



PALGRAVE STUDIES IN ARAB CINEMA

# Cinema and the Algerian War of Independence

Culture, Politics, and Society

Ahmed Bedjaoui

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Palgrave Studies in Arab Cinema

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## FOREWORD: ALGERIAN WAR OF RESISTANCE, A WAR OF IMAGES

Known in English as the Algerian War, in French (until relatively recently) by such euphemisms as “a police operation” or simply “the events in Algeria,” the Algerian war of independence (1954–1962) was, as Ahmed Bedjaoui notes, a vast national trauma, a beacon for decolonization struggles, and the logical endgame to over a century of French colonial occupation. As the author notes at the start of this moving and fascinating study, images were always at stake in the power play between the French colonial presence and Algeria’s indigenous inhabitants. The “battle of images” was fed by orientalist imagery on one side, a growing sense of national identity and resistance on the other. Ultimately, modern media—in particular, film and television, but also, as Bedjaoui observes, radio—became crucial propaganda weapons in the deciding conflict.

The military might of the French was, during the war and in the century leading up to it, matched by a control of the media and hence of representation. The result, both before and even after 1962, was often a kind of empty dreamscape, Algeria without Algerians. Meanwhile, massacres of Algerians, such as those that took place in May 1945, remained invisible in the French media and can still provoke defensive reactions, as the 2010 reception of Bouchareb’s feature film *Hors-la-loi* at Cannes—explained here in startling clarity—indicates.

After the decolonization of their country, Algerian filmmakers were confronted with a new struggle: the “decolonization of the image.” The challenge was to populate the Algerian landscape via filmic representation.

But, with one key complication; to do so, as Bedjaoui puts it, by not just making war films, but by making films on the war *of liberation*. The impassioned efforts that resulted are thoroughly charted here, in a comprehensive and elegant account, which pauses to focus on case studies that may not be well known to western readers, but which merit our close attention—among them powerful, evocative homages to figures such as Pierre Clément, Assia Djebar, Azzedine Meddour and Jacques Panijel.

Perhaps, the most moving chapters here concern the role of women in the resistance movement, and afterwards their partial absence from representations of the war, powerfully put right by films such as *Barberousse, mes soeurs*. Then again, there is the almost painfully poignant chapter on children of the war, with its beautiful pages on several heart-breaking documentaries including those using children's drawings (*J'ai 8 ans, La Fillette et le papillon*).

The author, a legend of Algerian film studies, used to work for the RTA, Algeria's national television station. He is rightly proud of his contribution to the production of Djebar's pioneering film, *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*. Of course, delays, divisions, and disasters—most notably the collapse of cinema infrastructure in the 1990s—have hampered the Algerian film industry in the fifty-five years since independence, as Bedjaoui demonstrates. But far from presenting an inward-looking national film history, this book pays careful and generous attention to the filmmakers and television crews from other countries—including dissenting directors from France, personnel from East Germany and the Soviet Bloc, and also those from the United States and the United Kingdom—who had the courage and open-mindedness to engage with the Algerian struggle during the war and its aftermath. The role of film in helping to inform and influence global opinion in the war years was crucial, never more so than in New York in December 1960, where the United Nations delegates saw Lakhdar-Hamina's seminal short film *Yasmina*.

This is an important, humane book. It tells a kind of secret history and reveals visual treasures some of which, as Bedjaoui emphasizes, risk slowly subsiding into neglect and decay. Film historians everywhere should welcome this valuable volume, I hope as much as I do.

Algiers, Algeria

Guy Austin

## PRAISE FOR *CINEMA AND THE ALGERIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE*

“Ahmed Bedjaoui is one of the best-known names in the world of Algerian cinema, as a producer, journalist, critic, and scholar. His book, *Cinema and the Algerian War of Independence*, comes at the right time.

The book, all in all, is an insightful and timely contribution not just to the field of North African studies but also to other disciplines, such as film and media studies, anthropology, history, journalism, and political science. It is a must-read for students, scholars and media professionals alike, as they will find in this book a rich source for research topics and viable ideas for film and documentary projects.”

