh methods of control is neither taboo nor morally reprehensible; it is not even an act of war. Instead, it is a pacification instrument that must be applied to an unruly inferior people who need it. Through this admission, the film associates the barbarity of torture and imperial abuse with France. The film identifies the French into the barbarians, the uncivilized, rather than the natives.

The unwavering approach to how Duplan perceives order may be the one redeeming quality that he possesses: honesty. His openness and frankness about how the high-ranking officer understands his own role within the pacification mission sets him apart from the rest of the French hierarchy. His morality serves as a denouncement of their hypocrisy. The colonel is forthcoming with his superiors about his brutal methods for maintaining control and obtaining intelligence, for which his commanding officer harshly reprimands him. The general decries torture arguing that France is not at war, an argument also repeated by others throughout the film including Rossi. The colonel refuses to be politically correct at every turn, but his brutal sincerity is somewhat refreshing. He argues the value of his *modus operandi* and refuses to play the cover-up game for the sake of maintaining a cleaner public image in continental France. The local *commissaire* (the equivalent of police chief) notes that Duplan is quite successful at obtaining information through violent methods. The *commissaire* calls them ‘*interrogatoires énergétiques*’ (energetic interrogations). To these accusations, Duplan retorts: “*allez dites torture, pas*

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<sup>25</sup> “the natives judge us by the way we administer justice” (translation by me).

d'hypocrisie, nous ne sommes pas l'Assemblée Nationale”<sup>26</sup> (Herbiet). The film does not defend the use of violence nor justifies the morals of the colonel. Instead, it utilizes this character to denounce the hypocrisy of the French government.

As seen in previous chapters, France refused to acknowledge the fact that it was conducting a war in Algeria. This hypocrisy lasted much longer than the war. It lasted until 1999 when France officially recognized the ‘situation in Algeria’ or the ‘incidents in Algeria’ or the ‘pacification efforts’ as an armed conflict.<sup>27</sup> This acknowledgment does not acquit the colonel from his guilt, but rather underlines the hypocritical complicity of those in charge who were the masterminds of the conflict and sent others to sully their hands in their stead while avoiding much of the emotional and physical risk. It also highlights the disconnect of continental France with the day-to-day reality that lived in Algeria during this time and how culturally distant this land remained from the mainland Republic, which claimed the North African territory as intrinsically French. Even though the government maintained a campaign of censorship and diffusion of information, the public, even when informed, maintained some apathy with regards to the war. Most seemed more concerned about the reputation of France than the actual day-to-day operations or the outcome of the conflict, and later the public became more preoccupied with WWII. Cohen states:

In the public debate during the Algerian War, most of its critics did not question the wisdom of keeping Algeria French. Rather, controversy centered on the conduct of the war (...) Opposition to the war was based on the way it was conducted, in particular the use of torture, rather than on its goals (...) There has been, in short, knowledge about the

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<sup>26</sup> “come on, say torture, don’t be a hypocrite, we are not the National Assembly” –the NA being the French equivalent of the US Congress- (Translation by me).

<sup>27</sup> “On October 5, 1999, the French National Assembly unanimously adopted a draft law officially recognizing the "Algerian War" (Enjelvin and Korac-Kakabadse 154).

use of torture in Algeria continuously since 1957. Yet while it had led to a firestorm of moral outrage during the war, thereafter the subject, while certainly not hidden, did not raise public ire until the late 1990s. (Cohen 228-230)

The exceptions would be those who were deeply affected by having friends or family who served in the military or who had lived or grown up in Algeria. Quemeneur explains that a negative backlash occurred in France from the very beginning of the conflict when the French army sought to increase the number of servicemen. France maintains obligatory military service, and many of the people already serving were stationed in Algeria. However, the government extended the duration of the service of those already involved while implementing new conscriptions (Quemeneur 408). These measures resulted in manifestations and riots in different French cities in 1955 (Quemeneur 411) and again in 1956 (Quemeneur 423). In summary, most French favored the preservation of a French Algeria but were opposed to the effort it demanded of them and how the government enforced this preservation. In *Mon colonel*, Duplan embodies those who in France and Algeria favored the preservation through any means necessary, irrelevant of the majority's wishes for a more peaceful resolution.

Although the character of Duplan lacks some depth and plays a stereotypical role, it is nonetheless relevant for more than one reason. The first and most important we have already outlined-- his role as the voice of truth against official French denial of the war. The second reason is that Duplan represents a stance from a section of the French government and population that advocated keeping Algerian in French domination. At the beginning of the conflict, most of the French, even in the Continent, favored a French Algeria. Early war polls show that

most said that they preferred the maintenance of Algeria's departmental status, an arrangement which reflected the fiction that North Africa was no less French than Brittany (...). Still, the FLN's solution to the Algerian problem -independence- appealed in July 1957 to only 18 percent of those polled. (Talbot 357)

With the progression of the war and the rapid elevation of both human and monetary costs, this opinion radically changed; by 1961 only 4% of those polled thought Algeria would remain French, with 58% believing the colony would gain its independence (ibid). However, others, notably *pieds-noirs* and anyone else who would be most affected by the loss of the territory, reacted quickly: "Sensing this shift, on May 13, 1958, crowds of *pieds-noirs* chanting "Algérie française!" (French Algeria!) stormed government buildings and demanded that former prime minister Charles de Gaulle, hero of World War II, take power in Paris. General Massu declared what amounted to martial law" (Browne 84). Towards the end of the conflict, some perceived de Gaulle as a traitor who would not support them any longer. Desperate sections of the population took matters violently into their own hands: "Alarmed, conservative European extremists in Algeria known as "ultras," including disgruntled soldiers and right-wing colons, founded the Secret Army Organization (OAS, Organisation de l' Armée Secrete)" (Browne 86). They performed terrorist attacks against anybody who posed a serious threat to keeping Algeria French. This stance that Duplan represents was not only very real, but deterministic within the war effort, mainly because the colonel does emulate real people.

The character of Duplan effectively and unapologetically echoes the infamous colonel Mathieu in Pontecorvo's seminal 'Battle of Algiers'. The theme of the hard-liner high ranking officer is, in fact, a necessary one in a film that aims to address the Algerian conflict and the forces that drove the conflict forward for years. Herbiet mentioned in an interview that "Quand le

politique cesse d'encadrer l'usage des armes c'est la porte ouverte à tous les dérapages"<sup>28</sup> (Mon colonel). Throughout the film, he illustrates the confrontation that the hardliners in the military faced. They had to confront the armed insurrection and the local population that supported the independence movement. They were also at odds with civil and military leaders and the French and *pied-noir* population that, in spite of their support of a French Algeria, favored a less violent approach to oppose the local dissension.

People who favored a different approach made their opinions heard as well, and some carried a lot of weight in the court of public opinion. Nobel Laureate author Albert Camus was one of the vocal leaders of this movement. Camus may be the best, or at least the most notable, example of that moderate, compromising voice. Speaking of Camus, Scherr proposes that

His objective was a peaceful and just resolution to the Franco-Algerian crisis. In essays and letters to the press, Camus often stated his desire for peace and reconciliation between Arabs and French in Algeria. He consistently reproached the French government for its repressive policies. (Scherr 77)

The *pied-noir* character of Ascencio, an educated man who befriends Rossi, and his refined opinions are somewhat reminiscent of the eloquent real-life *pied-noir* author. He will be discussed in more detail later. In opposition to this moderation, the colonel of Herbiet's film is the visual fulcrum of the violent approach, a discourse that has to be exposed for its relevance in not only driving the war forward but also as a catalyst for mounting resistance to French dominance.

To think that Duplan's character has few redeeming qualities is accurate. Still, in this case, we are not condemning necessarily the real individuals (who in real life were more

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<sup>28</sup> "When the political ceases to frame and restrain the use of weapons, it is an open door for all sorts of misconduct" (translation by me).

complex). Instead, the condemnation is for the policy of brutal dominance that some exerted on the Algerian population. This condemnation extends to those who passively watched and either condoned or turned a blind eye to it, especially the members of the government who sanctioned these actions. This condemnation is one of the aims of Herbiet. He stated:

There have been some movies on the war – the best one was “The Battle of Algiers” – but none of these movies have said what we are saying: that those responsible were the French government and political system, not the army. The army was doing as instructed.  
(Hammond)

Herbiet is somewhat mistaken in his statement, especially the latter part. If the absolution of guilt for the military was his main aim the picture missed the mark. If he was looking to lay the criminal responsibility squarely on the government’s shoulders, why did he embody military authority in the person of a high-ranking officer who is an alleged assassin and who is responsible for ruthless acts of ‘pacification’? The colonel seems to take violent action beyond the mandate of the civil authorities whom Herbiet holds responsible for the atrocities, so the director’s statement sounds contradictory. If the colonel is a vehicle for underlining the hypocrisy of the government, his portrayal in the film, as representative of the military, is in no shape or form absolved from culpability in carrying out morally questionable orders nor in excelling in the violent application of these. In this regard, neither Herbiet nor the picture absolves the military; on the contrary, they condemn it along with the government. But let’s return to what the film does well.

*Mon colonel* effectively portrays the inaction and impenitence of the guilty parties. This inaction is unpalatable in both the past and the present, and it exposes that the unrepentant attitude with regards to the inhumane treatment of minorities, especially where France is

concerned with those of North African descent, is still an issue today. Duplan is a composite character based on real servicemen. In his interview with Time Out magazine, Herbiet discussed his concept of Duplan's character in these terms:

He's based on a number of French colonels who were in Algeria at the time. There was a guy called Aussaresses, a general who became famous a couple of years ago. He murdered Algerian "terrorists", as he would say, in the late '50s. He was proud of that. It was a great scandal here. (Hammond)

The defiant Aussaresses admitted the following of his treatment of captured North Africans in his memoirs: "Prisoners brought to Tourelles were sufficiently implicated in terrorist activity that there was no way we were going to release them alive. Torture was used if a prisoner refused to talk and when they seemed to have nothing more to say my men would take them out into the bush, shoot and bury them" ("Paul Aussaresses: SOE Officer" 46). For Aussaresses and others under his command, torture was justified and necessary to obtain results. For them, the end justified the means.

The film does fail to ascertain that this attitude is not exclusive to those of the older generation. The younger Galois is a personification of a more modern France: "Galois n'est que le double moderne de Rossi, autrement dit, une version contemporaine et révisée de l'image nationale française, un peu plus de trente ans après la perte de l'Algérie<sup>29</sup>" (Calargé 98). As we have seen repeatedly in the past decade this modern France still has large sections of the population, such as the growing support of the *Front National*,<sup>30</sup> who do think along the lines of

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<sup>29</sup> "Galois is nothing more than the modern double of Rossi, in other words, a contemporary and revised version of the national French image, just over thirty years after the loss of Algeria" – translation by me.

<sup>30</sup> Stockemer documents the figures that show the rapid growth in support for the FN as follows: "With a manpower of 60 000-80 000 dedicated party members, the FN has now become the third party in France and the only party whose support base is growing (Stockemer, 2014). Regarding the party's electoral successes, the FN's political upswing has even been more impressive. In 2012, Marine Le Pen received 18.03 per cent in the first round

Herbiet's colonel. They do not agree with Duplan in terms of the colonial dominance of North Africa. Still, they do so concerning the acceptance of French citizens of North African descent and nationalized immigrants of African origin. Some do not accept them as legitimate French nationals who should enjoy all the privileges that the republic offers.

In the present, it is Lieutenant Galois who becomes the countermeasure to Duplan's way of doing things and understanding the world. Galois' character is interesting for personifying a concurrent duality of being an insider and an outsider to the plot and to France's history, as well as to the Republic's military structure. The obvious part is her role as an insider. She is a member of the military, a commissioned officer who the film portrays as worthy of the trust of her superiors. She works well with the military personnel, the police and the civilians with whom she comes in contact. Her character is sympathetic, inquisitive and likable. It is through her eyes that we see and understand the story. She brings the public into both the present and the past through her readings and the investigation.

The lieutenant is also an outsider. She is a woman in a very traditionally male-dominated line of work, in which women have struggled to gain respect and credibility. Any time we see Galois at work or conducting her research, she seems outnumbered by men, particularly when she is surrounded by authoritarian figures (at the military or the police most notably). She is also,

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of the presidential elections, which was an increase of almost 8 per cent of the results obtained by her father in 2007 (10.44 per cent). In the subsequent legislative elections, the FN received a total of 13.77 per cent of the votes (compared with 4.29 per cent in 2007) and won 2 seats in the National Assembly (Hewlett, 2012, p. 414; Shields, 2013, p. 189). In 2014, the party could further expand its vote base. By winning 24.9 per cent of the vote, the FN won its best result ever in the 2014 European Elections making it the first party in France. In 2015, at the occasion of the departmental elections, the FN could consolidate its 2014 score, winning another astonishing 25.2 per cent of the popular vote" (Stockemer 319). Stockemer explains that even though the FN continues to capitalize on its old signature themes of immigration, insecurity Euro-globalization and anti-Islamification, it has done so by rebranding its public image under Marine LePen who "embeds its sometimes racist statements within a republican discourse that stresses the concepts *laïcité* and sovereignty (Stockemer 320). By draping their inflammatory discourse within a republican framework, the FN appears to be in support of a traditional French values instead of advocating direct exclusion of immigrants, minorities and foreigners.



like many of her generation in France, vaguely aware of the severity and culpability of the former colonial approach of her country and mostly unaware of the hidden gory details of the war it had conducted on Algerian shores. Through the storyline, she gains knowledge and intimate details of all these past proceedings and becomes more of an insider. Although the journey is far from complete, the door is now open.

Galois becomes a personification of a heterotopia. Foucault posits the following concept in his third principle of heterotopias: “The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible”. He continues in the fourth principle: “Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies” (Foucault 6). Galois embodies a transitional space between the past and the present, between the self and the other and between the traditional view of what was defined as France/French in the past and in the present. This embodiment is particularly relevant concerning the military and its attitudes towards immigrants, as well as with their responsibility towards these ‘foreigners’ (who are in actuality the locals) and accountability for what the French have done to them. She is, as stated before, not only herself but an extension of Lieutenant Rossi.

If Galois is a heterotopic personification, so is the main character of the disappeared Lieutenant, since she acts as a present-day mirror of Rossi during the war. They are reciprocal images of the transitionality of French identity from the way it was constructed pre and post-war. They are also agents in this transition, although their role is minor. Galois personifies a modern *Marianne* (Calargé 100), a reinvention of the ever-evolving republican symbol in its latest, early 21<sup>st</sup>-century iteration. Galois is a representative of the republic now, and Duplan was in his own way a personification of France in her Hegemonic civilizing mission persona. The painful and

awkward passage between the colonial power and the post-colonial Hexagon is necessarily Rossi (a heterotopic, transitional character). The colonel represents France's old way of conceiving itself as the dominant colonial power responsible for not only dominating but also making the colonies prosper. At the beginning of the motion picture, the colonel's understanding of his mission towards Algeria can be reduced to the following statement: "*Ce pays a toujours eu besoin d'une autre civilisation pour le féconder [ . . . ] Nous avons aujourd'hui la responsabilité de cette mission civilisatrice*"<sup>31</sup> (Herbiet). It is an outdated colonial phallogocentric view of the world that the arrival of Rossi challenges. Rossi comes in a function of legal aid and counselor, and his disgust and challenge of these old held notions grow as the narrative progresses. The lieutenant represents an alternative way of thinking within France that had begun to question this civilizing mission, at least in its colonial application. By the end of the film, Galois is the new France in which a woman is entrusted with investigating the old guard and bringing it to justice while disproving the validity and effectiveness of the old ideals.

The young French lieutenant grows from a weak and confused green officer to one who is on his way to standing up on higher moral ground than the colonialist military currently in command. As opposed to them, he also establishes a friendly relation with a local educated man, the schoolteacher René Ascensio (Eric Caravaca). He pays attention to Ascensio's more tolerant and pacifist rhetoric. Duplan has relations with governmental authorities or with local leaders. They tend to be professional, but only because the military's authority is subjected to them. This dynamic helps portray the colonel's inhumanity while allowing the public to empathize with Rossi, who is portrayed as a sensitive person. Rossi attempts to have other types of human contact, from the collegial to the romantic, and the public will pity him as he inescapably fails

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<sup>31</sup> "This country has always needed another civilization to fecundate it (...) we carry today the responsibility of this civilizing mission" (translation by me).

due to the nature of his job and the precarious position in which his duties place him. The lieutenant is caught in a social no man's land, a non-place of human relationships in which his life loses and regains meaning with each passing scene.

René Ascencio is an interesting character. He would appear to be well educated and has strong local ties, although he is completely at ease speaking with the French. He plays a small but important role as he proves to be Rossi's voice of reason and at times, his conscience, even though he is also suspected to be a sympathizer to the rebel cause. It is noteworthy that someone who favors Algerian independence would be chosen by the writer (the renowned cineaste Costa-Gavras) and the director to be the logical, likable character that becomes a diegetic moral compass for the audience. This choice suggests that the film advocates his position and reasoning as the one France should have taken all along. It also shows that many, both in Algeria and in France, who did not take up arms (or an active violent stance) were still active in opposing the oppression of the French military. Ascencio personifies a large community of French intellectuals of varied political philosophies who supported Algerian independence:

In the 1950s and early 1960s, a number of leading French intellectuals played an honourable role in support of the Algerian struggle for independence. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre from the left, inspired by revolutionary third-worldism, Raymond Aron on the right, motivated by a calculated pragmatism, and a hesitant François Mauriac, stirred by Christian ideals, shared a belief that Algeria should be independent. (Drake 287)

Ascencio meets regularly with Rossi and reasons with him about the dangers of going along with the military and the merits of seeking a more peaceful resolution. It is a representation of French intellectuals providing moral guidance for the regular population since Rossi works as a

representation of a France whose conscience is awakening while losing its innocence with relation to the war.

Ascencio also becomes the voice for the Algerians, who are underrepresented in this film due to its focus on the story of torture and guilt and murder perpetrated by the French occupants. The teacher does not survive the war unscathed as he is wounded during the conflict, a victim of a terrorist attack. French authorities question him during the conflict and interrogate him later during the present-day investigation in a much more civilized manner. Ascencio is a visual representation of both the collateral damage and of the hard tactics that did not spare sympathizers to the independence cause, but also of more humane methods of achieving a solution in spite of the person's ethnic or cultural background. He brings to the fore the fact that the hardliners would target *pieds-noirs* and European French who sympathized with the Algerian cause, some going as far as attempting to kill Charles de Gaulle when his stance on Algerian independence softened. The New York Times reported on August 24, 1962, that de Gaulle:

escaped a hail of machine-gun bullets on Wednesday, presumably fired by terrorists of the Secret Army Organization (O.A.S). This was not the first attempt and, unhappily, it is not likely to be the last. There are powerful elements in the French armed forces who are embittered against the General. They sincerely believe that they (and by their thinking this means France) have been betrayed by Charles de Gaulle. On May 13, 1958, French troops seized control of Algeria and demanded the return of General de Gaulle as Premier. They did so in the belief -which he encouraged- that he would save Algeria for France. On the contrary, he and he alone was responsible for leading Algeria to her present state of independence. ("The Attempt on de Gaule" 24)

In the motion picture, Ascensio and Colonel Duplan act as the physical links between the past and the present, between Rossi and Galois. Each embodies a radically different point of view on colonialism and the treatment of minorities. Their survival until the present shows to the public that both voices still speak today. The picture also shows, by electing to kill Duplan at the end, which side it supports. However, it also illustrates that standing for what the narrative advocates as the high moral position comes at a cost through both Ascencio's injury and Rossi's disappearance.

Guy Rossi, the protagonist around whom the story revolves, is the most important character. The lieutenant allows the public to learn and evaluate one of the most shameful and worst kept secrets of the war effort: the coldly calculated and systematic use of torture to obtain intelligence and subdue the local population. France did not acknowledge officially until September of 2018 (McAuley). Almost as importantly, he opens the eyes of the public to the lack of knowledge and general interest that France has devoted to this matter. This lack of interest was mainly due to misinformation and the shame of either actively participating in these atrocities during the past (mostly the military) or the inaction and systematic of the continental public with regards to this matter during the war, but mostly in the three decades following its resolution.

As mentioned before, Rossi's story arc is a typical coming of age linear narrative interrupted by the flashbacks (or in this case, flashforwards) of the contemporary investigation of his disappearance. The parallel storyline of the investigation does not disrupt the Rossi narrative, but effectively piggy backs off of it and helps the viewer organize the findings in a manner that makes it relevant in the present. In other words, the film underlines the relevance of the topic in

spite of the historical distance of the war vis-à-vis the present historical reality of France and its current relation with its former colonies.

It is the attitude of those like Rossi and Ascencio who have made this present possible, rather than the stance taken by the hardliners such as Duplan. The present relations of the world of Francophonie are not without problems. Many do question France's present role in the French-speaking world, which some consider as a veiled re-incarnation of its colonial attitude in a post-colonial context<sup>32</sup>. French intentions and cultural and economic preeminence have positive and negative consequences within this context. But it must also be recognized that large sections of the population have taken a more tolerant and open-minded stance than its predecessors. Characters such as Rossi are the filmic embodiment of such peoples and attitudes. These attitudes were very present during and after the conflict within the military itself and among many of those civilians both in France and Algeria who were informed, even if partially, about the war effort and its failure to achieve its political goals, in spite of French operational martial success.

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<sup>32</sup> Chafer explains that "Until 1998 France adopted a unilateral approach to Africa. It stationed some 10,000 soldiers in its former colonies, pursued a policy of substitution rather than support for African initiatives, and undertook some thirty major unilateral military interventions on the continent between 1960 and 1990" (Chafer 57). With the end of the cold war and the new millennium France's heavy-handed approach has softened, or rather evolved due to the disappearance of the Organization of African States and its replacement by the AU, which seemed to be a more cooperative organization vis-à-vis the French and British (Chafer 58). Although it may be argued that the economic and political cooperation (under the umbrella of concern in security matters especially for the French) is nothing but a reincarnation of the former colonial dominance, Chafer suggests that all of the parties involved in such multi-lateral cooperation do have much to gain from a political and economic perspectives. Culturally this has already been the case, as English and also French have proven to be vehicles of communication in multi-cultural states where different societies are joined politically while not sharing the same languages and traditions. In this matter Salhi explicates that "'colonial language' was motivated by a desire to build national unity through a 'neutral' (that is, 'not ethnically marked') medium and to use the 'foreign language' in order to establish or maintain contacts with the Western world which was deemed necessary to attain a desired level of development" (Sahli 194). France's present role in cultural, economic and political matters continues to be latent in the former colonies, but this influence does not always have to be construed as a negative colonial legacy. The difference may be that the source of this influence is now more based on cooperation rather than exploitation, even when the legacy of colonialism cannot and should not be ignored for the role it still plays in these relations.

The relationship between Rossi and Ascencio is just as important to the film as that of the Lieutenant and his colonel because it is in this relationship that real dialogue takes place. It is in the exchanges between the two men that a way of contemplating the possibility of a different way of seeing Algeria and its population is devised, not just for past France, but for the present as well. For example, in one of the exchanges where Ascencio and Rossi discuss the French presence and Duplan's application of military rule, Ascencio gives Rossi a copy of Camus' *La Peste* (The Plague). This gift is one of the strongest suggestions made by the film, which continually uses literary references to posit its stances, that France's dominion over Algeria may be compared to the Nazi occupation of France during WWII.<sup>33</sup> It also allows Rossi and the spectators to view the rebels as more than terrorists or insurrectionists, which is the point always defended by Duplan. The mere sight of Camus' work tells us that their resistance is not only justified but necessary.

*La Peste* (1947) is a novel that takes place in Oran, an Algerian town that is suddenly attacked by a plague seemingly brought in by an infestation of rats. This disease quickly begins killing many, and the victims that fall do so randomly. Different citizens take different approaches and attitudes towards dealing with the disease and death. Some want to leave, some become isolated, others turn on each other. A few characters use the situation egoistically to advance their own interests while others try to find a solution, especially as the town is

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<sup>33</sup> Cohen details how evident the link between Nazi and French occupations became during the Algerian war: From an early date, critics of the war compared French brutality in Algeria to what the Germans had perpetrated during World War II. As early as January 1955, Claude Bourdet in *France Observateur* had headlined his first story on the Algerian War, "Votre Gestapo d'Algérie." By 1957, torture was widely discussed in the press, and as Henri Beuve-Méry, the editor of *Le Monde* publishing under the pseudonym Sirius, noted in an editorial, "From now on the French must know that they don't quite have the right to condemn in the same terms as ten years ago the destruction of Oradour and torture by the Gestapo." The liberal journalist Jules Roy, a pied-noir (an Algerian born of European origin) and friend of Albert Camus, was later to remember that when he returned to Algeria in 1960, he realized that "Les Nazis c'était nous. Hélas." The use of the Nazi parallel for describing the war was a permanent fixture (Cohen 228).

quarantined and becomes isolated from the outside world. Lund summarizes the main ideas of the novel in these words:

Albert Camus opposes a natural state of plague to the human will to health. When he states that the microbe is “natural,” he implies both that disease is a universal condition and that it has an environmental cause. Health, on the other hand, arises from the rebel’s determination to reject this norm and assert human values in place of the violence and amorality of nature. Through this use of organic metaphor, Camus assimilates the healthy body to the existentialist values of integrity and purity. *La Peste*, written in the wake of the German occupation of France, extends this logic to the body politic, purifying the multicultural city of Oran and reducing it to a mirror image of metropolitan France (Lund 134-135). The similarities from the novel may be easily translated to the Algerian conflict. Some of the characters match those of the writings of Camus. Special consideration must be given to the fact that just as Camus’ 1947 writings were meant to be read through the lens of the German occupation of France. Ironically, they may also be easily re-applied to reading the Algerian conflict in the context of the French occupation and the violent ‘peacekeeping’ efforts.

One important parallel between *La Peste* and *Mon colonel* is that native Algerians are not prominently represented in either storyline. In the novel, most of the characters are either *pieds-noirs*, Oran natives, or continental French citizens who were in Oran due to work or tourism. Oran is a real North Algerian town that was severely hit by the plague on more than one occasion, twice during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and as recently as 2003 (Raoult et al. 25). In the film, we mostly see native Algerians as the local population victimized by the French occupation, or briefly as rebels when the public catches glimpses of the insurrection fighters. Incidentally, there is more screen time of insurrectionist cadavers than actual fighting. The film



uses the portrayal of dead bodies to underline the plight of the *résistants* and the low degree of success they experienced during bellicose exchanges with the French armed forces.

But perhaps the most significant suggestion made by bringing up the oeuvre of Camus during the film is his particular exploration of human attitude vis-à-vis what the French *pied-noir* author defined as 'the Absurd'. Psychologist Paul Rom explains:

The absurd consists in our experience that the world is irrational and meaningless, whilst we ourselves long for an absolute, for clarity, for unity. Camus holds that we cannot possibly reconcile the world's irrationality with our longing for an absolute; if we do, we give up a fundamental truth. (...) Our intelligence confirms these feelings; we can, however, find a way of intense living by bravely accepting the absurd. (Rom 147)

The plague claims its victims coldly, randomly. The disease is not a respecter of persons, much like war. In the Algerian context, there is as much collateral damage as military casualties, if not more. At times, it is especially difficult to differentiate between the two. The lines between what was traditionally defined as a combatant and a civilian are blurred, a question raised by wars where guerilla warfare is used extensively. This randomness makes life inexplicable and tragedy absurd. The way innocent people are affected, when sometimes the guilty or people of low moral quality escape unharmed, can make us question the purpose and fairness of our existence.

*La Peste* proposes that what is vital for a human being is not to necessarily seek to understand the mishaps or even the good fortune in life through causality, but rather than our duty as humans is to face life's vicissitudes face on. This attitude of actively engaging the good and the bad in life is the approach that gives life its meaning. As another study of the meaning of the absurd concludes:

Camus argues that the only way to lead our meaningless lives with dignity and possibly even happiness is to adopt and maintain an attitude of revolt. We must acknowledge the absurd as a fact, but at the same time regard it as a scandal or injustice that must be defied. (Pözlner 488)

The French occupation of Algeria becomes the ‘absurd’ to which Algerians must revolt. When seen through the eyes of this work, Ascencio is suggesting to Rossi that the fight of the Algerian insurgent is necessary, dutiful, and glorious. The victory many of these men will reach will not be measured through a battle body count or territory lost and won, but rather through the resolve to oppose the ‘absurd’ of life embodied by the French occupation enforced through its ruthless military. This argument is particularly relevant in a film where native Algerians tacitly take center stage — the victorious outcome dwells in the act of resisting and in the fighting spirit rather than martial superiority<sup>34</sup>. The resistance of the Algerian is as French as the one *La Résistance* carried out against the Nazis.

