

# VISUAL COLONIAL LEGACIES: ALGERIAN IDENTITY AND FRENCH GRIEF IN *CACHÉ* AND *SOUVENIR, SOUVENIR*

AVRAMOVIC, LUKA

*Politics, College of Social Sciences*

## ABSTRACT

Since the French invasion of Algeria in 1830, the latter's identity has been falsely constructed and largely misrepresented in the former's homogenising mainstream audio-visual media. A combination of societal taboos and ignorance has left France's population in anguish or obliviousness regarding their colonial history. Using Michael Haneke's *Caché* (trans. Hidden, 2005) and Bastien Dubois' *Souvenir, Souvenir* (trans. Memory, Memory, 2020) as case studies, I will illustrate the battle that the collective French consciousness has with its violent past with reference to Algerian identity. In order to do this, postcolonialism, a theoretical framework seeking to investigate the impact of colonisation, will be employed. Since the 1960s, postcolonialism has become one of the most controversial and complex fields of scholarly debate, extremely applicable in the field of audio-visual arts. This is due to film's discernible characteristics for decoding and deconstructing implicit racist, xenophobic, imperial, and ignorant biases or distortions that are at the core of a film's production. By watching films through a postcolonial lens, we gain better access to the ideological conquests between the coloniser and colonised, the legacies left behind, and the ways it continues to shape our societies today. France's struggle with the concept of *laïcité* (secularism), ex-colonial state relations and their not-so-distant history has made this work ever pertinent for understanding the contemporary French political, social and historiographical landscape. Furthermore, the approach given to the selected films possesses wider functions, applicable to various other national, imperial and colonial contexts worldwide that can serve to challenge Western superiority, as the West sees it in itself.

## INTRODUCTION

Blood splattered on a wall. A stern look on the face of a retired soldier. Both key, revelatory moments in the quest for truth. Truth that has for so long been concealed in the old recollections of a family member. Estranged from their past, the characters in the films which will be discussed in this essay share an eerie relationship to the actions they have committed in a previous age. Whether explicit or lurking in the shadows, the veracity of history will, in these case studies, prevail over the emotional strength of shame, grief and subjugation angst. Throughout this article it will be revealed how, using the case of Algerian representation in film, the aftermath of colonisation has constructed a false identity of the colonised with respect to the identity of a rapidly homogenising modern European nation. In order to achieve this end, I will use a postcolonial lens to decipher the different artistic and aesthetic choices that the films' directors have employed to transmit their messages. Paired with relevant historical information, the postcolonial reading of the films will illustrate and explain how the relationship between Algeria and France has culminated in the one we see today. Since postcolonialism is a theory describing cultural representation in general, I will explain what issues the theory addresses as a whole before applying its concepts to film. Next, I will provide a general synopsis of the historical context of my case studies, accompanied by a discussion of some underlying themes pertaining specifically to this study. Thirdly, Michael Haneke's *Caché* (trans. Hidden, 2005) will be employed to illustrate the way that the aftermath of colonialism has not only tainted Algerian identity, but also how the collective French identity struggles with guilt over its actions in side-lining its Maghrebian<sup>1</sup> other. In addition, a textual analysis of *Souvenir, Souvenir* (trans. Memory, Memory, Dubois, 2020) will reveal a similar conclusion, although this time more

explicitly and taken from a surrealist biographical standpoint. In the following section, I will analyse how the film allows different interpretations of its content to open a debate on a possible future reconciliation between identities. Finally, extrapolating from the theoretical framework, I argue that my analysis is suited to many other colonial relationships, among other applications to wider spheres of study within the arts, humanities and social sciences.

## THE POSTCOLONIAL FRAMEWORK

Postcolonialism has, since the 1970s, become one of the most controversial and complex fields of scholarly study, especially when discussed in the context of cinema, identity, and representation on screen. Rooted most notably in 19th and 20th century imperialism, postcolonialism aims to comprehend and deconstruct the ideological conquests between the coloniser and colonised, the legacies left behind, and the way it shapes our societies today.

Fundamentally, we can define colonisation by the 'control and conquest of other people's land and goods' (Loomba, 1998, p. 2). Although the definition of colonisation may appear simple, the goal of postcolonialism is to reflect on the impact that this process has had on the experience, culture, politics, history, and society of native people, which had largely been discarded by Western scholarship until the 1970s (Iverson, 2020). Even to this day, Westerners have gazed at non-Westerners through a lens, which has projected certain false characteristics and stereotypes onto these people (Jhally, 1998). Consequently, this lens has created a distorted image, which is not in line with real depictions of their cultures, histories and societies. Academic scholar and author of the immensely influential *Orientalism* (1978) Edward Said describes the way that the Western scholars

