IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF RADIO, TELEVISION, AND CINEMA

MASTER'S THESIS

THE ROLE OF CINEMA IN CONSTRUCTING CULTURAL MEMORY AND HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: THE REPRESENTATION OF NORTH AFRICAN SOLDIERS IN WORLD WAR II CINEMA

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ISTANBUL, 2025

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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Radio, Television, and Cinema

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ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

KÜLTÜREL HAFIZA VE TARİH ALGISININ OLUŞUMUNDA SİNEMANIN ROLÜ: II. DÜNYA SAVAŞI FİLMLERİNDE KUZEY AFRIKALI ASKERLERİN TEMSİLİ

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Temmuz 2025, 121 Sayfa

Bu çalışmada sinemanın temsil fonksiyonunun kültürel hafızayı nasıl şekillendirdiği incelenmektedir. Çalışmada sinemanın dış dünyanın pasif bir görsel kaydı olmayıp, kültürel hafızanın oluşumuna aktif olarak etkide bulunan bir güç olduğu savunulmaktadır. André Bazin gibi film teorisyenleri, sinemayı fotografik görüntünün dolaysız kaydını sunması nedeniyle gerçekçi sanatların ön saflarında konumlandırırken, Stuart Hall gibi araştırmacılar ise medya mesajlarının belirli anlamları iletmek için kültürel ve ideolojik çerçeveler içinde inşa edildiğini vurgulamıştır. Bir medya biçimi olarak sinema mesajlarını bu çerçevede üreterek yalın bir temsilden daha fazlasını yapmaktadır. Kültürel bellek kavramından hareketle bakıldığında ise sinema geçmişin bir arşivi olarak işlev görür ve arşivini medyatik temsil ile bir tarih algısına dönüştürür. Bu çalışma nitel içerik analizi yöntemini kullanarak İkinci Dünya Savaşı filmlerinde Kuzey Afrikalı askerlerin nasıl temsil edildiğini ve kültürel hafızaya bu bağlamda nasıl yön verildiğini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın bulguları İkinci Dünya Savaşı'na katılan Kuzey Afrikalı askerler bağlamında sinematik temsilin iki ana yönünü ortaya koymaktadır: ilki tanıma ve görünürlük sunarken, diğeri ise kültürel hafızadan silinmeye kapı aralıyor. Bu temsiller, ideolojik ve kültürel faktörlerden etkilenerek ya egemen Batı anlatılarını pekiştirmekte ya da karşı hafıza yoluyla onlara meydan okumaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: II. Dünya Savaşı Filmleri, Kültürel Hafıza, Kuzey Afrikalı Askerler, Sinema, Temsil.

ABSTRACT

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This study examines how cinema's representational function shapes cultural memory. Rather than viewing cinema as merely a passive visual record of the outside world, it proposes that cinema is an active force that influences the formation of cultural memory. Although film theorists such as André Bazin have placed cinema at the forefront of realistic art forms due to its capacity to provide direct photographic recordings, researchers such as Stuart Hall have emphasized that media messages are constructed within cultural and ideological frameworks to convey particular meanings. As a form of media, cinema produces messages within this framework, doing more than simply representing reality. From the cultural memory perspective, cinema acts as an archive of the past, transforming it into a historical perception through media representation. This study uses a qualitative content analysis method to examine the representation of North African soldiers in Second World War films and the shaping of cultural memory in this context. The study's findings reveal two main aspects of cinematic representation of North African soldiers in the context of the Second World War: the first provides recognition and visibility. In contrast, the second opens the door to erasure from cultural memory. Influenced by ideological and cultural factors, these representations either reinforce or challenge dominant Western narratives through counter-memory.

Keywords: Cinema, Cultural Memory, North African Soldiers, Representation, World War II Films.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Assistant Prof. Hasan Ramazan Yılmaz, for his guidance, patience, and support during the journey to achieve my thesis. I am deeply thankful for the trust he placed in me and the freedom to explore my topic with confidence. I appreciate his insights, constructive feedback, and dedication to creating an environment for academic excellence, and I am truly privileged to have worked under his supervision.

I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to the esteemed professors and faculty members of the Department of Radio, Television, and Cinema for enriching my academic journey with inspiring lectures, discussions, and mentorship.

I am profoundly grateful to Ibn Haldun University for the generous support that granted me a scholarship to pursue my postgraduate studies and embrace me in its intellectual environment, which has set me on a path of academic and personal growth.

I present my endless love and gratitude to my family and loved ones who accompanied me along the way.

Obeida Nefzaoui

İSTANBUL, 2025

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

WWII	The Second World War
USA	United States of America

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The issue of time has long represented one of the most complex dilemmas in the course of human history, as it has been a profound obsession linked to human consciousness. Candau (2009 as cited in Marcel Gaard 1993) says: “What destroys man is time”, as “his eternal enemy until the grave” (Candau, 2009 as cited in Gilles Deleuze 1996). From this perspective, we realize the complex relationship between human and time, its brutality on one hand and its inevitable progression on the other.

While humans always seek to comprehend time and bend it according to their needs, it remains elusive and resists complete understanding. This sustains the atmosphere of confusion, shown in desperate attempts to slow time down or escape from its inevitable progression. However, with each passing moment, time issues a warning signal reminding us of its inevitability and the unpredictable transformations it may bring.

Preserving human experiences, which are crystallized in human heritage, has required a repository and a space that safeguards these memories against the wheel of time. Bertil (2023) describes, humans are inherently historical beings living within the time dimensions. In this context, their experiences only gain meaning through memory, reflecting the past and reshaping identity. Therefore, memory becomes the bridge that connects individuals to both their past and their future.

From this perspective, memory is considered a central part of human existence, serving as a repository where humanity stores the keys to its survival. According to Candau (2009), memory proves that the past has not entirely obliterated time. However, there is still a light of hope to reclaim it through remembrance, which gathers the fragments of the past to construct a new image that serves the present issues.

The loss of memory disconnects an individual from themselves and others, leaving them without a past hanging in emptiness or a future they can look forward to. As

Candau (2009 as cited in Bunuel 1994 p.336) says: “A person must lose a little bit of his memory to realize that memory is everything that makes our lives” Memory, in this regard, shapes our sense of identity and self as it is a necessity for both the individual and collective levels as Candau (2009) highlights. With this profound awareness of memory’s value, humanity has sought from its inception to invent various means of saving its history and knowledge based on a belief that the protection of the past is the essential guarantee for the survival of both the self and the continuity of societies. Societies cannot recognize their position in history without a collective memory that preserves their experiences, thus forming the basis of their identity and continuity. In Kant's (1998) view, memory is necessary for consciousness and self-perception.

Bertil (2023) notes that humans as historical beings have a unique capacity to preserve their experiences and overcome the passage of time. Memory, then, is considered the element of survival, allowing the continuity of the human race. Viewed in this perspective, remembering resembles the resistance in the face of forgetting, and documentation represents the attempts to avoid erasure. As a result, humanity has resorted to different approaches to sustain its past, in other words, its existence, since both terms work as synonyms for each other in this framework.

Furthermore, Candau (2009, cited from Pierre Nora 1992) highlights the centrality of three dimensions, recognizing that identity, memory, and heritage are essential for understanding contemporary consciousness. In this view, heritage is one dimension of memory, representing the summation of human experiences in their eternal struggle with time.

For a long time, human beings have endeavored to freeze moments in time and rescue what can be preserved from its relentless flow. From tablet inscriptions to the arts through monuments, literature, poetry, sculpture, and cinema, these represent collective attempts to resist oblivion. Although humans could not stop the wheel of time, they have managed to embalm and immortalize some of its fragments in front of decay, storing them in the form of stories, statues, or even films.

In this light, we understand Bazin's (1960) perception of what he terms “mummy complex” as a practice that reflects the human desire to resist death. From this standpoint, art has become a means of psychological defense against the inevitability of time. At the same time, the fear of death resembles one of the deepest motives inherent in the human psyche, as Bazin (1960) believes. When we contemplate Bazin's (1960) perspective, we recognize his way of imagining death not as an end, but as a victory for time. In this regard, humanity attempts to resist time's destruction through art.

It would not be an exaggeration to assume that history, if not visually represented, never happened to audiences who derive their historical knowledge and information from the media. The relationship between vision and reality is fundamental and eternal, with traceable roots to the earliest religious texts and even before, where humans have long centered vision as a means to legitimize truth, even in holy books that describe this desire as a necessity. In the Qur'an, “Moses said, My Lord, show Yourself to me so that I may look at You” (Qur’an, Al-A'raf: 143) and in the Bible, “Then Jesus told him, because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29, NIV).

This tendency to visualize everything reflects the complexity in human consciousness, as visual reception has always served as a starting point for either belief or doubt. Such a desire for vision seems deeply rooted in human nature as an innate quality. In this sense, cinema emerges as a privileged domain of vision, but it differs in its scope, which may expand or narrow depending on the message it aims to convey.