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<sup>34</sup> The ALN (*Armée de Libération Nationale*, the armed branch of the FLN) found some initial success in the early years of the war, mainly due to the failure of the French to recognize the severity of the insurrection and their initial military operational ineptitude. The French quickly adapted to ALN guerilla tactics and turned the tide of the war delivering significant blows to the ALN in three consecutive campaigns: the Battle of Algiers, the Battle for the Barrages and the Challes Offensive which were all resounding French victories in 1959 and 1960. Gortzak points out: “In a series of offensives that moved across Algeria from west to east, starting with Operation ‘Oranie’ in February 1959, the French delivered a significant blow to the ALN forces in the field. Operation ‘Oranie’ alone was estimated to have destroyed 50 per cent of the ALN’s manpower and weaponry in the Oran region. By the summer of 1960 the French security forces appeared well on their way to defeat the ALN as a fighting force” (Gortzak 315). The problem for the French in retaining Algeria was not their military superiority, but their inability to secure the favor of the local population and international opinion. While they won the military encounters, they lost the political war, as Gortzak also shows: “in an effort to goad the French authorities into rash responses against the Muslim population and to drive an insurmountable wedge between Muslims and Europeans. The campaign produced precisely this outcome as French commanders increasingly ‘resorted to conventional military force against villages suspected of collaborating with the insurgency and in the application of collective punishment. This heavy handed and inequitable approach created more enemies than friends and created more, rather than less, popular support for the FLN” (Gortzak 310). The FLN had its military arm almost completely defeated but succeeded at securing the support of the locals to their cause. Their revolt against the ‘absurd’ superior forces resulted in independence.

Rossi matures through what he sees and experiences: through his conversations with Ascencio, his verbal exchanges with his military superiors, and his failed attempts at female relationships. The lieutenant witnesses torture, executions, terrorist attacks, and also sees how the contending parts of Algerian society try to (un)fit. He sees the good and the ugly from both sides. His growth comes from becoming informed and formulating courses of action with which his conscience can live. This character progression can be argued as the ultimate goal of the film, to suggest that France needs to open its eyes, to deal with the harsh and sometimes shameful truth about its Algerian past and to formulate a course of action that can influence better future relations between both populations, because these populations continue to be interlinked in both territories, most notably in France. It is only after opening his eyes, which does not happen after one experience or one talk, that the young lieutenant learns to stand up for himself, but just as important for what is morally correct. That a young man represents this journey to a higher moral ground is a common literary and filmic device that can be effective at targeting the message to a younger generation, that much like the protagonist, was unfamiliar with many of the deplorable details of the war. Due to his experiences, the topic can be re-introduced in present-day France, which brings us back to Rossi's present-day representation: Galois. As mentioned earlier, her character is an extension of Rossi in the present. Her discovery of the lieutenant story allows the spectator to rediscover this past through the eyes of a changed France (Galois), to experience by proxy what this conflict was like and to take a Camusian stance by doing something, by trying to right some of its wrongs.

The modern-day investigation reveals the limitations of solving the actual crimes of the past. Galois cannot re-produce Rossi and cannot change the atrocities committed by the military. It also shows how the past, when unchecked, has pervasive consequences in the present. The film

suggests that unchanging attitudes towards the past, when morally wrong, will inevitably lead to destruction. The death of the unrepentant colonel exemplifies this outcome. It also indicates that innocent people will continue to be collateral damage because we must characterize Rossi's father (who kills the colonel) as a long-suffering victim himself. He is pushed to action by the grief, not so much caused by the death of his son, but by the reasons behind his disappearance. Galois, for her part, is not only powerless to change the past. She is also incapable of preventing the present negative consequences of this past. In the picture, she cannot forestall the colonel's murder. However, it is the investigation of the past that the film focuses on rather than in reparations. The film is, to put it, Camusian by facing the absurdity of changing the past. Galois' redemptive qualities are in the fervor she displays in investigating rather than in fixing. She is powerless to change Duplan or even the elder Rossi, but she experiences a cathartic growth. It is this will that may have a difference in the present and future generations by revisiting the past and taking responsibility for what cannot be changed, just as the heroic protagonists of Camus' novel facing the plague and doing what they could to survive and help heal those affected. Their triumph lay in their revolt rather than in the physical results of their fight.

## **Conclusion**

Film critic and theorist André Bazin had a comparable understanding of the purpose of painting compared to film and photography when trying to achieve realism when he said that "the solution is not to be found in the result achieved, but in the way of achieving it" (Bazin 7). In his discussion over the progression of art in its pursuit of realism, Bazin explains that painting always came up short in this pursuit. The advent of radical achievements, such as the discovery and implementation of perspective, was still not enough to achieve total realism because "no

matter how skillful the painter, his work was always in fee to an inescapable subjectivity” (ibid). However much it progressed, and no matter how accomplished the painter, the painting produced would never attain a perfect representation of realism. But then photography and cinema, Bazin contends, attained that goal: “in achieving the aims of baroque art, photography has freed the plastic arts from their obsession with likeness” (ibid). By attaining this goal, photography allowed the art of painting to pursue illusion and art for art’s sake instead of chasing realism as it had in the past. Art found renovated meaning due to its new-found pursuit of illusion rather than, as Bazin says, a ‘resemblance complex’. The obsession with likeness was the ‘absurd’ of art, but it fueled its progression. Once photography achieved this goal, painting was freed to pursue its other aims.

Relating this to Galois, it would be pointless (and impossible) for her to change the past, perhaps even the imminent present of this story -that is her ‘absurd’-, but the passion and persistence with which she pursues truth has the power to change her, Modern France. The success of Galois comes from becoming informed of the past and not giving up discovering the truth. The successful result is not based upon solving the past crime or stopping the present one but on the development of her character and the creation of a new attitude towards the war and its victims (both French and Algerian). The success from a Camusian and Bazinian perspective is the real result: the creation and perseverance of the process of the pursuit of truth, a recognition of guilt and taking responsibility for the past, thus opening up the opportunity of a better future rather than the resolution of a single criminal event.

Because the film is so character-driven, and all of the main and secondary characters are French, we do not get a chance to experience the Algerian point of view. This absence of the locals other than in-crowd encounters or torture scenes only serves to emphasize the lack of

importance not only as equals to the French but as how much the military dehumanized them. However, to make up for the short portrayals of indigenous people, it is through studying the places where we experience the Other. The places in this film gain greater importance due to the lack of display of natives, and effectively become characters themselves. Through the places shot we discover a heightened importance of the contrast between French and Algerian spaces and how they underline the difference between the (mis)understanding of the other culture. Of all the films, *Mon colonel* has some of the most illustrative shooting that highlights the difference of the French conception of civilization and order when compared to the Algerian spaces by characterizing them as a land and people to be tamed and condescendingly protected. Contrary to the films of the first chapter, the spaces in this picture split evenly between locations shot in continental France and in Algeria. The spaces represented in Algeria focused on the areas that the French had transformed into a semblance of a European Place and contrasted them with Algerian spaces when they ventured out of 'civilization'.

The relationships mostly focused on interactions between European French characters, both in the present in the Hexagon or the past in the Algerian theater of war. The purpose of this French point of view is not to ignore the importance of Algerian people in the war of independence, but to emphasize the eminence of the culpability of the French in the tragedy of that conflict. The film, through crimes committed by the French on Algerians and on other French, is a condemnation of the attitudes and actions of those who heavily advocated the preservation of Algeria as a French territory and the violence with which they attempted to enforce this policy.

## Chapter 4

### *L'ennemi intime* (2007)

## A portrayal of the destructive consequences of enforcing the French civilizing mission

### Introduction

*L'ennemi intime* is a 2007 film by Florent Emilio Siri that is arguably the most direct, open portrayal of the Algerian war, certainly up until its debut. Of all the films in this study, it is the one filmed most conventionally in the war movie genre, save perhaps *Indigènes*. The style in which it is shot, from camera angles to the narrative of the film, is reminiscent of American productions such as *Platoon*, *Casualties of War* and *Full Metal Jacket*. The two main differences between *L'ennemi intime* and those American films are the nationality of the soldiers and the geographical settings. A New York Times critic observed: ““Intimate Enemies” is a movie you’ve seen before, when it was set on the Apache reservation or in the Vietnamese jungle” (Hale). The similarity is not by happenstance. Siri explained in an interview that he and Benoît Magimel (the actor who plays the main character) were both heavily influenced by American war films:

Benoît et moi nous faisons partie de cette génération que des films sur la Guerre du Vietnam comme *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon* ou *Voyage au bout de l'enfer*<sup>35</sup> ont marquée à

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<sup>35</sup> *Voyage au bout de l'enfer* is the French-given name for ‘The deer hunter’ (Cimino 1979).

vie. Et je me suis toujours demandé pourquoi on n'en faisait pas en France sur la Guerre d'Algérie, sauf rares exceptions. (“L’ennemi intime”)<sup>36</sup>

Although the principal shooting took place in Morocco, this film takes the viewer the deepest inside of Algeria geographically and culturally. The narrative is also the farthest removed from French *civilisation*.

Patrick Rotman wrote the script for *L’ennemi intime*, basing it upon a documentary by the same name that he also penned. This documentary is chiefly based on veteran accounts and interviews (Branche “L’ennemi intime” 117). Rotman is a professional historian who has worked for over 25 years on the Algerian war and collaborated with renowned filmmaker Bertrand Tavernier for the production of the 2002 documentary. When Siri and Magimel approached him to script a fictional war film based on his research, Rotman decided to create his main characters as composites of real people. These composite characters are based on the material from the documentary that contained personal experiences of persons who served in Algeria or lived through the war. Rotman and Siri believed strongly that this war was both a civil war as much as a colonial conflict because both regarded the Algerians as legitimately French, and the fighting as taking place between French citizens. The first scene of the film elucidates this point of view by showing us that the Algerian war was in a way eight years of ‘friendly fire’, of French killing other French.

*L’ennemi intime* explores the effects that the war has on the individual French combatant on a more personal level. It is not as apologetically upfront concerning the war as *Mon colonel*. *Mon colonel* provides protagonists who may be easily characterized as stereotypes or symbols of

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<sup>36</sup> “Benoît and I are part of this generation that films about the Vietnam War such as *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon* and *The Deer Hunter* have marked for life. And I had always asked myself why in France we didn’t make any about the Algerian War, with some rare exceptions” (translation by me).



sections of the French population. As its title proclaims, *L'ennemi intime* is self-reflective on a more intimate and individual level. It shows how the French participants were both victimizers and victims. The film does not advocate for their exoneration from culpability in this conflict. Instead, Siri's production illustrates how the wounds from which the French soldiers suffer were self-inflicted due to their violent enforcement of colonialism.

Siri explains in a series of interviews for *L'ennemi intime* that he wanted to make a war film for a long time because France simply did not have too many real war movies, especially in the style that he and actor and friend Benoît Magimel had grown up watching. A film on the Algerian War was particularly appealing to him for two principal reasons. First, he considered himself rather ignorant on the subject, like most French citizens who grew up after the war. He mentions how the subject was brushed over in the French educational system. He considered the production of this film as a responsibility to educate and inform the public. The director believes that an action film is capable to attract an audience for the purpose of entertainment, but that it can become a vehicle for education as well (Florent Siri Interview 4: *L'Ennemi intime* 1:37-2:22). Second, Siri thinks the war had a profound effect on France, and one of the reasons these effects are felt today is because the conflict was full of contradictions. It was not even originally recognized as a war, when in fact it was different types of wars at once. The armed struggle was a civil war, since it happened between people who were French, it was a colonial war, a guerilla war and a secret war. To adequately address the complexity of the conflict the director chose a combination of approaches. He shot a drama that focused on very personal, emotional stories, mixed with a style that also incorporated epic storytelling and westerns.

To bring this vision to life, Siri carefully planned the film for years and assembled a team that shared his attention to detail. He used storyboards extensively. He prepared detailed ones for each scene, from the epic battle sequences to the more emotional dramatic dialogue and self-reflective scenes (L'Ennemi intime Making Of (5) VF 0:02-0:30). He met with each member of the group involved a particular sequence to ensure they had a common vision of what to accomplish (L'Ennemi intime Making Of (3) VF 0:04-1:26). Siri was not only very hands on with the actors, but with the rest of the crew as well. The story is fictional but deals with a sobering theme and is based on first-hand accounts. The director paid special attention to background authenticity to convey as much realism as possible to the spectator. For example, his team went to great lengths to obtain or recreate accurate clothing for the cast. His wardrobe coordinator explains that they carefully studied the details of the different types of uniforms. The coordinator describes how French army uniforms were the same colors as the ones worn by the Harkis, but that certain details differed, such as the headgear. The European French wore helmets, while the Harkis wore traditional Algerian headdresses or other types of caps. The weapons and munitions of the French were issued by the Army, while many Harkis obtained German, Chinese and Russian guns and rifles on their own (L'Ennemi intime Making Of (4) VF 00:35-2:34). Even the gun holsters and belts were different, the Harkis wore leather equipment while the French ones were made of cloth. Harkis sometimes mixed other Algerian traditional garb with the French issued jackets or army pants. The wardrobe team studied all those differences and reproduced period-accurate apparel to give the fictional characters historical authenticity (Florent Siri Interview 4: L'ennemi intime 2:48-3:20). One more illustration of this attention to detail was the recruitment of Kabyle natives as a supporting cast, to display a culturally and linguistically accurate interpretation of social interaction between the Harkis and

the French. The director wanted not only the right words and correct language used during the time in the dialogues, he even desired to utilize people with the correct accents.

Another example was the choice of color pallet in which the film was captured. Siri chose earthy tones and somewhat desaturated colors to convey the feeling of realism. He feels many westerns, such as the ones directed by Sergio Leone, follow this pattern. The combination of earthy western tones and a desaturated pallet instill a sense of harsh reality and roughness. As accustomed by many directors, he has repeatedly worked with the same director of photography, Giovanni Fiore Coltellacci. Coltellacci explains that not only the choice of color was of importance in *L'ennemi intime*, but that maintaining a consistent amount of light was particularly relevant and challenging since they were primarily filming outdoors and dealing with the elements (L'Ennemi intime Making Of (6) VF 0:02-1:37). He always made sure that the light was as consistent as possible so that the film maintains a cohesive narrative.

Siri mixes the epic battle scenes and grand scenic shots with close-ups of dramatic dialogue and conversations to show the contradictions of this war, one that did not exist officially but happened between brothers of the same nation. He states that his main goal was to show that the French were not fighting against a foreign enemy, but themselves. Concerning the Algerian War, he disagrees with Sartre's statement that '*L'enfer c'est les autres*' (L'ennemi intime en DVD: Interview de Florent-Emilio Siri 2:02-2:44). Instead, Siri shows that while one of his protagonists is on his way out of the hell of war, the idealistic newcomer is only about to enter it. In the end, they are both the same person. Hell is not a foreigner; it is found within us. The French were only fighting themselves and created their own civil, personal hell. The Algerian war was a struggle with an impossible victory. One of the Harkis states in the movie, while holding a cigarette burning at both ends, that on one side you have the French, on the other the

Algerians, but that in the middle, you cannot win. When you engage in the war, you have already lost at the outset.

### **Film Synopsis**

The year is 1959, and the Algerian war of independence rages on. In a remote location in the Kabyle mountains, a French lieutenant is killed, possibly by friendly fire. Lieutenant Terrien (Benoît Magimel) is an idealistic greenhorn sent to replace him. He is dropped right in the middle of a highly conflictive zone to lead a team of battle-hardened veterans, led by pragmatic Sergeant Dougnac (Albert Dupontel). The two men will clash due to their diametrically opposed leadership styles and views of the war.

In their first outing, they patrol a village where Terrien refuses to torture or kill with impunity the locals to obtain information. Later, they return to the same place only to find most of the villagers killed, supposedly by the FLN forces, for allegedly collaborating with the French. Terrien rescues a youth who hid in the depth of a well, and who appears to be the lone survivor of the massacre. In the same outing, Terrien refuses to shoot women who transport water, but Dougnac enforces their killing. To support his reasoning, Dougnac shows the new lieutenant that things are not as they appear when he shows the newcomer that the large water urns that the women were carrying are filled with weapons, and the 'women' are disguised men who support the FLN.

The unit is ambushed a few scenes later, and a few important men within the platoon are seriously injured. A jeep comes to their rescue, but as they evacuate the injured officers, the vehicle is also ambushed. The occupants are killed and savagely mutilated. When the French unit realizes what is happening, they rush to aid their comrades but do not arrive on time. They

discover the horrific results, which affect Terrien deeply. The unit returns to its camp, where high-ranking officers join them. The commanders lecture the men about their combat approach and responsibilities. As the story develops, Terrien becomes confused and disaffected with regards to the purpose of being in this war, for him and France. The atrocities that the men perpetrate, and from which they also suffer, impact Dougnac as well. The sergeant develops a sense of empathy while losing faith in the cause. In the end, Dougnac deserts the army and Terrien pays his participation in the war with the ultimate price, killed by the boy he had rescued from the well.

Even though the film is largely character and action-driven, the places portrayed in the film are of vital importance. They serve as a personification of the Algerian opposition to the French, especially in a film devoid of main Algerian characters as the pictures of the earlier chapters. The section that analyses the relationships focuses on explaining, through the story arcs of the characters, the self-reflection of the negative approach of France vis-à-vis the territory of Algeria. Before we focus on the protagonists, we will study how the Algerian spaces become the one main Algerian characters of the film through their relationship with the characters of the story.

### **Spatial Analysis**

*L'ennemi intime* was filmed in Morocco, a country adjacent to Algeria. The former French North African colonies share cultural and geographical traits. The entirety of the picture is shot in the fictitious Algerian territory -as far as the narrative is concerned-, save for a short vacation leave when Lieutenant Terrien goes home for Christmas. The setting transports the French spectator inside the war to involve him or her directly with the conflict instead of merely

referencing the war, as did the films of the 50s and 60s on this subject. This approach is comparable to that of many Vietnam films that attempted to duplicate the experience of the American combatants who fought in Southeast Asia. By placing the action in the Kabyle, a desertic mountainous region where a lot of the actual fighting took place, the picture places the viewer in the most unfamiliar territory possible. Geographically, this film takes us further into the Algeria that was never fully absorbed by France, away from the relative safety of the ‘*villes françaises*’ depicted in *Mon colonel*. Symmetrically organized towns are omitted; the only French territory shown are the barracks to which the military units are confined.

The French barracks have much in common with their equivalents in *La trahison*. They are austere, rudimentary and temporary. They stand out against the rough terrain, but it is the rough landscape that is an anthropological Place to its people. Due to their temporary nature, the barracks are the non-Place because they are not a home of any sort. They act as a shield against the indomitable, uncivilized Kabyle wilderness. The temporary military installations feel like inadequate intrusion by the colonial power in its failed attempt to subdue the local culture. The fact that we rarely see the insurgents while the French go on patrol only highlights how much these rebels find themselves at home. They blend with the land, exemplifying to what degree the territory and its people are inseparable. Of all the regions and peoples of Algeria, the concept of inseparability was particularly applicable to Kabyle. Scheele illustrates this point by explaining that the French originally viewed Kabyle in a more positive light than the rest of North Africa:

Even before the French army conquered Kabylia in 1857, the French public had been fascinated by these sedentary hill-farmers, in whom they all too easily recognized ideal French peasants attached to soil and independence. As Berber speakers, the Kabyles were seen as less Islamicized than their Arabic-speaking neighbors. (Scheele 896-897)

The Kabyle is a Place for its inhabitants. It is ironic that the French, who are culturally attached to their land of origin<sup>37</sup>, felt this commonality towards the peoples of Kabyle before they conquered them and dehumanized them. The definition of ‘sedentary hill-farmer’ could be easily be applied to the inhabitants of most rural French communities once one is removed from the large metropolitan centers such as Paris or Lyon. Kabyle performs its life-meaning function in a different, but effective manner, just as the French cities do for their European French dwellers. As the rebels fight the French using the land to hide, fight and ambush their enemies, these activities give a new meaning to the life of the rebel fighters. Insurgent activities become life-giving and life-preserving to the rebel fighters as agriculture to a farmer. The Kabyle represents the independence from French people and culture. It signposts the difference that still spatially separates North Africans from Europeans, even though they have closely interacted for nearly a century and a half by the time of the war.

The opening scene is of paramount importance to set the tone of viewing the two cultures as intertwined, while contradictorily maintaining a socio-economic *écart*. This segregation proposes continuous parallelism that serves as a cultural mirror. In this reflection, the French can see themselves in the *ennemi* that they are fighting since this *ennemi* is literally and figuratively themselves. As the camera follows a French patrol, the soldiers blend well into the terrain as they move surreptitiously through rock and shrubbery. Sergeant Dougnac, who leads this party, spots some movement down into a mountain valley. It is the scarf-covered head of an armed man. Dougnac’s men get set for combat, and he gives the order to open fire. During the bloody confrontation, we learn that Dougnac’s group is only half of the platoon when he calls his

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<sup>37</sup> Silberman, Alba and Fournier noted that the particular French cultural trait of rural immobility became one of the primary factors in needing to bring immigrant workers to France in the first place: “immigration was needed to provide workers for industrialization because of the relative immobility of French men and women in the country’s large agricultural sector” (Silberman, Alba and Fournier 3).

superior to alert them that they are pushing the enemy towards the other part of the unit. He is horrified when the voice on the radio responds that they have already reached them, and Dougnac can hear gunfire through the radio behind the screaming voice. He realizes it is the fire of his men. Dougnac halts the attack and his unit runs downhill to meet his comrades. His worst fears are realized when he confirms that he has been firing upon the other half of his platoon. Even worse, the commanding officer is among the casualties. The French pretended that Algeria and its people were French, and the film establishes that if we follow this logic, this conflict was a civil war where the French killed their own.

The second scene then flips that script slightly by showing that there existed irreconcilable differences among these fighting groups based on ethnicity, culture and religion. France is a diverse but fractured nation. In this scene, the men return to their outpost, '*Position avancée Mazel*', and funerals are conducted to honor the fallen. But there are two sets of funerals, one for the 'French' officer conducted in French and Christian fashion, while the other is a Muslim burial conducted in Arabic. The scene is deftly shot. First, the camera takes both close-ups and long shots to allow us to see the two separate funerals taking place concurrently. The close-ups are set in quick-cut, shot-counter-shot style, showing the French and Arabic services taking place next to each other. The viewer gets a sense of how similarly both cultures feel about their dead while also showing a lack of acceptance rather than one of tolerance. A shot-counter-shot is typically employed in a film during dialogue scenes, to guide the viewer through the interaction of two or more people, as they respond to each other's statements. The style of montage that uses quick shot-counter-shots and close-ups is traditionally used to provide the viewer with a sense of logical continuity. Most movie and television viewers have seen it



repeatedly. Due to this repetitiveness, viewers understand what the director is communicating through the use of these common techniques<sup>38</sup>.

Siri uses this established editing to show the exact opposite of what the audience expects. The scene illustrates an absence of dialogue, or perhaps one is occurring but falling on mutually deaf ears, as the country rents itself apart. To complement the close-ups, Siri mixes longshots to show that the French funeral is taking place at a higher ground than the Arabic service, making visually clear the power dynamics that exist between the two groups. Some of the white French soldiers glance back at the Arabic ritual with a feeling of distrust. The viewer can perceive how complicated these dynamics are in an army comprised of some native elements that culturally have more in common with the adversary than with their commanding officers. This situation hampers the trust of the continental French concerning these natives, whom they repeatedly viewed as foreigners, despite having shed blood together in this and other conflicts.

It is in this context that Lieutenant Terrien arrives. He fails to fully understand the tragedy that is taking place, regardless of his empathy towards the Algerians concerning the inequalities from which they suffer. The film suggests that all of the parties involved are casualties of war, of friendly fire, and that in this war there are no winners. Rotman echoes this sentiment in a video interview: “S’il y a un message au film c’est que il est un film violement anti-guerre”<sup>39</sup> (“L’ennemi intime Le scénario Making Of” 2:25-2:30). More importantly, *L’ennemi intime* underlines that the Algerian war as a fratricide above anything else.

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<sup>38</sup> Schaefer and Martinez explain the usefulness of classical editing continuity practices: “continuity shooting and editing techniques supported realism by enabling filmmakers to compress or telescope time and portray seemingly natural spatial relationships within a scene--a practice sometimes referred to as “invisible editing,” or “seamless editing.” Such continuity editing practices are associated with fictional “classic Hollywood techniques” that enable viewers to follow the shots in a sequence as if a scene were unfolding before their eyes” (Schaefer and Martinez 349). This type of straightforward editing practices is so commonly used in film that the viewer, when presented with this editing, almost automatically assigns it a high degree of realism.

<sup>39</sup> “If there is a message in this film, it is that this film is staunchly anti-war” (Translation by me).

The four motion pictures studied up to this point illustrate that it is simplistic to characterize the war as a dispute between two homogeneous factions. They show the complications of attempting to separate two cultures that had become intertwined despite their continued awareness of their differences. One of the main problems they faced is to what extent each party involved failed to recognize the commonality between them. Like the films previously analyzed, *L'ennemi intime* continues to underline that the conflict created a more pronounced social no-man's land for the Algerians who took the French side than for the French who sided with Algerian independence, or who objected with how the war was conducted. At times, the law persecuted the French who opposed their government<sup>40</sup>, but in most cases, they did not have to deal with the same degree of isolation and social stigma than their Algerian counterparts. *La trahison* showed that socio-cultural space where the Harkis became trapped was more difficult. They were shunned by their own as traitors, while at the same time, they were regarded as second-class human beings by those to whom they were showing loyalty. Their sacrifice rarely earned them the full trust of the French or the full benefits of citizenship in France. The same was true for them in Algeria, where they became outcasts in the Algerian Places by their collaboration with the French. In Siri's movie, both Harkis and French are invaders of the Algerian spaces, and this depiction applies to native towns and wilderness alike.

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<sup>40</sup> Perhaps the most complicated case is that of the conscientious objectors to the war and their participation in it. Since the beginning, intellectuals publicly condemned the use of torture by the Army in Algeria. A large section of the French population rapidly understood that the war was an act of repression rather than pacification (Johnston-White 121). These dilemmas affected many French who understood the need to protect the *pieds-noirs* and French interests in Algeria, but who also saw the problem of continuing to oppress the native Algerians, especially through sanctioned violence. Johnston-White demonstrates that this was particularly important for the young men who faced the possibility of being drafted and sent to fight for a cause in which they did not believe. She states: "For Christian soldiers and youth activists, the institutionalization of torture in the Army increasingly complicated the notion of unswerving obedience to authority, especially when the military received the backing of the state and the moral support of the Catholic Church" (Johnston-White 122). This crisis led the Church to change its view of unilateral support for the army and personal conscience, a movement that was ratified even by the Vatican II council. Some young men saw themselves forced to conscientiously object to serve in the armed forces and had to face court for their refusal.

An important space portrayed in *L'ennemi intime* is the Algerian town visited twice by the military unit. Both visits are important because the differences exemplify the increase of destruction that the French are bringing to Algeria through their military activities. The further the narrative of this film progresses, the harsher the suffering of every party involved in the war becomes. The town is organized in a different way than any of the French cities previously shown in our pictures. It is not ordered in a symmetrical grid pattern, but rather it blends to the contours of the land. It is obvious to the beholder that the settlement had grown organically, embracing its surroundings rather than deliberately attempting to change them. The French perception is that the space is haphazard and unorganized, but to the Algerians, it is harmonious and welcoming. In the first scene, we feel how much the locals are at odds with the invasive military units. This sense originates as much from the organization of the space as from the people who inhabit it. More importantly, we feel the harmony that the locals enjoy with their land, and that the French do not. The intrusion of the Europeans disrupts that harmony of the daily life of the natives, but this town is still a Place where the lives of its inhabitants have a purpose while that of the soldiers, including the Harkis, has not.

When the unit returns to the town, they find the place deserted, and the feeling is somber. The locals have been massacred for suspicion of cooperating with the French. What was once a town has now been transformed into an open cemetery. A Place has become a non-Place, the space considered by Foucault as one of the ultimate heterotopias. The effect of interacting with people who do not belong to this Place, both Europeans and rebels, has caused the Place to lose its place in the world. This loss represents the consequences of the policy of colonialism and civilizing mission because it characterizes the literal destruction of the native culture and the Places that give it its significance. If the whole of Kabyle is a Place, its center, its holiest spaces,

are the towns where people have learned to attach their humanity to the space they inhabit, blending their lives to their land. Colonialism and war have now destroyed this link by severing the people from their land. This space has now more in common with the barracks than the rest of the Kabyle.

The non-Place of the military barracks is just as telling. The temporality of a military post has already been established. Upon the return of the unit to their quarters, the film finally confronts the viewer to the crisis of suffered by the French occupation forces. We witness the loss of innocence and a proverbial descent into a personal hell of Terrien as he evaluates what he has witnessed. He weighs his sins of commission and omission. The lieutenant wades through several traumatic experiences while out in the wilderness of Kabyle, and these will be reviewed further in the relationship analysis section. About the study of spaces, the transformation of his person occurs when he returns to the army fort. Foucault explains how the space of the barracks underlines the progression of the story arc of Terrien:

Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. (Foucault 7)

For the French military unit, this ingressing and egressing of the barracks constitutes a safety barrier, a buffer zone between the semblance of civilization, a fake Place, and the untamable Kabyle region. But the film has already established that the Kabyle is indeed a Place, and Foucault allows us to understand that the barracks are the invasive non-Place. The soldiers must dwell here as long as they remain at war. Non-Places cause the individuals who dwell in them to lose or transform their life's meaning, and this is what occurs to the two main characters in the

story as Dougnac gains a measure of sensibility, while Terrien loses some of his humanity at every visit of this heterotopia when he evaluates and despairs, as he internalizes transpired while outside.

It is in the barracks that the soldiers let loose to cope with the harshness of the experiences lived and the comrades lost. In scenes reminiscent of films that inspired this picture - such as *Platoon*-, the men indulge in drugs, gambling and other perversions, while each of their souls breaks down a little further. This space illustrates how the imposition of the *mission civilisatrice* has the effect of destroying the Places of the locals, while simultaneously destroying those sent to enact colonial policies. The non-Places they are forced to occupy break down their moral compasses and put them in the prolonged risk of losing their lives, just as they did in *La trahison*. In this case, it is the government who sent these men to their destruction who has betrayed them by robbing the soldiers of their humanity. To more carefully examine these effects, we will now move on to the relationship analysis of this picture.