<sup>1</sup> The Maghreb refers to a region of North Africa that includes Algeria, among other nations. I employ this term to hint at the broader colonial

relationship context. Just as I would label a person from France as European, I would label an Algerian as Maghrebi.

had built the Orient (and others) as a means of ‘dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Other’<sup>2</sup> (Said, 1978, p. 3). This revealed an inherent binary system of centre and periphery, self and Other, civilised and uncivilised, which was ingrained into thought and society, where the Other is marginalised and misrepresented (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2012). By creating an opposition between the civilised West and the barbaric rest, negative inferences are associated with the latter, for the benefit of the former. The system sets the Other ‘outside the time frame of modernity, poised in a timeless space’, inferring being stuck in the past and a lack of development (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2012, p. 2). Frantz Fanon (1963) reasons that due to the Western imperial gaze, the coloniser is unable to identify with the colonised. In turn, this leads to the many symptoms of ‘colonial neurosis’, one that sees ‘the native, bent double, more dead than alive, exist[ing] interminably in an unchanging dream’ (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2012, p. 5; Fanon, 1963, p. 51). On the other hand, ‘the settler makes history; his life is an epoch, an Odyssey. He is the absolute beginning’, or at least in the eyes of the oppressive colonist invader (Fanon, 1963, p. 51). Time runs interminably prior to the intervention of the imperial national, whereas the coloniser brings a timeline to the otherwise perennial ‘immobility to which the native is condemned’ (Fanon, 1963, p. 51). In addition, through this logic, Others are seen as ‘unpeople’, outside the systems of justice and devoid of the realm of human rights. Therefore, an implicit disparity in power relating purely from this relationship can be observed, symbolic of the colonial outlooks from the 19th century and beyond.

However, although this may seem like an archaic method of control, the modern age is also accustomed to its fair share of evident Othering, the action of making someone feel like the Other. A contemporary example of the Western lens can be seen in the media, following the city bombing in Oklahoma in 1995 (Said in Jahlly, 1998). During the hours following the attack, news media baselessly claimed that Arabs or Middle-Easterners had been responsible for the damage. As a consequence of this assumption, the mainstream media of the United States, among other nations, associated deceitful and dangerous reflections with the identity of over 250 million people (World Bank, 2019; Said in Jahlly, 1998). When it was found that Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, two white supremacist right-wing terrorists, had committed the atrocity, the damage to the Arab Other and their identity had already been inflicted (Bouie, 2019; Said in Jahlly, 1998). It must be noted that Othering directly contributes to the occurrence of these kinds of defamatory events, just like the events contribute to an increase of societal polarisation and antagonism between groups of people. In simple terms, the false accusations will make people more scared of and hostile to the accused, just as the hostility will make such false accusations more frequent. The action contributes to the social division, just like the division contributes to the prevalence and increased recurrence of such actions. This cycle forms the basis for much of the control and stigma that marginalised groups may feel within a society, and is conducive to the control of people who would wish to divide communities, whether directly or indirectly (Bouie, 2019; Said in Jahlly, 1998). Bouie (2019, np), speaking about the United States specifically, describes the situation: ‘we are confronting the very worst of our legacy—wrestling with our own shadows’. By this he indicates that the source of dispute within American identity politics is actually the result of their historical relationships with the Orient. Their physical and cultural involvement across the globe, expressly,

their legacy, has come back to haunt the United States in the form of a battle over identity and representation.

### APPLICATION TO FILM STUDIES

Postcolonial theory deconstructs these antiquated methods of control for a broadly Western audience, who usually has no direct contact with these cultures. Therefore, it relies heavily on the decoding of cultural representations to break down Western stereotypes of ethnic, national, racial, and cultural identities deemed as foreign. The audio-visual arts are a medium in which postcolonialism can be very clearly identified since both fields are involved in representation, identity, and legacies of epistemological violence (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2012). The intersectional nature of postcolonial studies, shared by cinema, is exemplified in their common interest for the aesthetics that shape sensory perception. Just as films use different audio-visual techniques to convey a story, postcolonialism uses methods to inspect the foundations and meanings of that story. Therefore, postcolonialism acts as a tool to examine the texts and discover the racial, xenophobic, imperial, and ignorant biases or distortions that are at the core of a film’s production. In some cases, this ignorance and lack of cultural awareness can be identified easily, such as in *Latin Lovers* (LeRoy, 1953) where, when they are not speaking English, the Portuguese-speaking Brazilians speak Spanish (Stam and Spence, 1983). The hegemony of former colonial subjects, that is a result of the imperial gaze posited by Frantz Fanon (1963), is illustrated in this simple, language-based case. Here we see the grouping of all Latin Americans into one category, which nullifies the cultural and linguistic diversity found within an entire continent. In a more severe example, harmless-looking films like *The Jungle Book* (Reitherman, 1967) perpetuate negative stereotypes of laziness, exoticism, and violence within the African American communities. Particularly evident in the singing scene between King Louie and Mowgli, the lyrics that the apes sing can be read in a postcolonial manner to see how the civil rights movement in the 1960s could be perceived by the Hollywood creators. ‘I want to walk like you, talk like you do’ and ‘An ape like me can learn to be Human too’, sung in a jazz-scat style, a musical style coming from Black American communities, in a voice sounding to be that of an African American, could reference the perceived primitive nature of those of tanned skin. The violent and lazy nature of the characters is highlighted when King Louie (possibly a reference to Louis Armstrong, especially considering the music style), asks Mowgli to complete tasks for him and reacts aggressively when the young man refuses (Wainer, 1993). The last case is especially dangerous since these films are shown to children, whose young minds are more susceptible to internalising and naturalising stereotypes (Winkler, 2009). It is imperative to identify these biases since they are so ingrained in normal society that people accept such fallacies to be true, when in reality they are a product of ignorance, perpetuated long after the end of colonisation.

