# A Critical Analysis of Political Themes in Algerian Cinema

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*Abstract*

*The present paper analyses the significant relationship between Algerian film and the country's tumultuous political past. Algerian films have functioned as a reflection of and a potent reaction to the socio-political context, from the colonial era's skewed portrayals to the post-independence quest for national identity. The examination scrutinizes the influence of colonialism on early film storylines, the function of cinema in resistance and nation-building, the effects of political instability and restriction on creative expression, and the persistent themes of national identity, resistance, revolution, and remembrance. The study demonstrates that Algerian film is a dynamic and diverse medium, persistently navigating the intricacies of its history and contemporary context while influencing its collective memory and future trajectory*

*Keywords***:** *Algerian cinema, postcolonial cinema, national identity, resistance, Algerian war of independence.*

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## تحليل نقدي للمواضيع السياسية في السينما الجزائرية

**ملخص**

قدمتّ هذه الورقة تحليلا نقديا لطبيعة العلاقة بين السينما الجزائرية والواقع السياسي للبلاد، فلطالما عملت الأفلام الجزائرية كمرآة عاكسة للسياق الاجتماعي والسياسي، بدءا من الصور النمطية خلال الحقبة الاستعمارية وصولاً إلى السعي لبناء الهوية الوطنية بعد الاستقلال، كما استعرضت تأثير الاستعمار على حبكات وقصص الأفلام الأولى، ودور السينما في المقاومة وبناء الأمة، وآثار عدم الاستقرار السياسي والقيود المفروضة على التعبير الإبداعي، بالإضافة إلى مواضيع: الهوية الوطنية، والمقاومة، والثورة، والذاكرة، وقد أظهرت النتائج في الأخير أن السينما الجزائرية وسيلة ديناميكية ومتنوعة، لطالما مرت بمراحل وأحداث تاريخية منذ القدم أثرت في مسار تطورها وتنوع مواضيعها وحبكاتها.

**الكلمات المفاتيح:** *سينما جزائرية، سينما ما بعد استعمار، هوية وطنية، مقاومة، حرب التحرير الجزائرية.*

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## 1- Introduction:

Cinema in Algeria is conceived to have developed as a product of the political and historical discourse that has developed in the post-independence framework of the country. Much of the dialogue of its cinematographic output centers around the Algerian memory, with the case for national political power abuse manipulating self and national conceptions of history. The value of cinema, which is also visually stirring, offers political and historical storylines to help define what it means to be Algerian and the struggles and motivations that Algerians can identify and pursue. Contributing to the epistemology of the nation, there is an increasing view that the cinema produced by Algerians can no longer be broadcast on television because that is an unacceptable state of regulation for the producers; the Algerian state desires to divorce inconvenient counterparts. The coming of the eighth art, cinema in Algeria arose in colonial and multi-colonial jumps as representative of the land, revolt, and nation, informed by the increasing interest of the social sciences in the iconography, imagination, and mentalities specific to these lands, which panels and representations fed the foreigner's outlook on its territories of domination. Attempting to follow most filmographies in 1962, after gaining independence, Algerian filmmakers engaged in the war of symbols and defamation against the departing colonizer who had nothing left and left the land they had traveled for generations

## 2- Historical Background of Algerian Cinema:

From its earliest days, the history of cinema in Algeria was, in many ways, intertwined with that of its colonial overlords. Cinematographers recorded sequences of Algerian life as far back as 1897. As a holding of the Union of the West before being annexed in 1830, Algeria played a role in the French colonial imagination similar to that of the American "Western Frontier," a strange, dangerous, fascinating place where the binary opposites of civilization and barbarism lived in stark contrast. Presentations of the "Exposition Coloniale" were often dominated by photographic exhibits of the douars, whether to show off the "civilizing mission" of France or to make the natives appear as "noble savages," untouched by progress[1].

While there were never more than a few cinemas playing French fare for the European colonists and pied-noirs of the big cities like Algiers, French-made travelogues and newsreels were shown in the douars to beardless natives who often credited the images and the cameras that made them with magical properties of ensorcellment. Urged on by the National Alliance of Intellectuals and Artists, after the war for independence in 1962, as much as 80-90% of the "Algerian" performing arts and the majority of cinemas was controlled by French colons. Roughly 20% of the country's cinemas closed after 1962 as collaborators fled, died, or simply abandoned theaters. By the beginning of the Algerian Civil War, however, cinemas were quite common in the cities as well as rural regions, despite a lack of theatrical distribution networks outside of Algiers. The modernization of Algeria, a large part of which was carried on the shoulders of the Ministry of Culture, was spearheaded in part by documentaries and newsreels. Film plays a significant role today in helping Algerians come to terms with many politically and culturally explosive issues—from memory and history to social change and women's rights. Although theaters were burned, still other alternative, more ideologically friendly models sprang up and have flourished in the past 20 years[2].

In this historical context, many other filmmakers turned to a more independent kind of cinema. Merzak Allouache is known for his critical psychological analysis and for pioneering what was later coined with "urban violence postponement," the off-screen denunciation of social and political injustices. Mohamed Bouamari is regarded as another promising, prolific director for his questioning of the Algerian condition. The moving images of those who took the responsibility of addressing an oppressed civilization have grown into multifaceted, challenging journalists and reportage-makers. These filmmakers operate within a number of aesthetic and thematic parameters that, when analyzed in depth, can be quite diverse. However, to be general, three movements can be distinguished. The first is social, political,

and cultural, ranging from historical narrative to psychological analysis of national identity. The second deals with the now inseparable connection between religion and politics. The third movement is "globalization cinema." Each of these works is independent and different from the other movements, which can often be disconcerting. Moreover, the links and affinities between the films on show are neither purely thematic nor purely a matter of style, nor inflected in general terms. Each of them has its own profoundly political character, involving them in diverse ways; their work has been remarkable for human transportation[3].