### **Relationship analysis**

The story of the film revolves around a newcomer officer, as in *Mon colonel*. Lieutenant Terrien has volunteered to serve in the austere mountainous Kabyle region of Algeria instead of taking on a more comfortable assignment in Algiers. His volunteering is an important comment on his person because it reveals his idealistic and naïve nature. This character foretells that the narrative will center on a story of personal growth, disabuse and eye-opening. The principal story arc of the film will be the right of passage for the protagonist. This premise echoes the stories of the films that inspired the director such as *Platoon*, where the character played by Charlie Sheen arrives in Vietnam as a nubile, average mid-American kid who will have his eyes open to the

horror of war, while question the morality of the conflict. *L'ennemi intime* and *Platoon* share many parallelisms that did not go unnoticed by many critics (Besson). Beyond the similarities in storyline and shooting style, these resemblances are a directorial commentary that Algeria was in many ways to France what Vietnam was to the Americans in terms of loss, trauma, military operations, cost and social impact at home and international image.

In *L'ennemi intime*, Terrien's eyes are quickly opened to the cruelty of the situation in 'Mazel', the remote outpost to which he is assigned. He takes control of a platoon but soon realizes that he has little control over anything. His principal duty is to defeat the rebel Slimane, who we never see throughout the film despite the constant search for him. Terrien's main assistant is the rugged staff sergeant Dougnac, who has little respect for soldiers with scant field experience. Dougnac has been hardened by the intense field experiences acquired over years of combat that date back to the war of Indochina. He is a combination of the two staff sergeants in the film *Platoon*: staff sergeant Barnes (Tom Berenger) and sergeant Elias (Willem Defoe). In *Platoon*, each sergeant represents one of the Manichean voices of good and evil. Both of them have one ear of nubile private Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen). Dougnac's character is more interesting, and it is the one who, like *Platoon's* Manichean voices, advances the narrative. John Stone observes in his commentary of the role of Barnes concerning Taylor:

the function of good and/or evil in the morality play is important but subordinate to the role of protagonist/hero. For while the bipolar tugs of good and evil may provide the cause and effect forces impelling the protagonist/hero forward, it is the protagonist/hero who draws the viewer or reader into the message and models the moral conversion to take place. (Stone 85)

Dougnac is more than subordinate to Terrien because his character arc begins as sergeant Barnes but ends much closer to the benevolent Elias. However, he is neither, never fully turning completely good or evil, he is a protagonist/hero in his own right, although a protagonist/antihero is a more accurate description of his role. This quality makes him more authentic and believable. It is the progression of his arc that opposes the regression of Terrien's, which make up the core of the narrative of this film.

During their combat (pacifying) sorties, Terrien witnesses the mistreatment and execution of civilians and the torture of prisoners. The military unit, in an ironic twist of fate, adopts a local boy who has lost his family. At the beginning of his assignment, Terrien still has an idealistic view of the French involvement in Algeria. He attempts to keep a high moral ground when facing the atrocities of war, while Dougnac takes the approach that the ends justify the means, regardless of the brutality of those means. At the end of the story, the fruitless attempts of pacification and the futile pursuit of the rebel Slimane lead to a change in both men. Terrien's values -and hence France's civilizing mission- are put in doubt while Dougnac gains respect for the morals of the lieutenant. In the end, both men are driven towards the edge of insanity, and Dougnac deserts the army, not being able to handle the mayhem of the conflict.

The film focuses primarily on French characters, particularly on the relationship between Terrien and Dougnac. But before we take a closer look at these two men, it is paramount to study some of the supporting characters. They operate as a lens into the complicated relationship between the French and the Algerians, who sympathized with the French presence in North Africa. The characters in this film expose one more complicated element of the war through the interrelations of the different groups involved than the previous works that looked into this matter. This element is the genuine and evolving commonality that exists between some of the

Algerians and the French. It is here that *L'ennemi intime* makes one of its most significant contributions through the portrayal of Harkis in small supporting roles. The three main Algerians portrayed in the film are Saïd, Rachid and the boy that Terrien rescues from death at the small village. They serve to elucidate the complicated relations between the French and the Algerians in a military context, but the relationships are explained beyond this setting.

Rachid is a young adult Harki devoted to the French cause. From the beginning, he provides intelligence, helping with translation and interrogation of the natives. His roots are deep in Kabyle. In one of the initial missions and the first for Terrien, the unit goes through the village of Taïda, where they encounter a group of Algerians who have been allegedly helping the insurgents. The French soldiers continually refer to them as Fells or Fellahs. This term is short for the also commonly used *Fellaghas*, a derisory nickname for Algerian independence fighters that also applied to Algerians in general. This term derives from a name used to designate North African bandits (Branche, "Torture of Terrorists" 549). It is ironic that the French, who have taken the land from the locals, refer to them as thieves and outlaws. Rachid is caught in the middle of this situation, questioning 'bandits' on behalf of those who have stolen their legitimacy on their land from them. In Taïda, Rachid is forceful with the locals, including his relatives. He vigorously questions an older man for information on the insurgents. His sister lives in the small town, and the Harki slaps his nephew around until Terrien puts an end to the abuse. The unit continues the rough treatment of the locals while searching for weapons and information; Rachid always eager to help. At the end of the visit, the soldiers take two men prisoners for questioning back to their camp.

Even though Rachid seems loyal, the French lieutenant has some reservations about the man's devotion since he looks so deeply rooted in this particular area of the region. Rachid plays



a similar role to that of the four Harki protagonists of *La trahison*. His character has some development during the film as the brutality of the French eventually pushes him over the edge. In the beginning, he looks like the Algerian version of the French resolve to subdue the region, even mirroring the zealousness of Dougnac. While they take a break in the first outing, the two men sit together while the camera frames them closely. Rachid looks like a reflection of the French sergeant in size, pose and expression. The mise-en-scene and the tone of their voices make them look like friends taking a work break together rather than soldiers on a mission. As the story develops, Rachid experiences serious trauma that eventually breaks him during the unit's second mission to Taïda. The soldiers find the town deserted. Upon further investigation, they realize that the FLN has savagely massacred all the villagers for having talked with the French during the previous mission to the town. Here Saïd discovers the body of his sister with her throat sliced. The experience fills him with ire towards the insurgents, but his mind is confused and his spirit broken.

The French commander decides to retaliate brutally towards Algerians who allegedly collaborate with the FLN. Once outside of the town, the French are attacked and are about to be overrun. The commander calls in a Napalm run that incinerates the FLN fighters. Rachid mysteriously disappears and is suspected of desertion. He is found on a later night, tortured within an inch of his life, tied with barbwire to a metal obstacle in the middle of the road that Terrien's convoy is following. Dougnac comes close to him, whispers something in the dying man's ear and, to Terrien's surprise, mercifully puts him out of his misery with one gunshot. Saïd states: "*pauvre Rachid, il ne savait plus dans quel camp il était*"<sup>41</sup> (Siri 2006). Rachid exemplifies the complicated position of the post-WWII generation who had grown up Algerian-

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<sup>41</sup> "poor Rachid, he did not even know any more in which side he was" – translation by me.

French, expecting to maintain the status quo with France while hoping their service would eventually be rewarded. Many of them would have their initial naïveté wiped away by the harsh reality of war. *L'ennemi intime* paints how complicated it was to pick a side much better than the previous films through ambiguity because there is no determinate good vs. evil when closely looking at the soldiers. Instead the movie shows two sides with valid points when it comes to personal responsibility and allegiance. It does not defend colonialism nor exalt the pretentious 'civilizing mission' of France but considers that men with good intentions idealistically fight for what they consider to be their duty and their country. They do this even when the cause may be erroneous or morally questionable, and they become victims of this involvement.

The moral dilemma exemplified through Rachid is personalized in equally poignant fashion through the character of Saïd but from a different perspective. Saïd is an old *indigène* soldier who has much in common with the four protagonists of Bouchareb's WWII film. Like those *indigènes*, Saïd fought in WWII to liberate France but continued his service with the armed forces after the war. He proudly displays a scar received in the battle of Monte Casino. It runs the complete width of his chest. He has fought and bled for France and consequently feels committed to the French cause. As the narrative continues, Saïd turns out to be surprisingly cowardly for a man with such a long history of military service. He tends to be the first to want to run during combat or avoid confrontation altogether. Even though he has gained a measure of respect from the French officers and soldiers, he stands below Rachid in the eyes of Dougnac due to his lack of prowess in combat. Saïd is the embodiment of what the French power would intend the Algerians to be: a domesticated and servile man ready to obey his colonial Masters. Despite standing a step below the white French citizens, he will serve as long as he benefits in some way. He is not ambitious and will follow orders as long as his life is not in absolute danger.

During one of the ambushes later in the story, the Harkis lose a vital machine gun that tumbles downhill. Under heavy fire, they refuse to retrieve it although it is sorely needed. Through the hail of crossfire, Dougnac stands up and commands the men to recover the weapon. Rachid is reduced to tears in refusal. The sergeant fires upon him to force him to move. Dougnac could have acted in this fashion towards any of the soldiers, and yet he chooses to single Rachid out. The weakling Harki has given up his independence, and perhaps most of his identity, under the pressure of years of servitude. He is a coward, not just on the battlefield, but also concerning the preservation of his original cultural identity. The criticism of this man does not stem from his choice of camp; he would have been equally wrong to join the FLN under the same premises. The criticism is based upon the surrendering of his will. He personifies the opposite of the fight against the absurd that Camus had proposed in *La Peste*. Rachid is the anti-Dr. Rieux and his life becomes meaningless.

Ironically, Rachid criticizes Saïd upon his alleged desertion. He has harsh words for the missing Harki, stating that if he finds Saïd, he will shoot him. The story suggests we question which of the two men is better off with his choices. One may also question the real reasons behind the Harki's statement. Allegedly Rachid has betrayed them, but is not Saïd as much or more of a betrayer himself? Does he secretly, or even unconsciously, envy Rachid's courage to pursue his conscience, to go back on what may have been the incorrect allegiance from the beginning? There are few harder things than admitting one may have been wrong and then backtrack on an important decision. The narrative will allow the viewer to make his own mind on this.

The final secondary Algerian character of importance is Rashid's nephew, the boy rescued by Terrien from the Taïda massacre. His character may be mostly understood as a

stereotype, a metaphor for the young Algerian generation. The boy is in his early teens, and he is initially shown defiantly standing by his mother while the French interrogate the village. He doesn't seem scared and is visibly proud of a brother who has taken arms with the FLN. The boy survives the subsequent massacre by swimming inside a well and has spent all of his strength when Terrien discovers and saves him. The French officer takes him under his wing, and the one implausible proposition that the film makes is that the boy accompanies the men on their sorties. The violence of the French reveals his character. He looks initially subdued, but the story of the boy pivots during the Napalm run ordered by the French commander. After the fiery chemicals incinerate most of the FLN ambushers, Terrien's men survey the area. In this stomach-churning scene, the boy discovers the fuming corpse of his brother among all the calcined bodies. Like his two Algerian predecessors, he is caught between two worlds: a moribund French-dominated Algerian territory and a young, nascent Algerian republic. At this point in the narrative, the victor is still not clear. Some of the speeches and thoughts expressed diegetically and non-diegetically tend to point to the imminence of the French defeat. This imminence is not associated with military prowess, it is instead connected to the moral justification of each position (colonialism vs. independence). The film adequately points out the obvious with regards to colonialism. Its real strength comes from shedding light on the flaws of the operating procedures on both sides, and how the participants of both camps were victims of this war. It underscores that the side which achieves its political by fighting a morally defensible cause will eventually triumph over a tactically superior rival (Browne 80-81). The story of the rescued Algerian boy supports this argument.

The emotions of the young Algerian are torn between the hate he has for the FLN, who massacred his mother and the French occupation force that killed his brother. His rescue by a

French officer exacerbates his inner conflict after the youth's cousin had physically hurt him. Initially, he develops some respect for Terrien, but it begins to erode as the lieutenant's character deteriorates under the pressure of the war. Towards the end of the film, the boy disappears, and in one of the final scenes, it is he, now joined to the FLN, who shoots Terrien dead. This scene had been running through Terrien's mind as a sort of recurring déjà-vu throughout the story. The film utilizes the device of the repeating shot viewed as if through the eyes of the lieutenant to foreshadow his demise. In that inserted repeating sequence, Terrien sees a blurry group of FLN fighters nearing him; the blurriness is a clue of the life leaving the officer's body. When the real scene takes place, the lieutenant is mortally wounded, and the enemies get close enough to be in focus. Terrien realizes the youth leads his executors, his face transformed almost in that of a man, his eyes mixing harshness and sadness. The lieutenant smiles at the Algerian and then exhales for the last time.

The boy's transformation has been driven by people, but also by heartbreak and hate. His growth explains that no pacific resolution was ever possible between the two fighting groups: "Total war was the only way to achieve total independence" (Browne 87). Too much abuse could only give birth to a new nation through violence. This argument echoes some of the ideas that Fanon had on this topic concerning the need for a violent separation, as cited in earlier chapters. Concerning an independence war, and the need of the colonized to match the violence of the colonizer, Fanon did have a point. But his argument cannot be taken without considering the casualties that this approach causes and the cost that it will exact before having a chance of achieving success. Some of his most important ideas on the Algerian struggle may be summed up as such:

Mobilization of the will of the people is the guiding priority of what we might call his 'political psychology'. It integrates his strategic defense of 'terror' with his affirmation of a fully and concretely 'universal humanism'. It connects his French republican inheritance and his anti-colonial internationalism. Mobilized and united, the indomitable will of the people explains the triumph of the Algerian revolution. (Hallward 105)

Fanon had advocated that the new Algerian nation would be born of suffering, violence and mixed loyalties because a century and a half of occupation could not be erased in six years, not when the price that has been paid to achieve it is so elevated. However, it is important to underline that Fanon did not advocate violence as payback, but as a cleansing and necessary process. Upon reading Fanon, Kebede remarks:

Violence here does not signify revenge any more than it signifies a natural disposition. However, because we just saw that it had become indiscriminate to the point of being unleashed against Africans, this deposited violence will consume the colonized unless it is provided with the appropriate outlet. Hence, the cathartic value of the violence against the colonizer: It purges the colonized of the aggressiveness that is eating them. Because it steers the internalized violence toward the real culprit, it emerges as the right remedy to a situation that violence itself created. It is a cure, a therapy. (Kebede 550-551)

These remarks apply directly to the three Algerian secondary characters of this film. Through these three supporting roles the Other and the violence that comes upon the French -through fighting with the rebels and by their hand- is examined. But *L'ennemi intime* proposes to look at this as shared alterity, a violent reaction caused by the unbalanced power dynamics of two groups who had a lot in common, but who decided to dwell in their differences until they could not tolerate the presence of the other. The film does focus more on the effects of the war on the

French, but it was impossible to grasp a good understanding of it without accounting for the Other, which is why these past three supporting roles were so vital to the film. Their fate shares some commonality to that of the two French protagonists, thus creating an inseparable link to the negative consequences of the French-Algerian fratricide.

Lieutenant Terrien and Sergeant Dougnac are better understood when seen in context with their Algerian counterparts. At least partially, *L'ennemi intime* focuses more on the French side than the FLN or the Algerian population because the French brought the war to the country, and in the time in which it premiered, some of them were ready to review their role and admit their culpability. The obstinate French refusal to acknowledge the Algerians as equals is one of the principal reasons for the human and economic cost of the 'Pacifying Mission'. The movie establishes that this refusal was just as costly, from a traumatic point of view to the French who fought there.

The trauma suffered by the combatants trapped them in suffering limbo, in a painful heterochrony, as explained by Becket, Bagguley and Campbell, when they say that Foucault "blends these two concepts (heterotopy and heterochrony) in his discussion of heterotopia to describe spaces that are connected to the rest of space, and yet are somehow at variance with it. They are outside of known space and disruptive of conventional time" (Becket et al. 172)<sup>42</sup>. Those trapped in this time and space break had a difficult time escaping this non-Place, which disturbed the trajectory of their lives greatly. This trauma extends from the individuals who

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<sup>42</sup> A heterochrony is one of the concepts introduced by Foucault in his study of heterotopias. Angharad et al. further explain the effects of these spaces in these terms: "allowing for social movement activity which is at variance with, or outside of, known space (heterotopic) and disruptive of conventional time (heterochronic)" (Becket et al 177). The pacifying mission in which these soldiers take place represents a break in their social structure. It is a disruption of the timeline that their life would have followed if they had not been involved in the war. Their time of military service constitutes a parenthesis in the discourse of their existence; it takes place in alternative narrative than the one their lives were following until they enlisted or were drafted for Algerian service.

fought in Algeria to the French nation as a whole, as the films of the fifties and sixties on this topic emphasized. And so, as in the past films, what is portrayed as a matter of individual trauma can be studied as a stereotype for a larger malaise. This condition affected, if not all of the French population, at the very least anybody who had any involvement with the war, especially since the consequences of this involvement are still present today at a societal and individual level.

Lieutenant Terrien appears as the lead character, but Sergeant Dougnac's role is just as important and the film has co-protagonists. The end credits prove this argument by listing the names side by side instead of consequently. The characters strongly comment and complement each other's position and need to be analyzed concurrently. Furthermore, both protagonists follow similar story arcs but heading in opposite directions. Using two complementary protagonists is an interesting device shared with *Mon colonel*. The difference is the space between them. In French, *espace* (the word for space) is used as much in terms of time as it is in terms of physical place. In the present film, the space between Terrien and Dougnac is extremely compressed, so that they share both physical space and time. On the contrary, Rossi and Galois do not share the same time nor the same physical locations. Despite those differences, both pairs of protagonists can be seen as two sides of the same coin, with the story arch of one complementing that of the other. Due to the editing of *Mon colonel*, that *espace* is compressed in a way where Rossi and Galois share the space almost as closely as Terrien and Dougnac, a dialogue between the present and the past. In *L'ennemi intime* that dialogue happens in real time, and the increase of the immediacy of the two characters heightens the sense of urgency of having this dialogue between the past and the present. This urgency is the reason why the progression



and regression of the lieutenant and the sergeant need to be continuously compared as the film narrative advances.

Lieutenant Terrien follows the stereotype of the nubile young officer who is about to have his eyes opened by the harsh experiences of the war. This stereotype is used in the American films that inspired the storyline for *L'ennemi intime* as well as *Mon colonel*. By contrast, Sergeant Dougnac is the already seasoned and mostly corrupted veteran who has seen it all and. At the beginning of the film, he appears almost completely desensitized by his war experiences as a fighter, victim, and victimizer. The development of Terrien's character follows a different trajectory from that of previously studied Lieutenant (Rossi). Instead of coming of age, Terrien becomes partially spoiled by the war. By the time of his death, he is transforming into Dougnac rather than Rossi. As the storyline advances, Terrien changes from the man who stops the abuse perpetrated by soldiers to one who condones and even participates, in the torturing of prisoners.

The film illustrates that no person is righteous enough not to become corrupted by the atrocities of war. It also suggests that no one is too spoiled to prevent him or her from returning to a more hopeful path. Sergeant Dougnac characterizes this argument. In the end, he survives, narrates the conclusion of the story, and becomes the voice of conscience through a short but poignant non-diegetic monologue. Perhaps the picture's best attribute is that it does not make absolutist points through caricatured characters. At the outset of the narrative, Dougnac and Terrien look like the stereotypes of the innocent stand-up outsider and the seasoned-corrupted-beyond-repair veteran. And yet, as the story develops, both adopt attitudes from his counterpart. Terrien discovers the dark side of the war, and the one within himself, but renews the soul of

Dougnac with his idealism. Terrien enables Dougnac to re-experience the atrocity of war, to become re-sensitized to its horrors fissures his hardened protective outer shell.

On the other hand, Terrien descends to hell, but his journey does not quite make it through all proverbial nine circles. Even though his moral compass cracks, it is not completely broken. The suffering brought by his moral deterioration is an indication that his conscience endures. It allows him to experience sorrow and remorse and recognize right and wrong). This recognition is evident during his home Christmas leave. In France, he is not able to face his family due to the guilt he feels about the incidents in which he has participated. Another proof is his rescue of the young Algerian boy, and ultimately the revival of Dougnac's morality.

The commentary made through Terrien goes beyond the simplistic possibility of the fall of a good man. Instead, the Lieutenant personifies the death of an idealistic approach to war and an apologetic evaluation of colonialism. This apologetic revisionism persists in France today, exemplified by those who insist on viewing the civilizing mission in a positive light. As evidence of this type of pushback, Bennington cites the enactment of a law in 2005 to educate French youth on the benefits of colonialism:

the 'law of the 23rd of February' was passed, whose 4th clause stipulated that school curricula would recognize 'the positive role of the French presence overseas, particularly in North Africa'. Intense opposition ensured this was eventually removed, but not until 2006 following extensive debate and diplomatic embarrassment. (Bennington 1162)

The death of Terrien echoes this debate and explains the reasons for the international embarrassment cited by Bennington. It is a result of confronting, in the flesh, the real-life consequences of living by the principles of colonialism and oppression. These negative consequences are not exclusively destructive to the oppressed. They extend to the enforcers of

this subjugation who have to enforce colonialism violently at the front lines. The complexity of these consequences is only hinted despite its expository illustration of Terrien's demise. The film barely cracks the door of the depth of the tragedy. The troubles of a dead soldier are over on the battlefield, but the consequences of his death will last for long beyond that space. In the case of this story, the lieutenant leaves a widow with an orphan back in the Continent. How will this boy grow up? What kind of feelings will he have towards Algeria and its inhabitants, or French citizens of Algerian descent? How will this future adult react towards them? He may become an urban, Continental version of the boy Terrien saved from the well from an emotional standpoint.

The film ponders the consequences of the war on the youth, the next generation, explicitly through Rachid's nephew, and implicitly through Terrien's son. How will this boy feel, when he matures, about his government and his nation? Even though Terrien's baby will not be shown but briefly towards the end of the picture, he is introduced to the viewer through a photograph. His presence is diegetically projected through the increasing collection of drawings that the lieutenant displays in his barracks. The father even carries one with his person at all times. These drawings are vital to the survival of Terrien's conscience, so their importance should not be disregarded. They keep him linked to the Place from where he comes, and more importantly, to the ideology that was the foundation of that world. The plight of Terrien's wife should not be overlooked either. She may have to worry about employment, income and new family dynamics among other things. The consequences of the war are far-reaching and nothing but complicated.

The lieutenants in 21<sup>st</sup>-century French war films play the most significant roles concerning the representation of the relationship between France and its colonial subjects. They are literally, as their title suggests, the holders of the place (*lieu* – place, *tenant* – holder,

representative). They represent the authority of the higher military and civilian officers and keep, guard and defend the spaces that the French government is attempting to control through military might. In each film, they are the ones who develop a better understanding of the Algerians and have much more empathy for their struggle. In *La trahison*, it is the lieutenant who trusts the Harkis even though they are allegedly plotting to take his life. In *Mon colonel*, it is Rossi who refuses to go along the colonel's brutal methods, and who is willing to take into consideration the human rights of the Algerians. Terrien is not the exception to this trend, at least for most of the film. Despite becoming spoiled, much of his actions still emanate from his inner moral fiber, one that pushes him to save an Algerian boy and to oppose military *barbarie* initially. The lieutenants are the tragic heroes that risk their lives to maintain order through their sympathy for the oppressed. They also serve as a link between other officers and the lower-ranked soldiers, such as privates and sergeants. The most interesting dynamic usually takes place between the sergeants and the lieutenants. Although these relationships tend to be complicated, they serve as the link between the army and its leadership.

The sergeants are just as important as the lieutenants, providing the necessary counterargument to the ideals of the typically less experienced and better-educated officers. The sergeants tend to have extensive field experience that forces them to take a more desensitized approach to war. Most of the films where these characters appear do make a point of showing some of their humanity to complement their hard personas. Aside from Dougnac, the character of Martinez in *Indigènes* displays some of these characteristics. He treats the Harkis harshly, but he also watches over them, trains them and stands up for them when talking to his superior officers. He secretly takes a liking to the men and empathizes with them when he notices the sacrifices that they are willing to make for a motherland who denies them the same rights enjoyed by the

white French servicemen. Among the sergeants portrayed in these films, Dougnac has a preeminent role, even more than Martinez did.

Dougnac is the one sergeant who is a protagonist. He is a protagonist due to his importance as an agent of action in the film and based on his screen time, which he shares almost equally with lieutenant Terrien. *L'ennemi intime* studies Terrien's demise but devotes time to develop the story arc of Dougnac as a countermeasure to the deterioration of the life of the lieutenant. Dougnac is more than one side of the lieutenant's conscience. A comparison to *Platoon* is relevant here to better understand the role of the protagonists, along with the moral lessons the directors of both works attempt to teach through them. In Oliver Stone's film, the conscience of newcomer private Christ Taylor -the protagonist played by Charlie Sheen- is developed through the influence of Sergeants Elias and Barnes, along with the main narrative of the film. Each sergeant exposes a different side of the morality of the main character and arguments for the moral defensibility of the war in general. But not even the combined screen time nor the actions of the two proverbial angel and devil pairing on the protagonist's shoulder matches those of Christ Taylor. The same can be ascertained about the role of Martinez in *Indigènes*.

On the contrary, in *L'ennemi intime*, Dougnac is an equal counterpart to Terrien based on the parameters of screen time and advancement of the story. But a more important parameter, one we have already stressed, is that his character has an equally important personality development as Terrien's. The film begins by painting Dougnac as a French version of the rugged and nearly heartless Barnes, but by the end, he is more similar to the righteous and morally conscious Elias. His character is more believable than either American characterization

because he never fully reaches either side of the Manichean spectrum, and this characterization suits more closely the real human beings who fought in the Algerian war context.

The narrative slowly reveals the progression of Dougnac and the revival of his nearly dormant conscience. At the outset, the viewer realizes that he is responsible for the friendly fire debacle that led to the killing of the previous lieutenant. He is unhappy that he has to deal with a new and inexperienced idealistic officer. Nevertheless, the film begins to show that he does have a meaningful relationship with many of his men, including the Harkis. The respect he has for his men stems from their experience and sacrifice for country rather than their ethnic provenance. The attribute of judging a soldier based on his character rather than his ethnicity sets him apart from most of the French military and the French population of Algeria who favored colonialism. This trait also gives him important commonality with Terrien, more than either man is originally willing to recognize, although significant differences are still visible.

In the beginning, Dougnac is willing to carry out torture with impunity, a practice that is completely justifiable in his mind. But, as the narrative progresses, the story reveals a man tortured, both emotionally and physically, by the acts he has committed and the man he has become. One a night scene in the middle of the narrative, Terrien discovers Dougnac self-harming. Terrien barely saves the sergeant from shooting himself in the head. Later, Dougnac avoids partaking of the Christmas dinner with the rest of the unit. He is hard with the men or emotional, but in either instance, he does so with equanimity. His judgments are based on the merit and behavior of each soldier. At the end, Dougnac deserts the army. His conscience, though not fully restored, is developed enough to prompt him to leave the conflict, not so much because it is a losing proposition, but because he finds the inhumanity of the confrontation increasingly unbearable. He is the character who reminds the audience of Terrien's moral

disintegration. Simultaneously, he implicitly exposes his partial moral reintegration despite committing what could be seen as an act of cowardice. On the contrary, the movie argues that deserting is rather the taking of a stance against an amoral war, an act of conscientious objection.

Lastly, the film shows that Dougnac is just as much a victim as is Terrien, even though he acts quite a bit more a victimizer as well. More than a character with a parallel trajectory to the Lieutenant, Dougnac's story completes it. The stories of both men may be construed as a 'before and after' piece of a full tale of the war. They are two equal parts of a story arc: Terrien furnishes the first half of the story and Dougnac the second. Their treatment of others is quite similar in attitude since they both tend to treat their fellow men, Algerians and French, based on their actions and not on their ethnicity. Dougnac's character is coming from the (non-)place where Terrien is heading. While one is developing a dislike and mistrust for the locals, the other is rediscovers their humanity and his own. At the beginning of the story, Dougnac is morally dead, and his revival occurs throughout the whole of the narrative. Notably, the scene where he is torturing himself with electricity is a metaphor for the defibrillation of his soul. The key argument made by his character is that when he regains full function of his spirit, and at least a partial resurrection of his morality, he can no longer tolerate his involvement in an immoral war. In the final scene of the film, he surreptitiously boards the bus on his way out of Kabyle. He does not feel any anger as he literally and figuratively leaves the conflict behind. It is the only time when any of the characters experiences a measure of peace. In the scene, the bus takes a road that comes out of the mountains. Although the viewer has seen many mountainous paths, this one is different. The terrain is relatively flat, and the road is paved. Natives walk, going about their daily business. A measure of peace and relief is palpable. Although the conflict will never leave his permanently scarred soul, the war is behind Dougnac.

## Conclusion

By concentrating heavily in Algerian spaces and establishing them as the primary setting of the narrative, the picture asserts Algeria as a country in its own right. It proposes that the French are effectively foreigners to a space that is a Place independently of the value that may be assigned to it by these outsiders. It is the French who are transitory. This viewpoint creates a problem with the proposition that the French and the Algerians are, or could ever be, equal. Terrien champions this framework of equality based on French republic idealism at the beginning of the film, but he learns it is unattainable in the political framework of Algeria. This unattainability is especially true in light of the principle of universalism, where the republic is supposed to be blind to differences.