Further to the theoretical framework, famous postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon used Lacanian concepts, ideas put forward by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, of the ‘stade du miroir’ to ‘explore identity and identification in their multiple psychological, cultural, historical and political dimensions’ (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2012, p. 5). In so doing, he advanced the postcolonial fundamentals to include the many psychoanalytic techniques that would lead to the development

<sup>2</sup> The term Other, with a capital O, refers to the concept outlined in the previous quote by Edward Said. This is in contrast to regular usage of the term other, with a minuscule o.

of identity studies, critical theory and colonial psychopathology (Deschamps, 2022).

Similarly to the centre-and-periphery logic of colonial thought, cinema also tends to marginalise certain films, theories, and styles for the benefit of others. U.S. cinema, especially Hollywood, deems almost anything outside its borders to be art house, third or foreign, even with certain European films falling into this category. For example, only in 2020 did the Academy Awards honour the Best Picture award to a foreign language film, *Parasite* (Joon-Ho, 2019). This is indicative of the general approach of the American film industry, which maintains an inherent separation between film from the U.S. and the rest (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2012). Consequently, this separation sparked a transnational movement of Third Cinema in the 60s, which aimed to counter the ideologies, economics, and aesthetics of First Cinema, namely corporate Hollywood cinema (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2012). Here we see the Third World successfully taking 'control of its own cinematic image, speak[ing] in its own voice' (Stam and Spence, 1983, p. 8). Paired with the postcolonial rubric, Third Cinema aims to 'counteract the ghettoization of films (as 'ethnic,' 'minority,' 'immigrant,' 'hyphenated,' or even 'art-house') that depart from commercial and ideological hegemonies' of the West specifically (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2012, p. 9). Although the birth of Third Cinema meant that the voices of those who were marginalised could be heard, it did not guarantee that they would be heard by the West or be included into the mainstream or academia.

#### **HISTORIOGRAPHY, CONTEXT AND THE FRANCO-ALGERIAN ISSUE**

Extrapolating from the illustration in the United States, many nations, such as France, have issues with bringing up their colonial history in a similar fashion but on a larger scale: society. Thus, films coming from their ex-colonies are rarely incorporated into their standard viewing practices, which is symbolic of the shame they attribute to their history (Hargreaves and McKinney, 1997).

Throughout history, it generally took a long time to properly unveil the truth of the past, contributing to a lot of the shame and people feel towards their country or family's history. As to why it took so long, it is generally related to multiple factors. The most popular answer is that historians are very dependent on archival footage or writings, which, in France are subject to laws. A minimum of 30 years is required before archival material becomes accessible to the general public, with some more sensitive pieces of information being closed off for 50 years (Deschamps, 2022; Cole, 2010). When new material surfaces, new questions are asked. Naturally, it takes time for research to be conducted, and a lot of the time multiple layers of history need to be uncovered in order to paint a correct picture of the historical truth (Deschamps, 2022; Cole 2010). Another advancement is related to technology, where the digitalisation of documents means that it will be more widely attainable by scholars, academics and historians alike (Deschamps, 2022). More availability of information for more people is conducive to larger inquiry and a greater rise of questions. Specific to the case of Algeria, after a peace agreement was reached in March of 1962 for Algerian independence, a group of extremists from the OAS (Organisation de l'Armée Secrete) burned down the library of the University of Algiers (Kerning Cultures, 2022). Inside were over 115,000 books that recorded everything from Algerian folklore songs to the testimonies of war crimes being committed (Kerning Cultures, 2022). Therefore, it can be understood that there was a large reduction of national historical and cultural records, leading to a decline in reliable and authentic historical material. In addition, it has been posited through multiple stages