**3- Political Context in Algeria:**

In the course of its history, Algeria has gone through an intense and painful struggle against colonialism. The French administration proselytized a French lifestyle, language, and culture and exerted significant pressure on the Algerians to adopt a French identity and citizenship. The ambivalence of national identity issues within the context of colonialism and the decolonization of Algeria is the central motif in its cinematic production. After its independence in 1962, Algeria experienced drastic political changes. Within a few years, independent Algeria encountered some debris of its erstwhile conflicts, primarily in the form of regional and civil wars during the 1990s. Its perceptions of national identity and citizenship are subjected to further strains. Its literature and cinematography pursue the themes specific to these consequences as well as the representations of the prior social milieu[4].

The polity and, by extension, the political leadership is termed La Velours in reference to the military uniform that is typically green. In its sixty-year-old political legacy, Algeria has seen a politically expired president without an elected successor, another one who experimented with popular empowerment but remained alienated from the military and ousted by it, seven presidential elections, routine protests concerning reigning presidents, successive ruling coalitions in a parliament controlled by the political-intelligence-military establishment, and the effective non-employability of most of the country's youth. Notably, several culturally oxidized political discourses are recycled under these harshly sustained conditions. The situation becomes perceptible within the narratives and cinematographic expressions of the Algerian filmmakers and screenwriters. Filmmakers hardly have access to celluloid; thus, minor films are made on the whole. Their cinematic perceptions predominantly focus on these issues. Illustratively, in Fifi... Aziza of 1980, the Algerian filmmaker and his screenwriter teleologically discover that La Vache Qui Rit is the greatest and possibly only sense of love because it lasts longer than all other loves. It resonates with the 'Laughing Cow' street posters in the existential perception.[5].

**3-1- Colonialism and Independence:**

If colonialism had a profound effect on the collective consciousness of Algerian society, then, independence played a similarly crucial role in the formation of national identity. The Algerian war of liberation during the years 1954 to 1962 saw the French colonial regime wage a ruthless war against the country involving widespread torture, decapitation of the elite, and the brutal erasure of mother culture in the attempt to regenerate the Algerians into French citizens. It is; therefore, no surprise that the dominant theme in contemporary Algerian cinema is resistance[6].

Algerian films made during the war of independence sparked the beginning of an Algerian film identity, with the majority being the production of independently founded newsreels and documentaries. Of these films, the dominant subjects are those which depict personal heroism, self-sacrifice, the making of a nation, showing the people united in their fight for freedom, and non-violent but determined resistance to the French threat. The fearlessness demonstrated in these films is tempered by the fact that their subject matter is, in fact, their own history. Even so, the directors and producers treat the subjects as untouchable spiritual ideals, establishing a space in the Algerian collective unconscious as actual and extraordinary. Films from this era include Algeria's People as well as Octobre à Alger. Yet, a number of fiction films were also adapted, sometimes illegally, in cinema's response to the cultural aspect of colonialism; in the case of Algeria meaning the importation of comedies, and the export of

war films to enlighten and explain the occupation. Notable additions to this category include The Winds of the Awres. Such films can be viewed in the context of a nation that did not exist in the historical sense prior to its documentation on celluloid. Cinema was; thus,called upon to write this unwritten official history of a people's consciousness. The film Battle of Algiers is historically considered as the most accomplished example of this, and the first Algerian film about the Algerian revolution not produced on Algerian territory[7].

### 3-2- Post-Independence Politics:

The analyses above consider so-called revolutionary resistance in a transitional period of anti-colonial and post-independence violence. In this section, the political focus shifts again, this time to Algeria post-independence. French colonial rule gave way to internal conflict and civil unrest during the 1960s. Following the war for independence, Algeria, under single-party rule, built a state from scratch. However, national unity and the creation of a new, cohesive society were difficult tasks, as Algeria's population was and continues to be made of hundreds of different ethnic and language groups with varied customs and economies. Cultural unity is a key component of nation-building, but colonial powers had denigrated indigenous cultures. To address these issues, the government implemented the Cultural Revolution and the new Family Code Law, two policies that significantly undermined the rights of Algeria's mainly nomadic Berber population, who now form the majority of the nation's citizenry. For many years, the dominant political parties in Algeria were the neo-authoritarian military state, the National Liberation Front, and the Islamic nationalist group, the Islamic Salvation Front. However, these movements did not initially have widespread support. Other political parties had difficulty accessing national platforms until they formed a coalition to oust the FLN.

During the 1980s, social movements for cultural and linguistic rights arose across the country. In the early 1990s, internal disputes over the future of the state led to the cancellation of an election and the suspension of the Algerian constitution. This change also brought about an increase in terrorist actions within the country. In this period, between the Better Life Revolution and contemporary times, Algerian filmmakers began producing works critical of the direction the nation-state was taking. This section, outlining post-independence politics in Algeria, continues this analysis[8] [9].

### 4- Intersection of Politics and Cinema:

In Algeria, the political and the cinematic have long been coupled. Cinema, as a site of resistance and expression, has been hailed as a mouthpiece for the minority in its content and circulation; simultaneously, it has been condemned as a commodity for capitalist colonial ambition by audience and author alike, limiting it to propaganda. The production, and indeed the critique of such a national cinema – one often incorporating copious levels of poetic and dramatic irony – tells us as much about the public as it does about cinema as an art form. In Algeria, cinema is a predominantly nationalizing force that marries political with cultural expression[10].

A large number of aspiring filmmakers and individuals from the population as a whole are eager to participate in the evolution of a national cinema industry; here, the themes and exploration of a moving image symbolic of the national cause will often be linked to a discourse related to the ideology of the political authorities of the day. Political differences of this kind are evidence of the internal permeability of the nation, its ideological currents, and the role of cinema as a site of politically informed discrimination, both in the institutional modes of its formation and its critical reception. Eminently, Algerian cinema is an intensely political object, engaging actively with political issues even as it is subverted by the unrecorded voice of the nation. Selected texts of Algerian cinema from a period stretching from decades before and after its independence will direct several essential ways this dialogue has formulated its existence between politics and national consciousness. Through creative expression, such texts indicate the basis of a public consciousness. Receipt of the texts demonstrates the politicization of an expression. This relationship stems from Algerian cinema's preoccupation with the political, and the meaning of the questions raised manifests

parallels with the political climate. Algerian films remain a significant vector in the communication of political thought and the birth of wider political activism. Film, then, becomes not just an event, or a sociological document, a point of recollection, or a moment of truth, but a telling agent of cinema[11] [12].