In a discussion of spaces, where Places and non-Places oppose each other, and where heterotopias destroy or transform the identity of people who traverse them, universalism and equality are a utopia. They are an unattainable, imaginary space that does not exist but in the imagination of a French republicanism that excludes its colonial subjects from it. Even Terrien and Dougnac continue to see the natives as ‘them’, as a separate group. Terrien may not be proposing universalism at all, but mere mutual acceptance of two groups who are very aware of their differences. The demise of Terrien originates from his realization of the failure of this idealism. Cohabitation may be a much more realistic approach than universalism then and now, but it was never attempted in a manner in which the *colonisés* could profit from it on an equal basis as the *colons*.

The film underlines the notion of distance to constantly create separation between what is French and what is Algerian. For example, the narrative is a sequence of military sorties. Brief



pauses in which the French have a chance to exact information from captive natives, and also to recover from losses and the casualties from which they constantly suffer, interject the sorties. The men are always heading somewhere, especially as they chase the ever-elusive Slimane. For the start of almost every mission, Siri opts for aerial shots and long shots where the actors look small, lost in a vast, inhospitable terrain. These takes visually highlighting the insignificance of the men and the impossibility of the task at hand. This viewpoint allows the spectator to understand how foreign French soldiers truly are to the landscape, thus creating a separation of French spaces and what has remained native Algerian in spite of the efforts to conquer and control it. This approach is emphasized by other directing, like the long establishing shot of the French outpost that makes it look out of place, particularly by the repeated longshot filmed as if through binocular lenses.

The binocular longshots are of particular importance for what can be inferred through them. First, they do contribute to the sense of distance and detachment from the French regarding Algeria, and in particular with any North African space that is not an artificially created French Place. They symbolize the failed attempt to gain knowledge and control of the most remote spaces, which in *L'ennemi intime* signify the unconquered Algerian land and peoples. The unconquered spaces are as much a character as the elusive Slimane, but while he is tacit, the spaces are omnipresent. Slimane and Kabyle are one, but because the French fail to grasp this concept, they unsuccessfully search for something, someone, who was in front of them the whole time. The longshots also speak of the limited and myopic understanding that the French had of these spaces and peoples that contributed to their failed attempt to fully incorporate them in the French Republic even though they form part of the French Empire, for those who advocated segregation as much as for those who advocated universalism. Success is unattainable when a

nation approaches the incorporation of a large group of people without a consensus of strategy. Universalism is humanly impractical because French society is very conscious of cultural differences, while colonialism is abusive and exploitative and will inevitably lead to rejection and revolt. The binoculars are a metaphor for these two limited viewpoints. They stand side by side while allowing an enhanced view of a particular objective, while painfully ignoring the background view that would allow the viewer an understanding of the bigger picture of the spaces and people in question.

By taking us deeper into the Algerian space, the film virtually eliminates France as a Place in the anthropological sense that Augé gives to places. Augé categorizes Places as spaces “of identity, of relation and of history” (Augé 52), and as far as the Algerians are concerned in the narrative of the film, Kabyle is a Place, their Place. In opposition, the French continue to view Kabyle as what in previous films was understood as a non-Place -a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity (Augé 77-78)-. Algeria, but Kabyle in particular, remains a space incomprehensible and out of reach to the French.

The nearly exclusive focus on Algerian spaces identifies the French foreigners as an alleged extension of their own country. The film draws an irreconcilable physical, political and cultural demarcation line between them and the Algerians. It highlights the differences between French and Algerian spaces, denying the effectiveness of a universalist approach, and gives Algeria inherent independent value by representing it as a Place. France is never doubted as a Place in any film (country, nation, homeland), but the legitimacy of Algeria is always in doubt at the outset of each one. This questioned legitimacy is at the core of the conflict. Siri’s film validates Algerian spaces by placing them as equal in importance to the unrepresented French spaces that are ironically already taken as legitimate Places by the film’s French narrative

(French actors playing French characters, in a film with dialogue almost exclusively spoken in French, in spite of being located in Africa). Despite spending less than five minutes in Terrien's home country, *L'ennemi intime* does not ever question the legitimacy of France as a nation. Instead, it argues in favor of Algerian legitimacy and independence by refusing to incorporate it in a universalist socio-political discourse as three departments of mainland France and proposes it should be viewed with equal status.

In conclusion, *L'ennemi intime* and *Mon colonel* are two films that focus on the French recognition of guilt concerning their colonial policies and the war in Algeria. The films shed light on some of the abuses committed by the military towards the North Africans, and both go beyond simplistic shaming. They encourage the acceptance of responsibility as a step to make amends. Even though the films revolve around French characters, the small Algerian roles are important. The reason for focusing on France stems from the need to reexamine French involvement in the war, but more importantly French attitudes towards the former colonial populations. They also recognize French Algerians as equal Others. This recognition is vital to change the colonial construction of the Other that has been perpetuated for a century and a half. How do the films accomplish this? First, the films show Algerians as human as valuable as that of the French, capable of the same tenacity to fight for what is theirs. This equality has to come before recognition of guilt and dialogue because this conversation cannot produce real change unless the exchange takes place between equal parties.

The recognition of guilt is more than a simplistic *Mea Culpa*. It is a validation of the suffering exerted on a group of people that, if kept unsaid, will remain irreparable. The recognition is but a first step, but it is imperative because present-day Algerians and French-born citizens of Algerian descent continue to fight a different version of this war. Judging by attitudes

from large groups of the population, such as supporters of the Front National, the French citizens of Algerian descent are still considered immigrants rather than French<sup>43</sup> (even though they have more ties to France and only loose ties to the lands of their predecessors, mostly through family relations). They face an uphill battle in comparison to white French citizens when they compete for opportunities in employment and education<sup>44</sup>. In literal terms, they still mostly live in the periphery of French society geographically and socially.

The films recognize that Algerians are different than the French but not of lesser value. The portrayal of torture and other injustices is meant to cause feelings of shame, but also of sympathy towards the victims. They try to recognize their humanity through the portrayal of suffering, which tends to stir the viewer towards feelings of empathy. The films focus much

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<sup>43</sup> In previous chapters we showed how French-born North Africans are called 'immigrant's even though they have been born and raised in France. Simon explains that the French *Code de la nationalité* (nationality code) further complicates their status because "not all foreigners are actual immigrants, as the French-born children of immigrants are considered to be foreigners until they come of age, except in a few specific cases" (Simon 1098). In other words, the French tend to judge based on physical appearance, ethnicity and culture who is French and who is not. This is highly prejudicial since they group those who are third-generation French with people who are not born in France based on appearance. Singer explains the problem in these words: "I must explain two terms: "second generation" and the Beurs. Unlike in the States, the expression first- or second-generation is rather new here and used very loosely. If you called Poniowski and are a prince, yours is a good old French name. If you are a minister, like Socialist Pierre Beregovey or the conservative Lionel Stoleru, you are considered French, even if your parents happen to come from Eastern Europe. If you are good with a tennis racket, like Yannick Noah, or at kicking a soccer ball, like superstar Michel Platini, you're as French as a baguette or Camembert cheese. You are "second generation" and a problem only if you are plain Ben Mohammed, born on French soil but the son of an Algerian worker. And because you are likely to live in a suburban slum, where unemployment is high and tensions are real, you are more of a problem. You are a Beur" (Singer 280). A different study confirms Singer's words: "In 1993, 67 percent of French respondents agreed that something must be done about immigrants because France risks losing her national identity. In the same poll, 76 percent of respondents agreed that immigrants do the work Frenchmen refuse to do. France, like most other countries, has its "more" or "less" favored immigrants and, like other countries, immigrants who are most like the natives are viewed more positively than immigrants who have different ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds. Northern Europeans are the most liked of the immigrant communities, and the Turks, North Africans, Persians and Black Africans are the least liked" (Simon and Lynch 462). What these studies show is that France tends to welcome immigrant workers who work on jobs the French are not willing to do but oppose immigrants who threaten to change or destroy what the French of European origin perceive as their true national identity.

<sup>44</sup> For a detailed examination of discrimination supported by data, please consult the study by Silberman, Alba and Fournier, specifically pp. 17-24.

more on the French role played in the Algerian tragedy with the purpose of assigning the lion's share of the responsibility of the tragedy of war on them.

Second, the films zoom in on the plight of the French Lieutenants and other military personnel during the war, showing how they suffered equally as victimizers and victims. However, the war and all the French casualties are suffering that the French inevitably brought upon themselves. Kedebe explains it in these words: "At this stage, it is essential to understand that the violence of the colonized is only an outcome of the violence of the colonizer" (Kedebe 550). The men who are depicted as having a moral stance and a conscience, those who suffer due to the involvement of the war, are in their majority low ranking officers and regular servicemen. They are the ones who fight, torture, shoot and kill the natives, but they also receive gunfire, are tortured, suffer and die. The friendly fire casualties in *L'ennemi intime* and the disappearance of Rossi in *Mon colonel* prove that these soldiers suffer as much at the hands of the FLN as from the hands of their military.

Through these portrayals the films explain that the French soldiers may have more in common with the Algerian insurgents than with the French military command or with French governmental officials. Military films in the past have exposed this commonality. The example that relates best to this argument can be found in *La grande illusion* (Renoir 1937), which takes place in WWI. Renoir portrays the relationship between French prisoners and the Germans who hold them in a fortress. Through their interactions, the high-ranking officers from both armies find that they may have more in common with their French counterparts than with their low-class German foot soldiers. They share social status, education, mannerisms and even the same way of thinking. In the end, the aristocratic French Captain de Boldieu chooses to side for his men and death, instead of maintaining loyalty to the commander of the prison, Captain von Rauffenstein.

However, the narrative makes a case for social class affinity that transcends across cultures and borders. Von Rauffenstein understands de Boldieu and respects his decision because both also share a high sense of duty towards their men and their nation. They are equal even in disagreeing with each other.

*L'ennemi intime* and *Mon colonel* support this argument. This argument is important because, while the pictures recognize the cultural differences parties at war, they also emphasize that they are equally human. They advocate not for sameness, but real equality in the context of diversity. The films argue that even if universalism may be unattainable, an approach of accepting the humanity and the diversity of citizens of different backgrounds is an achievable goal worthy of pursuit. Before this acceptance may be pursued, a recognition of the erroneous viewpoints and actions of colonialism requires admission and validation by the guilty parties to open a dialogue in hopes for a better resolution. The films act as the first answer from the French viewpoint in this conversation.

## Chapter 5

### *L'armée du crime (2009)*

#### **Smaller groups of immigrants join the conversation of contribution to the French Republic through war film**

##### **Introduction**

The first wave of 21<sup>st</sup>-century war films in France addressed the topic of the contribution of minorities to the French Republic. Through the filters of Places and inter-ethnic relations, this chapter examines the complex association of immigrants of (mostly) European nations to France. This examination gages whether smaller European minorities suffer from discrimination, and to which extent when compared to what our previous films many times refer to '*Arabes*' in the French Republic, in spite of other marked social and religious differences that these minorities have that set them apart from mainstream white and Catholic France.

Through film, the French majority responded to these demands by an admission of culpability, although other social and political responses opposed this viewpoint. Sections of the French population refuse to acknowledge the disadvantages faced by minorities, and some have gone as far as stating that the recognition of crimes perpetrated against minorities and the emphasis given to their disadvantages are damaging to the white French population who are suffering from neglect as a result of the interest in discrimination towards 'immigrants'. Léonard cites two philosophers who championed this cause right at the time of the riots of 2005:

In 2005, French philosophers Pierre-André Taguieff and Alain Finkielkraut signed a call/petition against what they call an "anti-Whites racism," denouncing the shift of

French society toward multiculturalism and communitarianism. Denouncing anti-whites aggressions, Taguieff and Finkielkraut said that “we talked about David, we talked about Kader, but who talks about Sébastien?” The names used by the petitioners are supposed to “sound” Jewish, Arabic, and French, their claim being that the aggressions happened because the victims were French, but that the press doesn’t mention them because they are French. (Leonard 80)

This opinion represents the sentiments of a segment of the European French majority. This segment has not engaged the conversation through film. Instead, it is using political parties such as the Front National and intellectual discussions led by philosophers such as Taguieff and Finkielkraut. Those sorts of opinions represent the type of socio-cultural resistance that the original films are addressing, along with the group that is most resistant to change. Through such rhetoric it appears that more than resisting change this group may be categorically rejecting it.

Most of the films of this first wave centered on the topic of the Algerian war and the relationship of North African minorities in France beginning at the time of World War II. We have analyzed four of the principal examples of this period. One of the principal consequences of the discussion undertaken between North African minorities and the majority of European descent was to open the door for a deeper exploration of the roles of other minorities in the Hexagon. People with origins in the Maghreb are the largest and arguably the most visible group, but the diversity of France expands much further.

Migration from North African countries replaced migration from European countries as the most significant with the progression of the 20th century. This trend continues today. Hyppolite D’Albis led a study that analyzed recent immigration based on residence permit granting and found the following:



The nationalities of migrants changed considerably over the period 1998-2012. Nationals of African countries remained a large majority, accounting for 57% of all entries in 2013, but their share decreased steadily after a high of 63.3% in 2003. Among African nationals, those from the Maghreb were the biggest group. (D'Albis et al 473)

In contrast, permits granted to immigrants from European countries accounted for only 6.2% of the total entries. (D'Albis et al 474). Other sizeable minorities were already settling in France prior to the arrival of North Africans in large numbers. In the post WWII era most of the interest, positive and negative, turned to the challenges posed by these waves of immigration. The first four films studied reflect this interest. After the conversation between them and the majority was successfully started, some of the focus shifted to examining the role of smaller minorities with origins in other European countries whose voices have also been ignored through movies such as *L'armée du crime* (Guédiguain 2009). This film shows the nuances in the discrimination that smaller groups of immigrants suffered when compared to the ones endured by the larger, newer group of North African origin. The movie singles out the particular challenges lived by minorities that immigrated from other parts of Europe in smaller numbers. It concentrates on the challenges endured by them prior and during WWII.

This chapter is a chronological continuation of the analysis of the films. The first two chapters dealt with the study of relationships and spaces from the viewpoint of North African minorities, and chapters 3 and 4 studied a response from the majority to the statements made in the first two chapters. Chapters 5 and 6 study the continuation of this conversation to illustrate the thematic evolution of their production. Chapter 5 focuses on *L'armée du crime* and Chapter 6 on *Les hommes libres* (Ferroukhi 2011). We re-evaluate the use of spaces in these films because interestingly, the narratives bring us back to mainland France as if to bring the discussion

introspectively home. The differences in French and foreign spaces are more subtly marked, and porous liminality becomes apparent between the spaces. This liminality suggests that the whole of the hexagon may be seen as a large heterotopic space where the definition of what is traditionally French has become increasingly ambiguous. This ambiguity is the result of the interactions of so many different groups in spaces that the other films have constructed as traditionally French. The traditionally constructed French spaces are separate from those occupied by *immigrant* minorities. This ambiguity challenges that construction.

*L'armée du crime* is quite relevant not only as a continuation of the evolution of the war film in 21<sup>st</sup> century France, but also as an important addition to the particular topic of the *resistance*. Its importance dwells in the addition of the topic of minorities fighting in the *resistance* as opposed to films such as *L'armée des ombres* (Melville 1969) which focused on the accomplishments of the *resistance* by European French. Those first films tended to omit the Jewish experience of the Second World War, as Mihal Friedman explains:

We will also note that in the first Resistance films there is no mention of the genocide of the Jews. Indeed, only recently could French audiences learn from their films that among the underground fighters there were also Republican Spaniards, anti-fascist Italians, exiled Armenians, persecuted Jews.

(Friedman 51)

The film brings to the silver screen a dramatization of one of the best-known group of fighters of the resistance, who due to their Jewish and immigrant roots were forced to form a separate group from the Europeans. They also have waited much longer to be remembered and celebrated on par with their peers.

*L'armée du crime* illustrates that the difference in acceptance of immigrants and their descendants, who constitute French-born minority groups, is directly linked to perceived ethnic and religious differences. The difficulty of ascertaining this difference complicates the degree of acceptance into French society. Discrimination based on perceived ethnic and cultural differences shows that Universalism may be a utopia or, at best, a principle with a flawed application since the French prove time and again not to be color blind. When compared with the previous motion pictures, the six films in this dissertation show that, at least to some extent, French citizens are more likely to accept foreigners who resemble more closely the typical French majority of European descent than French citizens with more marked physical and social differences than the norm. The films also argue that religion may play as much of an exclusionary role as race.

Recent immigrants are viewed, when compared to long-established immigrants in France (even those of European provenance), as outsiders who do not quite fit into society, especially if they profess a different faith. When discussing pluralism in France, Safran observes that noted perceptive differences between the white majority and minorities with marked deviances from the norm have a much harder time being accepted or assimilated into the fabric of the Republic. Safran lists “the massive immigration of non-European immigrants who, because of their cultural, religious, and linguistic heterogeneity, could not be as easily assimilated as earlier French immigrants” (Safran 443) as one of the principal causes that undermine the ideal of France as a “culturally uniform society and a centralized state” (ibid). History teaches us that each group that arrives in France must undergo a social rite of passage before it is assimilated into society, if they ever do attain full acceptance. The film in this chapter shows that the

contribution of active involvement in the French resistance during WWII facilitates the claim of having paid that price for the immigrants who participated in this fighting.

### **Film Synopsis**

The film studied in this chapter is entitled *L'armée du crime* (Guédiguain 2009). It debuted at the Cannes Film Festival and is an action docudrama based on the real stories of WWII French *résistants* who were not of French origin. Instead, these fighters were immigrants of mostly Jewish background who came to France from other parts of Europe. Their reluctant leader is Missak Manouchian, an Armenian poet who came to France escaping the atrocities suffered by the Armenians at the hands of the Turks at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His circle of friends comprises people who inhabit the same neighborhood in one of Paris' central *arrondissements*. It is a rather diverse group, composed as cited both in the DVD jacket and as enunciated in the very first scene of the film as 'Jews, Poles, Hungarians, Romanians, Italians, Spaniards [and] Armenians'. Despite their different educational and social upbringings, they share the consideration of being recent *arrivés* to France. They are practically constrained to live in a sort of social *banlieue*, somewhat segregated from neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by European French, even though this *banlieue* is located within the city of Paris proper. The inhabitants of this space feel doubly oppressed by the locals and the invaders. They are persecuted by the French authorities and the Nazis. This is an added challenge to the difficulty of trying to find social acceptance and gain financial success in a new country. The nature of the allegiance of these immigrants to France varies greatly, from those who arrived as refugees to the ones who were born or raised in the Hexagon. Their hatred towards the Nazi occupiers is

uniform and forms an unbreakable bond between them that creates a common ground that only gets stronger as the narrative of the film advances.

The story is that of a diverse group of immigrants who become involved with the French resistance and the risks they take to ensure their survival and that of their adoptive new country. Some of the main young characters are very militant from the beginning, most notably among them Marcel Rayman (Robinson Stévenin, who played Lieutenant Rossi in *Mon Colonel*) and Thomas Elek (Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet). The protagonists upon whom most rely on for wisdom and leadership is a reluctant hero at the beginning. His name is Missak Manouchian (Simon Abkarian) and he is an Armenian poet detained with other Jews at the start of the story. His wife Mélinée (Virginie Ledoyen) visits him in prison and brings him food against everyone's counsel. Missak figures out with other prisoners that Jews are being deported and exterminated, but he manages to leave the camp. He rejoins his wife and, due to his detention experience, begins to support the resistance despite his original pacifist stand. He originally refuses to brandish a gun but still becomes the operational leader of a faction of minority *résistants*. Due to the extreme circumstances of the war, he reluctantly learns to shoot. Shortly after that, while accompanying some of the young fighters on a mission, he takes over the direction of the operation from the youths when things don't seem to work out; he throws a grenade at a passing Nazi patrol, killing most of them. The young fighters then shoot those who survive the blast. This mission amalgamates the group as they all prove they can work together, and that the men are ready to follow the warrior poet.

The rest of the film documents the risks that the different members of the faction undertake while they carry out hits against the Nazi occupiers. The Gestapo and the local police, who collaborate with the Germans, both persecute the band. Eventually, the antagonists capture

the *resistants* one by one; they incarcerate and torture them until none remain free. Finally, the band is imprisoned, judged and shot by collaborators who attempt to make an example of them as a warning of what will transpire to those who fight the authorities.

*L'armée du crime* is partly analyzed by comparing it to another film that covers the same topic, but with a much different approach, entitled *L'affiche rouge* (Frank Cassenti, 1976). The 'Army of crime' is not a fictitious name, but rather the moniker that was given by the Nazis to a real group of immigrants who fought in the resistance. Where *L'Armée du crime* seeks to narrate the story of this group, *L'affiche rouge* is instead an homage to the sacrifice of this band of fighters. *L'affiche rouge* is set up as a thirty-year commemoration of the passing of these men and one woman, in which a group of actors wants to organize a play to celebrate the life of these immigrant *resistants*. In an attempt for historical accuracy, they bring in first-hand witnesses of the events (such as old friends and relatives) who knew these fighters. These visitors shore up the knowledge of the actors and give their stamp of approval to the project. The film is documents of the development of the project and interjects it with two narratives. First, there is a film that portrays the capture of the band, as well as the propaganda organized by the Nazis to scare the public and turn them against the 'Army of crime'. The Germans photograph the members of the group. They attempt to make the prisoners look menacing by mostly choosing the foreigners of Jewish descent to make a red-colored poster in which their 'crimes' are matched with the face of each perpetrator. It is the Nazis who dub these fighters the '*Armée du crime*', while the *resistants* call themselves the 'army of freedom' or 'the army of liberation', labels with which the Resistance as a whole consistently identified.

These acted flashbacks transform the picture into a meta-film (a movie within a movie and about the creating process of this film), where the actors set a stage play. In this play, the

characters are portrayed in a more Italian tragi-comedic theater style to underline the tragic but heroic attributes of the martyrs. The setup of some of the scenes, such as the trial of the group, means to address the public directly. For example, during the interrogation of the elements of the insurgent group, the members are questioned and judged by authorities whose faces are filmed by a stationary camera. The public are mere spectators to their questions. In contrast, when the members of the group respond, the answers are directed in the film to the interrogators, but the shooting angle is different. The camera faces the respondents directly, as from the viewpoint of the interrogator. The answers look as if they are given directly to the theater audience because the camera visually includes the captors. The spectator feels more engaged, as an active recipient of the dialogue. Some of the theatrical performances have the same shooting style, where the cameras zoom into the performers and the diegetic public is overlooked in favor of the public watching the movie. Through well executed, basic editing choices and acting, combined with well-chosen urban setting, *L'armée du crime* reveals the underlying complications of struggling immigrants thrust into the chaos of WWII as they struggle to fit into French society.

The study of the interactions between the different protagonists, and between the protagonist and the antagonists, is at the center of the commentary of the nature of the relation between the immigrants and the French majority. The German occupiers complement the way in which the minorities viewed their relationship to the French majority. The Parisian spaces in which the film is set and shot underline the nature of this relationship as the immigrants use them for survival and attempt to claim them as their own. In the analysis, we will refer to the film by its original name: *L'armée du crime*. The actual group of *resistants* will be called 'The army of crime'.

This film had personal overtones for some of the members of the cast and crew. Guédiguian shares not only the same political tendencies as many of the protagonists but is also of Armenian origins (Plein de ciné No 43 2:20-2:54). The same applies to his principal actor, Simon Abkarian, who plays protagonist Missak Manouchian. Although it is difficult to definitively ascertain the political aims of a film, both actor and director did speak about their motivations for shooting this particular story in interviews. Guédiguian wanted to make a film with a visceral anti-racist message. He wants to call people to reject indifference and avoid non-involvement in important social issues. For Guédiguian, '*resister c'est une morale de vie*' (to resist is a morality of life) (Robert Guédiguian Interview 3: L'Armée du crime 1:50-3:20). The existentialist philosophy that inspired the director for the development of the narrative of *L'armée du crime* echoes the sentiments with which Camus endowed Dr. Rieux in *La Peste*. As mentioned in the discussion of *L'ennemi intime*, the protagonist of Camus' work faced the absurd inherent in human existence by realizing that his moral responsibility is to fight. To struggle against absurdity, to resist, is the only way to really live. Guédiguian shares this aim with the creative team of *L'ennemi intime*. Another common point that the cast and crew of *L'armée du crime* and Florent-Emilio Siri share is the necessity to educate through film.

Simon Abkarian was attracted to his part due to the experiences he and his characters have in common, which is typically not the case for him. Like his director, he shares the ancestry of the protagonist, and some of the idealized vision of France is common to all three. Abkarian explains that the film wanted to show that for many 'immigrants', (and he does use the word within quotation marks in the pejorative manner that it is used in this dissertation, referring to immigrants and their descendants), and for refugees, France is a beacon of humanism and the rights of man. He is aware of how much, in the present, many people still refer view immigrants



as an economic and social burden. Abkarian mentions that the idealized vision of France by immigrants existed in the past as much as it does now. The actor likes this link of past-and-present, because he proposes that the film speaks of the present generation of immigrants via a story set in the past. The actor also believes the film can be used to educate because it shows that immigrants are bearers of history as much as the French are, and that the different experiences that they bring can contribute to a thriving and progressive France (Simon Abkarian - *L'armée du crime* 2:04-4:00). Abkarian believes we all share the same humanity with different experiences that are beneficial to others.

Chris Millington shares the view that *L'armée du crime* is a particularly useful tool to illustrate the diversity of experiences lived in France during the occupation. Millington has used the film as part of history classes at Swansea University, although with some reservations. Some historians have pointed out inaccuracies that the movie has, arguing that the tone and the incidents portrayed in the narrative differ too much from the actual historical record. For example, we have no proof of acts of dissent within the group, like the one shown in a scene where one of the protagonists disobeys direct orders from the band leader and attacks some German soldiers on his own. The end credits of the movie do clarify that the director has taken some artistic liberties in order to portray his point of view of the story, as is common in filmmaking. But historical inaccuracy does not necessarily deprive the film of artistic nor didactic value. Despite a few shortcomings and inaccuracies, Millington still concludes: “Guédiguian’s film thus serves to remind viewers of the desperate sacrifices not only of the French but of the exiles and immigrants who had looked to it as a land of refuge” (Millington). It is up to each viewer to decide whether the goals set by some of the principal cast and crew

members were achieved. And, more importantly, to judge the quality and artistic value of the motion picture as a work that stands on its own.

### **Relationship Analysis**

*L'armée du crime* presents some interesting challenges in the type of analysis when compared to the patterns followed in all the previous work for one reason in particular: the narrative does not have an antagonist in a principal role. The film is based on an ensemble cast, where different characters have comparable importance and screen time and different stories share relevance. This type of cast complicates pinpointing a clear protagonist. Even though the credits propose this person to be the Armenian poet, some of the young *résistants* he marshals have almost as much screen time as he does, and their stories are just as compelling as his. The principal French characters (and by French, we mean white males of long-established French descent as in the previously analyzed texts) are the commissioner of police (Commissaire David) and a police inspector (*Inspecteur Pujol*). The other antagonists are the local SS and Gestapo German authorities, who play a much more distant role and hardly come in contact with the *résistants*. They hardly interact with the French civil authorities but for meetings where they pressure the French collaborators to produce results in maintaining order and bringing 'criminals' to justice.

The little communication between the 'Army of crime' and other locals accomplishes something important from a social point of view: the isolation of the 'immigrants' vis-à-vis the rest of the population. They are marginalized. The narrative of the picture does this by maintaining their distance from the three principal social clusters that could give them a sense of belonging to France. First, they are isolated from their enemies. The isolation is logical when it

comes to the Nazi occupiers, but it also applies to any ties with the French authorities. The distance heightens the sense of enmity between the two groups. This relationship is comparable to how opposing factions are portrayed in the previous films, such as the enmity of the French military and the insurgent Algerian freedom fighters, but with one important distinction. In the previous films, a cultural and ethnic crossover between the opposing camps existed. The films on the Algerian war illustrated the existence of French who supported and were even actively involved in both sides of the issue of each film. The same was true of the Algerians. Both ethnic groups had people who supported each side, blurring the boundaries of who was pro or anti-French, and more important bringing up how problematic the definition of who is or what can be called French. The clear separation between the protagonists and antagonists in *L'armée* serves to liken the French authorities to the German military. The separation proposes that the French police and the government had more in common with the Nazis than with the immigrants, and more importantly, with the regular population in which these immigrants are trying to fit. It is an indictment on France as a whole, showing that the Republic was rather belligerent toward the immigrants, even if by inaction.

The second group from which the 'Army of crime' is set apart is the general population. The members of the 'Army' share the same marginal neighborhood and, even when seen in public, they have little interaction with any other French people. The onscreen absence of other locals makes the viewer wonder where the rest of France is, as the spectator hardly ever sees any other French persons despite having the film set in Paris. The local Parisians are reduced to passersby; from a filmic point of view, the local French are nothing more than extras. The narrative has no French protagonists, and the Parisians that briefly appear have no lines, do not interact with the immigrants, and their presence has no significant bearing on the story. This

portrayal of locals puts *en relief* the importance of the story and the humanity of the immigrants in it. It argues that the immigrants are France. The suggestion is that, through their fight, the involved immigrants are much more important – and perhaps even more French and worthy of remembrance – to the Republic than the large populace of inactive locals who stayed on the sidelines during the time of occupation.