of history, that when written content cannot be accessed, it is oral transmission that attracts the attention of historians (Deschamps, 2022; Cole, 2010). When the supply of historical accounts is reduced, as people get older and start to die, the available set of information causes an increase in demand and interest (Deschamps, 2022). This is because historians realise that if they do not investigate a subject when few people remain alive, their stories will never be told. A combination of all these factors means that inquiries on such thin strata of, in this case, French colonial history tend to develop and be unveiled around half a century after they have actually occurred. Accordingly, it can be seen that as a result of the broader historiographical issues relating to the trustworthiness of the documents and the case specific content for Algeria, it can be concluded that French society had a weak link to their history. A weak link to the past, especially in the case of colonial violence, as will be discussed next, can lead to 'a particular subjective truth of oppressed groups' historical memories' (Habashi, 2012, p.1). By this, guilt about the past is concealed through the disinformation and misinterpretation of oppressed people's narratives, identities and histories (Habashi, 2012).

However, before the archives could be properly consulted, there were three events, pointed out by Cole (2010), that were more widely known across the French Empire. They are relevant to my discussion because they were precise and extremely meaningful events that remained clear in the collective memories of those who were persecuted, but concealed in the minds of those committing the violent attacks.

'Three events in particular served to focus public attention in France on the question of colonial violence: the massacres at Sétif and Guelma in the eastern Algerian department of Constantine in May 1945; the deaths of Algerian protesters at the hands of Paris police in October 1961; and finally the police killings of protesters at the Charonne metro station in the capital during a demonstration organized by the Communist Party and trade union organizations in February 1962' (Cole, 2010, p. 107).

These events were and are instrumental, because they emulate the trajectory that much of colonial violence follows through the minds of the concerned groups. 'Initially forgotten by the wider public', the memories of the events remain in the minds of those who were affected by the events due to the sheer significance it brings to the lived or national experience of those in exile or within a diaspora (Cole, 2010, p. 107). Hence, it can be confirmed that the manner in which French-Algerian historiography is compiled, stored and researched plays a significant role in how an ex-imperial nation will deal with its colonial past.

Seeing this in action, it has been posited that 'in France, the post-colonial problematic is seldom encountered in political or cultural discourse' (Hargreaves and McKinney, 1997). Yet, as one of the nations that had the largest colonial empires (still retaining five colonial territories, or *Départements d'Outre Mer*, outside metropolitan France, which have a certain degree of autonomy), this problematic is essential to the comprehension of its history. Although a law from 1872 prohibits the French Republic from conducting any surveys on the ethnic makeup of the nation, a 2004 study estimated that 10% of metropolitan France was from North Africa, 3.5% were Sub-Saharan African and 1.5% Asian (World Population Review, 2021). This large demographic of foreigners has created a new identity, separate from the binary insider and outsider logic of colonisation, which is a hybrid of the two, a Third Space (Hargreaves and McKinney, 1997). The relationship between the Western French identity, having an unreconciled postcolonial legacy, and the Other Algerian identity, blurs the lines of the hybrid space, creating difficulties for representation and self-

identification (Ford, 2012). This is the subject of Michael Haneke's 2005 film, *Caché/Hidden*.

### **CACHÉ: THE QUESTION OF VEILED RECOGNITION**

*Caché* is a masterpiece of modern cinema (Haneke won the Cannes Best Director Awards at that year's Cannes Film Festival), which explores colonial legacies in an entirely novel manner. It illustrates the suppression of history in the French collective identity by likening it to and manifesting it within a childhood experience of successful talk-show host, Georges. The film also shows how the Algerian is stereotyped and demonised through Majid, a man slightly older than the protagonist, who was deprived of a good life and education by the actions of a young Georges. Using tapes sent by an unidentified individual to Georges' household, Haneke reflects on the turbulent past of the Algerian War of Independence to show that although colonisation may have ended, the scars left behind cannot heal in the timeline of a single generation (Ford, 2012). Phenomenologically, the reading of this film borrows from certain Lacanian ideas that relate the tapes to the imperial gaze described by Fanon, and the memory of the past being woven into the fibres that make up the film's body and skin (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2012; Ford 2012).

In the early 60s, Majid's parents were employed by Georges' family, but after attending a pro-Algerian independence march in Paris, they are presumed dead after the horrific incidents of the October 1961 Paris massacre. Georges' parents resolve to adopt the young Majid, but out of jealousy, Georges claims that Majid coughed blood and killed one of their chickens in order to scare the young Georges. When his parents change their mind, Majid is sent to an orphanage, where he will not receive the same standard of life and education as he would have had Georges been honest.