Cinema, within its full capacity, opens a gateway to the distant past, reshaping it into a tangible and humanized form in an artistic expression. Accordingly, if cultural memory is equivalent to the rules of natural science, then it resembles the genetic code (DNA), which carries the traits of a society. As an aspect of this memory, cinema reflects these characteristics in the same way that a face or voice reflects individual traits. Therefore, with cultural memory, humans have been unable to stop the wheel of time. However, they have managed to embalm and immortalize some of its fragments, preserving them in the form of stories, statues, or even films.

This implies that cinema is not only a vessel for the past's memories; it is a human recreation that introduces the past visually in a way that engages emotions and evokes memories from the depths of oblivion. As Munsterberg (1916) highlights, film's capacity to manipulate time, allowing it to reconstruct the past in a vivid, emotional way that mirrors the mechanisms of the inner mind. Using different cinematic techniques such as editing, camera angles, and visual effects provides films with an impact on the audience that written records cannot achieve. In recent decades, cinema has become an ideal field for studying memory not only as a representational medium but as a participant in its messages within collective and cultural contexts however, since the representation process is not neutral as Stuart Hall believes (1980), cinema as an aspect in that system of meaning construction is shaped by cultural and ideological norms.

From here, we realize that the process of remembrance is meaningful and intended to benefit the current needs. As Arthur Schlesinger Jr. asserts, “History does not execute itself but is a continuous construction that is reshaped according to the needs of the present” (Aufderheide, 2008, citing Schlesinger). World War II, a significant event in modern history, is considered one of the most depicted themes in the historical representation, with an estimated over 4,500 related films (IMDb, n.d.). Despite the diversity of narratives, genres, time, and scenes, a dominant discourse remains centralized around one perspective, which controls the historical narrative on screen. At the same time, the war witnessed extensive participation involving many countries. The contribution of North Africans has been omitted from cinema.

This erasure raises important concerns regarding the remembrance in cinema and leads to forms of distortion that Paul Ricoeur (2009) refers to as the “abuse of memory.” This abuse can erode the integrity of memory by weakening its connection to historical truth. In response, Candau (2009, p.11) asserts that “restoring the memory of a deceased person is to restore their presence and dignity.” This thesis imposes an ethical challenge by reclaiming forgotten memories, seeking justice for those excluded from narratives. Therefore, cinema presents a duality between documentation and forgetting by offering a space for safeguarding memory on one hand and an instrument to employ manipulation on the other. This makes cinema more than just an art, but an arena of intellectual and ideological conflict.

1.1. Research Problem

Cinema as a powerful visual storytelling tool occupies a significant site of historical remembrance, influencing audiences' understanding of the past. The research problem lies in how cinema contributes to the construction of cultural memory. It also investigates whether cinema depicts history authentically through its representation or it reshapes it according to a specific ideological or cultural perspective.

1.2. Research Questions

- What is cultural memory, and how do we examine its relationship with cinema?
- How are North African soldiers represented in World War II cinema?
- In what ways does cinema contribute to the construction or erasure of cultural memory regarding the place of North African soldiers in World War II?

1.3. Research Objectives

- Exploring how cinema contributes to the construction of cultural memory
- Compare and contrast how World War II is portrayed in films made by different countries, at various times, and from different perspectives.
- Evaluating the balance between historical accuracy and representation in cinematic portrayals of World War II.

1.4. Research Scope

This study focuses on the representation of North African soldiers during World War II in post-war cinema up to the present day. It only focuses on feature films, excluding documentaries and television productions.

1.5. Limitations

It is imperative to acknowledge several limitations faced during this study. Considerable challenges were encountered in accessing films produced in North African countries due to distribution constraints. Furthermore, there was a lack of comprehensive studies that cover different aspects of North African Peoples in World War II. This gap necessitated the researcher to depend on various sources such as

articles, books, reports, websites or any material that could support the historical reality. The study further encountered challenges accessing archived records and visual evidence that could help compare the depiction with the analysis. Additionally, some of the films were obtained from a variety of sources and platforms, which may result in slight discrepancies in scene timestamps when quoting or referencing specific moments compared to the original version of the film, such as *"Les Hommes d'Argile*", which was viewed in two separate parts.

1.6. Literature Review

This section offers an academic background for the study by reviewing the most relevant work that examines the relationship between cinema and cultural memory. It provides key theoretical frameworks that help to understand how historical consciousness is constructed. Also, it identifies gaps that this study aims to address through its own analysis.

Jan Assmann's (2010) article titled *"Communicative and Cultural Memory"* provides a foundational distinction between two key types of memory: communicative and cultural memory. Assmann's study establishes the critical role of cultural memory in sustaining collective identity by preserving shared narratives and representations over time (Assmann, 2010).

Aleida Assmann's (2011) book titled *"Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives"* offers a comprehensive examination of cultural memory by analyzing how various media, rituals, and material practices contribute to the construction and transmission of collective memory. Additionally, the book sheds light on the role of memory in forming or challenging social and political identities.

Hagedoorn's (2019) work titled "Cultural Memory and Screen Culture: How Television and Cross-Media Productions Contribute to Cultural Memory" explores how memory is created and shared through television and digital media, especially with the growing importance of audiovisual archives and online platforms in shaping how we remember events.

Figen Algül and M. Elif Demoğlu's (2020) article titled *"Cinema as Carrier of Memory and Transformation of the Image of the Greek/Turkish Citizen of Greek Descent in Turkish Cinema"* explores the function of cinema as a carrier for memory in their work. The study examines how cinema serves as a powerful tool for documenting historical traumas and shaping social memory, particularly focusing on the depiction of Greek minorities. The study illustrates how films reflect both the persistence of stereotypes and a shift towards more empathetic portrayals of Greek/Turkish citizens of Greek descent in light of historical traumas.

Yılmaz's (2008) Master thesis titled "*The Construction of Collective Memory and War Propaganda in Hollywood Movies: Pearl Harbor, The Alamo, and 300 Spartans*" highlights the role of cinema in remembrance. Her master's thesis work addresses the role of Hollywood cinema in shaping collective memory and national identity. Yılmaz examines how cinematic narratives of war function as propaganda, emphasizing the use of storytelling and heroic imagery to construct a unified national identity and justify military actions within the broader socio-political context of post-9/11 America.

Burton's (2007) doctoral thesis, titled *"Film, History, and Cultural Memory: Cinematic Representations of Vietnam-Era America During the Culture Wars, 1987–1995,"* explores how cinematic representations of the Vietnam War contribute to constructing cultural memory by using an interpretive approach that combines cultural memory theory with intertextual analysis. Burton studies a group of films from the culture wars era. The study concludes that films function as tools of remembering and forgetting and shape how the public sees history through cinematic narrative.

Martinez Rosario's (2017) article titled "Film and Media as a Site for Memory in Contemporary Art" offers valuable insights that explore the relationship between film, contemporary art, and cultural memory and provides an overview of how film deals with memory, history, and the past. This article suggests that films are not just representations of the past but also as media that shape the understanding of the past from contemporary perspectives.

Kozlovsky-Golan's (2014) work titled *"Site of Amnesia: The Absence of North African Jewry in Visual Depictions of WWII"* highlights the systematic exclusion of North

African Jews from Western visual narratives related to World War II and links this exclusion to the cultural and colonial structures that shaped Western collective memory. Kozlovsky-Golan explains that the absence of North African Jews from film and television representation does not reflect a lack of contribution or historical absence but rather is the result of deliberate exclusion from Eurocentric perceptions of identity and heroism.

Adler's (2013) article titled "*Indigènes after Indigènes: Post-war France and its North African Troops"* examines how the representation of North African colonial soldiers in postwar French military discourse challenges the popular narrative of their erasure. The study reveals how these representations are often rooted in Orientalist and racialized imagery. Adler's findings indicate that creating cultural memory is a complicated process, as the visibility in the film does not mean fair representation since it may include simplifying realities or ignoring important facts.

There are significant gaps in the existing literature regarding key areas. Firstly, there is an absence of studies that distinguish between cultural memory and collective memory in the context of cinema. Secondly, the absence of studies has focused on the representation of North African soldiers in World War II films, especially within mainstream cinema.

This study aims to fill these gaps by first providing a clear framework to differentiate between cultural and collective memory in the realm of cinema generally, and specifically, of how North African soldiers are remembered in films depicting WWII. Secondly, the study also provides an alternative approach to erasure and marginalization practiced in cinema through presenting counter-memory as an ethical question. Additionally, this thesis employs qualitative content analysis, which allows for systematic examination of film content, themes, and representations. This method enables comparisons between different themes ranging through different selected stages and perspectives, and in examined films, in order to provide precise findings to understand the cultural memory.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION AND REALISM IN CINEMA

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Realism in Film

Realism in cinema is often understood in two different ways: either as a stylistic approach or as an epistemological and philosophical position (Koch. 2018). In this regard, cinema has long been a focal point of interdisciplinary debate questioning its essence and relationship to reality. As an art form, it has inherited aesthetic and intellectual traditions, drawing influences from theatre and literature (González, R.C. 2017). Cinema is often referred to as the total art form because it is a uniquely integrative medium that encompasses all other artistic forms and can respond to primary collective needs. (Aziz, 2022). Nevertheless, this revolutionary invention faced significant criticism over the years, disputing its relationship with reality.