Through their active participation in the resistance, and in general social and economic ventures, immigrants may enrich and complement the culture and the sociological needs of the local society with their willingness to work and sacrifice for the common good of which they want to partake. The absence of major native French characters is, therefore, a powerful indicator of the isolation that immigrants feel when arriving in the Hexagon and through most of their struggle to be accepted. The emphasis the film places on the contributions of Jews may be a response to a debate that began in the 1980s about the role of communist Jews in the resistance. Some argued that their contribution was limited to rescue of other Jews, and yet others purposefully avoided crediting them with influencing the outcome of the war due to the fear or mistrust of Communism. Poznansky explains the progress that this topic has undergone since the fall of the Eastern Block:

An age of concord seems to have arrived and, with it, an era of historical reflection unburdened by the ideological passions that had distorted it only a few years earlier. Yet the question remains. Communist Jews or Jewish Communists played a leading role in the Resistance in France. Were they Jewish resistance fighters or were they Communist resistance fighters? Although this question is less politically explosive today, it is essential in gaining a more precise view of those years' specifics and of the complex reference identities that the Jews in France adopted. (Poznanski 210)

Whether Jewish *resistance* fighters were affiliated with the Communist Party or not, their contribution to the survival of France should not be denied. It is true that one of their primary objectives was the rescue of other Jews, but this does not exclude their contributions in other areas. ‘The army of crime’ is a depiction of these efforts. It shows that Jews helped other Jews through their efforts in the resistance, but that those involved in the fight against the Nazi oppression also contributed in the general fight against the invasion beyond what the majority of the French population did. It also shows that despite their willingness to fight, their efforts remained mostly isolated from those of the European French *resistance*.

The regular French *resistance* is the third important group, and they are tacit from the narrative. Their absence is significant to the story. If there is a group of which the French are proud with regards to WWII, it is the Resistance as an institution; the small band of individuals who defied the Nazi occupiers to support the allied effort with the hopes of liberating France. Due to the humiliation of military defeat and German occupation during WWII, the French resort to the stories of the Resistance to recuperate some national pride. In a study on post-WWII victimhood and genocide on occupied countries Confino and Moeller note: “glorification of the contribution of the resistance movements was the only basis available for a true national myth” (Confino and Moeller 48). However, this narrative tends to be also whitewashed, like the stories on Algerian soldiers portrayed in *Indigènes*. In their study of the involvement of women and minorities in the *resistance*, Raul Bartrop and Samantha Laking explain how these contributions have been grossly overlooked:

The reconstruction of France after the war resulted in a narrative arguing that the liberated country possessed a united resistance against forces that were imposed by the German occupiers acting in conjunction with collaborators who did not represent the

“real” France. Consequently, there was little room for duplicate narratives from Jews, communists, or other actors. The only way in which their contributions could be recognized was through localized forms of remembrance and an alternative historiography. (Bartrop and Lakin 120)

*L'armée du crime* attempts to shed light on the contributions of minorities concerning the resistance. This film strongly suggests that ‘the army of crime’ of immigrants was largely (if not fully) operating independently from the native *resistance*. Beyond clarifying the involvement of immigrants in the Resistance, the film underlines the isolation of a group of people who felt like foreigners, in some cases in their own land, by virtue of their descent. It is plausible to think before seeing the film that one is going to witness the fighting of these immigrants as a part of a whole, as an appendage to the main group of *resistants* of which there are so many historical and cultural references.

In a war film, it is logical to find (at least) two sides in conflict with each other. In WWII films that depict the Resistance, the typical storyline follows the French resistance who faces nearly insurmountable odds against the Nazi occupants. The French *collaborateurs*, those who cooperated with the invaders, are typically the ambiguous element in such films, portraying the native turncoat element that may tip the balance of the dichotomy of good and evil, but more than likely serve to compound the element of difficulty for the small band of freedom fighters. These narrative elements are present in a war film, from French movies on the *resistance* to the Algerian films of the war of independence (with the roles turned on the French as the invading force), and it extends even to commercial franchises such as the Star Wars series. In the Star Wars universe, the main premise is presented in the first of the episodes filmed, which is named *Star Wars, Episode IV, A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977). In *A New Hope* we follow the story of

insurgent fighters who are desperately battling to free the galaxy from an evil empire. These insurgents call themselves the Resistance. 'The Empire', as this organization is called, utilizes a powerful Army that threatens the liberty of the complete fictional galaxy in which the films are set, and the threat and armies are ever present. In *L'armée du crime*, one of the principal challenges is that the enemy is prominently tacit, complicating the comparative study between the protagonist and antagonist in terms of interpersonal relationships, with the major exception of two secondary characters. Understanding the interaction between characters such as the poet or the young idealist and to the oppressive system as a whole is crucial since the system acts as the main antagonist, replacing an antithetic force centered around an antagonist in the role of villain as occurs in most conflict film narratives.

*L'affiche rouge* sheds a little light on these tacit antagonists and the interaction of the 'army of crime' with them. In the film, we do see more shared screen time between the minority *resistants* and, remarkably, the Nazis. The cause for giving the Germans all this time is that this narrative centers on the creation of the infamous red poster, as opposed to *L'armée du crime* where the poster is not even mentioned. *L'affiche rouge* helps us understand better who the protagonists are fighting. The portrayal needs to be organized chronologically following their space-time as captives rather than around their rebellious activities. The celebration of this group of fighters does open an important window into the awareness of the rest of France to the activities of this band. It shows that the French were not completely oblivious to the existence of the minority *resistants*, while still sharply underlining their underrepresentation and underappreciation.

The underappreciation is sharply noted when, at the outset of the film, one of the relatives/survivors states that in history, the roles of immigrants tend to be grossly overlooked.

This statement is consistent with the argument of neglect of recognition of immigrant contribution to the French national survival and development in recent times presented in every previously studied film. The more alarming element of this argument is that this overlooking is, at times, carried out purposefully to downplay the contribution of these groups. *Indigènes* illustrates this in the scene where only white soldiers are filmed as the liberators of France when they had been at least partially absent from the liberation feats in some of the places in which they are portrayed as saviors. In a way, the historical ‘army of crime’ is the *resistance* equivalent to the *indigène* soldiers who fought in the French military. Both contributed vitally to the cause while their impact on the liberation of France remained peripherally visible at best. Even in this meta-film, during the flashbacks to WWII, there is still no interaction between the Army of crime and their French counterparts or the general population. The general public then serves as a second witness to the relative isolation in which this band not only operates but also lives.

The proposed main character, Missak Manouchian, is an immigrant in the film, but the actor who plays him is, in real life, also an ‘immigrant’ in the loose sense of the word utilized in France to denominate the descendants of immigrants. Simon Abkarian was born in a suburb of Paris but is of Armenian descent, like the character he portrays. Abkarian is a significant casting choice that highlights the importance of immigrants and gives them some of the credit they have missed. Abkarian spoke Armenian at home and lived abroad in Lebanon for many years as a child and teen. He has a deep cultural understanding of the situation in which Manouchian would have found himself in France through his own experiences as an Armenian French. In addition to his acting talent, this cultural and ethnic background gives Abkarian’s performance an added empathy and gravitas while playing the Armenian poet refugee.



In the film, the accent of the protagonist underlines that he is a misfit as much as his pacifist attitude. Due to his profession, his sensitivity also sets him apart not only from the French but also from the other immigrants. The protagonist personifies the totality of the ‘Army of crime’, who do not quite fit with their own while being ignored by the majority. He is very much the reluctant hero who finds himself caught in a moral quandary. He is a pacifist who confronts the choice of preserving his moral anti-violence stance, but unable to stand inactive in the face of the crimes that the Nazi occupants of his adopted land commit. He openly debates the depth of his involvement with the resistance, especially since others see him as a leader due to the respect he commands in his community and the sobriety of his spirit. His status as an immigrant, as an Other and an outsider is not overtly emphasized in this text through his relationship with the natives, but rather through the absence of a relationship with them. He has little contact with locals. The native population is depicted as a tacit presence, inside a heavy vacuum. The film works this absence of people just as *L’ennemi intime* portrayed the absence of French space. In Siri’s film, the French soldiers represent France (the Place), while in Guédiguian’s work, the empty Parisian spaces represent the French people. This absence makes it rather easy for the spectator to mix the French, especially the collaborators, with the Nazis because, in most of the instances where they appear, they do so together. The film paints the native French as guilty accomplices through action or inaction, presence and absence.

The complicity of many French during this period is more than a commentary on the apparent lack of initiative in fighting the occupation. For our film’s purpose, it is a critique of the enmity of the French towards immigrants despite their positive contribution to the Republic. The interactions of Missak with other people outside of his band of rebels are limited to familial relations with his wife, his fellow Jewish prisoners during his detention, and other established

friends. Also, his contact with Nazis occurs exclusively through attacks of his band. These attacks are reciprocal, beginning with Manouchian fighting the Germans in the open and ending with his capture by the Nazis who torture him and the members of his group.

*L'affiche rouge* does not shed additional light on the relationship of Manouchian with the local French; it rather underlines what has already been pointed out with regards to the Germans. This older film does more to put him in the background when compared to *L'armée du crime* in terms of screen time and importance. He is still the leader of the band, but the film aims to assign equal importance to each member of the group, perhaps going along with the communist penchant of many of the band members of Spanish and Italian origins.

Through personal reflections and conversations with other prisoners, Manouchian reveals that his family had come from Armenia escaping genocide, looking for a place where they could enjoy liberty and equality. Based on his disappointing experience, it seems that these ideals do not hold sway for foreigners and minorities in France as they do for the natives. His engagement in the resistance does suggest that he still holds hope that this is possible and that whichever his fate, it still had a better outlook in France than it did as a boy in Armenia. His hope is comparable to that of Abdelkader in *Indigènes*, but where the Algerian is idealistic without reserves, the hope of the Armenian is of last resort. Abdelkader sees an opportunity when joining the army, while Manouchian feels compelled to fight only when other avenues have been exhausted.

The turning point for Missak comes after he has suffered in prison and feels ashamed of having been forced to denounce his ties to communism. It is there that he is compelled to practice shooting. He opposes violence but sees the problem that leading a band of rebels without having shown physical proof of his involvement could cause. The practice target he uses is a

poster of Maréchal Pétain; the WWI hero turned supreme collaborator. Missak turns out to be a fantastic shot, but more importantly, this is his first narrative interaction with a French authority having a face. This poster could have easily been of Hitler or any Nazi authority, but it is a French figure that is chosen, and one shrouded with moral, historical ambiguity. Pétain had been both a great leader and a failed one. He is credited with turning the tide of the Great War with his work at Verdun and was appointed to lead the French armies towards the end of the War, replacing the embattled Nivelle<sup>45</sup>. However, during WWII, he became head of the controversial Vichy government that collaborated with the Nazis. His legacy was therefore tarnished and most people in history remember him for his latter actions rather than his heroics in WWI. The film suggests again that the image that France is presenting towards these people is that of rejection through Nazi collaboration, that they two are at odds, and in a violent collision course. The relationship between the majority and the immigrants is not welcoming, but rather one of mistrust and possible violent rejection. It also suggests that the French cannot be trusted, that they may turn on them if it suits them. The main problem of the immigrants is not the Nazi occupation, but the French collaboration and the large section of the population who remained on the periphery.

In Guédiguain's film, the native French population remains (historically accurate) more peripheral at this point than the small band of 'immigrant' *résistants*. Kocher and Monteiro remark the following regarding the makeup and involvement of the population in the French resistance:

Individual reactions to the German occupation of France varied tremendously, from outright enthusiasm to dogged resistance. The overwhelming majority of Frenchmen

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<sup>45</sup> For a more comprehensive story on his legacy consult von der Goltz and Gildea's "Flawed Saviours: The Myths of Hindenburg and Pétain" article on the two leaders rise and fall to power.

disliked the occupation but did nothing concrete to contest it. Even “moral resistance” was not common; organized, armed resistance was exceedingly rare for most of the period. The historical literature stresses the ideological and political diversity of the Resistance. (Kocher and Monteiro 956)

They show two important factors. First, they show that the great majority of people remained sidelined during the war. Second, the makeup of the resistance was diverse from the beginning, comprising foreigners and minorities. It may be suspected that many, and likely most of them were much more concerned with hiding or going unnoticed by the French or German authorities. This pattern also suggests that there is equality between immigrants and natives in terms of their relevance to History, even if either group fails to see this particular shared behavioral trait.

*L'armée du crime* shares this factor with French resistance films, in that it does portray the exceptional individuals who acted, rather than the majority that did not, also equating both groups. In a perhaps unintended argument, this film shows that immigrants are, after some consideration, quite alike the native population that tends to overlook their existence. What we do, to form a mythology for a group of people, is to represent the extraordinary characters to better or worse represent the rest. Missak is one such character. Missak's interaction with the locals stays minimal, as does his interaction with anyone outside of his immigrant friends, family or rebel associates. This *écart* is mainly interrupted through acts of violence towards Germans, or after they capture him by their interrogation of him and his band. His relationship with the rest of France remains consistently void, showing that as a man, he never was able to settle fully into the adoptive society of his parents.

Secondary characters remain closer to the native French, but only minimally. Thomas Elek is a Hungarian Jew who is an active fighter in the Army of crime who has been called a

“militant student” (Matthews 50) and plays an important supporting role. He was a real person like the rest of the characters, and the way he is represented accurately portrays the fighters who joined the resistance out of principle besides necessity. He was idealistic and resourceful. In the film, his introduction to the public is his condemnation, by his university peers, for spreading the communist ideals on university grounds. He fights some of the French students for scribbling the red sickle and hammer on the walls inside the institution of higher learning he attends. He is berated, attacked and labeled a communist as if that in itself were an insult. Thomas defends himself well, but a professor who looks genuinely interested in protecting him also comes to his aid, trying not to pick sides. Thomas reacts by stating that he is only enunciating his position and that his opinion should be heard. He feels offended that the professor is taking the easy position of his attackers. The professor argues that he is neutral, and therefore constrained to forbid Thomas’ desecration of the premises, and especially his blatant proclamation of affinity towards the communist ideal. The Hungarian’s response is poignant, telling the academic that by not picking a side, he is lining up with his accusers. The film reinforces once more the idea that one should not remain on the sidelines, that the risk of apathy results in the danger of becoming tacitly complicit with the oppressive status quo. This commentary is directed to the population as a whole, but more specifically to intellectuals who may have rationalized inaction or peaceful resistance as the vehicle of their opposition to the occupation. The picture argues that such avenues only contribute to societal failure, extending beyond Nazi occupation, and in this case, to the marginalization of immigrants and minorities.

The nature of the confrontation of Thomas is doubly important because it singles him out not only as a minority but also as a communist. Communists had a complicated involvement with the resistance. In the beginning, French Communists were reluctant to enter the fight on the same

level as other parties, but the 1941 attack of the Soviet Union gave them the green light to openly fight the Nazis now that the Germans had betrayed the country of Communist political and philosophical parentage. When they entered the struggle, they showed they were more ready and quite capable of opposing the Germans with guerilla tactics that were more suitable for such a formidable military opponent. They still were at odds with the rest of the population, and with other factions of the resistance, due to their willingness to carry out assassinations and acts of violence beyond the rest of the resistance. These terror tactics typically caused the Nazis to react in kind, killing not only other communists as a reprisal but at times large numbers of non-involved civilians to try to discourage the rest of the population from supporting the movement. In the end, the German reactions favored the resistance (McManus 25-28). The character of Thomas does more than personify the Hungarian participants of the resistance. He brings into the discussion of the film the problematic and violent nature of the involvement of the communists in the resistance.

The confrontation between Thomas, his peers, and the professor, occurs at the outset of the textual narrative, and it is telling that this will be last visual depiction interaction of Thomas with the mainstream of French society. The insult he receives from his peers is that of *sale* (dirty), another common insult commonly thrown in the face of immigrants that emphasizes the inferiority of their stock to the natives. Thomas retorts that this should be the country of equality. The film notes that this principle only applies to those who conform to the norm and to those of French descent. After this incident, Thomas interacts only with family and other members of the 'Army of crime' unless he is carrying out an attack. Like the other characters, Thomas personifies the isolation of his particular immigrant group. Thomas has more of a simple history arc and similarly pedestrian character development. He is a stereotype for the unwavering young

idealist who will sacrifice all for the cause, even at risk of alienating himself from his family or from other members of society who are more reluctant to become involved in upsetting the status quo.

In this regard, the character of Marcel Rayman (or Rajman) is more interesting to follow, and he receives about double the screen time than Thomas. Played by Robinson Stevenin, who we have already encountered in this study playing the role of Lieutenant Rossi in *Mon colonel*, Marcel is almost as important as Missak. His character is highly idealistic, to the point of volatility, which creates a heightened feeling of risk in a film that otherwise may have lacked it and fallen a little flat. Stevenin brings a sense of desperation to the fight that balances out the Poet's initial pragmatic approach to involvement in the resistance. Based on his personality and appearance, Marcel is the one character who may have passed for native French when compared to the rest of the band, even though in real life, he was born in Warsaw and immigrated to France at the age of eight. Marcel moves around Paris like a native, as if he owned the place. In the movie, he is the one character who is shown in different open and public spaces of the city. He moves confidently and with purpose. The city feels like his playground, and in the film, the spectator gets the impression that he always has a home-field advantage up until the moment he is captured. His personality is volatile, but he is also decisive and capable of good planning. He is the leading figure until Manouchian assumes this role, and Marcel remains a driving force within the movement until the 'Army' is captured.

This sense of danger does much more than add the element of risk to the narrative of the film. The main purpose is to project the feeling of peril and mistrust that both French and Germans felt towards what they perceived as a hazardous group of outsiders. A common trait of native Europeans is to accept a group of foreigners based on their appearance and cultural traits.

The more common elements they perceive a foreign group to have to their own, the easier it is for them to accept them. Simon and Lynch demonstrate this attitude endures in France: “In 1993, 67 percent agreed that something must be done about immigrants because France risks losing her national identity. In the same poll, 76 percent of respondents agreed that immigrants do the work Frenchmen refuse to do” (Simon and Lynch 462). The French are more concerned about the cultural threat they perceive foreigners bring to France rather than the economic (such as job competition). The majority of French agree that immigrants take many jobs, but those jobs are typically positions that the European French are not interested in filling. However, they are still worried about the large numbers of culturally different immigrant workers settling in France in large numbers due to the cultural threat they may present. The comparative study of opinion concludes that “immigrants who are most like the natives are viewed more positively than immigrants who have different ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds” (Simon and Lynch 462). This observation is discovered in every film analysis of this study and is one of the problems that every work attempts to address. If some of them were viewed as a societal liability, Marcel’s character comes to embody such a premise.

However, the movie also suggests that this premise is largely unwarranted since Marcel becomes an asset to the ideal of the French republic and is only dangerous to the occupiers. In other words, what we may fear from immigrants may be a strength and asset to the country rather than a detriment, and what may be perceived as a weakness or as a menace to the host society will rather turn out to be a source of enrichment to its makeup, and vital to its survival. Marcel’s most interesting relationship is with his girlfriend, Monique. Although somewhat tumultuous, it is rather stable. Marcel gets easily excited or upset, and eventually shares his girlfriend with another man. Despite this, the couple is steady and remains together until the end.



This relationship provides an indirect connection to France and the enemy through her entanglement with the chief inspector who is persecuting the 'Army of crime'. The chief inspector forces a relationship on the girl, knowing she is in a weak position. He also attempts to obtain information from her. Initially, she manages to keep both relationships secret from the other. Through her, the link between the two men is indirect but dangerously close. The compromise Monique is forced to make is born out of necessity, underlining the desperate plight of the freedom fighters, especially those with immigrant roots. When Marcel finds out, he somehow endures the humiliation of seeing his girlfriend fraternizing with the enemy to keep operating. Marcel Rayman personifies the entrepreneurial and fighting spirit that an immigrant can bring to a new country, but also the compromise and humiliation that an outsider may be willing to undergo to transform a new place into a Place. Marcel is the type that will win at all costs, an example of what the human spirit will endure to succeed in a place where he is not initially, and maybe ever, fully welcomed.

What remains to be examined is whether Marcel achieves success or not. For this answer, we must consider that for many immigrants, the question of adaptation and assimilation into the host society may endure beyond the lifetime of a newcomer. This question will transfer into his descendants that will form as a minority group of mixed cultures. The film makes a point that perhaps there is a difference in assimilation and that the process is transgenerational. Acceptance begins with the immigrant who first attempts to open the door of opportunity in a new culture, but he may never fully achieve it. Instead, he likely passes some of the benefits gained to his children, a group of people with roots outside of the new culture, but who also share many of the traits of the adoptive society since, to them, it is also native. This first generation hopes to reap

the benefits of the sacrifices of the older one. But is their acceptance real, or merely partial? *L'armée du crime* and *L'affiche rouge* suggest that it may be real but never fully attained.

The plight of the first generation is the almost complete rejection and isolation that they suffer, according to both texts. The *immigrés* live segregated, enjoy little contact with the natives, and fight alone. They end up living and dying separately from their hosts. But the *raison d'être* of both films is to commemorate and to celebrate the sacrifices of these trailblazers. *L'armée du crime* is an opus to their exploits, while *L'affiche rouge* states that these former outlaws are viewed as heroes a few decades later and that their descendants are reaping the societal benefits of their ancestor's sacrifice. Although the story makes this suggestion, one must also consider that the transition between acceptance and rejection is not complete or without its own challenges. If acceptance does take place, it will occur over a much longer period if at all, and this period will likely be transgenerational. Previous films such as *Indigènes* have already shown the systemic and pervasive failure of the application of universalism towards the French of African roots. *L'armée du crime* strongly suggests that there is more cultural, religious and/or ethnic proximity between Poles or Hungarians to the French. This proximity plays a role in their eventual acceptance or assimilation. This French attitude means that perceived cultural proximity plays a strong role in the transformation of what any society perceives as an Other, into something like or close to what the incumbent society defines as the Self.

In *L'armée du crime* and *L'affiche rouge*, it is not the first generation that benefits from immigrating to France. Instead, they will pay the price of transitioning with their blood. It is their descendants and those related to them who endured the trial period who will see the first fruits of the sacrifice. There are, however, characters who do embody a partial transition and penetration

into what seems to be an unreachable sphere of 'Frenchness'. The porous boundary is drawn around and personified by Monique, the Jewish girlfriend of Marcel Rayman.

Monique Stern is not of much interest at the inception of the narrative. Initially, she appears to be only the amorous interest of the idealistic driving force that is her boyfriend. However, she gains importance due to the influence she has in affecting the mood of Marcel. How he approaches the fight of the oppressor is partially dictated by the emotional status of his relationship with Monique. Midway through the picture, she gains gravitas as a character when inspector Pujol discovers her. The French policeman is torn between his duty as a lawman and a moral conscience that does not appear to be completely dead. The most significant interaction between the immigrants and the French occurs through the relationship between Stern and Pujol so both characters need to be studied concurrently.

Inspector Pujol is a policeman with some authority, but he is beholden to Commissaire David, who, in turn, is subaltern to the German military. This authoritarian pyramid means to illustrate the relationship of the French legal enforcement apparatus during the occupation. Pujol represents a segment of the government that, due to their relatively low status, had little choice but to cooperate with the occupiers unless they found another line of work. Pujol is the character with the most conflicted soul in the whole of the story. His progressively declining choices lead him to become less sympathetic as the story progresses, showing how the more one complies with an amoral system, the more one loses oneself.

Pujol is an Ionescan rhinoceros, who slowly turns into a monster-agent for the occupation forces as he sheds his moral conscience with the progression of the picture. The inspector depicts the "dehumanization of a man by a totalitarian society" (Valgemaie 47). Ionesco used the metaphor of people turning into rhinoceroses similar to how Camus employed the plague, as

discussed in previous chapters. As Gerrard explains, the intention of Camus was “to use the plague myth to express artistically his fear and horror of totalitarian tyranny and cruelty” (Gerrard 309). Pujol is the French person who succumbs to the plague or turns into a bullying, charging beast on behalf of his Nazi superiors. Guédiguain takes this metaphor and applies it to how the majority has persecuted and rejected the minorities in France, showing the absurdity and destructiveness of this position.

The first significant depiction of the inspector (he has a few introductory, short exchanges of reports and assignments with David), occurs during a police intervention, a raffle where they round up a lot of Jews in the immigrant quarters of Paris. He is conflicted about the situation, and although he supervises the actions, he is visibly perturbed by his participation in the event. He purposefully overlooks arresting some of the Jews who sidestep compliance with oppressive instructions such as the bearing of the yellow star and avoids deporting some of them. Notably, he misses Marcel’s mother, who narrowly escapes the fate of the others while out buying groceries. Pujol walks the emptied streets after the arrests and feels as ruined and empty as the recently vacated neighborhood.

Due to the arrests, Monique finds herself alone in the Jewish quarters, reading *Les Misérables*. She feels that her current predicament allows her to identify with the fictitious characters of the Hugo masterpiece. They are at the margin of society, fighting to gain a foothold in a world bent on abusing them. Pujol finds the young woman reading in the street. She manifests fear of being alone at home. This fear goes beyond the immediate fear of abandonment of the young woman. The fear Monique experiences represents the collective angst of immigrants who came to the Hexagon at a very young age and joined the young children of immigrants who call France home and know little else from another country (but that which they

hear at home from their progenitors). This collective fear is the anxiety of abandonment and lack of identity of people brought up in a country that does not claim them as their own. They remain outsiders in the only place they know. They are 'alone' in their homeland, and their only ties to the other possible home (such as parents and relatives) are being torn away from them. In other words, the descendants of Jews and immigrants who are being detained and deported are becoming orphans in their own land, cut off from their cultural origins while never fully integrated in their native (or near-native) nation-state. Through her representation of this challenge, the character of Monique gains relevance.

Shortly after Monique finds herself alone, she meets with Pujol, who just barely decided not to arrest Marcel's mother. He feels sympathy for the young woman and offers to find the whereabouts and health of her parents. His ambiguous morals become evident, as he also demands sexual compensation from her in exchange for the information and for keeping her safe. This unfortunate turn of events is the first, and perhaps only, meaningful relationship in the narrative of the text that involves a member of the fringe society with one who represents the everyday French person. Stern has little choice but to acquiesce to Pujols lewd requisites. In exchange for sexual favors, she is also allowed to avoid donning the yellow star which could identify her publicly as a Jew. Ironically, she is the one character who cannot ever remove the star completely from her person, as her last name 'Stern' means star in German.

As the story progresses, the policeman provides information about the safety of her parents, and the exploitation of Monique continues. She reluctantly comes clean with Marcel about the relationship with the policeman and the information she receives, to which her boyfriend replies she is being fooled with falsehoods. Monique is conflicted as she finds herself caught between the hope for her parents' wellbeing while facing the real possibility that the

young Pole is correct. Her relationship with both men continues, and soon she and Marcel are spotted by the authorities who begin to follow them and stake them out. The interaction between the girl and the policemen only delays the inevitable, as the authorities finally apprehend Marcel and the others.

This liaison reveals the unbalanced and exploitive nature of the relationship between immigrants in France vis-à-vis their native counterparts. The imposition of Pujol on Monique and the powerlessness of Marcel is explained in Orientalizing terms by de Burgh:

The construction of the East as feminine also had the effect of elevating the status of the male coloniser, affirming yet again his dominance over the feminised Eastern subject.

But the indigenous male was maligned during the colonial process, because of his inability to halt colonisation and seize back the reins of power from the all-conquering Western man. Powerless, eroded and humiliated, the *homme orientale* was portrayed as impotent through his failure to maintain possession of his culture, territory and women.

(de Burgh 122)

The French hold most of the cards and take advantage of the newcomers to satisfy their wants and needs. They do so outside or beyond the law when it suits them because they fear no retribution for their actions. From a neocolonialist perspective, immigrants are Orientalized within the Western host society to the point of being degraded, unaccepted, exploited, persecuted, and ultimately dehumanized both as a group and as individuals. De Burgh explains it in these terms: “the colonised were symbolically demarcated by the indigenous woman as ‘feminine, receptive vessels of the advancing colonial presence’” (de Burgh 122). The host society acts in the same way towards the guest society as the exploitative phallogocentric culture of a Western European nation that has dominated or unjustly exploited the feminized (in Orientalism

terms) society of the newcomers, much as it did societally dominate its native women. This relationship dynamic is also evident in the interactions of our last character of import of this film: Missak's wife Melinée.

Of all of the characters in the movie, Melinée comes in contact with most people and sorts of people: immigrants, French and German. She needs to address the Germans and the French authorities quite a bit to obtain information about the status of her detained husband while he is detained. She is also in contact with many individuals within the immigrant community, in part due to the prominent standing of her husband as an engaged intellectual. She manages to move between the different sections effortlessly and always survives risky or difficult situations. Her resourcefulness is evident when she puts herself in harm's way by supporting her husband, who is dangerously noticeable while a prisoner due to his ethnicity, and as an active participant and leader of the army of liberation.

Due to unfortunate circumstances, Monique becomes partially responsible for the ultimate downfall of members of the army of crime. Melinée gains even more importance by bringing hope and emotional healing to the lives she touches. She is Missak's rock, while Monique turns out to be Marcel's sandy foundation. Melinée is uncompromising but cautious, emotionally invested, and yet smart and calculating. Her mostly equanimous approach counterbalances the unflinching but violent determinism of Marcel and Thomas, and ultimately of Missak, to continue the fight against oppression, and maybe a more effective one as well? Examining the roles of Melinée and Monique brings to the fore a critique of this film. *L'armée du crime* should have devoted more time to the secondary feminine characters. Although the 'Army of crime' was mostly integrated by men (and men of action at that), the stories of the

women who were involved either indirectly or tacitly with this movement are just as important to understand the reasons for its successes and failures.