### 4-1- Role of Cinema in Shaping National Identity:

Cinema is a melting pot in which Algerian national identity melts. This ideology of national cinema and national identity suggests us that national identity themes are very present in the cinematographic work of Algerian filmmakers. This theme poses simple and obvious questions. Indeed, it is about knowing what cinema brings, as a new means of communication, to identify a people in a certain place as well as to examine the different themes through the works of the filmmakers themselves. Do filmmakers, be they part of partisanship or not, directly or indirectly, deal with these ancient themes in their storytelling? Films, through their degree of discourse on social realities, values, and moral concerns, draw on this reservoir of collective memory and cultural heritage to overwrite one or more aspects of the life and work of a people[13]. In their cinematographic narrative, many filmmakers draw from their film influences and reference points, which they transplant perfectly into their narratives and staging. The diversity of Arab, African, Islamic, Berber, Andalusian, and European cinematographic inheritances have contributed to a singularity of its own, the particularity that constitutes the identity of the people. Moreover, films that involve collective events and historical struggles have, without exception, a theme related to aspects of memory connected to belonging to a certain Mediterranean society. Films question the historical, social, political, and ethical contexts within the twentieth century and the Maghreb. Current filmmakers are aware of the important cultural, civilizational, and historical references of their country.

It is an image of a range of cultures and civilizations that have converged since ancient times around a common Mediterranean culture. Cinema becomes a powerful tool for a living illustration and a visual fiction of the people. It transcribes cultural values and heritage—all the fine things that irrigate and unite the Mediterranean world. Moreover, through certain ambivalence, these films talk more about the fragilities and misfortunes of people. They deal with subjects that explore the history, culture, way of life, and behaviors of the Algerian people through circular narratives and multiple character structures. In their searches, between the meanders and the crossroads of identity staging, we have identified four fundamental cinematic themes: Identity, Heritage, Cultural Memory, and Modernity. The political course of the narrative: We consider that the relation to the political scenario will be seen as a process of discussion, articulation, problematization, and transformation of these cinematic representations, and no longer by their use of themes in the literary or cinematographic senses: known discourses. Moreover, this procedure is intended to evocatively identify identity themes—borrowing mainly from the language of political sciences—in the narrative framework of Algerian fiction cinema. Nevertheless, these themes only have value as a heuristic tool serving to approach and examine cinematographic creativity and narrative depth. The latter is a two-way process; it serves as much to develop as to enrich our approach by interrogating its contents, provided that they are not an end and a cause in this textual analysis[14] [15].

### 4-2- Censorship and State Control:

Censorship and state control through film financing programs, usually governmental, have actively shaped the narrative of the Algerian film industry. The parameters of these policies receive updates pertaining to changes in governmental ideologies, technically transforming the dominant and accepted narrative. Institutions control who can receive funding to produce films, influencing the freedom and range of cinematic creativity in Algeria. Censorship mechanisms can prevent political commentary, such as blunt anti-government sentiment, altering the foundation of the filmmaker's portrayal of everyday life, thus adapting narratives to bypass these filters of government grace. Importantly, the artists themselves also play a role

in self-censorship to produce their films**.** Political Repression Filmmaking, as a grand genre of art, coincides within the domain of politics because images are a communication tool employed for political ends. During the decades of political violence leading to the civil war in 1990, the Algerian government organized opposition to suppress representation, sacrificing freedom of expression, particularly in the cinema community. The Algerian Ministry of Information brought unyielding repressive measures against various cultural elements, especially filmmakers, who were assassinated for making films. Yet, during and after this oppressive period, Algerian filmmakers persistently worked to capture their reality honestly. They subtly criticize, in what could be read as pro-government content, through imagery, an eloquent and often daring form of political and social commentary[16].

**5- Methodology:**

This study adopts a semiotic analysis approach to critically examine the political themes within major works of Algerian cinema. Semiotics, the science of signs and meaning-making, enables rigorous decoding of visual and narrative elements to uncover the deeper ideological structures that contribute to the construction of national identity and collective memory in Algerian films. A purposive sample of key Algerian films was chosen based on their recognized contributions to political discourse and national memory as well as their prominence in scholarly literature. The focal films include *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), *Zabana*, *Chronicle of the Years of Fire* (1975), and *Days of Glory* (2008).

**5-1- Analytical Framework:**

The analysis is guided by classical and contemporary semiotic theory, particularly the concepts of signifier (the physical form of the sign) and signified (the underlying meaning), as outlined by Saussure and Barthes. In each film, the study identifies recurrent visual signs (e.g., costumes, colors, settings, gestures), narrative motifs (e.g., martyrdom, resistance, memory), and symbolic objects (e.g., flags, letters, urban landscapes) that function as carriers of political meaning. The research also examines how cinematic codes—such as camera movement, editing, and sound—serve to reinforce or challenge prevailing ideological narratives.

**5-2- Steps of Analysis:**

**1- Identification of Key Signs**: Each film is viewed with attention to its recurrent symbols, visual patterns, and narrative structures that reference political struggle, identity, and memory.

**2- Contextual Decoding**: The meaning of each sign is interpreted in relation to Algeria's colonial past, independence movement, and ongoing debates about national identity.

**3- Motif Mapping**: Recurring motifs—such as collective bodies, resistance rituals, martyrdom, and national iconography—are mapped across the film corpus to uncover consistencies and transformations in the political semiotics of Algerian cinema.