—Nabil Boudraa, *Oregon State University*



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# ACRONYMS

ALN	National Liberation Army
ANOM	National Overseas Archives, France
ANP	Armée Nationale Populaire, Popular National Army, Algeria
APS	Algérie Presse Service, Algeria
ARTE	French-German Public Channel
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BMC	Military Campaign Brothel
CAAIC	Algerian Center of Cinema
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System, USA
CDC	Distribution Cinematographic Center, Algeria-France
CNC	Cinema and Animated Image Center, France
CNCA	National Cinema Center, (1964–1967), Algeria
CNRS	Scientific Research National Center, France
CRUA	Revolutionary Committee for Unity and Action, Algeria
DEFA	Deutsche Film AG (State studio the former German Democratic Republic)
DST	Directorate for the Surveillance of the Territory, France
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
ECPAD	Communication and audiovisual production of defense Institution-France
ENAP	Algerian Press National company
ENPA	Public National Company for Audiovisual Production, Algeria
ETM	French camera produced between 1945 and 1955
FLN	National Liberation Front, Algeria
Fox	Fox Broadcasting Company, USA
GPRA	Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic

IDHEC	Institut des Hautes études cinématographiques (Institute for Advanced Cinematographic Studies), since 1986 <i>La Femis</i>
INP	International News Photo
MALG	Ministry of Armament and general connections, Algeria
MNA	Algerian National Movement
MTLD	Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties, Algeria
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
OAS	Secret Army Organization
PPA	The Algerian People's Party
RDA	DDR (Deutsche Demokratische Republik)
RTA	Algerian Broadcasting Organization, created on 28 October 1962
RTF	French Broadcasting Organization, replaced by the French Broadcasting Office (ORTF) on 25 July 1964
SCA	French Army Cinema Service
SCAM	Multimedia, authors Civil Society, France
SDEC	External documentation service and against espionage, France
SFIO	French Section of the Workers' International, France
TF1	French private TV channel
TVE	Televisión Española
UMP	Union for a Popular Movement, France
UN	United Nations
UP	United Press (USA)

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction

Sixty years after it began, the Algerian liberation war still continues to generate divergent and relatively personal depictions. The passing of time since November 1, 1954, could have made for a detached attitude concerning the events that so dramatically marked relations between Algeria and France. Yet, this has not been the case. In Algeria, the vast majority of the population was born after independence. On the other side of the Mediterranean, the senior officers of the French army have almost all passed away. In this respect, the death of General Aussaresses, who was the embodiment of the most brutal repression methods used, drew attention to the rekindling of memories. Never since the start of the conflict has the liberation war sparked so many audiovisual works and products in the two countries. Two generations later, there is an acute awareness of the question of transmitting memories and taking responsibility for them. While the observers and players were alive, there was no apparent rush to examine history. With the passing of the war generations, the urgency for a re-examination of history has resurfaced. This was expressed forcefully during the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Algeria's independence.

Both countries have experienced their productive period, although not simultaneously. Algerian cinema played an essential role during and after the liberation war. For its part, French cinema remained hesitant, a victim of censure and self-censorship. There is therefore an Algerian cinema that

feels it fulfilled its duty in the past, while on the other side, French audiovisual historiography that stirred itself on the eve of the millennium and only then began to question still painful memories. This increased interest was not without ulterior motives. The commemoration in the media of this event was accompanied by a minor semantic war that clearly showed the different undertaken approaches.

The fiftieth anniversary of independence was indeed treated audiovisually in two different ways, depending on which side of the Mediterranean it happened to be. For Algeria, it was the celebration of the recovery of its independence, and for the French, it was the anniversary of the cease-fire, as if the essential point was to mark the end of the war without actually legitimizing the Algerian victory over colonialism. It should be noted that most of French audiovisual production was the work of public television, while cinema screens remained silent. The manner in which a cinematic style is perceived differs radically according to how it is viewed: individually (in front of the television set) or collectively (in a cinema). The intensity and impact of the emotion are obviously not the same.