Many scholars consider cinema the most realistic of all arts, attributing it to its unique capacity to function as both a medium for artistic storytelling and a historical legal record, thanks to its realistic nature (Gunning, 2007). With this multifaceted presence in mind, a significant question may arise regarding cinema functionality: should it be seen as a tool for documenting reality or a device that creates reality with an aesthetic experience? Addressing this question requires exploring the theoretical aspects that shaped the discourse of cinematic realism. In this regard, André Bazin a very famous film theorist in the middle of the 20th century considered one of the most influential voices to this debate, Although Bazin very often accused of being an advocate of reality, realism for him is not primarily a stylistic doctrine, but a natural effect of photography technology, derived from an irrational psychological desire (Andrew. 2005. p15).

In this way, the core of Bazin’s argument lies in how cinema functions as an extension of photography, enhancing its ability to capture the world authentically. To illustrate that, Gunning (2007) points out that Bazin's theory focused on the nature of the

photographic image, emphasizing the relation that gathers cinema in its raw image linked to photography and reality. According to Bazin (1960), the turning point in history came with the invention of the camera, which totally changed how reality is captured. This invention enabled the mechanical reproduction of the natural world. A development that later crystallized Bazin's insights of cinema as a realistic art, it also laid the groundwork for his vision to view cinema as an unparalleled art form with a degree of authenticity that other arts cannot achieve.

Expanding on this, Bazin (1960) emphasizes the need to differentiate the cinema as an extension of Photography from other art forms, particularly the plastic arts such as painting. Bazin places Photography and cinema in high rank in capturing objects naturally, serving as direct reflections of their existence in the real world, challenging the plastic arts, which derive their source not directly from the real world but from interpretation and artistic illusion. Throughout history, painting was limited to creating illusions, and for centuries, it was considered sufficient for depicting reality.

The invention of Photography allowed for the fulfillment of the fascination with realism in a way that even the most skilled painter could achieve (Bazin, 1960). Moreover, photography and cinema rely on mechanical reproduction without direct human influence. They minimize human intervention, enabling more authentic and objective reflection of reality. In contrast, painting inevitably falls to the subjectivity of the artist, no matter how talented he is, but their work is inevitably shaped by personal perspective and choices, as Bazin (1960) argues. Bazin (1960) states, “All the arts are based on the presence of man; only photography derives an advantage from his absence”.

In other words, photography and cinema demonstrate their uniqueness in their ability to minimize the artist's subjectivity through truly depicting reality as it is. Therefore, the importance of both photography and cinema lies simply in their process of capturing reality, as is their nature to remove artistic bias and present the world as it appears. Walton (1984) agrees with Bazin's notion by emphasizing the mechanical nature of photography and cinema, which enhances their credibility as reliable reflections of reality. As a result, this connection with reality grants them a level of realism that other arts cannot attain, such as painting. This is precisely why

photographs should be considered reliable evidence in legal contexts, such as court proceedings.

On the other hand, Walton (1984) points out the fact that photography also serves in the same way as visual aids such as mirrors, telescopes, and microscopes, which all extend human vision beyond the natural limits. However, photography in this sense can go a step further by preserving specific moments in time, which in turn enables the recollection of the past. In spite of their shared foundation in mechanical reproduction and their mutual orientation toward reality, photography and cinema differ significantly in their representational capacities. If the aim of both is to mirror and immortalize an event in reality, then photography is limited to providing a static image of a single moment, as its asset can be observed as a dead product, because although it succeeds in freezing the progression of time, it fails to bring that moment alive.

In contrast, cinema extends this capability to capture time and movement, which in turn allows the image to be born alive. This means that it can stretch the time and condense its components during the scene. As a result, it grants an advantage over photography and enables us to perceive reality closely, in our living world, with vivid, dynamic, and human qualities. Building on that, the argument of realism supported by the notion "cinema as an extension of photography" may be limited and not fully convincing of cinema's unique capabilities. As capturing reality through a camera is only the beginning of filming, the process continues in several stages beyond that point.

According to Amini (2015), themes of illusion versus reality have remained a central focus of artistic exploration in cinema. By tracing this concept back to the time of George Méliès' 1902 film *"A Trip to the Moon*" this theme has continued to appear in productions such as *"Mary Poppins"* 1964 and more recent films like 1999's *"The Matrix".* The recurring presence of this theme in mainstream cinema pushes us to question the factors that contribute to its relevance. In other words, why do audiences willingly accept cinematic illusions as part of their entertainment experience? The concepts of illusion and reality become especially complicated when analyzing historical films.

Within this scope, defining cinema by its mechanical ability to reproduce reality, as Bazin (1960) claims, raises these questions in particular: how should we evaluate films representing historical events occurring before the invention of cinema? And in the absence of recorded footage, what contributes to filling the gaps in films claiming realism in their representations?

Building on this, realism has become even more complicated in mainstream cinema in recent years, where digital technologies increasingly employ digital effects such as CGI to enhance narrative storytelling. (Amini. 2015). However, with this reliance, the boundaries between reality and illusion fade away, as noted by Amini (2015). Therefore, this cinematic technique allows for manipulating audience perception, particularly in the context of historical depiction.

In this regard, while many historical films claim accuracy, they inevitably fall into the necessity of dramatization in order to make a narratable history on screen. Consequently, Bazin established the measurement for his perception of realism. "Cinema as an extension of Photography". Impose a need to reconsider the reliability of his limits. As we delve into the classification of historical films, several questions come to mind: Is realism in cinema solely dependent on its capacity to capture reality authentically, or is it equally shaped by the process of representation that includes filmmakers' decisions and ideological factors?

The discussion explored insights about the realist direction in cinema. Scholars such as Bazin (1960) and Walton (1984) have argued the similarity between cinema and photography and their direct connection to reality, serving both as a mirror of the real world with minimal human touches. However, this perspective does not fully encapsulate the complexities of cinematic capability as it pushes us to further explore its aspects in a broader framework that provides satisfactory answers to the recurring issues in cinema, such as bias and manipulation. That is why we seek to develop our discussion in the second section, which focuses on representation theory.

2.2. How Cinema Constructs Rather Than Mirrors Reality

Similarly to translation studies, where the primary focus for scholars and practitioners is the extent of fidelity to the original text, the question of being faithful to reality is also a central issue in cinema studies (Keramatfar, 2019). While translation endeavors to convey the original text, cinema, through its representation, also seeks to translate reality into a visual material. However, the degree of realism in cinema is defined by its accuracy in portraying and how faithfully it represents it. Although cinema has the capacity to mirror the world on screen in a form that closely resembles its natural image, as a mass communication medium, its impact extends beyond mere reflection.

This perception finds its way in Stuart Hall's insights, particularly in his theory of representation, which offers a solid foundation to understand how meaning is constructed through language, culture, and discourse (Hall, 1997). In his book "*Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*," Hall (1997) argues that meaning is not fixed in itself but is shaped by cultural contexts and media. While cinema is an aspect of that framework. It must submit to the same rules.

According to Hall (1997), understanding the world depends on a framework through which meaning can be interconnected, comprehensible, and exchangeable. This system that we call culture enables us to make sense of events and objects when interpreting them within a shared context. Hall (1997) also explains that objects or events rarely have one fixed meaning because their meaning is always shaped by the cultural environment. As he points out, giving meaning to things is not a neutral or isolated process; it is always influenced by culture. For example, a simple object such as a stone can have different meanings: it might be just a rock, a boundary marker, or even a piece of art, depending on how it is viewed within a cultural framework.

From this perspective, meaning always requires a medium to be conveyed and exchangeable, and primarily through language. Hall (1997) describes language as a representational system that operates through signs and symbols at multiple levels, including sounds, written texts, images, and objects. Consequently, language, according to Hall, plays an important role in producing meaning. As its capacity extends beyond the verbal expression to include artistic forms such as cinema. Without

language, cultural artifacts like Leonardo da Vinci's "*The Last Supper"* would not be seen more as painted surfaces, while in fact this painting has a significance because of its historical and religious meanings.

Therefore, language can bridge the physical world to the meaning we assign to it. This understanding lays the foundation for studying the relationship between language and representation. It raises important questions: When we represent a particular event, do we create it or only reflect it as it is? Hall (1997) argues that the media are not a passive mirror of reality but an active producer of meanings about that reality.

Expanding on this idea, Hall (1980) argues that media representations are not direct reflections of reality but are interpretations that construct messages regarding reality. Although reality itself exists beyond language, it is continually mediated through discourse. Therefore, all acquired knowledge must be formed within discourse because meaning does not emerge from a direct or transparent depiction of what he considers "real" but from the way language structures and conveys real-world conditions. To illustrate this, Hall (1980) states: "There is no degree zero in language. Naturalism and 'realism', the apparent fidelity of the representation to the thing or concept represented, are the result, the effect, of a certain specific articulation of language on the 'real."