**4- Interpretive Synthesis**: The analysis draws out how these symbols and narrative patterns work together to construct or contest national myths and collective memory, linking them explicitly to the political context relevant to each film's production and reception.

**5-3- Rigor and Validity:**

To ensure analytical rigor, the process draws on both primary film texts and relevant scholarship on Algerian political cinema. Multiple viewings, interdisciplinary insights, and consultation of secondary sources support triangulation and validity of interpretations.

**6- Results of the Discussion:**

Results and Discussion section interprets the semiotic patterns identified across the selected corpus of Algerian political films, clarifying how recurring signs of martyrdom, collective bodies, and national iconography construct political meaning and contribute to the articulation of national identity and memory. Building directly on the reported findings, the discussion begins with a brief synthesis of the most salient codes and motifs, then, situates these meanings within prevailing debates in the literature to demonstrate where the study confirms, extends, or challenges prior interpretations of Algerian cinema's political discourse. Special attention is given to unexpected configurations of symbols—such as silences, spatial

labyrinths, or off-screen violence—and their plausible readings in the Algerian historical context, while avoiding claims that exceed the evidential base of the analysis. The section, then, examines the implications of these sign-systems for understanding how films function as vehicles of collective memory and ideological formation, identifying the theoretical and cultural stakes of the observed narrative and visual codes. Finally, the scope and limits of the semiotic approach are acknowledged—clarifying what the evidence can and cannot support— and directions for further work are outlined to encourage replication and extension across additional films, periods, and complementary methods.

**6-1- Themes of Resistance and Revolution:**

One of the most recurring themes in Algerian films is that of 'Resistance' and analyzes how the toils of war have continued to define post-colonial political life. Revolution is another political theme that has seen equally significant considerations on the celluloid and its subsequent disillusions. Analysis of postcolonial Algerian films that involve remembrance of the 'Resistance' often involves a controversial politics of representation that is the legacy of the War of Independence[17].

A number of features characterize the centrality of the Algerian War of Independence in Algerian cinema. Given the complexity of themes and the narrative frame, notions and stories of resistance, with their club of hope and heroism, inform the films that deal with historical justice and the will to erase the Algerian collective memory. The presence of resistance is always less historical, and it is the religious movements of the '80s that created the second independent state. Some of the prominent movies that capture resistance as the concrete experience of the new generation include Outside the Law and The Battle of Algiers. On the other hand, the modern Algerian cinema of resistance comprises movies of historical travel that revisit the narrative of the subjects of armed struggles and nationalist formations as well as the films of the '90s that tell the story of the insoluble conflict. Some of the filmic narratives that have been released since the beginning of the century offer the image in movement of the themes of the current Algerian cinema of resistance, now focused on history.

From Sekkar Kebir to Ismi and finally to Algerian Dream, the narrative desire for something significantly different to be said has always indicated a deep distance from the audience and, more generally, from the time that the film or the narrative poem of the struggle wanted to evoke. In such a context, the rapid and continuous transformation of memory has only been possible with an epistemological and narrative trust. The more Ismi pertains to the reality of war, the more general subjects are returning to the center of self-reflection: the Algerian Liberation War, the key event and focus of Algeria. Algerian cinema, with its diverse and multifaceted approach to resistance, has become a powerful medium for exploring the complexities of the Algerian War of Independence and its lasting impact on society. The films delve deep into the themes of justice, identity, and memory, presenting a nuanced and thought-provoking narrative that resonates with audiences. By shedding light on the struggles and heroism of a new generation, these movies capture the spirit of resistance and the ongoing quest for freedom.

They also offer a glimpse into the historical travel of Armed Struggles, shedding new light on national formations and the conflicts of the past. Through powerful storytelling and visual imagery, Algerian cinema transports viewers back in time, allowing them to experience the realities of war and its aftermath. From the earliest decades of the 20th century to the present, Algerian filmmakers have consistently pushed the boundaries of storytelling, creating bold and thought-provoking narratives that challenge societal norms and push the audience to think critically about the past and the present. The dynamic and ever-evolving nature of Algerian cinema is a testament to the enduring power of storytelling and its ability to shape collective memory. By delving into the complexities of history and resistance, these films invite viewers to reflect on the key events that have shaped the nation and its people. In doing so, they offer a unique and compelling perspective on Algeria's struggle for independence and the ongoing quest for justice[18].

The Algerian War of Independence remains a critical chapter in the nation's history, and its impact continues to be felt in Algerian cinema today. With each new film release and narrative exploration, the themes of resistance, justice, and memory are revisited, inviting audiences to engage with the past and reflect on the present. Algerian filmmakers continue to push the boundaries of storytelling, creating an ever-expanding body of work that captures the spirit of the Algerian people and their unwavering determination to carve their own path towards a better future. Whether through historical travel, personal narratives, or visual imagery, Algerian cinema serves as a powerful medium for reflecting on the complexities of the past while inspiring hope for a brighter tomorrow[19] [20].

## 6-2- Depictions of the Algerian War of Independence:

One of the incidents that strongly shaped the Algerian identity and national psyche was the Algerian War of Independence from France. Algerian cinema was a prime witness to and chronicler of the historic event and the war. Foreign and Algerian filmmakers, represented in state-funded, independent Algerian production, produced an unequaled cinema that depicted diverse, contradictory, and multi-faceted visions of the freedom struggle and Algeria under colonial oppression. Independent films portrayed the war against the French colonial forces by a resistance led by the F.L.N. to forge an Algerian nation's identity. The war has become the central, though not exclusive, theme of Algerian cinema.