The difference in terminology admirably reveals the clash of visual images and imaginative worlds between the two belligerents. It is also a reminder that the history of colonization, then decolonization, was also characterized by a war of images. During the invasion, the colonial power made use of artistic representations to accompany its enterprise of military conquest acted out against Algeria and its institutions. In reality, the battle of images started in 1830, when "the art of the conquest trumpeted annexation," as Dominique Legrand described it. For the Algerians, the national movement was accompanied by the emergence of a strong national culture quite distinct from that of the occupier. Writers like Mohammed Dib and Kateb Yacine were among the first to create the break while supplying the national movement with a culture of resistance. The appearance of an Algerian school, which included several talented painters such as Choukri Mesli, Mohammed Khadda, and M'hamed Issiakhem, brought an end to the imbalance in the iconographic portrayals of identities. As such, it can be said that most of the Orientalists represented the conquest, whereas Algerian artists captured imaginations with images of the struggle.

With the advent of the cinematograph, Algeria became renowned as a good hunting ground for the first cameramen, yet productions concentrated essentially on its quality of light, with a notable absence of any



Algerians. Nevertheless, the efforts of the colonial system to provide the European population with a wide network of cinemas benefited Algerians most of all, for they acquired a solid cinema culture by their regular attendance.

The appearance of the first films made by Algerians came only shortly before the armed struggle began. For its part, the Government General soon turned cinema into a propaganda weapon at the service of psychological action, trying to appeal to isolated native populations.

For their part, the leaders of the National Liberation Front (FLN) rapidly became aware of the importance of visual images in the media battle that was organized away from the military battlefield. The National Liberation Army (ALN), then the Provisory Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA), created cinema services around Djamel Chanderli, followed by other Algerians and foreign filmmakers sympathetic to the Algerian cause. In 1956, the platform of the valley of the Soummam emphasized the necessity for the systematic use of iconographic and audiovisual documents to support a fight that progressively came to focus on the political front—with evident success. In response to the first media successes of the resistance, France launched a television network in December 1957.

Is it really possible to refer to a cinema in the *maquis* in the same terms that apply to a cinema production, with a given paternity of authorship? It shall be seen in this work that the images collected by photographers and cameramen were essentially part of a collective work, the sole aim being to draw the attention of international public opinion to the legitimate struggle of the Algerian people and its mobilization behind the FLN. An exceptionally talented generation of politicians played an important role in amassing the material and in providing a framework for the filmmakers. This involved first and foremost supporting a war diplomacy destined to raise public awareness in countries that were normally France's allies, by supplying powerfully telling images to television newsrooms, in particular those of the large Anglo-Saxon broadcasting networks, at a time when television was becoming the dominant media. The culminating point was reached thanks to M'hamed Yazid, with the presentation of two Algerian films on the fringes of the United Nations General Assembly, films designed to prepare diplomats to recognize the right of Algerians to self-determination. *Yasmina* made people cry and *Les Fusils de la Liberté* [Guns of Freedom] showed the determination of an entire people.

Half a century later, it is legitimate to wonder how and to what extent Algerian films (cinema and television sectors combined) represented the War of Independence. These representations evaluate the reflections of the different sections of Algerian society as mirrored by history: women, children, and emigration. The sources of history will also be examined, the better to measure the ability of Algerian films to explain, both in documentaries and in fiction films, the origins of this great nationalist movement whose combat became a rare example in the history of humanity, through the enrollment of the Algerians in their vast majority.

It seemed interesting to consider this war of images opposing French propaganda (rigid but possessing colossal resources) and a team of men and women who made the internationalization of the conflict the real battleground on which political victory was played out. The study would be incomplete if it did not examine the way in which French cinema handled the history of relations with colonial, then combatant, Algeria. Contrary to certain often pre-conceived notions, French cinema produced an impressive amount of images about the Algerian war. It is true that the importance does not lie in the number of films produced, but rather in the manner in which they were made. It cannot be said, either, that the majority of Algerian films dealt with the liberation war. Now, sixty years after this famous first of November, it is important to give the young their turn and to listen to their views on this war that so marked their parents and their grandparents.