As Aligwe et al. (2018) point out, media consumption itself is a process of meaning-making through engaging individuals with media for certain purposes, such as learning or entertainment. In doing so, they interpret and negotiate meaning. This supports the idea that reality is represented through political, cultural, and social lenses, and that audiences interpret meaning based on these frameworks. Moreover, dominant meanings in media messages are not created in isolation; they are shaped by and embedded within wider social structure in this sense, media contribute through their representations to reinforce dominant perspectives and shape public perceptions of what is considered natural within a given culture. This framework underscores the role of cinema as part of this media realm, in maintaining preexisting ideological structures, conditioning audiences to accept particular representations of reality.

Although the communication process begins with encoding, the audience also engages with the message they receive by interpreting it. Considering this, Hall's

encoding/decoding model (1980) provides a perception of decoding in media, especially with the dominant-hegemonic reading, which illustrates how audiences often adopt the intended meaning of a message without resistance, just as the encoder intended. Hall argues that these professional codes produced by media practices tend to reinforce dominant ideologies not through their appearance as neutral, but rather quietly and without people noticing. People often help spread these ideas without even realizing they are doing it.

Accordingly, the media in this sense is not simply a channel for transmitting information but also a mechanism for shaping and sustaining ideological hegemony, as Hall believes. In cinema, Paalman (2021, citing MacKenzie), asserts that film functions not merely to reflect reality but to shape reality itself. Therefore, the media in general and cinema in particular do not aim for a neutral simulation of reality but instead work to align reality with dominant ideologies. In this way, while cinema contributes to making much of human life "visible," it also creates new domains of the "invisible" (Elsaesser, 1986). This dual role supports Hall's argument, as it becomes evident in cinema through themes of historical omissions, subjective interpretations, and ideological biases in the cinematic.

To elaborate on that, some film productions frequently marginalize or distort historical events based on ideological biases, as our study explores "the representation of North African soldiers in WWII", as their invisibility through a wide range of films reinforces dominant perspectives on the account of historical fidelity. Consequently, audiences in the first model of Hall decoding accept these representations as objective reality without recognizing the underlying ideological framework.

Through selective representation, mainstream media constructs its discourse based on political and cultural considerations. (Algül et al. 2018). Edward Said profoundly explored this idea in his work "*Orientalism*". Said (1978) highlights that Western media, including cinema, have portrayed the "Orient" as exotic, inferior, and dependent on the West. This has led to the widespread circulation of stereotypical images of colonized peoples, as North Africans are one of these groups that faced this marginalization. At the same time, Western-dominated mainstream media reinforces narratives of passivity, otherness, and subjugation.

These representations reveal how cinema serves not as a neutral medium, but as a site of ideological construction. In conclusion, it challenges the traditional notions of cinema as a transparent medium. We recognize it as a constructor of meaning operating in the ideological and cultural frameworks, transcending the realist feature that Bazin established of mechanical reproduction. As a result, Hall's perspective reveals another aspect of cinema's capacity to create a parallel fact of reality itself.

2.3. The Relationship between Film and History

In modern times, historians are increasingly influenced by what is presented in cinema, as film transcends its role of mirroring society to become a powerful tool for shaping historical memory. While literature and historical writing have long contributed to the construction of collective remembrance, the cinematic image has proved itself to be a tremendous force throughout the twentieth century (Stora, 2014).

Exploring the relationship between cinema and history reveals intertwined dimensions that are influenced by each other, as this relation does not appear on a superficial level, but as a profound interaction embodied in multiple approaches. Within this framework, three main aspects can help to identify the nature of this connection. (Groß 2018). Firstly, history provides a foundation for interpreting films as cultural artefacts and illuminates societal and historical transformations. Secondly, cinema, on the other hand, functions as a narrative tool to shape the public's perception of past events, influencing collective memory. Thirdly, films become historical sources in themselves, offering valuable insight into the political, social, and cultural climate of the period in which they were produced, as Groß (2018) argues.

In its nature, cinema is much like history, concerned with reality material, whether from the past, the present or an imagined future. (Aziz. 2022). While historians fundamentally rely on scientific sources such as documents, testimonies, and artefacts to rebuild the historical narrative, filmmakers use cinematic techniques to create immersive stories about the imagined past. Although both aim to engage with the past, their objectives differ according to their nature and intended effect. In this regard, historians study the past to uncover objective truth, whereas the artist draws inspiration

from history to achieve human communication through artistic and spiritual expression (Murad, 2019).

However, both historians and filmmakers have established a common ground between the process of documenting history and artistic creativity. Over time, cinematic production has contributed significantly to human filmography, capturing key historical figures and memories, or representing history in a broader sense as a constructed narrative (Titou, 2005, as cited in Aziz, 2022, p. 91). While the main point of dispute between cinema and history science lies in the way history is processed and presented. Murad (2019) points out that the most challenges that dramatists have always faced rely on historical accuracy, while sacrificing it for artistic necessity is an essential element for creating narratives that resonate with audiences. As a result, filmmakers inevitably modify, condense, or ignore some details in order to reshape history to serve cinematic storytelling.

Additionally, representing history on a visual level can fundamentally contribute to the formation of collective memory by making history memorable more than traditional historical records as Aziz (2022) highlights. Many examples in cinema demonstrate this phenomenon through different depictions such as these about the French Revolution, Spanish Civil War, or Egyptian films that have made their national history more accessible to the public. Like Algerian cinema, which focused through its themes on colonial rule and the revolutionary struggle, taking advantage of using film as a tool to reinforce national identity (Aziz, 2022).

According to Yahya (2021), cinema is fundamentally tied to processes of communication and signification, which means that it is never a neutral medium. The way history is depicted through film is subject to several factors, such as implicit codes, cultural frameworks, and ideological influences. Yahya (2021) further asserts that history itself is often subject to various forms of pressure, political, ideological, and personal, which directly impact how historical narratives are represented on screen. Accordingly, the fragmentation of historical events in film compromises the integrity of history; in this sense, Yahya (2021) points out that dramatic appeal should not come at the expense of historical accuracy.

One of the primary challenges of cinema depicting history is the tension between devotion to historical facts and the need for dramatic coherence. As Yahya (2021) explains, while films can be faithful to historical truths, they can also distort or manipulate facts to serve specific agendas. Critics agree on the importance of cinema in this field, considering it a tool for questioning the movement of history and confronting it with human dreams and destiny (Mahyawi, 2021). Despite these concerns, cinema, as many describe, provides an invaluable device for engaging with history. For example, Murad (2019) emphasizes how historical cinema works not only as a retelling of the past but as a reinterpretation of history through a creative lens.

As we observe, world cinema, because of its global impact, compelled those who are studying it to analyze it with cultural, political, and historical contexts. Instead of viewing films solely as artistic expressions, many scholars recognize them as historical and cultural artifacts that contribute to the collective consciousness. According to Moller (2018), although the empirical evidence supports the assumption that films have a more significant impact than school on shaping the public knowledge of history. However, there remain some studies indicating that current.

When we consider the intersection of cinema and history, a pressing question arises: can films explore aspects of history that written records cannot? In this regard, Aziz (2022), answering the question by assuming that film offers an alternative means of documenting history to capture events that may be overlooked in historical texts. This also leads us to ask whether cinematic storytelling can supplement historical narratives by presenting emotional, social, and cultural dimensions that traditional historiography may not fully convey.

Since discourse is the raw material of cinematic representation, it inevitably involves a degree of distortion and selectivity. In other words, while cinema serves as an essential device for conjuring history through visual appearance, its representations are shaped through a process of narrative construction that ultimately determines the form of the final product. While the cinematic interpretation of history presents challenges due to its inherently subjective portrayals, a historical and social reading of film enables us to uncover hidden aspects of a society's past, including mechanisms of self-censorship and underlying social dynamics. This perspective helps reveal

unspoken truths embedded within dominant historical narratives (Al-Jaidi, 2005, as cited in Aziz, 2022, p. 120).

Building on what has been discussed above, cinema is both a historical and artistic artifact. It helps to sustain historical memory while still owning the keys of its presence through visual and narrative techniques. Accordingly, Murad (2019) points out that cinema does not constitute history itself, but it contributes to historical discourse by bridging the gap between fact and fiction. In conclusion, this saying suggests that historical films should not be judged only on their factual accuracy but also on their ability to provoke thought, question historical narratives, and engage audiences in critical discussions about the past.

CHAPTER III

CINEMA AND MEMORY

3.1. Cinema as a Medium of Memory

Throughout history, humanity has strived to preserve its experiences, knowledge, and collective identity as a fundamental aspect of its survival; this preservation is a psychological need deeply rooted in humanity's psychology to resist time progression and death (Bazin, 1960). Humans have never been satisfied with relying solely on their brains to store memories. Despite the remarkable capabilities of human memory, individuals have long sought to expand its range through external means. This is what is referred to as external memory, which has evolved gradually over time (Candau, 2009, p. 136).