Depictions of the Algerian War of Independence, a protracted, brutal anti-colonial struggle that began on November 1, 1954, against the French colonizer, who had denied the larger part of modern history and a better part of human form and their rightful place as a human community, valorize the Algerian resistance heroes. The personage of the martyred freedom fighter has been central to the Algerian unsettling and practice of rule. Key themes in photographic valorizations of the war include portrayals of the brutality of French colonialism as historically rapacious, the Algerian resistance as an articulation of African resistance against colonialism, and the rapacity of the colonialist, along with narratives of heroism, spirituality, valor, martyrdom, sacrifices, and the ultimate quest for millenary freedom and sovereignty for its nation-state[21]. The heroes of the revolution and the liberated Algeria have been placed under observation. Independent films depicted the war and the resistance. The Algeria of the late nineteenth century to early twentieth century of colonization was a kind of hell of a massacre where an estimated 1 million to 3 million esteemed and underestimated Algerian women, men, and children were reportedly killed by the French colonial forces. French Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria were part of the stingy promised regions for settler colonialism and overseas colonies, particularly for the French settlers of European Jews[22].

## 6-3- The Battle of Algiers (1966):

To survey the broader corpus of films engaging the imagery of the Algerian War, a persuasive point of departure is The Battle of Algiers, the foundational work that crystallized the iconography and narrative grammar through which this conflict would be cinematically imagined. Pontecorvo's film stages the FLN's urban insurgency against French paratroopers in the Casbah with a newsreel aesthetic—handheld camerawork, stark monochrome, and non-professional actors—that generates an aura of documentary immediacy. The narrative's strict symmetry of action and reprisal—bombings, assassinations, curfews, and the mass strike—renders violence as a historically driven cycle rather than a melodramatic exception.

Within this structure, emblematic figures such as Ali La Pointe and Colonel Mathieu embody opposed ethical rationalities, exposing both the tactical calculus of counterinsurgency and the insurgent claim to historical justice. The film's depiction of women crossing checkpoints and planting bombs foregrounds gendered performance and masquerade as tactical signs in anti-colonial struggle. Internationally, the work reframed debates about colonial repression and revolutionary violence, circulating as a touchstone for activists and militaries alike, from insurgent study circles to lessons appropriated by state institutions. Crucially, the ending's temporality projects beyond the immediate defeats of 1957 toward the eventual triumph of popular sovereignty, converting historical memory into a horizon of hope.

Establishing this benchmark enables comparison of subsequent films' semiotic choices—whether they echo the Casbah's labyrinth, rework the image of the martyr, or critique the costs of liberation—against a template that continues to shape artistic and political discourse on the Algerian War.
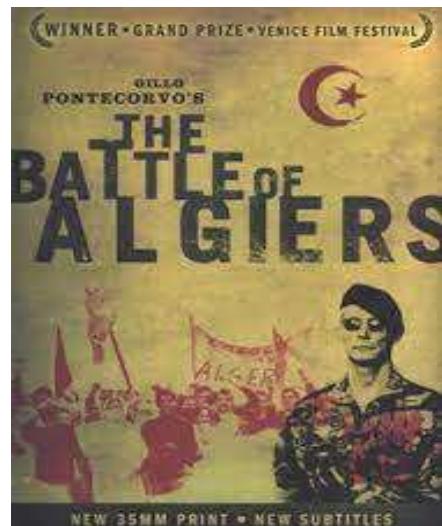
The Battle of Algiers is widely regarded as a landmark of political realism whose quasi-documentary style thrusts viewers into the textures of urban insurgency and counterinsurgency with an immediacy that few narrative films achieve. Pontecorvo's reliance on non-professional performers—including Saadi Yacef playing a version of himself—alongside casting drawn from immigrant and working-class communities, produces performances that feel observational rather than theatrical, so convincing that early U.S. releases appended a disclaimer noting that no actual newsreel footage had been used. Marcello Gatti's handheld; high-contrast black-and-white cinematography amplifies this journalistic effect, mapping the narrow alleys, plazas, and checkpoints of the Casbah as a lived labyrinth where bodies, gazes, and weapons circulate with alarming volatility. Formally, the film's famous symmetry of bombing and reprisal arranges events as a chain of action–reaction, an austere pattern that reads less like melodrama than historical mechanism, even as the filmmakers' ethical alignment remains with the colonized. Within this design, Colonel Mathieu and Ali La Pointe crystallize opposed logics—technocratic counterinsurgency versus insurgent justice—so that the narrative can be both coolly comparative and unmistakably attuned to the FLN's political claim. The film's depiction of women adopting disguises to slip through checkpoints and plant bombs foregrounds gendered masquerade as a tactical sign system, complicating the spectator's moral vision without diluting the critique of colonial violence. Circulating far beyond cinephile circuits, the work became a global reference point—read by liberation movements as a manual of resistance and screened by state institutions, including a 2003 Pentagon event that framed it as a study in winning battles while losing the "war of ideas".

The concluding movement projects historical time forward, transforming the tactical defeat of 1957 into the mass demonstrations, that herald independence, thereby, suturing realism to rhetoric of collective hope and moral inevitability. By fusing documentary codes with epic political argument, The Battle of Algiers established the template against which subsequent films on the Algerian War measure their realism, ethics, and historical imagination.

**6-4- Zabana:**

Zabana portrays the story of Ahmed Zabana, an emblematic figure in the Algerian War of Independence. The FLN and French governments saw Zabana as a hero of the revolution and

a key figure of martyrdom. Martyrdom, in general, and Zabana's sacrifice, in particular, became touchstones for the war and the foundation of Algerian national identity after the war. Martyrs played a metaphysical as well as mythical role in the fight against colonialism. They were, and continue to be, the ultimate heroes of the war and remain important to the collective memory of the war today. Zabana became the first officially recognized martyr of the war to liberate the nation from the French, which marked him as a symbol of resistance for the Algerian populace throughout the war. Subsequent to the war, Algerian state leaders have often invoked Zabana in their various political speeches and communications, and his name and image have found a place in video, literature, schoolbooks, and painting. His story was presented on what is known as the big screen, portraying his untold story, and one of the actor's most famous performances was in 1969 playing Ahmed Zabana.