In this work, a view of the way in which visual images and audio-visual productions in particular recounted the war of independence will be proposed. In a cinema where men are omnipresent, what is the place given to women and children? Above all, the different types of figuration reflected by fiction films for cinema, films for television and artistic documentaries have also been examined. The exercise entails making a choice. It is impossible to mention them all, in light of the enormous number of reports and programs devoted to the liberation war over a period of half a century, the product of the information services of Algerian television.

The subject overall is vast and still wide open to research. The intention has been to let those who witnessed this period of history speak for themselves. While the cinema can only play the role of an eyewitness, the responsibility of writing history devolves to historians. The objective is not to present a historical work but to offer an account and a point of view of the multitude of filmed representations to which the liberation

war has given rise, here and there. “Written history is just one possible re-transcription of the past, and established truths are on borrowed time awaiting other discoveries ... However, while the line put forward by the historian may seem more credible than the filmmaker’s one, the historian is rarely the greater heeded of the two.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Aurélien Portelli, <http://mecaniquefilmique.blogspot.fr/2006/08/le-film-historique.html>.



## CHAPTER 2

---

# Popular Resistance at the Origin of the National Movement

All peoples need to tell their own history, produce their own image.  
—Jean-Claude Carrière

Usually, the historiography of the liberation war begins in the mid-fifties, somewhere in the *maquis* and on the borders. It is quite possible, on the other hand, to consider that the resistance started as soon as the invading troops set foot in Sidi Ferruch. For decades, the images painted by French artists fed a one-sided colonial view of history. After World War I, the development of the national movement was accompanied by a cultural renaissance that reached its peak with the demonstrations of May 8, 1945; a strong political conscience that coincided with the emergence of a generation of artists with exceptional talent.

Painters like Mesli, Issiakhem, Khadda, Yellès, and Ali-Khodja placed before us a sort of mirror in which was reflected a nation in movement. They represented our visual conscience, until the first filmmakers came along.

During the first two decades that followed independence, Algerian films mostly dealt with events linked to the 1954–1962 period. Events that eyewitnesses still alive can compare with their own experience, which singularly complicates relations between the artists and the public. Going back further, that is, before the twentieth century, it becomes apparent that very few films have dealt with the period of the beginnings of colonization and popular resistance reacting to the French occupation. It is

true that until very recently, history was a concept most often related to the liberation war. Writing history was supposed to narrate the war anecdotally down to the last detail. This is what all Algerian cinema did. Did it succeed? It begs the question. However, would it not be useful to return to the sources of resistance, the better to reflect on history and to explain the general conflagration of November 1954? *La Voix du peuple* [The People's Voice], produced by the cinema service of GPRA, made in 1961 by Djamel Chandlerli and Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina, returns to the underlying causes of the armed conflict. It places it in the history of the nationalist fight against colonization and is a reminder that the struggle for independence started well before November 1, 1954.

### GOING BACK IN HISTORY

Other Algerian filmmakers have started to go back in history, looking at the episodes of resistance experienced by the precedent generations. Since its liberation, the country is still waiting for a film that can recount the resistance during the two decades that followed the French invasion. Over the fifty years since independence, many projects about Emir Abdel-Kader have been prepared. None of them have yet seen the light of day. Fortunately, several documentaries (more or less successful) have been devoted to the man who many consider as being the founder of the Algerian State after Ottoman occupation.