As societies developed various strategies to preserve and remember their past, including oral stories, written texts, poems, rituals, and myths. However, despite all these efforts, there was a persistent challenge in conveying their memories beyond the spoken language. The emergence of art offered a transformative solution to make this missing feature more attainable by providing an expressive tool to share memories and imagination with others. Bazin's (1960) notion of "mummy complex" suggests that early artistic efforts were driven by an instinctual desire to preserve human existence and create permanence in the face of inevitable decay.

However, while art enabled these expressive tools, it often failed to fulfill the human desire for realism. In contrast, the invention of cinema marked a turning point in achieving this realism, as Bazin (1960) argues. Moreover, the collective characteristic of cinema helps to explain why its true beginning was attributed to the Lumière brothers in 1895, despite having inventions that came before, such as Thomas Edison's "Kinetoscope," and even the camera, which carried a more individualistic character, did not offer what cinema did. In contrast, cinema, from its inception, distinguished itself as a medium of shared experience. For instance, early films were public events

that quickly demonstrated cinema's potential to foster collective experiences in a way no other medium of the time could.

What makes cinema a memory medium is the ability to manipulate time and space through storytelling and cinematic language, which travels with the audience on a journey into the distant past, transcending the chronological linearity of time and enabling the integration of multiple temporal dimensions within a singular experience. As Münsterberg (1916) explains, cinema imitates the mechanism of the mind by directing it to attention, memory, and imagination to reshape events in a way similar to how our mind operates. In this regard, cinema constructs memory, offering a space where past experiences are represented and reinterpreted. This ability to overcome the boundaries of physical reality makes cinema the most efficient tool for carrying memory (Algül et al., 2018).

Cinematic language also offers a unique approach to evoke memories through the scenes it depicts, not only on a personal level but also on a collective one. For example, it can evoke collective memories by its representation of the key moments that have shaped national identity, cultural narratives, or even traumatic experiences. (Rosario. 2017). On the other hand, cinema performs as a historical museum, bringing the past to life. As Rosenstone (2006) argues, cinema does not convey history like records but rather in a visual version full of emotion to the past, making the audience feel as if they were experiencing the same imagined experience.

Through film, important historical events and periods of social transformation can be revisited, along with the ways people captured and shared their memories during those times (Rosario, 2017). Films often revisit historical events and revive forgotten or suppressed narratives, thereby contributing to cultural remembrance. Rosario (2017) further notes that cinema provides fertile ground for artists seeking to explore the complexities of memory. Contemporary filmmakers often engage with historical subjects to reinterpret or challenge collective narratives and contribute to the construction of a living memory archive that is accessible, effective, and enduring.

What distinguishes cinema is that it has the capacity to present history in the present tense and influence contemporary thought. This interplay underscores the role of

memory in sustaining the past's influence, shaping present realities, and contributing to the construction of perspectives and opinions (Algül et al., 2018). In this way, cinema is not only a vessel of memory but also bridges the gap between past and present, allowing audiences to experience history through a visual lens. (Algül et al. 2018).

The relation between cinema and memory has further gained considerable interest, especially in film studies, because of the significant impact cinema has on our understanding of the past as well as perceptions. As a result, it is essential to examine how historical narratives are constructed and shaped (Algül et al., 2018; Rosario, 2017).

3.2. Cinema and Memory: Collective or Cultural?

Regarding our case study, the concepts of collective and cultural memory stand fundamentally significant, particularly about remembrance in cinema, as these terms are broadly utilized to describe how individuals and societies recall their past. However, as observed in many media and film studies, there is a need for terminological precision when using these concepts. Our aim in this section is to establish a precise conceptual framework that aligns with the representation in cinema generally and our case study in particular. We also aim to explore these concepts closely to determine which of these terms is a more appropriate lens for the cinematic depictions of history.

As articulated by Assmann (2011), "just as all roads once led to Rome, all roads also lead to memory". Our obsession with the past itself, generally, and memory in particular, stems from the disconnection and loss at once. Pierre Nora's (1996) famous quote also asserts the obsession of memory, stating: "*Memory is constantly on our lips because it no longer exists*". It seems quite reasonable why, when we lose our connection with the past without any tangible proof from our ancestors, it becomes challenging to imagine how it was once. Halbwachs argues that memory is deeply intertwined with social thought, as it arises through the transmission of shared memories. This process depends on the stability of social frameworks. However, when these frameworks weaken or break down, the transmission of memory can fail, leading

to gaps in historical continuity. Such failures pose a serious threat to collective identity, which is built on the preservation and sharing of common knowledge, values, and experiences across generations (Candau, 2009, pp. 133–134).

Although biological factors contribute significantly to this issue, which reflects in brain limitations affected by losing millions of neurons daily after age thirty, the continuous transmission of knowledge across generations, genders, and social groups enables individuals to keep learning throughout their lives. At the same time, it allows them to develop new cognitive frameworks, and through this ongoing learning, they can shape the present in an organized way, starting from past lessons. (Candau, 2009. p134).

However, from Assmann's (2008) perspective, forgetting is not the opposite of remembering; it is the foundation that triggers that action. According to Assmann, memory operates through a dynamic interplay between remembering and forgetting.

On the other hand, memory's value transcends cognitive experience, becoming a necessity upon which our entire existence relies as Candau (as cited in Bunuel, 1994) states: "A person must lose a little bit of his memory to realize that memory is everything that makes our lives" Memory then, in its very bias, is the fundamental component of human identity as well as self-perception according to Kant (1998). Without this stimulation of memory, every cultural identity cannot emerge, and since the human being is not an abstract individual but a socially embedded being, it is a fundamental necessity (Candau, 2009, p. 134).

Consequently, memory enables individuals and societies to understand themselves in the first place and shape their present or future accordingly. To fully comprehend this need, it is essential to consider human nature, which has a deep-rooted drive to preserve and interpret its past. As a dynamic process that informs identity and guides future actions, it was perceived as an active mechanism rather than a passive repository of experiences. (Assmann. 2008).

The idea that humans are inherently social beings has been a longstanding assertion initially proposed by Aristotle (1920), and subsequently developed by many scholars,

such as Durkheim, and many came later. This criterion particularly paved the way to understanding memory in a broader framework than proposed in psychology, especially since memories pertaining to a group rather than an individual require a suitable framework than suggested. The birth of the "collective memory" concept first saw light with the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who shifted memory understanding from the psychological phenomena to the social aspect. This concept introduces a new way for groups to develop a shared historical awareness that shapes their identity and reinforces social cohesion. (Halbwachs, 1992).

The concept that Halbwachs coined, as Loiko et al. (2016) describe, was deeply rooted in Durkheim's sociological perspective, as the real contribution lies in shifting the study of memory from a biological perspective to a cultural framework (Dinter, 2022). This significant breakthrough shows how memory is socially constructed rather than an individual phenomenon. Halbwachs' primary thesis lies in how human memory functions exclusively within a collective context in an inherently selective way, as it also functions differently when social groups build their distinct collective memories, which shape their behaviors (Loiko et al., 2016).

Additionally, Halbwachs differentiates between memory and history by highlighting the importance of being aware of this distinction. While memory enables us to rebuild the past as lived experience, history, in contrast, tends to portray the past more separately and abstractly. (Dinter 2022. p2). In the scholarly debate on memory, it is important to distinguish between two closely related terms that may appear synonymous: collective and cultural memory. While both refer to societal memory, they are not identical. Collective memory emphasizes the social dimension, whereas cultural memory focuses on the cultural aspect (Fillekes, 2022).

To illustrate, collective memory is the recollections that are often triggered and structured by the environment, as Halbwachs (1992) points out. In this sense, the community stands as the framework in which personal memories are recalled and given their significance. Grounded with this perspective, collective memory can be understood as the shared remembrances of a group, the common stock of narratives, and interpretations held by people who have a direct or indirect connection to the events (Assmann, 2008). This form of memory is sustained through social interaction

and communication within the group; it is fluid and can evolve as group members discuss, recognize, or represent their past (Assmann.2010).

Building on this distinction, Dinter (2022) explains that Halbwachs' theory laid the conceptual framework of cultural memory in three fundamental aspects: first, memory emerges from lived experience rather than inheritance; second, through social interactions individual memories merge into collective ones. Third, symbolic stimuli such as physical objects, play a crucial role in evoking the remembrance of shared experiences.

The Egyptologist Jan Assmann integrated these foundational principles into his earliest formulation of the concept of cultural memory. (Dinter. 2022). Assmann (2010) defines cultural memory as distinct from collective memory in this context. While collective is a short-term informal transmission of personal and collective experiences within a community that typically lasts no more than three or four generations, shaped through direct interpersonal communication, family narratives, oral traditions, and shared community experiences (Dinter, 2022). Cultural memory functions as long-term memory, institutionalized and sustained through stable symbolic forms such as oral myths, written texts, and ritual performances, ensuring its transmission across contexts and generations. (Assman, 2008).