**Source:** http://www.africine.org/film/zabana/13956
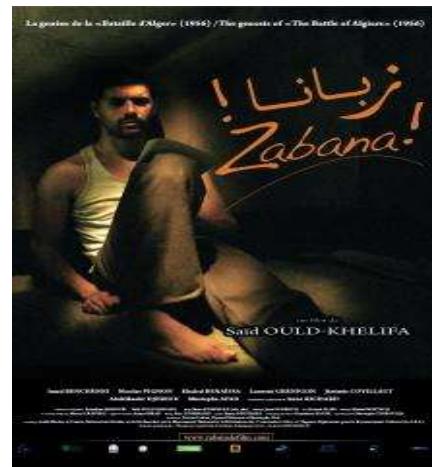
Zabana constructs a semiological narrative that reframes heroism and sacrifice through a network of signs which convert an individual life into an active public memory. Recurring flashbacks overcode present-tense scenes, translating private ordeal into a collective script of independence and postcolonial reconstruction. Carceral architecture—cells, corridors, barred windows—materializes colonial power so that space itself becomes a readable code of domination and counter-assertion; every pan along a corridor and every pause at a threshold signifies the passage from coercion toward testimony. Calibrated silences surrounding verdicts and farewells produce condensed ethical meaning, turning auditory voids into discursive markers that reappear as mnemonic cues in the contemporary political imagination. By suturing the protagonist's biography to communal gestures and public speech, the film activates the civic sphere and channels affect into a symbolic participation in nation-building, consistent with Algerian cinema's historic function as a medium of memory and belonging.

The film's sign system coheres around martyrdom as an ethical grammar rather than a mere plot device. The condemned body, the final walk, and the metonymic close-ups of hands and faces operate as compressed signifiers that translate suffering into obligation. Documents and letters circulate as evidentiary signs that stabilize narrative time as memorial time, legitimizing the story as historical claim. Costumes and uniforms index the colonizer/colonized binary; fabric, cut, and insignia signal authority, subalternity, and strategic disguise. Spatial oppositions—enclosed interiors that hide pain versus open civic spaces that proclaim resolve—align liberation with visibility. Movement across doors, gates, and checkpoints function as a liminal code in which crossing is not logistics but meaning: a performative shift from private fear to public agency.

Performance and sound consolidate this semiotic matrix. Restrained acting and concentrated close-ups convert micro-gestures into ethical signs, asking viewers to read

dignity in composure rather than in spectacle. Sonic cues—brief evacuations of sound before judgment, murmured prayers, swelling communal chants—index collective affect and convert diegetic sound into a chorus of historical memory. The overarching effect is an activist semiotics: the film does not only represent history; it instructs audiences in how to read history as a claim on the present.

Expressive photograms that condense these meanings can be read as autonomous sign units. A photogram of the protagonist's face in tight close-up, suspended in silence before the sentence, inscribes courage as stillness rather than bravado. A photogram of prison-bar shadows cast across the cell floor by hard side light compresses the body–space relation into a single image of coercion that paradoxically generates resistant meaning. A photogram that cuts from the dim cell to a sunlit field within a flashback, pivoting on a simple head turn, marks a passage between the temporalities of confinement and action—the cut itself becoming a sign of transit from memory to presence. A photogram of a letter being written, folded, and passed from hand to hand turns paper into a vessel of testimony, shifting the narrative from personal account to public document. A photogram of collective footsteps entering a civic square, faces multiplying beyond the hero, affirms that the film's final signified is not the glorification of the individual but the emergence of a political community. A photogram of a still hand resting on the chest during farewell transforms a modest gesture into a civil creed, extending beyond ritual piety to a social contract that links remembrance to responsibility.

**6-5- Analyzing the Impact of "Chronicle of the Years of Fire" (1975):**

The film was made during a colonial war that left three-quarters of a million martyrs and innumerable amputees. Chronologically, the narrative gives coherence to the film by reflecting on inhumanity and the national resistance from 1830 to 1962 and tries to keep individuals, not facts, in the forefront of the storyline. It is characterized by the depth and vigor of scope for exalting endurance in an ongoing battle to redeem human rights; that is the struggle for Algerian independence through cognitive, sensible, and emotional facets.



**Source:** https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0072782/
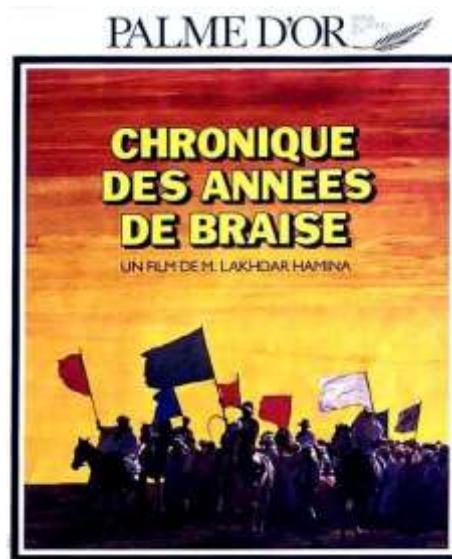
Indeed, the profound and remarkable nature of this captivating film remarkably conveys and epitomizes its visionary director's idiosyncratic and distinctive artistic perspective. Utterly immersed in his own artistic journey, the director openly acknowledges his arduous struggle to meticulously scrutinize and deeply delve into an extensive range of creative media, including literature, paintings, cinema masterpieces, colonial archives, and the vibrant tapestry of everyday street conversations. Through this multifaceted exploration, he endeavors

to intricately interweave a rich narrative fabric that intertwines with the very essence and ethos of a profoundly decolonized society. Central to the film's thematic tapestry, the director evocatively examines and traverses the captivating realms of spatial ornamentation, meticulous event management, and various forms of resistance that permeate the intricacies of a society in metamorphosis.