Since the first images shot in Algeria, French cinema has done much to give a colonial representation of warm sun and sand to this country, while the local population lived in abject misery under this Orientalist gaze. French cinema rarely attempted to go back to the sources of colonial injustice to explain why and how the massacres of May 1945 could have taken place and thus lead to the national uprising of 1954. Algerian cinema also made use of heroic description for the liberation war and it was not until ten years later that the break with this colonial cinema made it possible to present a coherent historical argument. To understand, it is necessary to be done with exotic Orientalist imagery and postcard images of "the Ouled Nail women." How is it possible to understand without explaining the spoliations, the deportations and the disposessions of a people deeply attached to its land? Lamine Merbah was the first

to describe these dispossession mechanisms in *Les Spoliateurs* [The Plunderers] (RTA,<sup>1</sup> 1972) and *Les Déracinés* [The Uprooted], also known as *Beni Hendel*, (ONCIC,<sup>2</sup> 1976). When these two films are seen again, it is impossible not to think of the terrible phrase of Abdelghani Megherbi: “The passion of the colonizer is increased when the reflected image sits perfectly with his project of domination, his dream of “pulverizing” the *Other*, the dominated one. He who has lost his land and must consequently also lose his soul.”<sup>3</sup>

*Les Déracinés* by Lamine Merbah and *Bouamama* [The Epic of Cheikh Bouamama] by Benamar Bakhti placed their action in the same period, that is, around 1880, the former in the Ouarsenis and the latter in the south of the Oran region. *Les Déracinés* tackles the vital question of expropriations of which the Beni Hendel were the victims and provides an insight into the methods used by the settlers and their agents to grab Algerian land. Once the Emir was imprisoned, colonization took hold through vast expropriation campaigns. Nadir Marouf recalls, “Between 1830 and 1847, Muslims lost 7.7 million hectares, of which 40% was requisitioned by the colonial State.”<sup>4</sup> It was also the period of the colonial society’s economic and cultural installation. Djilali Sari described very well the disintegration of the fabric of Algerian rural society through colonization. *Les Déracinés* ends with a pistol fired by a peasant that both symbolizes and announces the revolt. Many films like *Conique des années de braise* [Chronicle of the Years of Embers] by Lakhdar-Hamina and *Hors-la-Loi* [Outside the Law] by Rachid Bouchareb base their plot on scenes of expropriation at the start the cinematic story and then explain it. Lamine Merbah said during the film’s release: “What interested me in this film was not just the acts, but also the dialectic process that opposes, on the one hand, a well-integrated community that disintegrates with, on the other hand, some sparse and contradictory elements that, in parallel to the disintegration of the *Arch* (*rural communities*), set up a colonial class of landed gentry.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> RTA, Radio Télévision algérienne.

<sup>2</sup> ONCIC, National office of Cinema.

<sup>3</sup> Abdelghani Megherbi, *Les Algériens au miroir colonial*, ed. SNED (Algiers, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> Nadir Marouf (supervisor), *Le Fait colonial au Maghreb* (Paris, L’Harmattan, 2007), 71.

<sup>5</sup> Reda Koussim (pen name for Ahmed Bedjaoui), *Algérie Actualités*, interview with Lamine Merbah (January 1977).

## BOUAMAMA, EL-MOKRANI, AND THE GREAT REVOLTS

With far greater resources available to him, Benamar Bakhti made action the mainspring of *Bouamama*. He tells the story of the revolt led by Cheikh Bouamama against French penetration in the region of the Ouled Sidi-Cheikh. The battle of Tazina in 1882 was reconstituted with brio. He makes a few changes to the historical reality, for example, by bringing together Bouamama and the poet Belkheir, for the sake of the fiction.