To illustrate more, if we look at the stories of Holocaust survivors during World War II, we recognize that traumatic experiences of genocide were orally passed down and transmitted to later generations through conversations and stories. However, critical questions arise: What keeps these memories alive today? Moreover, if the carriers of this collective memory pass away, how can their stories live on until today? Addressing this question requires understanding that the issue of remembrance does not reside only in the memories themselves but in the media that carry these narratives as well. That is, without objectifying that narrative and symbolizing it as Assman points out. That memory would slowly fade away. However, with media such as cinema, for example, through iconic works such as "*Schindler's List"* and "*The Pianist*", we have the opportunity to see and hear the lived struggles of survivors.

Cultural memory, then, is the guarantee of that consistency and the shelter to all narratives, granting them the elixir of life. In this context, Assmann (2008) highlights the capacity of cultural memory to sustain stories over time by embedding them within institutionalized frameworks that safeguard their substance, unlike the main issue associated with the short life of collective memory. Cultural memory ensures a degree of consistency with a long-term course that enables the continuity of cultures and societies. In this regard, Alida Assmann (2011) asserts that cultures spend great efforts building long-term memory by adopting all available methods that serve this vital purpose, such as oral transmission, media, technology, and institutional frameworks. Additionally, cultural memory depends on specialized carriers who are hierarchically embedded within society. Those carriers include figures or specialists such as priests, teachers, artists, scholars, etc. In oral cultures, their role becomes crucial when exact transmission is required, turning human memory into a kind of database. (Assmann 2008).

Cultural memory functions through a mechanism that does not seek to preserve the past as it precisely occurred but rather symbolizes it in ways that give meaning to the present. That is because the memory concept itself is not a fixed record of the past, but something affected by current events and contexts, which makes memory not a tool to revive the past but to understand it as well (Rosario, 2017).

In this regard, unlike historical knowledge, memory seeks to be objective and universal. However, cultural memory is selective and deeply intertwined with identity. It deliberately forgets what falls outside a group's sense of relevance (Assmann, 2008). In this framework, Assmann (2008) and Assmann and Czaplicka (1995) define cultural memory as a repository of cultural messages specifically designed to be passed down to subsequent generations. These messages are expressed through various forms, such as art, and are meant to be revisited and discussed repeatedly to maintain their relevance over time.

Cinema, as a form of art, is similarly structured to convey specific messages to new generations, serving as a powerful medium through which historical narratives, cultural values, and collective identities are preserved and reshaped over time. Films, as cultural artifacts, extend beyond lived experience, shaping historical consciousness

and reinforcing cultural memory as mainstream cinema strives to reconstruct history and present it in a closer approximation of the truth by structuring memory through interactive connections within the memory field, which consists of various memory symbols, characters, objects, and scenes that construct a human memory text and evoke emotional resonance (Zheng et al., 2024).

Cinema further has the power to frame history on screen within the lens that supports political or ideological agendas. The proficiency of filmmakers in conveying their messages plays a crucial role in shaping historical representation on screen. As cultural memory is selective, cinema likewise selectively presents historical events, emphasizing some aspects while omitting others. Consequently, the shaping of cultural memory aligns with the intentions of those who create and control cinematic narratives. War films, for instance, often reinforce national pride by emphasizing heroism, sacrifice, and patriotism while downplaying the complexities of war. As Loiko et al. (2016) highlight, modern media technologies contribute to the retention of vast amounts of information but also generate conflicting accounts, making it easier to manipulate or distort historical truths.

A critical issue surrounding cinema's role in cultural memory is the blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction. Even apparently factual historical films involve scripting, editing, and dramatic reconstruction, rendering them interpretations rather than direct representations of reality. This raises concerns about historical accuracy. Donnelly (2020) observes that while films can enrich historical understanding, engaging audiences in ways that textbooks cannot, they also risk distorting facts due to artistic license or commercial pressures. Filmmakers often compress timelines, invent composite characters, or dramatize events to craft a more compelling narrative, potentially misleading viewers who are unfamiliar with the actual history.

Building on that, cinema functions as both a historical artifact and a gatekeeper of history, shaping what is remembered and how it is framed. If cinema plays a role in shaping cultural memory, it does not merely facilitate spontaneous remembrance but involves a deliberate selection of what should be remembered. Assmann (2010) explains that cultural memory is not something that naturally occurs, but something that is intentionally shaped. Through cinematic language, film shapes history in a way

that engages the spectator with all their senses, allowing them to immerse themselves in the constructed narrative.

Considering this, the distinction between collective and cultural memory has gained significant attention in memory studies. While both concepts originate from individual cognition, they extend metaphorically to the cultural level, where the aggregation of personal recollections forms a shared historical consciousness, as noted by Manier (208). Although both involve shared remembrance, they differ regarding recollection and transmission. Collective memory is socially fluid and short-term, while cultural memory is institutionalized and transmitted through established mediums such as literature, media, and rituals (Assmann, 2008).

In this regard, studying cultural memory has also gained interest in the age of modern media (Loiko et al., 2016). Today, the media play a significant role in shaping how societies remember and reinterpret the past; among these technologies, cinema actively influences collective identity and cultural remembrance. Based on the differences discussed above, it becomes more obvious why cultural memory is more relevant to our case study than collective memory. While collective memory is linked to lived experiences and informal modes of transmission, cultural memory is constructed, mediated, and selectively preserved through institutional frameworks. Cinema, as a powerful form of mass media, operates within this structured system, actively shaping and transmitting cultural memory across generations by encoding particular narratives of the past.

3.3. Cinema as Counter-Memory

Although cinema takes part in shaping cultural memory and historical awareness, it is essential to consider the ethical implications of its final product. It would not be possible to assess its quality without fully understanding the mechanisms of remembrance and the issues associated with it. As a powerful site of representation, cinema places itself at the forefront of memory formation and transitions. However, memory, in its very essence, resembles human nature, as it may experience sickness conditions that hinder its natural progression as it is shaped and restricted by biological and cultural factors.

These influences may lead to the suppression, displacement, or erasure of painful or conflicting memories. Similarly, cultural memory functions in a comparable way, where certain narratives are highlighted while others are marginalized or neglected (Assmann, 2008). That is because remembering is a reconstructive process that undergoes many changes during its recollection, including distortion, revaluation, and reshaping (Assmann, 2011, p. 19).

As we delve deeper into this process of remembrance, we find in Paul Ricœur insights into a striking alignment of what is articulated in memory-related issues. In his work "*Memory History and Forgotten*" Ricœur (2009) argues that memory is not immune to distortion, manipulation, or what he terms the abuses of memory, which refers to ways in which memory is distorted, instrumentalized, or selectively manipulated to serve certain ideological or political ends. According to Ricœur (2009), memory abuses are embodied in various ways, such as silencing certain narratives, the exclusion of marginalized voices, or the reshaping of historical events to reinforce dominant powers.

Within this lens, cinema emerges not only as a form of historical recollection but as a space for building and destruction when historical narratives of an event are framed through a lens that privileges dominant perspectives, cinema risks becoming an instrument of forgetting as much as remembering. Since it is easy to idealize memory, as Ricoeur (2009) argues, in this tension between memory and its appropriation, the ethical dimension of cinematic representation must be critically examined.

Even though cinema claims to realism drawing from the argument of mechanical reproduction that Bazin (1960) earlier positions, it, from time to time, operates under the illusion of neutrality, constructing historical narratives that appear objective, while in fact it reproduces dominant ideology to deliver a specific message. Likewise, Hall (1997) identifies media as the medium that carries meaning through language and discourse. Films, in their discourse, intend to address the masses and are meant to deliver a specific meaning for which they were created.

The complex interplay between memory history and forgetting is also reflected on screen through incomplete or distorting renderings of the past depicted serving a

dominant power structure. While this misrepresentation not only compromises the integrity of historical memory but also silences those whom Ricœur (2009) describes as co-authors of the past, the individuals and communities whose lived experiences are essential to the construction of a more pluralistic and ethically responsible memory. Hollywood productions are a prime example of how films often align with the cultural, industrial, and geopolitical agendas of dominant powers. In the context of World War II cinema, many films present this critical event through a Euro-American perspective, only highlighting Western heroism while minimizing other perspectives, such as those of non-Western actors.

Within this hegemonic framework, North African soldiers who fought in the war are often excluded from the narrative. This silencing act devotes the exclusion to a dual ideological function: it legitimizes dominant historical interpretations while at the same time delegitimizing alternative or counter-memories. Schudson (cited in Alpan, 2016) highlights how memory's role extends the passive preservation of the past to include a selective process to shape the narrative ideologically.

Compared to any message perceived through media, the decoding of the cinematic message follows the same approaches that Hall (1980) points out in his "*encoding/decoding*" model, where the circulation of media messages does not occur in a linear or unidirectional manner. Messages, as Hall (1980) suggests, are encoded with ideological codes, but audience reception can differ according to the reading method they follow. For example, in negotiated readings, audiences may partially accept the imposed message but are critically reframing it through specific cultural or personal views.

On the other hand, in oppositional readings, audiences fundamentally challenge the intended message (Hall, 1980). From this point, it becomes clear that audiences are not only passive recipients of content but sometimes engage in negotiation or opposing readings. This interpretative process influences what is remembered, as the act of decoding becomes an opportunity for viewers to reinterpret cinematic content. Consequently, cinema has the potential to function as a space of resistance, where dominant discourses can be challenged through critical engagement and alternative readings.