Painstakingly acknowledging the historical delay in producing cinematic masterpieces that authentically and empathetically shed light on the lives and struggles of indigenous communities, this groundbreaking film decisively emerged as an indomitable classic within the realm of Algerian cinema, thereby, meriting esteemed recognition and adulation during a prestigious film festival. By serving as an enlightening catalyst, this cinematic masterpiece effectively scaffold and galvanized further investigative endeavors, delving into the profound complexities surrounding the intricate interplay between colonialism and the forging of national identity. Remarkably transcending the mere portrayal of revolutions and armed conflicts for emancipation, the film remarkably accentuates the introspective journey of individuals striving to internalize and navigate the multitude of suppressions that pervade their existence. While the film's overarching message undoubtedly encapsulates the profound valorization of disobedience, its most conspicuous and compelling subject matter unequivocally revolves around the moral fabric of resistance itself.

Skillfully and evocatively portrayed throughout this filmic marvel, the undeniable essence of resistance lies in the profound willingness to sacrifice one's own identity, aspirations, and desires for an irresistible, all-encompassing idea that passionately resonates within the depths of one's soul. Not to be underestimated are the pivotal cinematic rights that were astutely and audaciously emphasized within this groundbreaking film, prophetic in its prescient foresight. Undeniably, Algeria's fervent aspirations and creative ambitions dared to inhabit the very celluloid upon which this masterpiece was created, forever immortalizing the visionary creator's colossal dreams and aspirations within the indelible annals of cinematic artistry.

**6-6- The Significance of "Days of Glory" Indigénes in French (2008):**

Further, some have argued that the potential pan-African appeal of 'Days of Glory' inherently reduces its value as a film about Black and Arab soldiers, but it only does so if those soldiers are constantly represented as sub-Saharan Africans and Arabs first. On the contrary, it is at times generic (although generally insufficient) Western representation of the Black and Arab Moroccan soldiers that makes the Algerian nature and origins of the film so valuable because these soldiers were overwhelmingly left to die by the West once the war was won, as it was for those in Algeria between 1954 and 1962, be they in French or FLN uniforms. 'Days of Glory' utilizes Black and Arab soldiers as a means for a broader dialogue on the unsettling aftermath of wars fought on behalf of freedom, justice, or liberation overseas; it is the traditional terrain of French cinema, set outside of France's borders to protect its narrative continuity of the world's savior, the resistance fighter cum citizen-soldier. The first hook of 'Days of Glory' is the five minutes it shows at its end. It illustrates how the code of silence surrounding these soldiers functions, something very few films show us at all.
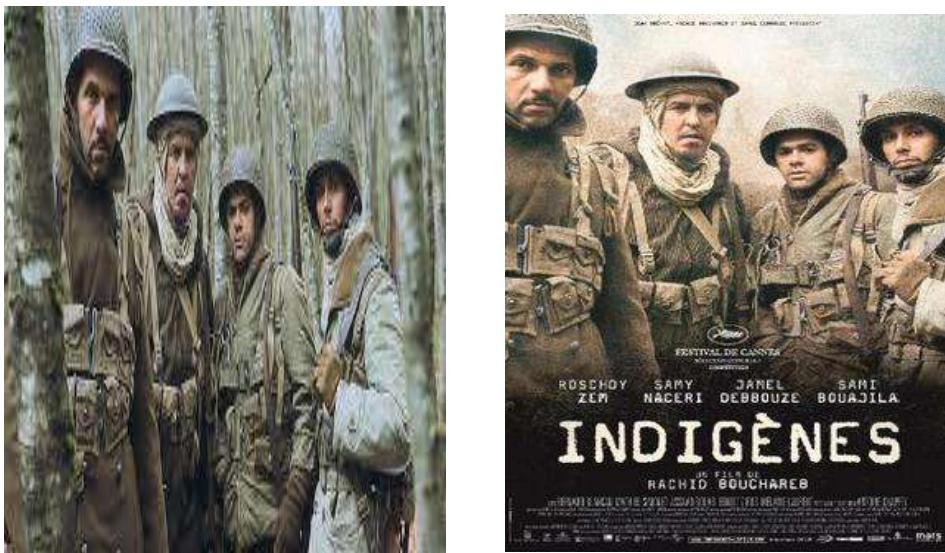
Most films that feature Black and Arab soldiers fold them into celebratory narratives of imperial pride, allowing the spectacle of victory to eclipse the political labor required to inscribe these fighters into historical memory as speaking subjects rather than ornamental extras. Days of Glory actively contests that erasure by staging recognition as a conflict in its own right—between the men's demonstrable sacrifice and the institutional refusal to convert that sacrifice into rights, parity, and remembrance—so that the film's battle scenes are mirrored by battles over archives, pay, promotion, and the right to be seen and heard. The "code of silence" is treated not as a mere absence of information but as a disciplinary technology that withholds visibility until an affective shock—mourning, scandal, mass audience response—forces open the circuits of media, scholarship, and policy debate. In this sense, the film's strong domestic box office, the public interventions of its North African cast and crew, and the subsequent parliamentary attention are not para-texts but integral scenes of struggle in which cinematic representation catalyzes a broader contest over who counts as a historical agent in France.

Read through a Gramscian lens, the soldiers function as "subalterns" whose practical nobility—courage, competence, loyalty—runs up against a hegemonic common sense that naturalizes their marginality and rationalizes the non-recognition of their claims, thereby reproducing an order in which contribution does not automatically generate citizenship, dignity, or narrative centrality. The film dramatizes this contradiction by juxtaposing scenes of competence at the front with scenes of humiliation in barracks and canteens, making inequality legible as a patterned social logic rather than an episodic misfortune. Crucially, the work situates itself inter-textually alongside contemporary films about "great wars" and multicultural futures, conversing as much with revisionist epics as with dystopian allegories like Children of Men, where the distribution of visibility and vulnerability allegorizes the present's contest over borders, bodies, and belonging. Days of Glory thus operates as a counter-archive: it records courage and injury at once, converting the spectacle of battle into a claim on history, policy, and pedagogy, and insisting that remembrance without redress is merely another form of silencing[23]. Ultimately, The film representes a corrective intervention in collective memory. Acting as a tribunal that demands historical Justice and Political Recognition, for the marginalized Indigenes rather than passive commemoration.