The present-day Georges tells his wife this story in their book-filled, chic living room, in a reluctant and frustrated manner, replicating France's problems with discussing the heinous actions and guilt which plague their past. Furthermore, it begs the question as to why we know so much about Georges' life, and so little about Majid's childhood. This is because, like France's colonisation of Algeria, nothing mattered before the French participation. The film slowly transitions to show Georges positioning himself as the victim of an attack, the video tapes, that has been orchestrated by the Other, Majid. Georges tracks down who he thinks is the perpetrator of these crimes by inspecting a street sign from one of the tapes, which leads him to knock on Majid's door. This scene is crucial in understanding the colours that Georges wishes to paint onto the Algerian Other because of their discussion of recognition. When Georges is invited into the dark, worn down and significantly cheaper apartment to the Frenchman's own, he does not dare utter the name of the man facing him, since this would legitimise Majid's existence and the suffering that Georges has caused him. Using an untranslatable play on words, Majid says he is 'reconnaisant' of Georges' parents' help, here meaning 'grateful', but in another sense meaning 'recognising'. This double entendre exhibits the reality of Majid's personality and national identity, not blaming the French for his nation's suffering, but showing his gratefulness and recognition of Georges' parents' help in his childhood.

Although Majid claims his innocence regarding the tapes, this confirms Georges' suspicions and is straight to blame his Algerian counterpart. From a French point of view, exemplified by Georges, the Algerian Other is seen as a dishonest, vengeful, and tormenting force, when in reality Majid and his son have nothing to do with the tapes themselves. This ease to point a finger at the Other is a product of the power dynamics that, although are not explicitly expressed in the film, remain

perpetuated within French society. The vengefulness that Georges believes is present in Majid is simply a product of the former's paranoia, since he realises that what he has earned is not by his own virtues, but by his indifference to the suffering of the Other.

In a separate instance, when Georges' son, Pierrot, does not return from school one evening, Georges is quick to blame Majid and his son again, simply because of his privilege as a white, French male and their disadvantage as darker skinned Algerian minorities. When it is revealed that Pierrot was staying at his friend's house, Georges offers no apology to Majid or his son. Whilst we see that Georges is capable of apologising, by repeatedly doing so to his wife, Anne, for his short outbursts of anger, he never offers one to the individuals who deserve it the most.

The disparity between Georges' anger, and the politeness and integrity of Majid and his son's characters is central to the discussion of how the French collective identity views the Algerian collective identity. Although the Algerian pair constantly act in the most moral manner, they will never be seen as anything else than what French society has shaped them to be; different, deceitful, problem-causing, and dishonest. In reality, it is the exact opposite which is true. For example, in one of the final scenes, Majid's son, representative of the Third Space mentioned before, waits for Georges at his work. He wishes to discuss the details of his father's suicide, which was witnessed, and indirectly caused by, Georges. Georges attempts to avoid the young man by stepping into an elevator, but is swiftly followed. Here, Majid's son is framed large in the foreground, with the Frenchman hidden in the mirror's reflection, surrounded by the faces of white workers, trying to hide behind their collective mask. This pivotal moment exemplifies the insecurity that Georges has, yet he still gets angry when the son only asks for answers surrounding his father's death. Perfectly explained by Ford (in Ponzanesi and Waller, 2012):

'Majid commits a gruesome and violent suicide that Georges is forced to witness. Through this action the film hints at the responsibility, personal and by extrapolation national, that Georges has to take, which until then he has repressed in order to safeguard his comfortable present' (Ponzanesi and Waller, 2012, p. 10).

During the encounter with the young Algerian, 'do you expect me to apologise' and 'I'm not to blame' are phrases used by the Frenchman that symbolise the same guilt attributed Majid's death and to France's involvement in the Algerian war. Through the postcolonial lens it is revealed that the French depend on the Other, both figuratively, to confirm their identity, and literally, to maintain their comfortable lifestyle.

The last shot of *Caché* opens the question of reconciliation between the two identities and the creation of the third, hybrid identity. The eerie stillness of the shot, with its wide framing, similar to that of the tapes, shows a positive interaction between Georges' and Majid's sons in front of Pierrot's school. They seem to agree on something, but continue with the routine of their days just after. This indicates that the next generation are capable of discussing and resolving their past, the figurative aspect of their nation's identity relationship, but still live in the shadow of colonisation, their literal dependence, as mentioned previously. What is meant by this is that although the lifestyles, material benefits and personal history of the children is linked to that of their fathers (afforded by the consequences of the ex-colonial relationship), it is their figurative dependence, their identity dependence, that permits them to communicate and try to resolve their nations' past conflicts. They accept that their lifestyles are shaped by the past, but they are willing to, at least

on the identity front, come to understanding of how one will perceive and act towards the other.