This resistance finds a theoretical correspondence in Michel Foucault's (1977) insights. Foucault presents history not as a neutral record, but as a construct shaped and controlled by power, suggesting that historical understanding should not merely reproduce dominant narratives but interrogate mechanisms that authority shapes and legitimizes the past it. Then reclaiming forgotten or marginalized histories becomes a form of resistance that challenges the dominant control of power over history. Foucault emphasizes that such resistance does not exist outside the power structure but arises from it: "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault, 1990, p. 95).

This challenging view is laid in counter-memory, which presents a strong mechanism of criticizing the dominant historical narrative. As Radzobe (2019) suggests, counter-memory functions as a democratizing force as it introduces marginalized perspectives into the public sphere and interrogates dominant historiographical conventions. To comprehend what counter-memory advocates, it is necessary to engage with the dynamic interplay between memory, history, and forgetting in Paul Ricœur analysis of memory.

According to Ricœur (2009), these three dimensions, while often marked by tension and contradictions, are fundamentally interdependent. Memory, in his view, is more than a subjective act of recollection; it is the foundational source of historical understanding. It serves as the very condition for historical inquiry, as without memory, there would be no trace, no testimony, and consequently, no basis for historical reconstruction (Ricœur, 2009). Writing history, then, is indebted to those who remember not simply as witnesses, but as mediators between lived experience and collective understanding. These individuals act as channels through which personal memory is transfigured into cultural and historical consciousness, forming the ethical bedrock upon which just memory can be built.

Bertil (2023) further highlights the unstable and contested nature of the intersection between the dimensions that Ricœur discussed. Bertil suggests that since memory is mediated by perception, influenced by emotions and the time factor, it has a dual nature: it can convey historical truth on the one hand, and it can also be easily distorted

on the other. This issue makes memory vulnerable to manipulation, as forgetting is not just a passive act but a deliberate one that is often used to promote political or ideological purposes.

Cinema, in this context, operates under the same dynamic. While it can reinforce existing ideologies, it also highlights stories that are often ignored or forgotten. By presenting different perspectives to the public, cinema not only maintains political messages but also questions them, bringing hidden or overlooked stories to light and reshaping how people understand history and culture (Algül et al., 2018). Bertil (2023) argues that memory and history are not opposites to each other, but they are closely connected, primarily through the role of the eyewitness. For example, eyewitnesses provide personal accounts that link real experiences to historical narratives.

These stories are not only the sources of information but also reminders that, regardless of how it is recorded or conveyed, history is fundamentally rooted in personal, emotional, and lived experiences. In this sense, memory is not separated from history, but it is essential for its creation. Forgetting is also not a neutral act; it raises important ethical questions about what and who gets remembered.

This is precisely where the vulnerability of memory acquires profound ethical weight. When forgetting is no longer a passive consequence of time but a deliberate act weaponized through the marginalization of social actors and the denial of their narrative agency, it threatens not only to erase specific recollections but to undermine the possibility of a truthful and pluralistic historical consciousness. In such cases, forgetting becomes a tool of exclusion, a mechanism through which dominant powers reassert control over the past, as we can observe in the depiction of North African soldiers in WWII cinema.

Ricœur (2009) cautions against this degeneration of memory into what he terms negative memory, a form of remembrance that severs from its ethical orientation toward truth. When memory is used to push political or ideological agendas, it stops revealing the truth and starts hiding it. The dialectical relationship Ricœur (2000) envisions between memory, history, and forgetting is one built on tension but also on

mutual reinforcement, and risks collapsing into manipulation and erasure when ethical responsibility is abandoned.

Ricœur (2009) advances the discussion by contending that political regimes frequently mobilize collective memory as a means of fabricating or consolidating national identity. This often operates through mechanisms of selective remembrance and strategic forgetting, where certain events are amplified, ritualized, and canonized, while others are deliberately consigned to oblivion. The consequence is not merely a distorted collective memory, but one that loses its critical dimension, becoming instead an instrument of ideological consolidation and social exclusion.

Additionally, Ricœur (2009) identifies what he calls the pragmatic level of memory abuse, which is a dangerous point where memory stops being a means of reflecting on the past and instead becomes a tool to maintain power. Accordingly, memory is no longer a space for diverse perspectives or ethical questions but instead becomes a controlled narrative that serves the interests of those in power. Bertil (2023) further notes, this process often takes form through state-sponsored rituals, commemorative practices, and educational curricula institutions that shape collective memory not only by what they include, but by what they systematically exclude.

These practices of remembrance itself often legitimize a singular historical vision while sidelining other viewpoints, thus reinforcing the existing power dynamics within cultural memory. This ideological shaping of memory is not always expressed through overt coercion. Instead, it works through what Ricœur (2000) refers to as "silent pressure," which is a powerful influence that shapes how certain events are remembered across generations. This kind of memory control embeds power structures into acts of remembering, using tools like patriotic education, national pride, and official commemorations to promote certain narratives while ignoring others. As a result, forgetting becomes not just an accident but a learned behavior, passed down over time.

The effects of this process extend far beyond its symbolic practices. Building on Ricœur's understanding, Bertil (2023) asserts that erasing memory often takes physical form, such as in the renaming of streets, the destruction of monuments, and the

alteration of school curricula. These acts are not just tools of ideological control but also, they are forms of symbolic violence that reshape collective memory. A clear example is the history of French colonialism in Algeria, where indigenous identities and histories were systematically erased through cultural suppression and knowledge control. Ricœur (2000, p. 104) notes that these strategies even target children, embedding a distorted historical perspective that disconnects communities from their past and builds memories that align with dominant narratives.

Returning to cinema, the hegemonic perspective works much like state discourse, promoting an official history that is often conveyed through the narrative structure of mainstream war films. Instead of encouraging critical engagement, these films frequently present simplified, ideologically driven depictions of the past. In this context, memory ceases to be a space for ethical reflection or nuanced historical analysis. Instead, it becomes a tool for reinforcing dominant narratives, legitimizing power structures while erasing the voices and experiences of marginalized communities.

To counter such instrumentalization and manipulation of memory, Ricœur proposes *a "just memory policy,"* which is a reparative and inclusive framework that reorients memory from exclusion toward recognition and reconciliation, depending on the ethical imperative to acknowledge and incorporate the memories of marginalized others into the broader historical narrative (Ricœur, 2002). Especially that Ricœur's philosophy of others is not merely a passive witness or external subject, but a co-author of the shared past. Recognition of the other is not an act of kindness or generosity, but a fundamental step toward genuine self-understanding and collective ethical maturity.

Through such recognition, memory is transformed from a monologic tool of identity construction into a polyphonic space in which entangled narratives, plural temporalities, and contested histories can coexist. Bertil (2023) further asserts that Ricœur's perception regarding memory and human existence is inseparable, as the disconnection with one's past increases the risk of repeating it without learning from it. This belief shapes Ricœur's view of memory not as a fixed archive of what has been but as a forward-looking responsibility that aims for fairness and positive change. In this framework, just memory is not only concerned with correcting historical

distortions but also with cultivating a historical consciousness capable of accommodating plurality, difference, and accountability.

Cinema, in its power as a visual narrative medium and meaning constructor, holds significance in historical accountability. When it breaks away from hegemonic tradition, it positions itself as an advocate for forgetting stories, as its visual codes and scenes can raise the question about the history that has never been projected on screen. Counter-cinema, therefore, brings the questions on screen and triggers the presence of forgotten stories. As a result, it leads to a certain understanding that illuminates the dark spot of history.

In sum, create a memory that restores the value of marginalized or erased people. However, to perform this resistance, cinema employs two main strategies: one in the scenario itself and the other in cinematic techniques such as editing and composition. As Tello (2019) argues, counter-cinematic strategies such as montage, narrative discontinuity, and temporal fragmentation are not merely aesthetic choices; they are epistemological interventions. By disrupting linearity and coherence, these techniques interrogate the ideological foundations of mainstream historical storytelling and invite the spectator into a space of critical engagement and ethical reconsideration.

Counter-memory and just memory function not merely as theoretical foundations, but as ethical imperatives for a more just historiography on screen. They reveal the gaps in dominant historical narratives and offer ways to address them visually by replacing one story with another, but through providing a balanced engagement with the past. In this way, cinema emerges not as a passive reflection but as a transformative tool allowing the past to be reimagined and the future to be ethically redefined.

CHAPTER IV

THE HISTORICAL REALITY OF WORLD WAR II AND THE NORTH AFRICAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE WAR

The outbreak of World War II began in 1939, when Nazi Germany launched a military offensive against Poland, leading to a rapid escalation through Germany transformed into a destructive military force. In a short time, several European countries, including Denmark, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Norway, and Poland, have been captured. (Hadibi, 2020) Historians widely regarded the war as a continuation of tensions that arose after the First World War. The consequences of the First War contributed to the continued use of wars as a tool for resolving disputes and conflicts between European States (Tayeb, 2020).