When referring to the accuracy of Guédiguain's movie, the reference occurs in two facets. First, the critique applies to the 'Army of crime' as a revolutionary unit. More importantly, this criticism also applies to the success or failure of immigrants to be accepted by an incumbent culture, and their ability to settle in and adapt. The film illustrates that the contact between the women in the film and the incumbent society is understated and yet at times more meaningful than the male relationships with their cultural hosts. The narrative of this story provides both a real and allegorical inspection of the exploitive nature of this relationship. However, the development of the relationships does not go far enough in exposing where the real communication between the two cultures occurs between the women, who appear to be more effective communicators between the immigrant and host societies, especially when it comes to contact that goes beyond the workplace, in a time where men largely made up the majority of the workforce. The film barely shows this possibility, mostly through Melinée. Her participation in advancing the narrative and her connections to other characters are an effective example of such possibilities. To see other female characters being more developed beyond stereotypes of the 'dutiful wife' or the promiscuous (even under duress) 'girlfriend' would have been enlightening. The characters do have depth, but it would have been more effective to give them equal screen time (and therefore equal gravitas) to that of their male counterparts. Still, with a cast ensemble, this was always going to be a challenge and one that the film does an adequate job in spite of this criticism.

In conclusion, Melinée is a vehicle for alternative solutions and approaches to how to deal with adaptability for both sides of the cultural line, and also provides the story and some of



the characters with a sense of emotional stability that a film that deals with war needs: persecution, inequality and death. Melinée is the one person who most effectively navigates the spaces of the self and the other. The analysis of the usage of those spaces, Places and Non-Places, complements the relationship study showing the problematic relation of the immigrants to the Paris of WWII.

### **Spatial Analysis**

When we look at the spaces in which immigrants or foreigners (from a European French point of view) occupy and negotiate in this and the next chapter, we experience a reversal of settings. The first four war pictures were filmed largely on location, and except for *Indigènes*, were based in North Africa where the French had established a foothold. The French transformed small portions of the territory to fit what a French Place should feel to them. However, they remained primarily an outsider culture attempting to dominate the local Places that felt like a foreign or Non-Place to them. These films were effective in showing that the penetration of the cultures was reciprocal, and that as much as the French invaded foreign spaces, the peoples of these Places reciprocally penetrated France via immigration and culture mixing, sometimes to the point of “creating a new transnational culture” (Stovall “Blacks in European History” 226). The films portray these exchanges by repeatedly and systematically taking the spectator between French Places and Non-Places in colonial lands. They also achieved this by bringing the stories at least partially to French soil, such as in *Mon colonel* and *L’ennemi intime*. This retroactive acculturation is even more evident in *Indigènes*, where most of the film’s narrative takes place in France.

*L'armée du crime*, and subsequently *Les hommes libres*, take this penetration even further. In these films, although all the films deal with the topics of resistance, war, and liberation, these last two works also speak of settlement, not of the French abroad, but from those foreign cultures in France as well. The French, while seeking to 'civilize' the Other, inadvertently 'retro-civilized' themselves and their own spaces, but not with a measure of resistance, pun intended.

This particular analysis proceeds in a chronologically linear sequence of events to illustrate how the spaces support the evolution of the events. The opening sequence and the closing scene are similar. They portray the detention of the 'Army of crime' by the German authorities. As the members of the band are arrested and herded into a detention vehicle with barred windows, their names are read out loud (non-diegetically for the benefit of the audience), followed by the enunciation of every crime with which each detainee is charged. This particular scene echoes the *affiche rouge* project, which is better explained in the film of that name, as the detainees are photographed one by one and their crimes discussed so that the poster may be designed and printed. The closing sequence is almost identical. The faces of the prisoners are seen through the bars. How the camera does the close-ups of the barred faces creates a claustrophobic feeling of being caged for the viewer. The editing detail of having the same scene bookend the picture emphasizes the sense of being trapped without an exit. The spectator instantly sees them as prisoners. The other feeling that film transmits through showing the cage is a sense of dehumanization as if the men are trapped animals. In the same sequence, their heroism is also lauded, when after each enunciated name, a commentary ads: '*mort pour la France*' (died for France or died to save France). The surroundings are of the center of the city, the streets and walls where they are confined are built of solid rock blocks, which only underline

the feeling of being imprisoned through their harshness. Finally, the foreign origin of the names suggests that more than immigrants, these outsiders are perhaps more trapped in Paris rather than inhabiting it, at least during the occupation period that only compounds their ‘otherness’.

The very next scene depicts the confrontation of Thomas with his university peers over his scribbling of communist symbols. It takes place at the campus, where Thomas does not seem out of place, but he takes himself out of place through his actions. The space of learning where a foreigner looks at home, and the fact that Missak is also an intellectual, proposes that foreigners are intelligent and potential contributors to society instead of a detriment. Their cause is not altogether foreign to the native French. Many of them sympathized with the communist party at that time, especially in opposition to the fascist regime that oppressed them, and many more supported or were in some way involved with the movement of the resistance.

To begin the story with these two scenes is significant because from the outset the *L’armée du crime* illustrates a premise that remains true throughout the film: even though the totality of the narrative takes place on French soil, the spaces in which immigrants operate do differ from those in which the rest of the Europeans live and move. In these first two scenes, the members of the ‘Army of crime’ move in French spaces but are not part of society in the same manner in which the native French are. The two scenes in which the French university students confront Thomas, and where his professor reprimands him, bookend a take of the Tour Eiffel with a large sign that proclaims that ‘Germany is winning on all fronts’. The other side of this coin, which is understood only, is that France is losing on all its fronts, including its societal development.

In the beginning, the film begins by showing seemingly disconnected history threads that become interwoven as the narrative progresses. The one commonality between them, even when

they do not look to have any relation yet, is that all the protagonists are outsiders and in cases enemies in more than one respect. It is as if immigrants have a *mise-en-abîme* enmity. They do not own (in more than one sense) spaces that they occupy, and hold at times enmity towards them, as for the other people that occupy them. The French, when seen in relation to the Jewish newcomers, appear to have more in common with the Germans than with the Jews. This commonality is once again reminiscent of one of the principal questions brought up by *La grande illusion* in terms of social relations. The most important question is the one brought up in the other movies influenced by this work: do stronger vertically or horizontally ties exist between the different strata of society? What this means in Duvivier's film is that it would seem that more loyalty may exist between members of the same social standing even across enemy lines. Does the French aristocrat officer have more affinity towards his countrymen, or the aristocrat German officer who is holding him prisoner, but clearly in much esteem as well? In the end, the French officer sacrifices himself for his men, at least partially answering the question (he did spend much time conversing with the German leader, and exchanged polite words, thoughts and pleasantries even when disagreeing).

*L'armée du crime* offers an alternative answer when considering immigrants, and the use of spaces emphasizes this difference. For example, Commissaire David, who is French, has unquestionable loyalty towards his Nazi and Gestapo commanders, a trait that he seeks to inculcate into his police force. The one exception could have been inspector Pujol, who at the beginning has sympathy towards the plight of the Jewish immigrants, especially the women, but eventually exploits them in their time of need.

The spaces in which David and Pujol operate underline the attitude of each man. Commissioner David always appears in a building decorated in opulence and filled with other

French and German authorities and public servants. The building is the seat of an old institution of the government (it could represent the Conciergerie in Paris or any other edifice that represents the state in all its glory and authority). The text leaves no question of what David represents this heavy but outdated and outpowered state authority. On the other hand, Pujol is the one character that navigates all of the spaces in the film, perhaps the only character that deftly crosses from Places to Non-Places in the Augéan sense, and certainly the only one with balanced screen time between them. The palace where David works is a Place by Augé's definition. It defines him and those work for him in a professional way. It gives meaning and purpose to their life as they carry on their daily duties. It represents them and their nation to all foreigners, not only to the immigrants but even more so towards the Nazis who come here to converse and visit with them. On the flip side, it serves as a reminder that even as occupiers, the Germans are still dealing with a nation with long traditions and history. It is a space that, because of its institutional role, creates and maintains existential meaning for the individuals who work there and for the city of Paris as a whole.

Pujol spends little time in the grandiose offices where David works. His Place is much more Spartan and functional, but no less significant. Pujol's headquarters are a more toned-down and traditional neighborhood police station. It serves as an extension and a reflection of David's palace on a local level, and it carries within the same functions for the authorities who work there daily. As far as the film is concerned, this is France for the immigrants. France is the sitting, incumbent, and yet crippled authority, a powerless power concerning the French, but still a power to be feared by the foreigner. It is a sometimes decorated and, at other times, a barren seat of authority that depends on the whims of a more powerful occupant to act. France is a two-sided shell of its glorious past. However, it is more than that because these places also exemplify the

desperate need of the locals to cling to a semblance of authority and of national pride that they hope is not completely extinct, that will hopefully return.

What is more significant for the film is that to the immigrants in question, this is France as well, not necessarily the land, but for sure its people. In other words, this is the France of the incumbent French. To the immigrants, the French and the Germans do have more in common than they have with French. The spaces shown in *L'armée du crime* emphasize this point. The peripheral France in which immigrants dwell is a separate space altogether, a space locked within the France that is to the French their Place. The space where they have confined the immigrants is to the French a non-Place, a barren space conscribed within France, even within Paris. It is remarkable to think that the Parisian region is known throughout France as *Ile-de-France*, 'the Island of France'. This title suggests Paris' lofty status as a beacon to the rest of the nation, in a way isolated but also elevated as a center of luminous culture and order. Even though the prominence of urban centers has evolved, Pradel explains the traditional importance of the Île-de-France in the following terms:

Le modèle du polycentrisme hiérarchisé dans lequel le centre traditionnel conserve sa domination de par ses spécificités et son positionnement central dans les réseaux de transport, et où les centralités demeurent de taille modeste et ne répliquent qu'une partie des attributs du centre traditionnel. C'est ce troisième modèle qui domine pour l'instant en France et notamment en Île-de-France. (Pradel et al.)

For centuries, Paris has dominated the cultural, political, economic and linguistic panorama of France and continues to do so. During the colonial period, this preeminence compounded itself through extension into the colonies. Ironically, it is the immigrants who live within islands of real isolation from the rest of the population within the Island of France. These areas are, even

without actual guards, moats or ramparts, perhaps the closest spaces to contemporary ghettos such as the ones established in Central and Eastern Europe during the same historical period.

First, we have to examine the spaces in which the protagonists live and move to establish the significance and importance, and especially the different characteristics of each place.

Missak, Marcel, and Julien appear chiefly in homes and open public spaces of what we will refer from now on to ghettos for practical reasons. These areas are primarily inhabited by Jews and by immigrants and/or their French-born descendants. In these restricted areas, native French hardly make an appearance walking around, shopping, eating out and even less so, dwelling. All of the verbal exchanges are, curiously, conducted in French. It would be easy to presume that the reason may be practical both for diegetic and non-diegetic convenience. For example, since many of the characters come from different countries and now all speak French due to their present living circumstances, the lingua franca of communication with the natives and between themselves would logically be French. Also, for easier communication with the viewing public, it is less complicated if most of it is done in the language of the target audience, in this case French.

There is one more purpose, one that underlines the intent and the message of the film, and it is to show that these people were, if not of native blood, at the very least French in spirit. Communicating in French makes the characters mouthpieces for the ideals of the Republic in a time when many of its native sons and daughters betray these ideas were. The 'immigrants' are appropriating the French language, and in doing so, adopting with it some of its culture and its ideals. For as we know, language and culture are not and do not exist in a vacuum, and they certainly not exist separate from each other.

Language is culture. In language acquisition discussions, the connection between language and culture is well established and studied. Liu states in the introduction of his study on the cultivation of intercultural awareness the following:

Language and culture are inseparable. Foreign language learning is not only the language learning, but also the culture learning. Intercultural awareness, therefore, should be cultivated so that students can have the competence to use language to fulfill the successful intercultural communication. (Liu 226)

The choice of language in this film shows more than an attempt to communicate in a tongue common to all interlocutors, but rather the effort to integrate into the culture of this common language. Language in this film, as in many of the others, becomes a non-Place where the meaning of the different bisecting cultures is challenged, contested and recreated, and this is done most notably by the 'immigrants', as they all speak French with different accents and levels of proficiency, borrowing and inserting their own culture in this language as they reproduce it in their unique way and create ways of communicating with others who face the same challenges. There is a similarity between this language place and the ghetto as a space. The immigrant quarters become a Non-Place to the French, as they stay away and isolate the immigrants. To the native French, these ghettos become oubliettes in the strict sense of the word, a place to isolate undesirables to the point where they are unseen prisoners, forgotten by the outside world. But to the immigrants, much like the French language, it becomes a reclaimed space in which their lives not only transition from their old to the new existence, creating new meaning in itself. This creation rejuvenates the old French space, and with it its culture. It accomplishes this by contributing to the survival of France in a very physical and also ideological way. It both reinforces the French republican motto while challenging it in its practical application when



examining how far it reaches and who *universalisme* and *laïcité* do not necessarily encompass and protect.

Of these ‘immigrants’, the most complex relationship to spaces occurs to the main protagonist. Missak is imprisoned upon his introduction. He presented in two different types of restraining spaces. The visual introduction is the detention vehicle in which he is unceremoniously shoved by the French authorities, and the second (the introduction of his character) occurs while he is in a prison cell. From the outset, we understand that France for him has not quite become a Place, but a Non-Place. Purdy explains how much prisons and a foreign country become heterotopias to immigrants:

Given the many controls and circumscriptions placed on (im)migrant life, from both without and within, such regulation of traffic is a constant of heterotopian sites from the border to the ghetto, from the mosque or synagogue to the refugee camp, and is a familiar aspect of life in almost all (im)migrant communities. (Purdy 19)

The explication by Purdy closely matches the experiences lived by the protagonists in the narrative. Prisons fit much more the definition of a Non-Place from the Augé viewpoint, as well as a heterotopia in the Foucault definition. However, these views may be challenged if we consider the duration of the stay and the nature of it. One could argue that a life sentence may turn a prison into a Place, in spite of how grim the prospect of dwelling in such a space must be to the prisoner.

In the case of Nazi detention camps, long permanence is not necessarily dependent on a carried-out sentence, but rather from a logistical point of view. Detention camps were in France originally instituted as temporary facilities in which the prisoners were not intended to stay permanently. It was a space in which they awaited deportation to another terminal camp outside

of France. Lerner explains that detention camps in France were established for other purposes, even before the war had started. Somewhere instituted to deal with Jews and other refugees coming from the Spanish civil war. In the beginning, most of the occupants were not Jewish. The infrastructure already existed, and the French were used to roundups and detentions of minorities since the late 30s (Lerner 50). In France, the German occupiers needed little effort to detain Jews because they had extensive help from the Police and the population at large. Lerner states:

by 1942, all foreign-born Jews were being sent to the camps and then deported to Germany. Only the 90,000 or so Jews born to families whose French citizenship went back many generations were still largely exempt. Their turn would come the following year. (...) By war's end, 76,000 of France's Jews had been deported to German camps where all but 2,500 perished, and uncounted thousands more had died in French camps. (Lerner 52)

The function of the camps changed as the war progressed, but it seems that even those who perished in these camps did so while awaiting deportation. Therefore, Missak's first spaces are Non-Places. In both, but especially in the detention camp, the significance and meaning of his existence are challenged. His life and principles are threatened. Missak wants to cling to his beliefs, such as pacifism and the French ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, but his circumstances and his cellmates make him question his tenets.

At first, it appears that these spaces have only strengthened his resolve, but as the story progresses, his experiences as a dweller of Non-Places do change him. He quickly picks up a gun and goes from a reluctant voice of reason to an active and violent leader of the opposition. Very few times we see Missak in a French space. The exceptions are a park where he practices target shooting on the Marechal's face, or while he perpetrates his attacks on the Nazis. His only real

Place is his home, which can always be argued that - regardless of where this is situated - is a Place in the Augean sense, and the film does not place him there often. The rest of the time he spends meeting others in secret places or the ghetto. Missak is very much a character in transition and one who fails to find peace for the rest of his shortened life. His existence in the film is bookended by prison and mental and physical torture. We first see him being apprehended and then staying in a detention camp. His narrative ends with his capture and detention in the jail of the police headquarters, before his unrepresented but suggested death.

The situation of Marcel has noticeable differences, but his end is similar to that of Missak. Marcel is a lot more at home in any space in which he operates. He always moves about and behaves as if he owns the space through his confident and brash demeanor. Perhaps because the actor is in real life French, his performance does come across as someone who belongs in both French and foreign spaces. His performance is arguably a rather strong portrayal of a person who immigrated young and grew up feeling as much French (if not more so) than a foreigner, which is the case with most young immigrants or with the children of *immigrés*. Marcel does spend more time in transitional spaces as he does in the ghetto because he is a character of action, always on the move, and perhaps the one who moves forward the narrative of the film in a more proactive way than any other of the protagonists. Initially, Missak is a man of thought, Marcel is the man of action, and both are necessary to push the movie forward just as much as the real personages spearheaded the actions of the army of crime during the resistance.

The most glaring similarity between the spaces where both men operate is that when they appear in a Place, such as their homes, it is a space meant for immigrants and therefore not necessarily understood as such by the French. The French spaces that they occupy are not Places, but rather non-Places, transitional spaces and spaces of limited permanence, such as parks, roads,

streets and other open public Parisian spaces. This use of space is also true of most other characters of the “Army of crime” during the film, which underlines their status as secondary citizens of the Republic despite inhabiting the most French of spaces as far as the film is concerned: Paris. But the City of Lights does create a space for Marcel to represent the next step in immigration and adaptation to that of Missak, generationally speaking. Missak was an adult when he came and remained a cultural outsider to France primarily. In contrast, the Polish youngster had come to France at the age of eight and grown-up culturally as much French, if not more, than Polish. Having spent his formative teenage years in Paris, the city had become his home more than his refuge, the former being the specific case with Missak. The cultural penetration of France is more obvious in him represented by how he feels at ease living and moving both in the ghetto and outside of it. Throughout the film Marcel blends in the French public spaces.

As far as negotiating spaces most skillfully, it is the character of Melinée who, as mentioned before, does the most penetration of both in terms of diversity of places. She spends time at home and in public places both inside and outside the immigrant ghetto. She visits a prison and manages to work herself out of dangerous situations at every turn, as when the authorities are looking for resistance members. She does it with a mix of intelligence and ingenuity that is believable and that would seem to make the spaces that are foreign to the protagonists as a distant promise of tolerance and acceptance; if only the war would be over before their apprehension. Just as Melinée can extract information and sympathy from the Germans, the film suggests that in a more peaceful time, she would feel accepted by the locals. She is more a connection to France for her husband than any of the characters in the resistance group. She becomes his home, his Place, more than any physical location ever does.

This is less the case with the other significant amorous relation of Marcel and Monique, for two main reasons. First, because Monique ends up (according to the film) being partially responsible for the capture of Marcel and some of his associates. The filmmakers may have taken some creative license to make her responsible for this in the film. Arguably, the result is mostly due to investigative police work rather than her conversations with inspector Pujol. In a sense, Monique would be spared, and she manages to remain within the French spaces. However, the narrative suggests that she does so through betrayal rather than merit, even if she does find herself in a tight spot due to her sexual exploitation at the hands of the inspector of the arrondissement.

The second reason is simpler: she has a lot less screen time than the two male protagonists, even though her involvement in the story is pivotal and unique when compared to the other story arcs. At the outset of the narrative, she is a heterotopic character caught between two worlds and belonging to neither, because she does not fit, due to her betrayal, neither in the French nor on the foreign spaces of Paris. The film argues that her lack of loyalty has displaced her spatially since, at the end of the film, she has no family, no friends, and no home. The film establishes with the juxtaposition of French and immigrant spaces that the members of the ‘Army of crime’ remain largely marginalized and incapable of becoming French, not because of their ideals or their lack of belief in the French republic, but due to their nature as foreigners.

## **Conclusion**

The large change that occurred in French war film after 2005 focused on the production of works that focused on discussing the contribution of minorities of North African descent in France. They also contributed as tools to add to the official history of France. This history had

traditionally been sanitized and whitewashed to reflect the contributions of the majority as if only the majority existed. Due to an unstable socio-political climate, segments of the population who oppose immigration and dislike the growing minorities continue to oppose a favorable view of these contributions. A different, large section of the French majority has become more tolerant. After time to evaluate and reflect, this group is ready to begin a more apologetic review of the treatment of former colonial populations in both the past and the present.

On the heels of this new dialogue between the majority and the largest minority groups, other smaller minorities have also begun to add their stories to the narrative. *L'armée du crime* reflects this new addition to the conversation following the same vehicle utilized by the North Africans: war film. Some of these immigrants had come in earlier waves than people of the Maghreb. They have also made important contributions in the time of war to the survival of the French Republic. Although they have not suffered discrimination in the same manner, and perhaps without the same intensity as people from the Maghreb, their journey into acceptance has not been easy, nor has it been completed either.

*L'armée du crime* shows the difficulties that immigrants of European descent have had to endure in France while remaining in relative anonymity regarding recognition. This film clarifies that the French have traditionally resisted immigration from any other culture, but that their social and ethnic prejudice does facilitate a faster acceptance of groups that share more cultural and ethnic traits with them. However, these similarities are a direct cause of their overlooking. The film also shows that minorities do genuinely care for France, that they will do whatever necessary to remain and belong.

A problem with this approach has been brought up by Norindr when reviewing the flawed approach to acceptance undertaken by Rachid Bouchareb in *Indigènes*. The same

criticism may be applied here, that immigrants are too desperately trying to become French by betraying their roots and their culture. Despite the validity of this criticism, *L'armée du crime* shows that the price has already been paid, whether required or not and thus the same privileges of citizenship that the French European citizen of *souche Française* needs to be bestowed on them. The film shows that cultural differences are a richness and a resource that, if valued by the French, may contribute to the survival of France and its progression as a true, multi-cultural society. The last film of this dissertation will illustrate further how the combined trial of French rejection and German occupation facilitated cooperation and solidarity among different minority groups.

## Chapter 6

### *Les hommes libres* (Ferroukhi 2011)

#### Unlikely allies cooperate to face a common enemy

##### Introduction

*Les hommes libres* (Ferroukhi 2011) is a film that portrays the cooperation between Muslims and Jews during WWII. Muslims used the great mosque of Paris and other locations to hide Jews from the German and French authorities at great peril and cost. The story illustrates that minorities have been involved in French conflicts on behalf of the Republic and its inhabitants in other ways than open-armed combat, and that their contribution goes further than military prowess. The movie premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2011 to generally positive reviews, notably regarding lead Tahar Rahim, whose interpretation of protagonist Younes was regarded as a break-out role for the young actor. Just as *L'armée du crime*, the whole of the narrative takes place in Paris during the time of the Nazi occupation. The protagonists are also immigrants who have settled in Paris. Although both groups of immigrants in these two films face the same antagonists, the main difference between them is that the protagonists of *Free Men* are of North African origins. In *Free men*, religion plays a central role through illustrating how the Mosque of Paris protected Jews against the Nazis during WWII.

The case of Jews is particularly interesting because they began migrating to Algeria after being expelled by the Catholic kings of Spain in 1492 (Alba and Silberman 1173). When the Evian accords were signed at the end of the Algerian War, many Algerian Jews immigrated to



France, but their numbers were counted with the *pieds-noirs* rather than native Algerians. Alba and Silberman explain the reasons behind the Jews obtaining automatic citizenship in France:

many of [the pied noirs] possessed this status beforehand, either because their parents and grandparents were French citizens or because of naturalizations in previous generations. Algerian Jews can be included here because they had been granted French citizenship by the Cremieux decree of 1871. (Alba and Silberman 1177)

Algerian Jews and Algerian Muslims had always experienced and kept a separate identity from the Christian French. For example, before the war, the great majority of Algerian immigrants were reluctant to accept the French offer of citizenship because they would have been forced to renounce their religious identity<sup>46</sup>. They had suffered from prejudice and various forms of cultural and even physical persecution at various points in history, most notably in this instance, the Jews due to their prolonged history in the French territory.

Jewish immigration to France after the Algerian war represented but a fraction of the Jews already living in France. They had been immigrating to the Hexagon from other parts of Europe for centuries and had obtained hard-fought victories in terms of acceptance and recognition as French citizens. Freadman summarizes in the abstract of her study of Jews during the Vichy regime the following: “Following the Napoleonic edict granting citizenship to the Jews, and the implementation of laws consolidating the secularism of the Third Republic, France

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<sup>46</sup> Alba and Silberman explain how complicated immigration matters were for North Africans from a juridic standpoint in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: “At the moment of Algerian independence, [pieds noirs] were guaranteed the status of French by birth; many of them possessed this status beforehand, either because their parents and grandparents were French citizens or because of naturalizations in previous generations. Algerian Jews can be included here because they had been granted French citizenship by the Cremieux decree of 1871. Before independence, Muslim Algerians were also regarded as French nationals, but with more limited citizenship rights than Europeans possessed. While it was legally possible for them to accede to full citizenship (statut de droit commun) before World War II, only 5,000 did so according to Francois Gaspand because they would have effectively had to renounce their Muslim identity” (Alba and Silberman 1177). They continue explaining that at the end of the Algerian War, the Evian accord obligated Muslim North Africans to choose between Algerian or French citizenship, but they had to do it by January 1, 1963.

seemed to have confirmed its status as a land of freedom for European Jews” (Freadman 54). Due to these social victories, Jews who had dwelt in France for generations considered themselves both Jewish and French. Changes to these statuses betrayed this belief. Freadman continues explaining that they began to be identified as *Juifs de France* (Jews of France), which felt like an oxymoron and a betrayal (Freadman 57). The new laws created by the Nazis and enforced by the French government effectively separated the Jewish community from the rest of the European French, which was a betrayal of *laïcité* and the republican principles of separation between state and religion.

An important note before proceeding to the analysis is that the film is arguably based upon a true story. All films which make such a claim take varying degrees of artistic liberty to achieve the goals of the text, which at times diverge from or conflict with the historical record of the story upon which the text is based. Willis explains the importance of separating fictionalized history from truth in these terms: “Both the serious historical film/TV series and the serious historical theme park claim truth on the basis of authenticity of detail. Realism stands in for truth; realism conceals what it cannot show” (Willis 84). In this case, the historical record on the story of the Paris mosque sheltering Jews is somewhat unclear. Based upon his research and the limited documentation that currently exists, or is available to the public, Katz posits that his investigation

offers the first full examination of both the debate over the Grand Mosque of Paris as a haven for Jews during the Shoah and the historical evidence for and against this story. In the essay’s first section, I argue that the story of the mosque has become a touchstone for several contemporary issues. These include republican universalism, French patriotism, sacred memory, Islamophobia, and contested narratives of Jewish and Muslim power and

victimhood. By reading the question of the mosque through debates around these issues, the French have arrived at what I term an impasse between mythology and silence (...) I suggest that during the war, the mosque and Benghabrit acted as agents of, by turns, resistance, accommodation, and collaboration. These categories provide a nuanced alternative to the alluring but incomplete account of the mosque as simply heroic. (Katz, Did the Paris Mosque Save Jews? 260-261)

The approach of the 'simply heroic' mosque is the one taken by *Les hommes libres*, and when analyzing it, the points brought up by Katz need to be taken into consideration. The analysis of the film will be taking the 'simply heroic' point of view at face value. The film utilizes fiction based on fact to tell a story to illustrate the little-known plight of immigrants in danger of the Nazis during the War, rather than using the film to establish strict historical factuality. Instead, the narrative functions as an approach to view important players in this historical time, and how some facets of their stories may comment on the contribution of minorities and the development of their identities from the time of the story up to the present.

This film looks different than the previous five entries in this dissertation because it feels less as a war film, and rather as a drama set in war time. The story is set during WWII, but the film is less about the war and more about the right of passage of a man on a path to discover his humanity. The war facilitates a unique journey since the young man is a foreigner working in an occupied country. One expects a dramatic film to have depth in the development of the characters and to concentrate on the drama created by their interactions, rather than have it based on action sequences such as epic battles and other violent scenes, from which the tension comes in war films.

One flaw that has been pointed out by some critics is the rather weak dialogue of the film. They make a good point that it is bland and subdued (Travers). It is for this reason that the camera work and the actors gain importance in this film, because they must carry the narrative when the dialogue fails to provide them with compelling material to deliver to the audience. The performances in the film are quite strong and do make up for the weakness of the script. Critics in particular loved Tahar Rahim and his measured but captivating performance as the troubled and yet emerging Younes. He gives depth to a character that could have been predictable and boring based only on his lines. The experienced Michael Lonsdale does not disappoint as the director of the mosque (Katz, “Vichy France from the Margins”), and Mahmoud Shalaby is a surprisingly bright addition in his supporting role of Salim Halali.

To get the most out of their performances, it is the camera work of the film that compensates for the weakness of the script from a technical point of view. The shooting captures the greatness of the performances in outstanding fashion. Most of the shots are close-ups as one would see in a dialogue, even when there are no words spoken. The camera follows the protagonists closely, whether alone, in small groups or in a crowd, like when Younes appears in the court of the mosque, or when Salim performs at the café or the mosque. The camera is static when the protagonists stand or sit, and scans or follows them when they move or walk. The proximity of these takes puts the onus on the actors to perform. Their every expression is enhanced because the shots are centered on them. And yet, all three of the protagonists do not overreact, giving more credibility to the drama than if they had given an over the top theatrical performance.