The action is generally lively and the enemy army credible. Above all, the film partly resolves a big problem in Algerian cinema: the dialogue and the kind of Arabic to use. However, he can be reproached for not having sufficiently presented the social, cultural, and economic structures in the Bouamama camp, which would have given the work an even wider historical dimension. In addition, fiction could have and should have played a more important role in order to increase historical credibility. When Boualem Bessaïh wrote the text for *Bouamama*, he was thinking of a trilogy. Indeed, he had prepared a second scenario about the war led in 1871 by El-Mokrani and his brother, Boumezzag, under the political and spiritual leadership of Cheikh El Haddad from the Zaouia of the Rahmania. When the shooting of *Bouamama* ended, the project was given to Abderrahmane Bouguermouh who even started its preparation. Unfortunately, the removal of Abderrahmane Laghouati from the head of the RTA in April 1983 put an end to this project, which resurfaced several times without ever coming to anything. For Boualem Bessaïh, the trilogy was meant to end with a film about the Emir, the scenario having been written a decade earlier. At the time, the projects of Bouamama and El-Mokrani were to allow the setting up at the RTA of a production unit capable of offering national filmmakers the technical means to undertake historical epics, with all that entailed in terms of scenery, costumes, and accessories. The experience of *Bouamama* has shown that Algerians could develop know-how in these different models, for apart from one chief stuntman, no foreign technicians figure in the generic of the film. Considering the difficulty, thirty years later, to assemble a single, entirely Algerian, technical team, it is clear that precious time and experience have been lost.

A few films can be mentioned that refer to resistance and popular uprisings before May 1945, a turning point in the radicalization of the national movement.

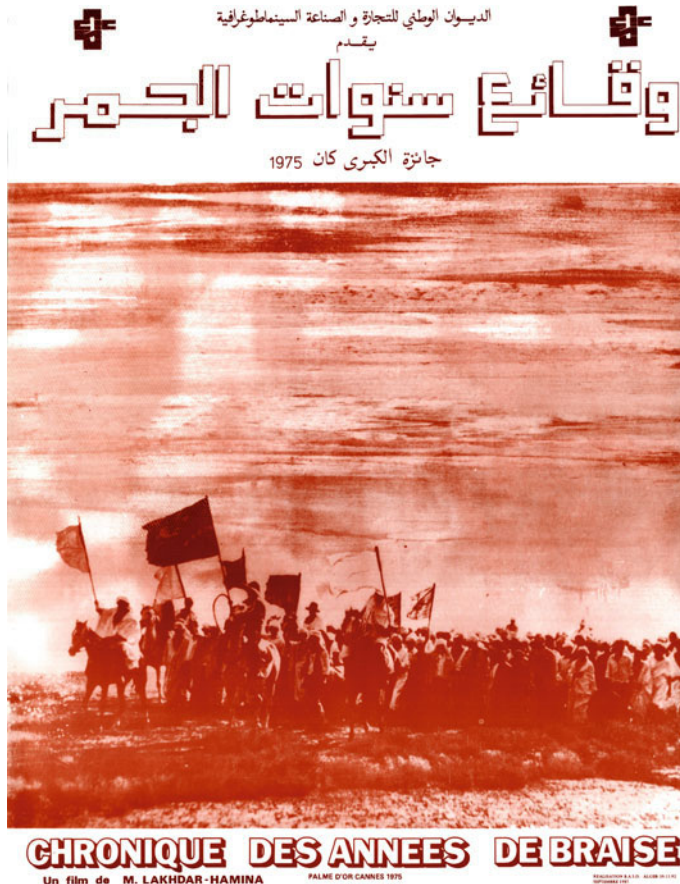
At the dawn of independence, Mustapha Badie tackled the sources of colonial oppression in the first set (entitled *La Terre a soif* [The Earth is Thirsty]) of *La Nuit a peur du soleil* [The Night is Afraid of the Sun] (RTA, 1964).