Finally, unlike films like *Souvenir*, *Souvenir* (Dubois, 2020), *Caché* is made such that the narrative can be interpreted in many contrasting ways. Whereas *Souvenir*, *Souvenir* deals with the memories and heritage of the Algerian War in an abstract biography, *Caché* conceals its message in the shape of a family thriller drama, when a postcolonial reading allows for this text to reveal its true nature.

### ***SOUVENIR, SOUVENIR: REMEDYING THE LINEAGE OF GUILT***

On the other hand, *Souvenir*, *Souvenir* deals with the Algerian question from an autobiographical standpoint, reflecting on film director Bastien Dubois' experience. The film uses aesthetic changes to animation, music and more to morph together timelines, stories and wartime trauma over a ten-year period. Bringing together multiple failed attempts to get Bastien's grandfather, a soldier during the more brutal part of the Algerian war, to speak about his past and his involvement in the conflict, the short film unveils the brutality and violence of the 7-year struggle for Algerian self-determination. A filmmaker himself, the protagonist of the short relies on many of the historiographical processes described before to build an image of what he thinks the reality of war looks like. Voiced by some of his own family members, Bastien Dubois seeks to break up the generational trauma that he sees his father subject to too, whilst capturing the essence of French guilt. This guilt, which may seem specific to the case of Bastien, retains much more meaning when thinking of France as a whole, since the reflections passing through the mind of the creator are indicated to have been experienced by more people. Even those within the film who are not concerned by this dark layer of French history illustrate another symptom of ex-colonialism: obliviousness. Obliviousness caused by anguish that, not explicitly, stains the pages of French history books with the blood of the Maghrebian Other.

During the first stages of his filmmaking life, Bastien<sup>3</sup> tries to create a film on Algeria, believing that it would reveal some of the stories that were hidden in the life of his grandfather. Having heard the same repetitive stories of gazelle hunting, or the time the French soldiers got an orchestra to play for them, Bastien realises that his struggles to make a breakthrough are in vain. Therefore, he creates a short film bringing together what he thinks would be the worst possible outcome of the war. Speaking to his sister after having read some historical accounts of the violence and testimonies of Algerians in the conflict, he says that 'In fact what I imagined as... 'the worst' was actually quite close to reality so, well... uh... I moved on'. Here we see the first instance in which someone in the Dubois family glosses over the reality of the war, deciding to change projects when the task becomes too heavy. Representative of most people, the fact that no further investigation is brought to the horrifying reality of war indicates that the newer generation conforms to the comfortable rhetoric of obliviousness or misinformation.

The next scene confirms this, instantly switching to the environment of a nightclub, where Dubois hints at the dark blanket that is placed on France's past. It is there that Bastien meets Aziz, an Algerian glass collector at the club, who is evidently less well off than his French counterpart (Bastien can make short films for a living, indicating a similar disparity as that of Majid and Georges: one seems to be living for his dreams

and the other one working tougher jobs in order to attain a more comfortable lifestyle that the former easily takes for granted). They go outside where Aziz lights his cigarette: stylistically speaking, spreading light on the truth that is about to be shared. Aziz visibly has much more information on his grandfather's life, describing how he fought in the French army during World War Two and then in the Algerian resistance, the FLN. After being found out by the French army, he recounts how his grandfather was burnt with fuel, sent to hospital and disappeared soon after. The disregard of his life, without any message to his family or respect for the dignity of a veteran militant illustrates the broken relationship that a Frenchman can have with another soldier of a similar rank, and who could have fought beside him in the early 1940s. Although Aziz takes a moment for himself after describing his grandfather's disappearance, he almost immediately cracks a joke about how his grandmother got pensions from both the French and Algerian armies. Aziz's ease to discuss the past, in contrast to Bastien and his family, suggests that on the Algerian side, there is less to be ashamed of, their historic pain has, concerning their own actions, been resolved and they could even make a joke out of it. In any case, he seems to know much more about his own family's past and is able to share it more freely than Bastien, hinting at a disparity with how much of their past has been reconciled internally.

When speaking to his grandmother on another occasion, Bastien realises the double standards with which his family understands the war. She calls it a 'peacekeeping operation' instead of a war (similar to the Russian rhetoric in its illegitimate invasion of Ukraine this year), showing once again her ignorance on a subject which occurred in her lifetime and directly concerned her significant other (Reuters, 2022). Only when Bastien corrects her does she reflect on the terminology she used, yet brushes it off with a chuckle. For the public population, the past is nothing to be concerned about, since she knows nothing of what happened in the war. The cycle of the general population not knowing about the details of the conflict means that there is not much intrigue to the subject, and it falls into the hands of repressed recollections of already shattered soldiers. Bastien even explains, when he reuses the script of the worst-case scenario, that his years-long investment still cannot reveal the true complexities of a brutal hostility.