The camera also emphasizes that the story is mostly seen from the point of view of Younes. When he is part of the scene, the camera alternates from focusing on him, to seeing the

place from his point of view. However, it does it in an original way. Repeatedly, when the camera switches from capturing Younes to what originally seems as seeing through his eyes, suddenly Younes enters the frame from one of the sides of the shot. Although we may think that we see what Younes sees, we actually do not, not exactly. Many times, the camera then follows him and we see what he sees, but with Younes physically included in this point of view. Instead of seeing the world through the eyes of Younes, we are closely accompanying him in his journey, without completely getting into his head. The camera work allows us to be more intimate with him and the other characters without invading them. The public is a close outsider, just as the French who were Parisian neighbors to these people at the time of the War. Even though we are still dealing with a war film, it is one that cares more about the performances and not the action. What the film lacks in dialogue it provides in acting performance and camerawork to deliver its intended message.

To analyze how this WWII film that focuses on the Resistance is relevant to the premise that universalism largely fails to cover under its umbrella immigrants and minorities in France, we will again evaluate the relationships among members of the different minority groups and the French of European descent in the first part of our review. For the second part, we will examine how the spaces in the film contribute to this analysis, and how this film compares to the ones discussed before, most notably to *L'Armée du crime* with which this new text shares historical and thematic similarities.

## **Film Synopsis**

*Les hommes libres* is a 2011 film directed by Ismaël Ferroukhi that tells the story of unlikely allies who decided to help each other during the Nazi occupation of France in WWII.

Younes is a young Algerian delinquent living in Paris who arrested for his dealings in the black market. The Germans give him his freedom with the condition that he spies on the Paris mosque. They suspect that the authorities at this religious institution are helping French Jews to escape by providing them with falsified papers. Although originally the mythology of the resistance was develop based on European French elements who fought a guerilla-style warfare in opposition to the German invaders, other forms of resistance have been slowly added to this original narrative. In their study of women in the resistance, Bartrop and Lakin explain that there were all types of participation in opposition to the Nazis, such as women social workers hiding and secretly transporting Jews across France in order to smuggle them out into neutral territories such as Switzerland and Spain. Bartrop and Lakin observe: “What this translates to is a view of resistance that is at significant variance with the notion of resistance as combat alone. And with this we arrive at what contemporary scholarship refers to divided memory” (Bartrop and Lakin 119). *Les hommes libres* meets the criteria explained by Bartrop and Lakin and ads another factor to this divided memory, the one that contains the chapter of Muslims protecting Jews while avoiding open confrontation with the German occupiers.

This factor is exemplified through the relationship of Younes and Salim Halali, a young Algerian singer and they become fast friends, only for Younes to eventually discover that the artist is Jewish. His new friendship and his involvement with the mosque open his eyes, and the young Algerian decides to begin helping those whom he was supposed to denounce. The spirit of Younes awakens; he finds a moral compass and sheds his old naïveté about the world and the war as he becomes more involved in a cause for which he cares. His defiance of the Nazi authorities brings an elevated risk as the young man plays both sides to keep his friend safe. He receives support from the rector of the Muslim Institute of the Paris Mosque and discovers that

his cousin is also hiding there. The mosque has become a center for trafficking of information between rebel fighters, especially those of Algerian and Moroccan culture who oppose Nazism and fascism. It also supports Algerian and North African independence and self-determination. During the film, Younes goes from being at the mercy of others as a naïve, rudderless youth, to becoming an idealistic fighter and protector of the persecuted. He loses friends and family in the process but their sacrifices for the cause of freedom only strengthen his resolve as he is forced to grow up in the face of adversity. Both he, the mosque's rector and the Algerian Jewish singer survive the war.

The introductory note from the film explains that during the interwar period, many North Africans had arrived in France looking for work to gain a better life and also to help support their families back in their homelands. Many of them are trapped in France due to the occupation, but for the most part, they were not a major target of the Nazi persecution. Initially, and for most of the narrative, the hierarchy of the mosque and the Nazi leadership stationed in France have a collegial relationship. This uncomfortable *détente* works as long as the Muslims do not cross or defy the German authority, nor interfere with their persecution of other groups, most notably the Jews.

### **Relationship Analysis**

Younes, a young Algerian man struggling to make ends meet, is the protagonist of *Les hommes libres*. With the aid of his cousin, he immigrates to work in the factories of industrial Paris to help his family. The war and the subsequent scarcity of job opportunities expand throughout France. The young immigrant, who has the misfortune of arriving in 1939, quickly finds himself in the street. He turns to hustling in the black market to make a living, without the

knowledge of his parents. He has a basic level of education, and at the beginning of the film seems like a barely average individual barely worth noticing.

The two secondary characters in the story are first, Si Kaddour Benghabrit, the director of the mosque of Paris of which he was the founder. The second person is an Algerian Jewish singer: Salim Halali. The characters were real historical figures, and their stories are depicted fairly accurately, with what the film states is a noticeable degree of artistic license. Klein explains that the “drama is based on historical events -Halali and Ben Ghabrit were real, and Younes is said to be a composite” (Klein). Younes is an amalgam of ‘anonymous’ helpers and freedom fighters. He is based on people who gave their lives or put them at risk to help save those persecuted by the Nazis and to fight against both the German occupation. They were *resistants* who sowed some of the seeds of what would eventually become the Algerian independence movement. This last component is evidenced in scenes where Younes follows people at the mosque and elsewhere who are involved in resisting the Nazis. Their talks and haranguing always blend the fight against fascism with the one against colonialism. Two other characters worthy of mention are Younes’ cousin Ali, and the young Algerian’s romantic interest, Warda Slimane, who goes originally by the alias of Leila to hide her true identity.

Since this film is about the resistance, the antagonists are the German occupants and the French collaborators. In its narrative, *Les hommes libres* shares with *L’armée du crime* an almost total absence of protagonists who are of European French ancestry. Instead, most of them are antagonists. The sole exception to this rule is a woman who works at a bar. She is depicted as sympathizing and helpful to the Algerians and their cause. She transmits their delicate information and welcomes them at her place, using it as a front to hide them or host them. She is



especially nice to Younes and even buys some of his contraband merchandise since some things have become scarce in occupied Paris.

In a brief but heartfelt scene, the woman's birthday is celebrated by the North African insurgents by throwing her a small party in which Salim performs. The songs are in Arabic as is the dancing, and except for the person who is the reason for the little celebration, the invitees are almost all North African. Still, the woman feels and looks completely at home, and not just because the festivity takes place at her establishment, but also because she is genuinely cared for and cares for the attendees. She dances with the best of them and shares happy moments with the men in attendance. She and Slimane are the rare feminine characters in the film. As far as the film is concerned, this woman provides the one significant link between the North Africans, both Jews and Muslims, to the French world that is positive.

The rest of the North African ties or relationships vis-à-vis the French are painted in a negative light and resemble closely those depicted in *L'armée du crime*. They are mostly typified through authorities, police agents, and informants, who must answer to the Nazis. Even the mosque director must lie and cheat to the captain to keep the mosque, and the people they are helping, safe, despite having a very diplomatic entente with the Nazi captain who serves as his governmental liaison. He has no respect for the Nazis but knows that many lives' safekeeping, including his own, dwell on his diplomatic abilities and so, he must present a collegial and seemingly cooperative front.

The main French characters in the film play very small secondary roles. They are mostly officers of the police whose part is to enforce order and follow Nazi protocol, particularly the rounding up and deportation of Jews. The first encounter between Algerians and French is a roundup where Younes is caught trafficking. The young Algerian is brought to the station and

beaten up. The inspector in charge gives the petty delinquent a pass if he promises to infiltrate the mosque and transmit information to the police concerning the mosque officer's activities. Younes reluctantly agrees to the betrayal. Up to this point, he does not seem particularly bright and shows no strong morals nor ideas. He only cares about surviving in a world that has not welcomed him. This presentation of the relationship between French and Algerians helps to establish the social status quo between the two groups, even between three groups, if one considers the Germans who are represented tacitly. The French appear as exploiters of the immigrants in an attempt to save some semblance of freedom. This exploiting relationship goes beyond extortion as a police tactic; it serves to explain to the viewer that the French authorities have chosen the wrong side of history and morality by exploiting North Africans both at home and abroad. This commentary or erroneous action, regarding the treatment of people of the Maghreb, is directed at the leadership of the country specifically, rather than towards the general population.

During the rest of the film, most of the interactions of the North Africans, the mosque, and the French authorities are portrayed as a game of cat and mouse between *resistants* and the collaborative authorities. The game comes to a head towards the end when a friend of Younes, who works at the hospital, turns out to be another informant. He betrays a wounded Algerian leader whom Younes and his brother are trying to hide. A dramatic car chase ensues, and it evolves into a shootout that ends with the death of Ali at the hands of the French police.

The portrayal of the French authorities as collaborators and exploiters of the immigrants caught in French soil during the war is condemning. The particular exploitation of this film happens in the form of the persecution of immigrants of Jewish faith in order to appease the Nazi occupants. They manipulate the Muslim immigrants to aid in the capture of the Jews. The

portrayal has some common elements with the way that these men were represented in *L'armée du crime*, except for Maryvonne, a woman who befriends the North Africans. The previous portrayals are the reason why this small character is so critical to understanding what the film is saying about the complicated relationship between the North Africans and the French as opposed to 'The army of crime', where we virtually find no French character worthy of redemption, in this later picture we do. The helpful French woman is the counterbalance to all the men in suits and trench coats, a woman in a dress. She is friendly where the authorities are vitriolic; she is loyal where they have betrayed their conscience and ideals. The film shows us that those types of French people exist as well; those who helped, befriended, tolerated, and who resisted the opposition.

The film is also illustrating that people like Maryvonne were much smaller in numbers than they should have been. Links may have existed between *résistants* of different ethnic groups, but their collaboration should have been stronger. These minority groups suffered from as much isolation from their fellow insurgents as the regular population of immigrants did from the rest of the French population that put their heads down and decided to ride out the Nazi storm in stoic silence. The isolation, as seen in *L'armée du crime*, was especially harsh on the Jewish minority because of their singular status regarding the Nazis. Hershco explains the reasons behind this reality and how this isolation still resonates today:

the French public discourse and formal commemorations still devote very little attention to the Jewish Resistance in France and especially its important role in rescuing some of French Jewry (...) This disparity is only accentuated by the French tendency to focus on the role of French Gentiles in rescuing French Jews and especially children. (Hershco 52)

Along with the neglect of mentioning the Jewish efforts in the Resistance, the French continue to overlook the contributions of other minorities in it, especially when it comes to assisting the Jewish community. Much like the *L'armée du crime*, this film underlines the isolation and neglect vis-à-vis the European population suffered by immigrants and minorities from the main population, even in times of need, and perhaps even more so at such times. Once again, Camus helps illustrate this point through his use of the plague, only this time, we refer to his play *L'état de siege* (1948), in which the plague arrives in Cadiz, this time fleshed out in the form of a protagonist. The theme in the present film resembles the 1948 play closely, which once again criticizes the dormant masses while praising the active minority, personified in the protagonist Diego. Diego is the one character that opposes the Plague and the takeover of Cadiz by the disease, even at the peril of losing his life. Gerrard states that "Diego symbolizes the voice of democracy opposing a destructive and evil force" (Gerrard 308). *Les hommes libres*, through its Diego-like Younes and Ben Ghabrit characters, also underscores that not all French ignored those in peril. Some individuals did maintain ties with them and did lend a helping hand even at their own risk, a statement that the previous film did posit.

*Les hommes libres* shares another element with *L'armée du crime*: different groups of immigrants collaborated to help each other regardless of their cultural differences and rivalries. In *L'armée*, the bond that unifies most of the immigrant fighters is their Jewish faith and their fate as social rejects based on their foreign origin. In *Les hommes libres*, we find the same argument of smaller groups coming together to face adversity, with the added element that the two groups helping each other are, at present, antagonistic to each other on the political and cultural arena. But the point made goes further than the obvious present-day disconnect between Jews and Muslims. The film argues that people of different religious and ethnic backgrounds

who share a nationality can, and should, care for each other. This point is made not only to Jews and Muslims but to the rest of the population of France, a country with an indescribably rich cultural diversity. To understand how this point is made, we examine the evolution of the relationship between the two main characters, Younes and Salim, as well as the involvement and invaluable tutelage that Ben Ghabrit, the mosque director, provides to the young men.

Younes' acquaintance of Salim comes as he begins to spy on the mosque. Salim is presented as an up and coming artist who has one of the most beautiful voices in all of the Arab world. Younes falls in love with Salim's music. He sells Younes a small percussion instrument of historical importance since it belonged to a famous singer that Salim respected. Salim makes beautiful music with the *darbuka* ('goblet drum') the second time they meet. The two become friends, and Salim takes Younes under his wing, introducing him to people and taking the young trafficker and spy around Parisian music clubs. Younes, despite his predicament and poor choices, has a good heart. As the narrative of the film progresses, he develops a sincere affection for Salim, and the people he meets at the mosque, most notably Ben Ghabrit, Leila (Slimane) and his cousin, who he discovers has been hiding in the complex's capacious basement.

Younes and Salim's relationship has an interesting arc because the Algerian protagonist goes from receiving the protection of Salim at the beginning of the story to becoming the protector towards the end. The shift is gradual as the relationship grows and Younes comes of age. The film largely avoids the formulaic one moment when the hero switches from child to man, or from being acted upon to being proactive. Instead, the narrative develops the change through a series of smaller but important transformational incidents. A collection of circumstances allows Younes to grow, change and facilitate a more believable and sincere evolution. It would be easy to point out the murder of his cousin at the hands of the French police

as ‘that moment’, but in this picture, ‘that moment’ is the culmination of a progression that has been a long time coming. Younes has a few encounters with Leila, whom he likes, and their short conversations, along with some material that she gives him to read, begin to push him to think and reflect on his nonchalant attitude towards the Resistance. Every conversation with his cousin takes the same direction as well since Ali is an idealistic fighter who never doubts the cause (or causes). Originally, the young cousin tells the older one that he does not see the point in becoming involved with a fight that is not their own. Ali responds that if they do not stop the invaders in France, this plague will also reach their home country and that besides helping France, the North African freedom fighters also believe that their contribution will help their cause of self-determination against the colonialist oppression of the Europeans.

This conversation does more than reveal that the North Africans were not only acting for the benefit of their adoptive country, but that they felt that France could provide a buffer between the invaders and the countries of origin of these immigrants. This ulterior motive illustrates an argument that *L'armée du crime* does not make, and that none of the other films up to now clarify either. This point is that, at least in small part, the separation of Algerians and French was not completely a one-sided affair, but that the Africans envision themselves as a separate group that was not completely to be absorbed into the mainstream of French society. More importantly, African immigrants were struggling for equal rights, but not for a notion of equality that meant the total absorption of their culture into the French one. Universalism then could not work nor apply to them because their intention was not assimilation, but rather the goal was equality of rights and privileges, even if the only result could mean eventual separation. Mehta studies questions of identity, citizenship and assimilation by minorities in the suburbs of Paris, and notices that many young *beur* writers are arguing in their works for acceptance of cultural

diversity rather than identity absorption, which is rendered impossible by the majority. Brinda Mehta cites Faïza Guène, the principal *beur* author of her study, who speaks about the challenges faced by children of immigrants:

Guène herself describes the predicament of this in-between generation of beurs in an interview with Jason Burke in which she refuses to succumb to the dictates of a contested identity: "People say that people like me should be more integrated. . . . But what does that mean? I was born in France, I went to a French school, I speak French, I live in France. It is difficult to do the things that are apparently needed to be accepted if that means denying things that are a part of my culture. It is as if—and this is a bit brutal but is true—we (children of immigrants) are told, "You are children of the republic, but you are bastard children. You are very welcome here but with the following conditions. . . . The great symbols of France, the cultural richness etc . . . all that is inaccessible. . . . It has got nothing to do with me or our lives". Guène's statements reveal the deep fractures and social divisions in mainstream French society. (Mehta 176-177)

This particular argument is somewhat different than the ones presented in previous films, but not completely dissimilar to those of other minorities depicted in the movie of the previous chapter. Jews of different European provenance (Hungarian, Polish, and so forth), did seek to maintain their traditions at the same time that they searched for acceptance as equals in the society of the Hexagon. Other immigrants, especially first-generation arrivés, looked for more than just shelter from lands where they were either persecuted or suffering from a precarious economic situation. They looked for better, if not equal opportunities. To them, France sounded like such a place, in which they would keep their traditions as long as they worked to fit into society, conform with the law and contribute to the economy through their hard work. The immigrants of *L'armée du*

*crime* were trying to fight the invaders and survive and fit in. The fighters of *Les hommes libres* were rather hoping for a quid-pro-quo by helping the French. They hoped for an improvement in their citizenship status and social acceptance (rather than absorption), or for greater liberties for their home countries. The disappointment of failing to achieve either goal, coupled with a feeling that their contributions to the survival of France were underappreciated, prompted the North African revolutionary movements that eventually led to the independence of those countries.

Ferroukhi's film shows us that it is not possible to generalize the goals of the different groups of immigrants that have come to the Hexagon. Their aspirations may be as diverse as the reasons that brought them. Just as important, it also illustrates that motivations for immigration, and the goals of different groups and individuals, change and evolve with the permutations of the situation of each group. For example, the North Africans in the film of this chapter are more interested in self-determination than their French-born descendants of later decades. This representation of aspirations is logical since these descendants would have weaker ties to the country of origin of their forefathers, a link that only gets weaker by the generation. Each newer wave feels further removed from the culture of their forbearers than the one of a country that is no longer their adoptive land, but their native one instead. Where immigrants want acceptance as human beings with the same rights as their host, their descendants would rather be considered as hosts themselves, especially facing the incidence that many French of European descent insist on calling them immigrants by virtue of their ethnicity.

This evolution is somewhat typified by Younes, who begins as a guest in the mosque and among his people, but who by the end becomes much more of a protector and a denizen, having embraced the cause of liberty and taken a leadership role. Younes feels a lot more at home in Paris than his cousin, who keeps strong cultural and ideological ties with his country of origin.



His ties to Algeria are his idealism for self-determination and his latter-age immigration, with a personality and identity already formed. Younes was, in large part, formed by the streets of Paris, at least in terms of what has made him the man that he is at the beginning of the motion picture. His change occurs in the shadow of the mosque, but still within the confines of Paris, where he carries out all of his protective endeavors. Younes feels as much home in the clubs and the streets as he does in the mosque, perhaps even more so.

The story of Younes pays homage to biblical tales, such as the parable of a man who reclaims his birthright and his culture, and with them his humanity. At the first meeting between him and Salim, he sells the singer a precious piece of his ancestry for money. This situation mirrors the scriptural story of Esau, who sells his birthright to Jacob for a plate of lentils because he hungered and because he valued his birthright little<sup>47</sup>, a stance that almost perfectly mirrors the initial attitude of the young Algerian. In the hands of the Halali, the Darbouka is a musical treasure, so the spectator sees a justification in the trade, by seeing the instrument in the hands of someone who not only values it but, in a way, blesses everybody within hearing distance when Halali plays it. However, as the film continues, Salim loses his faith. Under the weight of the persecution, he refuses to continue to perform, betraying his talents (or as another biblical parable would state, burying his talent<sup>48</sup>).

As the initial confidence of Salim wanes, the stature of his friend grows. Even if Younes does not buy the Darbouka back, it is through his efforts that Salim survives the war and finds within himself the ability to begin creating music again. It is Younes who pushes his friend to

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<sup>47</sup> The story of Esau selling his birthright to his younger brother Jacob is found in Genesis chapter 25.

<sup>48</sup> In chapter 24 of the Book of Matthew in the Bible three servants are given different quantities of 'talents' (a measure of precious metal, such as silver or gold). The master takes leave but returns later and requests that each servant return the talents. The first two servants doubled the quantity of talents each had received, and returned all of them to the Master, who praised them for their diligence. However, the third servant was afraid and hid the talent on the ground. The Master chastised the third servant and sent him to jail for his negligence.

sing at the celebration of Maryvonne. When Halali initially refuses, Younes tells him that he has already committed Salim to play, that he is awaited, and that he should avoid embarrassing the young Algerian by not showing up. Therefore, if Younes does not buy the goblet drum back, he is the one who gives it (along with its player) back to the people, thus reclaiming his cheaply sold birthright, and with it his soul. Halili agrees, and, as soon as he begins singing, the joy of life re-enters him. Younes has rescued and revived Halili. The pendulum shifts, and Younes becomes the driving force behind their friendship, and more important, the clear catalytic agent for the narrative for the remainder of the film.

The affiliation of Halali and Younes is a representation of how the relationship between the two communities of people that they represent evolved during the war. It applies particularly to the involvement of the mosque and North Africans regarding the Resistance and the sheltering of Jews. The latter had been established in France for centuries, and although they mostly were somewhat segregated and endured all sorts of persecution at the hands of the predominantly Christian population, they had become a staple of the French society. Some North Africans arrived in the Hexagon around the time of the African Napoleonic expeditions, but their numbers had made themselves felt at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during times when labor was needed, such as the Great War. Muslim North Africans were considered immigrants in France because even though their countries were part of the French Empire, not even Algerians enjoyed the same citizenship status as their countrymen of European Ancestry. This situation applied to North African French Jews, who did qualify for the same status as the *pieds-noirs*. North African Jews of French ancestry had a more secure status in France than Muslims, and this situation is evidenced in the social status of both protagonists. In the film, when Younes arrives, Salim is already established.

During the war, under the Nazi persecution, the foundations that the Jewish community had built throughout Europe crumbled, and France was no exception to this phenomenon. Populations shifted and disappeared. People fled and hid and depended on the humanity of a few valiant locals to survive through hiding or escaping, and this is precisely the phenomenon that the filmic relationship of the two young Algerians portrays.

The role of the mosque director only highlights this relationship between the two communities. Where Younes comes of age through his involvement with the religious institution, it is Ben Ghabrit who plays the grandfatherly role of mentor and overall protector. Younes and Salim have significant character development in the film, but Ben Ghabrit does not, which allows the rector to become the bedrock in which the story finds a solid foundation. As the Gestapo and the French police inquire and chase, the mosque protects. Even when the Nazis threaten the director, he never loses his composure. The only time he displays any exasperation is with regards to Younes, when the young man confesses his involvement with the police as an informant of resistance activities of the mosque. Ben Ghabrit already suspected Younes, but the fact that Ben Ghabrit allows him to continue spying until the young man grows on his own is a testament of the supreme confidence and solidity of the director's spirit as a guide and protector. He is the enabler not only of Younes' maturation but also of the salvation of many from the hands of the Nazis, Jews along with *resistants* of different nationalities.

The fate of Ali and Leila is a representation of those who did pay the ultimate price for either resisting the occupiers and, just as important, of those who already beginning to support North African self-determination. The film does make a strong point of not separating those two issues in the minds of Algerian and Moroccan freedom fighters. This way of presenting these two issues differs from the previous WWII period films studied in chapters 2 and 5. In the end,

Ali and Leila, along with many others, share the fate of all of the *Affiche Rouge* case ‘criminals’ portrayed in *L’armée du crime*. During the German occupation, this was also the fate of many *resistants* caught harboring Jews or disturbing the order that the Nazis were trying to establish in France and beyond. The film argues that the mosque is successful and serves as an example of what should be done in the face of adversity. It also shows that the survival of Younes and Salim is only one side of the coin of the story, with the flip side being the lives lost of the insurgents who were discovered.

To conclude the study of what the relationships in this film portray, there are a few points to review. First, the interaction between immigrants and French was very limited, especially during this period. Immigrants are portrayed as isolated and mostly left to their own devices by the French, including the Resistance, much like in the previous WWII film dealing with a similar topic. A small number of European French did help and became involved with immigrants, and most notably, with those invested with the Resistance movement. They were brave and decent people who were loved back by those they helped. Regrettably, their stories are too scarce, especially considering how French authorities persecuted immigrants and French *resistants* alike, not to mention Jews and other minorities just for the sake of being minorities. And finally, peoples of different ethnicities and cultures helped each other during these times of great need, putting aside dramatic cultural differences because it was their moral obligation. This reaction stems from the response of a community when facing a common threat. This threat may be defined, according to Ingrid Creppel, as a ‘normative threat’. She defines it as:

an expectation of significant harm to a political body. Five core elements form the nucleus of the threat concept: (a) the threat: a signal of danger enacted/made and received/ perceived – that is, a conveyance of information about something to happen; (b)

the threatener: the entity or act/event perpetrating the danger signal; (c) the dangerousness of the threat: the content of harm/danger; (d) the threatened: the entity expected to suffer or be damaged; and (e) perceiver or interpreter of the harm. (Creppell 453)

Although Creppell applies her study of threat to a political body, a normative threat can also be a danger to a community not formed with political ends or ties. A) The German menace was dangerous physically through the limiting of the freedom previously enjoyed by the French. It was a political, cultural and ideological danger. B) the threatener was clear: the Nazis. C) the dangerousness of the threat ranged from detention to deportation and torture, and ultimately, loss of life. D) the threatened was the whole of the French population, but in particular the Nazis targeted Jews and other minorities. E) Finally, the perceiver of the interpreter of the harm was a diverse and complex group, but the films studied portray those who perceived the threats and chose to act against it: The Resistance.

The Nazi invasion met all the criteria listed by Creppell, not only as a threat to the whole of France, but in particular ways that applied to immigrants as a separate group that shared certain disadvantages when compared to the general French population. The one element they shared regarding the principle of Universalism was that none of them received protection under this ideological blanket. Richard Lamm, former governor of Colorado explained how immigrants from different nationalities gained cohesiveness when facing the Nazi threat. He stated: “A community is much more than a place on a map. It is a state of mind, a shared vision, a common fate” (Lamm 238). When facing the normative threat of the Nazis, their shared lack of equal rights forced strangers to fight a common enemy. Their common fate brought them together as a community, at least temporarily. Poles, Hungarians and Spaniards who shared the Jewish faith

fought together in France, but at times they were also aided by Muslim immigrants who all felt it was the correct moral response to the immoral Nazi menace. *Les hommes libres* and *L'armée du crime* show that, at times, that fight was carried out independently from the European French Resistance.

### **Spatial Analysis**

The spaces in *Les hommes libres* support the portrayal of the relationships between immigrant groups and the French as in *L'armée du crime*. The most significant space in the work of Ferroukhi is the mosque of Paris. The Parisian mosque is a Place by Augé's definition. Even though we have posited in previous chapters that non-French spaces are portrayed in all the films of this dissertation as Non-Places, this particular picture does the opposite. Despite obvious thematic commonality between the two films, the different approach to space portrayal is one of the main differences between *L'armée du crime* and *Les hommes libres*. In *L'armée*, the spaces where the immigrants live feel borrowed and temporary. They are still not fully claimed or transformed into a Place. The immigrant characters do not seem completely settled in but rather bunched up in a common space where the rest of Paris casts them, serving as a sign of the refusal of Parisians to accept them as equals.

The mosque of Paris is an institution of repute among the locals, and most important, commands respect from the authorities, both the Gestapo and the French police. The mosque of Paris is a place with a relatively short time of existence, especially when compared to other religions with much lengthier established spiritual and physical traditions in France, such as Christians and Jews. One of those main characteristics of a Place is its function as a space where

one's life acquires meaning through ritualistic behavior, especially in modern and post-modern times.

The project of the Paris mosque was born during the years of WWI, but the original plans for that space were different from a religious temple with a singular function. Naomi Davidson explains that the mosque and its Muslim institute were originally conceived to commemorate the sacrifices of *indigène* soldiers during the Great War (Davidson 199). However, the scope of the project quickly changed in location and purpose. The location moved from the vicinity of *Les Invalides* to the *Quartier Latin*, and when finally built the intention was to use it for the administration and surveillance of the North African population of Paris under a non-secular model. Construction began in 1922 and the building was inaugurated in 1926. However, it became quickly evident that Muslims would not tolerate secularization in the French model, so the mosque became a symbol of French control rather than religious tolerance. Ben Ghabrit, the leader of the mosque, became an important intermediary between the French government and the Muslim community of Paris. Eventually, his influence extended well beyond Paris; during WWII, it reached over the border into Vichy. Ben Ghabrit became a cultural and religious mediator between the Europeans and the North Africans, between the Christians and the Muslims. Davidson further explains the ambiguous role of the mosque as a site of worship, refuge, but also of control. It became at times more important as a tourist attraction rather than a place of instruction of worship. The mosque and the institute became an attempt to create a new type of Islam, a secularized French Islam that immigrant Muslims resisted. She also explains that Ben Ghabrit gained much power as a mediator between cultures. He went as far as influencing or manipulating, and most notably blocking, other Islamic construction projects throughout France

to keep the Paris mosque as the preeminent Islamic site in the Hexagon<sup>49</sup>. Robert Aldrich further explains Davidson's statements by adding an important historical observation:

the mosque inauguration celebration followed soon after the defeat of Abd el-Krim's rebellion in Morocco. Behind noble words about long-lasting and amicable ties between the French and Muslims, speeches obliquely reaffirmed imperial control over Afrique Francaise du Nord and, at least for the moment, Muslim acquiescence to French rule.