Then came the work by Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina, *Chronique des années de braise* [Chronicle of the Years of Embers]. This film in six parts describes the crucial stages of the story of Algeria from *Les Années de cendre* [The Years of Ashes], marked by expropriations, up to the days that followed the start of the insurrection. After the expulsion of the peasants to arid zones, many Algerians were enrolled in the French army during World War II. The film recounts the repression of May 8, 1945 (without specifically mentioning it) as well as the falsified elections of 1947, two factors that decided militants of a nationalist party to turn to armed combat to chase away the invader. In spite of the desire on the part of its author to use fiction to recount the epic of a long resistance, *Chronique* offers an interesting view of history. The controversy of the elections appears in its second half. It is preceded by a very complete historical analysis. *Les Années de cendre* prepares the spectator to understand why this people, forced back to the steppic zones and into miserable livelihoods, was going to have to revolt against its condition. *L'Année du typhus* [The Typhus Year] underlines the segregation operating in health care. The enrolments and *Les Années de braise* culminate with the uprisings of May 8, 1945, and the fierce repression that followed. This is where the electoral debate intervenes. This is 1947, and the controversy between the supporters of elections and those in favor of armed struggle is very precisely and clearly situated here, from the historical as well as fictional angle; the thinking that dominates in the FLN emerges, in particular, without the Algerian Nationalist Movement (MNA) and the name of its leader being mentioned, or indeed those of the supporters of the electoral option. The elections in the film are a delusion; partisans and adversaries of the urns are all massacred in a more or less oneiric sequence, with fiction relaying history and seeming to explain it better than the real thing.

A few years later, in the first days of November 1954, representatives of both camps are in the *maquis*, united under the leadership of the National Liberation Front (Fig. 2.1).

Seeing *Chronique* again, it has to be admitted that Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina was successful in amalgamating **history and fiction**. The film possesses a strong epic feel. Imagination and fiction are often





**Fig. 2.1** Poster « *Chronique des années de Braise* » (Chronicle of the Years of Amber), by Mohammed Lakhdar Hamina, the 1975 Paleme d’or, Cannes Festival

more expressive and explanatory than proven historical facts. During the press conference after the projection of his film in Cannes in 1975, Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina declared:

This film, whose story starts in 1939 and ends on 11 November 1954, does not have the pretension of telling the whole history of Algeria. Through historical points of reference, it tries to explain that 1 November 1954

(date of the start of the Algerian revolution) is not an accident of history, but the result of a long journey undertaken by the Algerian people ...

The filmmaker seems attached to the realistic approach; but certain details are added to the story making this chronicle a fictional tale personified by the character of Miloud, whose madness seems like a mixture of wisdom and historic determination. "Blessed be this madness," he says, whereas he will die once he has fulfilled his destiny. Madness that triumphs over pure reason is also what ferments history. The "stamp" of Rachid Boudjedra is recognizable in this character, as well as in the popular poems that Miloud declaims to wake the dead.

*Noua*, adapted by Abdelaziz Tolbi in 1973 from a novel by Tahar Ouettar, completes this retrospective of a series of fiction films that tried to propose visual representations to the post-independence generations free of any fantasy about the sources of the national movement. In other words, these films, although not numerous, contributed to explain how a people, beaten and humiliated in 1830, succeeded in raising its head in face of settlement colonization and in uniting finally to produce one of the greatest liberation wars known to humanity, going so far as to transfer the conflict to the very land of the colonizer. Hannibal dreamed of it with Rome, the Algerians managed it with France.

### THE FICTION-DOCUMENTARY AND THE "OUTLAWS"

Alongside these fiction films that appeal to the imagination, another type of audiovisual production dealt with history. They were the reconstruction documentaries/fictions that tackled the case of those who were once called "outlaws" and who played an intermediary role in the resistance against injustice and the *Hogra* or abuse of power.

The first in the series was made by Tewfik Farès in 1969 and is called *Les Hors-la-loi* [The Outlaws].<sup>6</sup> He was already the screenwriter of *Vent des Aurès* [The Winds of the Aurès], and here he set out to recount how, during the colonial period, the code of honor and the law of an eye for an eye had survived Napoleonic law in certain regions. The publicity at the time presented it as the first "Algerian western." This aroused some negative reactions.

<sup>6</sup>Not to be confused with *Hors-la-Loi* by Rachid Bouchareb (2010).

*Les Hors-la-loi* is a film presenting a pre-revolutionary situation of awakening consciousness in some individuals, through the inhumanity and indignity of their condition. Their tragic end is the collective catalyst that allows the idea to spread and advance.