In a critical scene of the film, Bastien interviews an older lady who happens to be from Algeria, and who decides to speak to him about the war. Describing the treatment of men being beaten, young girls being raped, and her own rape stories Bastien breaks. The words used by Dubois in the diegetic interview are taken directly from the actual meeting that he had with this lady, leading to the authenticity of her testimony. This shatters, both figuratively and literally, Bastien and his understanding of the war, believing that his own relative could be one of those people. When he confronts his grandfather again, we see the stereotypical excuses like 'we were conscripts' or 'we had no choice! I'm fed up!' as the senior man rushes out of the room. Similar to the experience of Georges being questioned by Majid's son, it is revealed that the blame is directed towards the nation-state, or the rules they abided to, not ever choosing to accept the past because of their subconscious anguish. Shame is concealed behind the excuse of obligation.

When Bastien's sister suggests that they contact their father about the topic, his father replies that 'No, for me, Algeria, it's rather good memories', exemplifying the immediate ignorance to his own father's life. In a later scene, the grandfather gets a

<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of clarity, in this section I will use the name 'Bastien' when referring to the character in the film, and 'Dubois' when it concerns the filmmaker of *Souvenir*, *Souvenir*

little bit drunk while having friends over for a meal. He begins to describe a weapon that one of his comrades made, a homemade mace, and then instantly bursts into tears. When Bastien again asks his dad about all the 'good memories' after the guests leave, the older man dismisses them as stories that the grandfather must have heard. The complete denial of what had happened almost the very same instant once again maintains the point of France not being able to take responsibility for its past, not even one generation down from those directly involved in the hostilities. While Bastien meets his psychiatrist she perfectly explains what he is confronted by: 'Actually what you are facing with your grandparents is shame. Unspeakable shame, which is usually protected by the first generation and often questioned by your [the second] generation.' Later on in the film, when his grandfather is in the hospital, Bastien asks whether he had ever shared anything with Bastien's grandmother, to which she replied 'no'. But throughout all this shame and lack of discussion, Bastien sees a little light in the generational trauma: at least his grandfather was not indifferent. This moment highlights the idea that through even minimal discussion, someone can eliminate their pain and allow for wider acceptance of the horrific events of the past.

Like *Caché*, this film ends with the question of a possible reconciliation between both identities, without the French one tainting the Other, whilst alleviating its own, internalised grief. The last scene of *Souvenir*, *Souvenir* shows that Bastien will no longer fight back against the violent past, he must accept what has happened and not be the source of more mental or physical violence towards history, even when metaphorically encountering a metaphysical scar in the conscious of the French people. The genres of both films, one being a surrealist timeless biography, another being a psychological family drama, have been carefully selected to mirror the lineage of a traumatic episode of history. Each with their own stylistic choices, but both conducive to internal questioning, reflection, and the possibility of harmony with the help of future generations, learning and accepting. The surrealist autobiographical stylistic choice from *Souvenir*, *Souvenir* is more focused on the discovery of the past and slowly coming to terms with it. It also emphasizes a more subjective point of view, in that it does not allegorise the whole national context to characters in the film, like *Caché* does. The approach by Michael Haneke takes the story from a purely historical point of view, trying to discuss the whole colonial relationship while disguising it as a family drama. Both films use family and national contexts, but arrive at different goals when discussing this chapter of history. Although *Caché* hints at a possible reconciliation, it leaves the viewer in distress, questioning the role that they may have played in the lineage of colonial legacy. The negative ending, with Majid dead, is meant to initiate reflection in the audience. In a different fashion, *Souvenir*, *Souvenir* uses the family dynamic to slowly reconcile the wrongdoings that Bastien's

family has committed in the past, at least in Bastien's eyes. The film ends with a relatively positive message: a message of hope, whereby generational trauma has been ended.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the aim of this article was to demonstrate how postcolonialism describes the harsh reality of the aftermath of French imperialism in Algeria in its diverse forms. When applied to the visual arts, the postcolonial lens reveals layers of bias and misrepresentation that still lingers on screen in and outside the national contexts of both concerned countries. Filmmaking is translation: it translates ideas, social climates, values, memories, perceptive media and more. Studying the discipline of film, as a means to explain social, historical, cultural or political mechanisms of events, can lead to a better understanding the past. This is evidenced especially when tailoring our viewership with a lens such as postcolonialism or a national circumstance, where the intersectional characteristics of critical theory and audio-visual arts converge.