**6-7- Contemporary political narratives in Algerian Cinema:**

In recent years, a remarkable and transformative phenomenon has taken place within the realm of Algerian cinema. A groundbreaking type of political narrative has emerged, capturing the essence of contemporary events and social dynamics with unparalleled depth

and insight. These cinematic masterpieces have illuminated the intricate web of power dynamics and unveiled long-standing phenomena that have finally reached their critical tipping point. The cinematic lens has meticulously explored themes like "the colonels," delved into the heart-wrenching civil war, and passionately articulated the urgent necessity and insistent call for democratic discourse that has emerged in the wake of the Arab Spring. This powerful trend has been further strengthened by the advent of "diagonal" or "social" cinema. Filmmakers, in a valiant effort to establish a profound connection with modern audiences, have boldly departed from their historical epics depicting the Algerian struggle for independence or the tumultuous "years of blood." Instead, they have fearlessly shifted their focus towards shedding much-needed light on a fresh array of societal conflicts that continue to plague Algeria. These include the pervasive corruption that corrodes the pillars of society, the searing abuse of bureaucratic power, the relentless violation of fundamental human rights, and the egregious denials of social justice. In this awe-inspiring era, a new generation of filmmakers has emerged, propelled by an unwavering commitment to capturing the true essence of the people's spirit. These visionary artists have harnessed the medium of film and the compelling realm of documentary-making to effectively amplify the resolute refusal of the Algerian people to accept the status quo. Through their extraordinary works, they courageously express the unwavering demand for meaningful and transformative change, echoing the heartbeat of a nation yearning for a brighter future[24].

In the film directed by Driss Kettani, the colonel, who embodies abusiveness and repression, is symbolically incarnated by the shades and tones of green found on the colonel's clothes and on several carefully selected accessories, as worn in the uniform sported by a dictator. Another example of this approach is a documentary that looks at former Algerian resistance men who fought during the war. The court cases brought by these very same individuals during their exile, accusing the government of property confiscation and breach of promises made at the time of independence, testify to the failure of authorities' attempts to prevent the spread of "poisonous" ideas and suggest that the new narratives are those of men who are losing faith in government-initiated dialogue and "power-sharing" approaches.

**7- Findings and Results:**

This paper examines in general the complex link between Algerian film and the country's political history, spanning from the colonial period to the current day. The results may be encapsulated as follows:

- **Colonial Impact and the Emergence of Algerian Cinema**: The beginning of Algerian films is profoundly intertwined with French colonisation. Early films -predominantly French-produced- depicted skewed representations of Algerian life, so promoting colonial myths. During the Post-independence in 1962, the French influence persisted because a substantial segment of cinemas and performing arts remained under the authority of French colonists. This colonial history influenced the first evolution of Algerian cinema, affecting topics and depiction.

- **Film as an Instrument of Resistance and Nation-Building**: Post-independence, Algerian film emerged as a formidable instrument for resistance and nation-building. Filmmakers utilised their craft to contest colonial myths, to foster national identity, and to explore the intricacies of post-colonial society. The Algerian War of Independence emerged as a predominant topic, with films illustrating the savagery of colonialism and the valour of the resistance. Documentaries and newsreels were crucial in moulding national memory and advancing modernisation.

- **Political Context and Filmic Representation**: The political environment of Algeria profoundly influenced its film. Political instability, civil unrest, and authoritarian governance impacted the topics, styles, and production capabilities of films. Filmmakers frequently attacked the political status quo, either quietly or blatantly, despite restrictions. The relationship between governmental regulation (by financial support and censorship) and creative expression is a persistent motif.

**- Principal Cinematic Themes**: Numerous persistent motifs manifest in Algerian cinema: **Resistance and Revolution**: The Algerian War of Independence and ensuing efforts for social and political transformation are frequently examined. Films portray the valour of resistance warriors, the savagery of warfare, and the persistent pursuit of liberty and justice.

- National Identity: The pursuit and establishment of Algerian national identity is a primary focus. Films confront the intricacies of a heterogeneous culture influenced by colonisation and internal strife. The friction among various ethnic and linguistic groups, along with the influence of colonial policies on cultural identity, is often discussed.

- Algerian filmmakers frequently use their art to attack social and political inequalities, corruption, and the adversities encountered by everyday Algerians. This critique is occasionally nuanced, utilising metaphor or symbolism to circumvent restriction.

**- Memory and Historical Record:** The collective memory of the Algerian populace, especially during the War of Independence, is crucial to several films. These films examine the formation, contestation, and use of memory in the construction of national narratives.

**- The Function of Censorship and Government Regulation**: Governmental regulation of film finance and censorship profoundly influenced the Algerian film industry. This regulation affected the narratives conveyed and the viewpoints expressed, frequently resulting in self-censorship among filmmakers. Notwithstanding these limitations, filmmakers discovered methods to convey dissent and critique through nuanced approaches.

In conclusion, the Algerian film is not only a mirror of its past, but also an active contributor to the formation of national identity and political discourse. The interaction between political reality and cinematic expression is a distinguishing feature of Algerian film, highlighting both challenges and resilience of the country's cultural terrain.

**Conclusion:**

The intricate relationship between the Algerian cinema and its political context unveils a compelling story of defiance, the formation of national identity, and the persistent quest for autonomy. From the skewed representations of the colonial period to the intricate analyses of post-independence dilemmas, the Algerian cinema has persistently functioned as a reflective surface, revealing the nation's multifaceted identity and its ongoing challenges.

The persistent motifs of defiance, upheaval, national identity, and the orchestration of collective memory underscore the significant influence of cinema in moulding public awareness and contesting prevailing narratives. In the face of censorship and state control, Algerian filmmakers have consistently harnessed the medium to articulate dissent, to advocate for social justice, and to cultivate a profound comprehension of their nation's intricate history and its continuous development. The examination of the Algerian cinema presents a complex array of cinematic expression, while simultaneously providing deep insights into the nation's quest for self-awareness and its continuous endeavour for a stable and equitable future

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