The subject is a very fine one and does not deserve having the description of “western” attached to it ... Trying to get an Algerian film liked, by saying it is a western, amounts to condoning the value and the justice of the cowboys’ law, when our place is closer to that of the Indians in history.<sup>7</sup>

The theme of the outlaw was later abandoned until the beginning of the eighties. Two television producers succeeded in getting around this hurdle linked to the theme of the “unstructured” rebel: Belkacem Hadjadj and Abderrezak Hellal chose the fiction-documentary to recount popular resistance dating from the last century.

Belkacem Hadjadj reconstituted the feat of arms of two “outlaws,” *Bouziane el-Kala’i* and *Djillali el-Guetta’a*. A talented actor, Boumediene Sirat, played the majority of the roles, the convention of the genre allowing him, with a good dose of humor, to multiply points of view on the history of this period.

As for Abderrezak Hellal, thanks to the same methods, he revived the story of the life of an outlaw, Benzelmat, by the massive use of reconstitutions to mix fiction, documentary, and history. The visual scenes are rarely with narrative and are often accompanied by songs by Aïssa Djarmouni. Benzelmat became famous between 1917 and 1921 for his rebellion against colonial order, executing *Caïds* and the agents of French administration.

More recently, Belkacem Hadjadj returned to the theme, making a large-budget film in 2013 about a legendary character of popular resistance in Kabylia. *Lalla Fatma N’soumer* was produced in the framework of the program for the fiftieth anniversary of independence. This ambitious film revisits the exceptional character of a woman who, after having joined the Cherifs,<sup>8</sup> Si Mohamed El-Hachemi and Cherif Boubaghla, led

<sup>7</sup>Reda Koussim, “Le Cinéma algérien en mouvement,” *El Moudjahid* (October 24, 1968).

<sup>8</sup>*Cherif* is a title of nobility given to dignitaries or leaders.

a fierce resistance in the heart of the Djurdjura against the French occupation until 1857. She died in prison at the age of thirty-three. Public television co-produced an Algerian and Syrian serial in 2004, with images by the Syrian producer, Sami El Djinadia. The scenario written by Azzedine Mihoubi received very mixed reactions in Algeria.

The reconstitution fiction-documentary presents the advantage of not being expensive and allows a historical presentation that can inform Algerian youth about the period preceding the beginning of the liberation war, often called “the colonial night.” This approach, however, runs the risk of confining itself to a too limited view of history and requires considerable talent and expertise in managing the relationship with fiction. In addition, this genre appears, a priori, more accessible to Algerian television than is possible for the cinema industry, given the existence of different kinds of audiovisual public. Between the period of the “outlaws” and that of *Bouamama*, Algerian cinema succumbed to a kind of amnesia. Very few audiovisual documents examined this colonial night. Nevertheless, a deserved recognition should be given to Sid Ali Mazif who was one of the rare filmmakers to mention, in *Sueur noire* [Black Sweat], the role of Algerian laborers at the start of the insurrection in 1954. Neither is it possible to ignore *Ettarfa* [The Rope] by Hachemi Cherif who, for his part, saw the peasant struggle against land feudality as being one of the important segments of popular resistance to colonialism. Again, in this type of representation of colonial history, mention should be made of two films relating the resistance in the Kabylia region against both French occupation and land feudality, an Algerian and Moroccan co-production, *Si Muhand U M’Hand l’insoumis* [Si Muhand U M’Hand, the Rebel], made in 2004 by Rachid Benallal and Liazid Khodja, and *La Montagne de Baya* [Baya’s Mountain] (1997), Azzedine Meddour’s last film.

These four films express neo-Marxist views that are, all the same, a break with the strictly nationalistic orthodoxy of the resistance.

## LIFTING THE VEIL ON THE COLONIAL NIGHT

There has to be some hesitation in classifying *Rupture* [Breakdown], produced by Mohamed Chouikh in 1983, among films devoted to outlaws. The action of this film is set somewhere between 1930 and the beginning of the Revolution. While recounting the story of an outlaw and his companion, a popular poet, Chouikh fails to avoid the pitfalls of history. In spite of the positive aspects of the film, the fact remains that the political