(Aldrich "Vestiges of the Colonial Empire" 52-53)

Aldrich continues by saying that ben Ghabrit, in his inaugural speech of the mosque and Muslim institute, proclaimed that the building symbolized the friendship of France towards Islam and the latter's attachment to the French empire. Through uneasy but necessary his relationship with the French government, ben Ghabrit had the opportunity to hone his diplomatic skills in relation to oppressive occupation forces and was therefore prepared to deal with the Nazis when they arrived.

*Les hommes libres* chooses a specific point of view, which is that the mosque of Paris functions as a safe space where Muslims could carry on with the religious traditions that they had brought from their countries of origin. The city of Paris originally becomes a large Non-Place for Muslims, where they feel as if working and living on borrowed land and time, remaining ever as outsiders. The mosque offsets this setting, feeling completely different. It becomes a space where Muslims can reconnect with one of the aspects that gave their life meaning, inside of Greater Paris, a space that challenges, questions and redefines their life. The mosque serves as Place, an effective cultural oasis for Muslim immigrants, functioning as a physical and spiritual embassy

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<sup>49</sup> For further understanding of the evolution of the role of the Paris mosque and Ben Ghabrit as its administrator, please consult the work of Naomi Davidson. I have cited for this chapter "La mosquée de Paris. Construire l'islam français et l'islam en France, 1926-1947", but she has published a more comprehensive work on this topic entitled "Only Muslim: embodying Islam in twentieth-century France" through the Cornell University Press in 2012.



not just on behalf of their homeland, but of their home culture. The words of Augé once again come to mind when initially defining the anthropological Place:

It simultaneously designates the place of the social order, defined by the same stroke as a common place. We will reserve the term 'anthropological place' for this concrete and symbolic construction of space, which could not of itself allow for the vicissitudes and contradictions of social life, but which serves as a reference for all those it assigns to a position, however humble and modest. (Augé 51-52)

The mosque is, therefore, a foreign Place among the local Places, but a Place nonetheless. None of the previous films has portrayed a space so clearly defined for immigrants as this one.

Previously, most of their Places are reclaimed or adopted, and the European French may still view them as non-Places. The mosque may not fit this view, and judging by the tone of the film, it does not.

The respect paid to the mosque as a Place is evidenced by the visits that the Nazi captain pays to the director on more than one occasion. The captain is both courteous and diplomatic, even in his last visit when he bids farewell to Ben Ghabrit and all but threatens him. The captain, during each visit, extends to the director due respect as a spiritual leader and also to the mosque as an important institution. This respect is a legitimization of the temple as a Place. At the beginning of the story, no significant conflict of interest appears to oppose the two men. Even if the Nazis did not see Muslims as having an equal religious or moral footing in comparison to their philosophies, in France, the Germans did not treat them as a nuisance for the most part. The regular visits to the mosque serve to maintain an amicable relationship between the Nazis and the French Muslim community or to request cooperation and help in their persecution of others. The Nazis had strategized an approach towards the Muslim communities in the occupied European

territories to recruit them as collaborators to their cause. Herf explains that first, they convinced Muslims that the Nazi brand of antisemitism did not extend towards Arabs, but merely Jews (Herf 716). Then, “having dispensed with the charge that their racism extended to Arabs and Muslims, Nazi propagandists appealed to them as allies in a common cause, the fight against the Jews” (Herf 717). To further assure their services, they persuaded Muslim leaders in Europe, Africa and the Middle East that should they help the Nazis defeat the imperial powers of Britain and the United States, they would support them in overthrowing the rule of these empires that had broken up the Arab nations according to their convenience (Herf 722-723). These messages had great appeal and success, and many leaders established relationships with the Reich against what they saw as common enemies. However, different leaders gave mixed responses because their goals differed, as evidenced by the dealings of Ben Ghabrit with the French and German leaderships.

One further proof that there existed little enmity between Nazis and Muslims in France occurs when Younes is wrongfully detained during the roundup of Jews (la Raffle). Upon having his penis checked for circumcision, he is mistakenly thrown with the Jews being arrested until someone interrupts the Nazi soldiers by explaining he is Muslim and not Jewish. The soldier acknowledges his error and hastily lets the young Algerian go. The mosque as a Place did not come into significant danger until they became suspect of harboring Jews, a suspicion that put the institution in direct odds with the Gestapo and the French collaborators.

The role of the mosque in this film is physically and figuratively multi-layered. First, it serves as a protective space. It protects the practicing Muslims from the outside world spiritually and physically. In its bowels, it harbors those who are persecuted for not having remained neutral by taking sides against the occupiers, as well as those who are already harboring feelings of

North African self-determination and separatism from the French Empire. The mosque also serves as a home. The people in charge of running it live there, so in Augé's definition of a Place, it plays both roles of sanctuary and home that qualify it as such, where life gains and retains meaning through ritualistic behavior.

Of all the spaces studied this far, the mosque performs more qualities of a Place than any other depicted in any of the films. Beyond the functions already mentioned, it also serves as a school, since people attend it to learn culture and language besides the practice of religion. Finally, the religious institution is a transformative space where Younes comes to find the meaning of his existence, and the mosque performs for him all of the roles previously mentioned of refuge, church, home and school. Younes penetrates or occupies every single space of the mosque, from the offices of the director to the places of worship and from the courtyards to the basement and hidden passages where refugees and rebels hide. The mosque reciprocally penetrates the spaces of the soul of the young Algerian, from his mind to his heart. Within its confines, the protagonist transforms from a naïve simpleton into an idealistic freedom fighter who protects friends and strangers alike, including those of Jewish faith. Ironically, Muslims feel more at home at the mosque than the French collaborators do in Paris, including their headquarters, and also the German invaders. It is almost impossible to differentiate German and French collaborators, except for the military uniforms than the former wear and, of course, the spoken language. However, the attitude of both is very similar when dealing with the mosque.

The film goes as far as demonizing the locals even further than the Germans, who treat the mosque with more respect than the French do. We have already mentioned the diplomatic manner of dealing with each other between Nazis and Muslims, even when they issue threats. Interestingly, it is the French police who decide to pay informants to watch the mosque, and

when the Germans learn of the scheme, they reprimand the French for violating a sacred place inhabited by neutral agents in the war. The French inspector cuts off Younes when it is obvious that the young man identified him. This abruptness shows the disdain and mistrust that French authorities already felt towards the Muslim community, but one that was not echoed by the Nazis who saw them as allies, or at the very least as tools that may be manipulated to the German advantage. The abrupt French treatment of Younes is evidence of a judgement that the French authorities had already passed on the Muslim community as mentioned by Naomi Davidson when she mentions that “le fait que les populations musulmanes soient assimilées à leur identité religieuse signalait qu’aux yeux de l’État français, il y avait une impossibilité à ce que les musulmans deviennent laïcs”<sup>50</sup> (Davidson 199). The French authorities already saw a challenge of absorbing a religious minority into a laic society. For the Germans, this was not a problem, or at least not yet. Where the Germans seem to have respect for a sacred Place, the local collaborators do not. The film tells the spectator that an antagonistic relationship does already exist between the French governmental authority and the immigrant community. This antagonism underlines the separation between the two segments of society and the virtual impossibility of any reconciliation where treatment and opportunities remain unequal between the two groups.

The antagonistic relationship between French and immigrant is exacerbated by how the former invade and disrespect the Places in which the immigrants go about their daily lives. The best example is their unwarranted invasion of the mosque through informants and spies, but this attitude is not exclusive to the holy place. The French uninvitedly penetrate the homes of immigrants, as well as other Places like the social club. Ironically, even though we are in France

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<sup>50</sup> “the fact that the Muslim populations be assimilated to their religious identity signaled that, to the eyes of the French State, there existed an impossibility that Muslims become laic” (Translation by me).

and these spaces are French by being physically located within Paris, the setting of the movie helps the public see and understand these spaces as North African Places, islands of foreign territory within the Hexagon. The French look and feel like invaders despite being in their own country. The betraying of their principles through collaborating with the occupiers transforms the French into foreigners in their own land, foreigners to themselves. The police do not look like they belong in the mosque or the club, or even in the young Algerians' apartments, any more than *Pepe le Moko's* persecutors look at home in the Casbah of Algiers in the classic French picture.

This club to which we have referred, the Moorish Café of the Mosque where Salim performed during the time of the German occupation, serves as a Place as well. After the mosque, it is perhaps the second most important space, even if the story only spends a small amount of time inside it. This place still exists, it is presently called 'La Mosquée' and it continues to serve as a restaurant, attached to the Parisian Mosque in the Fifth *Arrondissement* of Paris. Robert Aldrich says of this place:

The faithful still come to the mosque, and the building and courtyard are particularly busy during Friday prayers. The café is a popular spot for mint tea and pastries, and is frequented by many non-Muslims, who also use the restaurant and hammam. The building thus now fulfils a dual function: a religious site for Muslims, a tourist spot for others. (Aldrich, "Vestiges of the Colonial Empire" 54)

The scenes filmed in the club where the Jewish singer performs are significant. First, this place gives its most significant meaning to the life of Salim. It is his sanctuary, his mosque. Just as Younes finds himself at the religious establishment, so does Salim at the nightclub than anywhere else. He may perform elsewhere, but it is in this space that the film shows him receive

his inspiration, his *joie de vivre*, where he defines himself consciously and unconsciously. In this club, Salim is the grand priest, the central figure to whom everybody else comes for spiritual renewal. He becomes the light that others in his culture look upon for uplifting. Some of the scenes of progression of his relationship with Younes occur inside the café as well. He buys Younes' drum there. He woos Younes with his voice in this club. He is also arrested there, before being taken to the cemetery where Younes has forged a tombstone with his purported father's burial place that certifies him as Muslim. He reveals to Younes his plans to one day open his cabaret in this place. And inside the near-sanctity of that space Halili finally, following the encouragement of his young friend, rediscovers himself through his music after having waded through the waters of despair and vowed never to sing again.

For Younes, the cabaret is the second place of cultural and self-discovery. In this space, he discovers a part of himself through music, which serves as a connector to his culture and an underdeveloped sense of who he is. This space also serves as a meeting place between him and other Algerians who have more in common with him than he had previously thought or allowed himself to enjoy. Up to that point, Younes has been little more than a hoodlum, but in the club, he interacts with people of all walks of life who share with him their provenance and their religion, however little they may practice it. Through his evolving relationship with Salim, Younes' growth can be traced within the nightclub. His journey can be tracked from his first scenes, where he comes as a trafficker of goods, to meet people, to looking for his friend while he is down, and helping him revive his career and his soul.

By contrast, the homes of both young men are not as significant in terms of what transpires there. Younes' place is barely apparent in the film, and his apartment does not play the role of a home, or for that matter, a Place. The meager quarters appear as a space where he sleeps

and hides his contraband, closer to the heterotopia of a motel than to a home. We barely see the Algerian's flat, and perhaps the most significant scene filmed there shows the arrest of the young while his placed is tossed about. Younes' apartment represents what France has been up to now for the youth: a space devoid of much more a few things to get, allowing him to commit petty crimes while losing himself. A Non-Place facilitates a non-existence. His home stands in opposition to what the mosque and the nightclub eventually become. Younes is more at home in those two public spaces than his apartment.

Salim's apartment also tells the story of a man, although it is more of a Place for him than Younes' Spartan excuse for an apartment. Apparently, Salim is better established. He is in the process of making a home for himself through a promising career. Where Younes flees from his derelict apartment because there is nothing from him there, Salim flees to his apartment when things go wrong. Even though his flat does not bring him the solace he seeks, the singer still views it as a refuge from the world. In other words, he does have a home. Unfortunately, he does not always utilize it to its best potential. He is nonetheless relatively safe and at peace from his pursuers in this space.

One small detail that does occur at Salim's apartment, one detail which the film greatly neglects to pursue or expand, is the fact that the young singer is also gay, which double earmarks him with the Nazis as a non-desirable. Even before the War had begun, the Nazi party had deemed homosexuality to be a threat to the German people, and specifically male homosexuality since it threatened the power of procreating the superior German race as the Nazi saw it. The Nazi party had published statements in response to Gay groups who were seeking to revoke anti-Gay laws in Germany. Alistair Newton reports the following as the first of those statements:

Anyone who thinks of homosexual love is our enemy. We reject anything which emasculates our people and makes [them] a plaything for our enemies. Might makes right. Let us see to it that we once again become strong! But this we can achieve only in one way: the German people must once again learn how to exercise discipline. We therefore reject any form of lewdness, especially homosexuality, because it robs us of our last chance to free our people from the bondage which now enslaves us. (Newton 18)

When he has almost quit singing, Younes has been frantically looking for him and encouraging him to return. Younes goes up to Salim's room only to see a young man he recognizes from the crowd that attended Salim's concert, come out and close the door while finishing getting dressed. Salim realizes Younes now knows, and it seems like the small incident has put a dent in their relationship. Later in the film, a small (almost non-) apology about the misunderstandings of that night allows both friends to know that things are good between them, and also that they have both grown and accepted who the other person is and what they have learned about the other and themselves.

Salim required of his close friend and of two safe Place to escape harm. More than that, he needed these spaces to remain who he was. His apartment became the proverbial closet, behind whose closed doors he could express his sexuality. The café of the Mosque became the artistically performative space behind whose open doors he could remain a Jewish artist. The sacredness and ceremonial repetitiveness of his actions in these spaces permitted his survival, while his Muslim friend facilitated it. The apartment allows Salim a place of refuge where he can be gay, in opposition to the outside world, where he must act as a heartthrob. Places, in brief, are spaces where we can feel safe, be who we are, and develop as people. The places that perform these functions tell us where Younes and Salim do belong. The film barely opens the door to this



complex situation but offers a glimpse into the menace posed by the Nazi normative threat. It shows that this threat stretched beyond the persecution of different cultures, and how it extended to any sort of anomaly to what they perceived to be the social norm that they were attempting to impose upon the world.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion to this section, we can ascertain that the spaces in which the protagonists of the picture move define how the men feel, and even more importantly, who they are. The spaces serve as transformative Places in the story arc of Salim and especially Younes. The mosque, more than a place, may be seen as an active participant in the narrative, as one of the main characters in the narrative. The most interesting facet of the spaces shown in the film is that they are portrayed as THE important Places of the story, even though they are hardly frequented by French and quite possibly not viewed by them in this light. The film has effectively turned the tables of what is a Place in the way that the European French originally defined it as a French European space, thus validating the inherent value of sacred places regardless of its adherence or use by a particular religion or culture. These spaces also serve to humanize the immigrants and to portray them as worthy of the same privileges than their French hosts, and as capable of heroic and noble acts as the French who participated in the resistance for the love of their country and fellow human beings.

The complex relationships between the different minority groups, and their limited and unbalanced relationship dynamics regarding the Germans, but especially the French, show how little progress they had made into being accepted and assimilated into the main narrative of the Republic. However, this disassociation also facilitated the positive impact they had on France.

They also show the type of goodwill and solidarity of which immigrants and foreigners can have in the face of widespread rejection. A.O. Scott summarizes the film in these words:

Ismael Ferroukhi's new film, "Free Men," takes place in Nazi-occupied Paris, by now a familiar setting for morally serious period dramas. The story this movie has to tell is a bit unusual, though: it concerns the efforts by Muslim North African residents of the city to protect Jews and aid the Resistance. Like Rachid Bouchareb's "Days of Glory" -- about North African soldiers who suffered abuse and discrimination while fighting to liberate France from German domination -- "Free Men" is both proudly conventional and determinedly revisionist (Scott C10).

Ferroukhi successfully pours the new wine of revisionism into the old wineskins of conventional movie storytelling. He shares these elements with the previous five films of the dissertation but begins taking us in a new direction, doing more than merely reviewing the contributions of minorities to France. He shows the solidarity they have to each other in times of need. More importantly, he strongly suggests that this is still possible, the dialogue and the collaboration between minorities and the majority, but also between minorities with conflicting goals and beliefs. He posits that dialogue between all may strengthen the fabric of a complex 21<sup>st</sup>-century French society.

## Conclusion

The objective of this dissertation is explaining the significance of the increase in the production of 21<sup>st</sup>-century French war films. These new films have a new style and differ in thematic elements from those produced in the previous century after WWII. The old, state-sponsored cinema of Imperial France had a different agenda. Martine Astier Loutfi explicates that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century “The expression of potential anticolonialist sentiments in French films was seriously limited by the progressive development of an official state-aid and censorship system” (Astier Loutfi 24). Governmental leaders pushed an agenda that endowed the Empire with the duty to civilize its periphery, and suppressed any sort of idea and media that opposed this view. The loss of the Empire and the subsequent rise of a large, identity-conscious minority with roots or ties to former colonial territories became an engine for changing the outdated and diversity-blind official historiographical discourse. Works such as *La trahison* and *Indigènes* also have a different point of view. They focus on the role played by immigrants and minorities in the French armed forces, from the *résistance* in WWII to the regular army in the wars of colonial independence. These motion pictures show and stress the importance of minorities in shaping the history of France in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Important political changes facilitated these innovative works. The first was a confrontation between France and its guilt when dealing with the crimes of *collaborateurs* during the Second World War. Although the guilt and sins of that generation cannot be completely washed away, facing them and beginning to solve them allowed France to begin moving forward. This movement permitted the refocusing on other problematic policies, such as colonialism and the neglect of minorities and immigrants within France.

The films of this dissertation form part of this refocusing. They represent an exploration of controversial topics by the affected minorities as well as the majority. These films developed in three distinct stages. This dissertation analyzes two movies of each stage to represent the themes discussed in each time frame, as the progression of an emerging dialogue between segments of the French population. The first pair of motion pictures focuses on the thematic shift from movies that depict a whitewashed story of France to one where minorities of colonial origins take center stage. These works are thought up, produced and acted by people who form part of the minorities of colonial origins or who have direct relations with the conflicts depicted. These relationships allow them to have a unique, first-hand experience on the topic and give the movies, and the topics discussed increased validity. *La trahison* and *Indigènes* help us understand how vital and present former colonial populations have been in the preservation and progress of the French Republic.

*Mon colonel* and *L'ennemi intime* represent the second group. They are, foremost, an admission of guilt regarding colonial abuse, specifically during the Algerian war of independence. They shift the gaze of the lens back to the viewpoint of the majority. They constitute the opening of a dialogue with the first group of films, and with the minorities that produced them. The first two groups focus on the largest minority in France, people from North African descent, and their struggle against the white majority. The third group goes back further, to WWII, and in it, *L'armée du crime* and *Les hommes libres* depict the struggle of smaller minority groups who join the conversation. These groups show the contributions of their culture and, at times, their lives for the survival of France. When studied together, these films help analyze the current social climate of France and the tension that the different ethnic and cultural groups are navigating.

These film studies are organized in this dissertation through two types of analyses. First, we analyze the relationships of the characters in the stories. Second, we study the places in which the narratives develop. This dual approach facilitates a two-pronged study that allows us to understand the relationship between groups of diverse backgrounds, and the role that the spaces in which these relationships develop have in complementing the interactions of the protagonists. The use of the concept of heterotopias is vital to this understanding. They are, in essence, spaces of transition and transformation of identity. The definitions of what Foucault considers a heterotopia and its applications to various spaces may occasionally be vague, and at times even contradictory enough to apply to opposite concepts. However, when paired with Augé's anthropological definition of spaces, the combination of both notions provides insight into how a space helps to define or transform the identity of the people who permanently or temporarily inhabit it. Through the use of Augé's Places and Non-Places, the film directors complement the commentary made through the relationships between the protagonists of each film. Places are spaces where the life of an individual gains meaning and significance through its ritualistic repetitiveness and stability, as opposed to Non-Places where an individual may lose or transform the identity he has gained through his use of Places. This commentary focuses on the claim of cultural legitimacy and identity by the different majorities who have suffered from discrimination and invisibility by the European majority. The European French tend to view the spaces they inhabit as the only legitimate Places, while they viewed the spaces that minorities and colonial subjects inhabited as Non-Places that needed to be tamed and conquered. This view dehumanized the life of minorities. The analyzed films show reversals of these definitions. Minorities claimed their spaces not as heterotopias but as legitimate Places, returning the gaze of the colonial master through the filmic lens and reclaiming the legitimacy of their lives.

The films depict past stories and serve as metaphors for the present struggle of immigrants and minorities in France. The 21<sup>st</sup>-century war films in this analysis accomplish the following objectives:

1) Revise history:

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, history and what means to be French have been whitewashed and censored in France. Dayna Oscherwitz clarifies how the concept of being ‘True French’ was understood in the Hexagon:

the term “the True France,” (...) holds that the French are a people in the cultural, if not the ethnic sense, of the term and which considers culture to be the foundation of national cohesion. Colonial subjects and their descendants are, according to this principle, permanently excluded from the space of the nation because they lack the appropriate heritage (Oscherwitz 14).

That space from which immigrants and their descendants are excluded for cultural and ethnic reasons is the Place that the French identify as France, the country, the nation. France is the birthright reserved for the ethnically European. The government, other entities and individuals who misapply the republican ideals of laicity and universalism performed this censure. These Republican ideals, since the time of the revolution, attempt to create equality among all men through the erasure of categories such as religion, cultural provenance, ethnicity, and any other factor that may help differentiate or segregate individuals. However, the application of these ideals has resulted in denying the existence of minority groups and facilitating their mistreatment, discrimination and exploitation.

The war movies that began premiering in 2005 tell the story from the viewpoint of the minorities and the groups of immigrants that contributed to their genesis, most notably, people

from the Maghreb. The movies become what Roland Barthes calls a *punctum*. Michael O’Riley explains Barthes’ *punctum* in these terms:

For Roland Barthes the framed image is characterized by a piercing yet delayed recognition in the form of the *punctum*. According to Barthes, the *punctum* is a point of recognition—a return of memory at first unlocatable—that is etched onto the body of the viewer. For Barthes, this point of memory pierces the viewer because it recalls another time frame, a haunting image. The *punctum* introduces a spectral presence into the viewing framework—a temporality that is incongruous with the present yet very much a part of it. (O’Riley, “Cinema in an Age of Terror” 154-155)

The films in this dissertation become an important point of recognition, the returning memory, of vital complementary historiographical narratives neglected or omitted from the Eurocentric French mythology of the French nation. The spectral nature of the haunting images contained in these works are generating controversial sentiments, from rejection, confrontation and guilt, to recognition and acceptance. These films are *puncta* presented in twenty-four frames a second. They create a space for the discussion of sensitive topics and for potential healing. The films show the contribution that hundreds of thousands of Algerians and Harkis had in the survival and deliverance of France in WWII. They portray European Jews fighting to protect themselves and their new adoptive homeland. They also show support that some people from the Maghreb gave to the French during the war of Algerian independence. Some sacrificed their lives, but even those who did not were permanently affected by their support of France. The movies demonstrate that their influence has existed in practice but was systematically erased from the records. Nevertheless, these minorities, and most notably their descendants, are fighting to establish a voice and a historical narrative that complements the one written by the majority.

2) Assist in defining the identity of different minority groups:

Films such as *La trahison* and *L'ennemi intime* portray the vicissitudes suffered by the Harkis, a group made up of individuals with diverse cultural provenances that amalgamated through their support of the French during the War of Algerian Independence. The narratives of these stories show how their shared suffering, caused by their enemies as well as their allies, created a new group of people with a shared story that differentiates them from others, including their cultures of origin. Although their stories are known in general terms, recent studies show that much is still to be learned about them and that much is yet to be done to correct the wrongs inflicted upon them.

Harkis are not the only minority group that benefits from identity creation or development. The same can be argued about the other groups depicted in these films. For example, *L'armée du crime* depicts protagonists who come from different countries and speak different languages, but who have their Jewish background in common (at least most of them), so the motion picture becomes a Jewish resistance story. As Spiering and Wintle explain in their study of the evolution of European Identity since WWII:

History establishes what Paul Ricoeur has called 'the narrative identity of a culture' (Ricoeur 1987, 215). The narration of what the community 'lives through' is what constitutes identity over time. Through the narrative, the community stands out as a permanent entity despite all the changes it experiences. Narratives are made and told in the community. (Spiering and Wintle 75)

Despite creative and artistic license, these films provide a historically based narrative that contributes to develop mythology to which minority and immigrant groups may refer to identify themselves, but also to set themselves apart and their unique contribution to the French Republic.



3) Begin a conversation between the majority and the different minority groups:

These films constitute the opening of a dialogue between the majority and the minority groups that they have, for the most part, negatively affected. Concerning the Algerian war, very little has been done by France about correcting or compensating Algerians in North Africa or France concerning colonialist and subsequent discriminative policies and attitudes. There existed no official recognition of the conflict until 1999. One of the reasons for which *Indigènes* is famous is influencing President Jacques Chirac to change military pension policy for North African veterans, along with undue recognition of their contribution. Many wounds remain open, and not just for the North African population. Beyond being a declaration of *mea culpa*, *Mon colonel* and *L'ennemi intime* showcase ways in which the French European population has suffered due to its participation in the wars of decolonization. They show that the effects continue to be felt in present-day France and that French soldiers who participated in the conflicts were both victimizers and victims.

The conversation includes strong admissions of culpability and reaches further by clarifying proper ways to distribute this guilt. The films assign the lion's share of the blame to the military and civic leadership without absolving the responsibilities of those at the grassroots level. In a country famous for governmental censorship, this is an important step towards recognition, healing and coexistence. However, this dialogue does not extend to all sectors involved. People like General Aussaresses remained unapologetic and justified his controversial methods of pacification, arguing that to serve and save the France he knew, the end justifies the means. A significant portion of like-minded people remain in France, exemplified by people of a mind alike to the supporters of the *Front National* party who oppose immigration to France, and this also needs consideration. The last two films in this dissertation illustrate that the

conversation is not exclusive to North Africans and Europeans, but that it is extending to all the cultural threads that comprise the weave of modern French society. These last two films suggest that in the future, the conversation will be continued and expanded.

The films and their goals are not without flaws. Questions are also raised against the opinions that these works propose. Critics have praised or questioned the qualities of the movies, including the subject matter, the script and the acting. But perhaps the most poignant criticism is the one raised by Norindr in her analysis of *Indigènes* when she argues that the film seeks to obtain the wrong type of acceptance by attempting to show that immigrants qualify to be French based on their sacrifice on behalf of the Republic. There is validity in the argument that this is not the correct way about seeking acceptance, at least not the only way. She also suggests that the goal seems to be to become French by the monolithic definition of the majority, which is absorption. Instead, there exists more than one version of a French person, and what immigrants and minorities should be fighting for is addition and tolerance of diversity rather than absorption and loss of identity. Fortunately, other films do make this latter argument, which is the reason why they should be studied as statements in a conversation rather than isolated lectures.

Just as importantly, this is a conversation that is only at its genesis. Only three years after *Les hommes libres* another French war film debuted. It helps point where this conversation is heading. The six previous films focus on past wars to provide a revision of history and an increased understanding of the present plight of immigrants and minorities. In contrast, *Le grand homme* (Leonor, 2014) is set in a present conflict and offers views on where this present is heading, concerning questions of redefinition and blending of identities of the minorities and the large French majority. In this film, two immigrants, Markov and Hamilton, are trying to obtain French citizenship through service in the French Foreign Legion. While in Afghanistan, they are

ambushed. Hamilton is wounded in a place outside of their authorized area of operations. Hamilton is rewarded for his service with automatic citizenship, while Markov, who saved his life, is ignominiously discharged. He chooses not to continue his service to return to his young son in France. But now he has become an undocumented immigrant. Hamilton receives a new identity and name: Michaël Hernandez, but he allows Markov to take it so his friend may live in France. Markov, whose real name is Murad Massaev, is a Chechen war survivor. However, he dies in an accident. Hamilton reclaims the identity of Hernandez upon Massaev's death and begins taking care of his son. The film shows how, through much toil and sacrifice, the identity of immigrants may evolve and succeed in entering and adapting to the culture of France. It shows that it may take more than one generation and that partial loss of previous identities may be part of the price to be paid for this admission.

*Le grand homme* raises important questions that merit further analysis. But it is particularly useful in this conclusion as a text that signals where the conversation between the different segments of the French population is heading. First, it shows that as France continues to be involved in wars near and far from the Hexagon, peoples from other nations continue to participate in these conflicts along with French of European descent. The French military serves as a microcosm of the make-up of French society. It also may function as a doorway for the entry of immigrants into French citizenship. War films are ideal for the portrayal of how difficult, and at times violent, the struggle for entry, admission, and recognition for immigrants has historically been and continues to be. War films become a window into what Homi Bhabha calls the third space, which he defines as “a challenge to the limits of the self in the act of reaching out to what is liminal in the historic experience, and the cultural representation, of other peoples, times, languages, texts” (Bhabha 10). This third space becomes the physical, but also historical and

linguistical place where the intersection of the French and the Foreign cultures generate new identities. Republican policy has attempted to suppress such a space attempting to either assimilate or reject immigrant cultural influence, but instead this influence continues to gain visibility. Through the struggle for recognition and acceptance, this series of motion pictures also shows that there does exist a measure of goodwill and hope despite all of the difficulties. *Le grand homme* even suggests that through sacrifice and struggle, some of the immigrant and minority groups may attain in the future acceptance as equals, though a partial loss of the original identity remains as a byproduct. There are real possibilities of moving from the foreign, to the Third Space and finally settling in the French space. Another possibility suggests that the Third Space may become a viable Place. At the very least, all of these films prove that the conversation is only beginning and that it will likely have as many voices as existing groups of minorities vying for inclusion and recognition in France.

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