Using Algerian representation as a case study, I have shown how their identity is polluted in the eyes of their ex-colonists, as well as the grief in the modern age that is attributed to the horrors of the coloniser-colonised relationship. Using *Caché* as a case in point, France's colonial fragility has been exposed, as well as resistance of Algerian identity to be broken, in the midst of constant misrepresentation and demonisation. Michael Haneke shows how identity and time can be 'dissolved by the slippery reflexivity of the virtual' in order to produce a discussion that is necessary for France to reconcile with its atrocious colonial past, not just with the Algerian Other (Ford, 2012, p. 74). *Souvenir*, *Souvenir* has shown the brittle lineage of memory that is so destructive to the French society struggling with its unsettling past. Bastien Dubois' autobiographic piece unveils a more nuanced view of a family in disarray, but altogether treats the denial and angst that slowly chips away at his grandfather's conscious. However, a more open dialogue looks to be forming within French society, with artistic expression being an efficient instigator for this conversation, as evidenced by the two films. Be that as it may, the French socio-political landscape is becoming more polarised and extremist, made apparent by the recent election results, particularly on subjects concerning immigration, identity and citizenship (Taylor, 2022). Whether it is regarding foreign diaspora, social inclusion, freedom of expression or racial inequality, we see that, as a result of its unresolved history, France is still dealing with its consequences.

## REFERENCES

- Bouie, J. (2019). "Opinion: The March of White Supremacy, From Oklahoma City to Christchurch", in *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/18/opinion/mcveigh-new-zealand-white-supremacy.html>. (Accessed 11/12/21).
- Cole, J. (2010). "Massacres and their Historians: Recent Histories of State Violence in France and Algeria in the Twentieth Century". *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 28:1: p. 106–126.
- Deschamps, E. (2022). "Informal interview with Étienne Deschamps". [interview] Personal Communication. 27 May 2022
- Fanon, F. (1963). "The Wretched of the Earth", New York: Grove Press. p. 35-95.
- Ford, H. (2012). "From otherness "over there" to virtual presence: Camp de Thiaroye – The Battle of Algiers – Hidden", in Ponzanesi, S. and Waller, M. (eds.) *Postcolonial Cinema Studies*. Abington, Oxon; New York: Routledge. p. 63-77.
- Habashi, J. (2012). "Colonial Guilt and the Recycling Oppression: The Merit of Unofficial History in Transforming the State's Narrative", in *Diaspora Indigenous and Minority Education*, 6:1. p. 50–58.

- Hargreaves, A. G. and McKinney, M. (1997). "Introduction: The Post-Colonial Problematic in France", in Hargreaves, A. G. and McKinney, M. (eds.) *Post-Colonial Cultures in France*. London; New York: Routledge. p. 3-9.
- Iverson, D. (2020). "Postcolonialism", in *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/postcolonialism>.
- Jhally, S. (1998). "Edward Said on Orientalism". [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVC8EYd\\_Z\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVC8EYd_Z_g). (Accessed 12/12/21).
- Kerning Cultures (2022). "The Burning Library". <https://kerningcultures.com/the-burning-library/> (Accessed 3/6/22).
- Loomba, A. (1998). "Colonialism/Postcolonialism", London; New York: Routledge. p. 1-16.
- Ponzanesi, S. and Waller, M. (2012). "Introduction", in Ponzanesi, S. and Waller, M. (eds.) *Postcolonial Cinema Studies*, Abington; Oxon; New York: Routledge. p. 1-16.
- Said, E. W. (1978). "Orientalism", London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. p. 1-16.
- Stam, R. and Spence, L. (1983). "Colonialism, Racism and Representation", in *Screen*, 24:2, Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 2-20.
- Taylor, P. (2022). "Now that Macron has won, it's time to fix French politics", in *Politico*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-has-won-but-france-remains-on-the-brink/>. (Accessed 9/6/22).
- Wainer, A. (1993). "Reversal of Roles: Subversion and Reaffirmation of Racial Stereotypes in Dumbo and the Jungle Book", Ferris State University: Jim Crow Museum. <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/links/essays/reversal.htm> (Accessed 3/6/22).
- Winkler, E. N. (2009). "Children are not Colourblind: How Young Children Learn Race", in *PACE*, 3:3. p. 1-8.
- World Bank. (2020). "Population, total – Arab World". <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=1A> (Accessed 12/12/21).
- World Population Review. (2021). "France Population 2021 (Live)", <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/france-population> (Accessed 12/12/21).

#### FILMOGRAPHY

- Caché*. France, Austria, Germany. France 3 Cinéma, Canal+, Bavaria Film. 2005. Dir: Michael Haneke
- Latin Lovers*. US. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. 1953. Dir: Mervyn LeRoy
- Souvenir, Souvenir*. France, Germany. ARTE France, Blast Productions. 2020. Dir: Bastien Dubois
- The Jungle Book*. US. Walt Disney Productions. 1967. Dir: Wolfgang Reitherman
- Parasite*. South Korea. CJ Entertainment. 2019. Dir: Bong Joon-Ho