However, it remains one of the most influential and transformative events in modern history; It has restructured the international system, reformulated political and economic systems, and profoundly changed the course of many States (Ginio, 2016, r. 91). In addition to that, the war has mobilized nearly 100 million troops, resulting in an estimated 70 million deaths (Jubouri, 2020, p. 20). 211). There was also a profound paradox in this war in which colonial peoples, including those of North Africa, fought alongside the Allied Forces for the Liberation of Europe. In contrast, these people were under colonial rule that denied them their freedom and fundamental rights for years (Davidson, 1994, as cited in Myrice, 2015, p. 77). This chapter focuses on North African soldiers and their military contributions to the Allies' victory. It also investigates the challenges they encountered as colonial troops serving under foreign flags.

4.1. The Strategic Role of North African and Indigenous Troops in World War II

Following the French defeat by Germany in 1940, the government of Marshal Pétain signed the armistice surrender despite German forces already occupying significant

parts of the country. This surrender was held in the same railway carriage where Germany surrendered in World War I (Lawand, 2006, p. 53). It also resulted in an internal division in France, creating two opposing parties: the Vichy government, which collaborated with the Axis powers, and the Free French Forces under General Charles de Gaulle, which aligned itself with the Allies. Although the situation was complicated for all parties involved in the war, it was particularly difficult for the French forces, who found themselves uncertain about whether to fight the Allies, who had landed in their North African colonies, or the Nazi Germans, who had occupied their homeland (Bimberg, 1999).

As the conflict of World War II escalated, the strategic significance of the African continent became a focal point for the warring powers, notably the Axis countries, which saw North Africa as a crucial base to access the Suez Canal and the rich oil reserves of the Middle East. The North African territories under French colonial rule attained increasing attention due to their critical geopolitical location. These factors made North Africa a valuable military asset, an important logistical gateway, and a human reservoir for military forces. As a result, the region became a major battleground in the global war (Hadibi, 2020).

The strategic value of the North African continent was also underlined after Italy entered the war on the Axis side. The fall of France to Germany shifted the center of the war in Europe to the African continent, making it an important battleground in the conflict. (Hadibi, 2020). As a result, France relied heavily on its colonies to rebuild its military strength through an extensive mobilization of resources and manpower from North Africa (Ginio, 2017; Shabub, 2018). In order to achieve this objective, French authorities employed various recruitment methods, including mandatory conscription throughout its North African colonies and formal mobilization campaigns targeting local community networks involving religious leaders and influential community figures to facilitate the recruitment (Balja, 2016). Conversely, these figures found that participation in the war could help negotiate independence after victory (Pascal, 2003; Shabub, 2018, as cited in Belkacem, 1996, p. 218).

Although France had earlier utilized colonial troops in the First World War, they were employed more significantly in the Second World War. The expansion of the war to the African continent led to the deployment of large numbers of Africans who later played a significant role in weighing Allied power, as their participation was a crucial element in achieving victory (Jubouri, 2020). In this context, North Africans comprised the majority of these groups and provided France with enormous human resources (Miot, n.d. & Shabub, 2018). According to Jubouri (2020), North Africans, including Tunisian, Algerian, and Moroccan units, played a strategic role in restoring military balance, particularly in North Africa's campaigns.

As highlighted by Stenner (2025), a significant number of North Africans fought alongside Allied forces during World War II. This group encompassed a mix of local populations, including Muslims, Jews, and European settlers. However, Muslims made up the vast majority of the North African population and the majority of these soldiers as a result (Boum & Stein, 2018, p.2; Shabub, 2018, as cited in Belkacem, 1996, p. 218). Moreover, North African forces were composed of a diverse mix of regular regiments from Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, as well as auxiliary troops such as the Goumiers, who were irregular soldiers from the Atlas Mountains known for their effectiveness in mountainous battlefields. (ACHAC, n.d.; Bimberg, 1999; Maghraoui, 2014).

From the beginning of the war, France recruited over 300,000 North African soldiers, primarily from Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco (Belkacem, 2007; Bouaicha & Zerrouki, 2018; Maghraoui, 2014; Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration, n.d.). North African troops participated in many of the major battles of World War II, both in North Africa and Europe. After the Allied landings in North Africa in 1942, troops from Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco were mobilized across several theaters. Tunisian soldiers, in particular, took part in critical battles such as Majaz al-Bab, Tabarba, Umm al-Abwab, Qantara al-Fahs, and the battle of Dhahiriya. One of the French military leaders during World War II Marshal Juin praised the remarkable contribution of Tunisian soldiers during the campaign, highlighting their resilience in defense against Rommel's attacks and their consistent presence at the front lines (Tunisian Ministry of Defense, n.d.).

Morocco also played an important role in supporting the Allies, not only militarily but also economically and financially. Sultan Mohammed V offered his political, and military support to France and called Moroccans to stand by its side. The country contributed to securing the French coastline, provided agricultural and livestock products, and sent soldiers to Libya and India (Al-Ajili, 2023). Although Morocco was under French protection, the Sultan saw the Allies' victory as an opportunity to achieve independence and encouraged his people to participate in the war.

Belja (2016) argues that France did not view these recruits as partners but rather as tools to compensate for the shortage in its army, so it worked to remove them from North Africa and distribute them across battlefields in Europe. By 1944, the contribution of North African countries had reached its peak, with Algeria accounting for 56% of recruits, followed by Morocco with 38% and Tunisia with only 6%. Testimonies suggest that the percentage of recruits from North Africa may have reached 80%, revealing a gap between official data and the reality on the ground (Belja, 2016).

Beyond the African continent, North African participation was notable in the Italian campaign, where Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan units made significant contributions during the Battle of Monte Cassino and broke the German defense, known as the Gustav Line, opening the way for the Allied advance to Rome (Maghraoui, 2014; Tunisian Ministry of Defense, n.d.). Among these forces, the Goumiers units were irregular troops recruited from Morocco's Atlas Mountains and deployed in mountainous sectors because they were regarded as the only Allied units capable of conducting effective operations in such rugged terrain. This force, consisting of 12,000 soldiers who were experienced in mountain warfare, succeeded particularly in forcing German withdrawal from the Aurunci Mountains, which opened the way to Rome (Bimberg, 1999; Maghraoui, 2014).

Furthermore, the Tunisian 4th Infantry Regiment had a decisive role in seizing a highly strategic military position, Belvédère Heights, in 1944, marking a major turning point that opened key routes for the Allied advance. According to the commander of the French forces, Marshal Juin, “The price was very high. The 4th Regiment of Tunisian

Infantry pressed forward to take control of Belvédère. These are exploits that history will record for them".

North African soldiers also helped in liberating France after the "Provence Landings" in 1944, which paved the road to liberate Alsace, Toulon, and Marseille, and advanced north to aid in the liberation of Paris (Maghraoui, 2014; Tunisian Ministry of Defense, n.d.). During the German Campaign in 1945, the 4th Tunisian Infantry Regiment crossed the "Rhine", capturing multiple towns while advancing under the leadership of Ahmed El Abed (Tunisian Ministry of Defense, n.d.; Jubouri, 2020; Maghraoui, 2014; Miot, n.d.; Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration, n.d.; Stenner, 2025)

One of the key reasons that France did not mention its colonial troops from North Africa during wartime can be attributed to the armistice agreement between France and Germany in 1940 after the occupation, which imposed the demobilization of the French army and the handover of specific types of its weapons except for the forces necessary to maintain internal security (Dulaimi, 2017; Lawand, 2006). At that time, the French administration attempted to conceal the large number of North African soldiers still serving in the French army, with approximately 100,000 Moroccan soldiers stationed under the excuse of maintaining internal security. These soldiers were also supported with a large amount of military equipment (Dulaimi, 2017; Lawand, 2006).

To deceive the international community, the French administration adopted a policy of camouflage by hiding Moroccan soldiers dressed in civilian clothes and presenting them as workers rather than soldiers; this was a breach of the terms of the armistice. This plan succeeded in convincing the parties concerned that these units did not belong to the French army but instead were merely manpower and, therefore, were not subject to the demobilization conditions stipulated in the agreement. Thanks to this systematic policy, the French authorities were able to reorganize these forces into COM units and form a reserve army that was later used to support military operations against the Axis forces (Dulaimi, 2017).

In addition to French colonies, Libya also played a key role in the North African theatre of World War II, where its territories were contested between the Axis and the Allied

powers and used by Italy as a base to fight the Allied forces. However, Britain countered that by weakening Fascist efforts to gain Libyan support, paving the way for military control (Ashour, Belkacem, Eidat, & Arqoub, 2022). When Italy entered the war against Britain, the latter realized the importance of securing Libya to confront Italy in North Africa, which is why it resorted to the assistance of Libyans under the leadership of Idris al-Senussi, who facilitated this effort by mobilizing approximately 14,000 soldiers and 120 officers (Yaghi, 2019).

Although the Senussi forces had limited military capabilities, they provided significant support to the British. However, the British command avoided using them in major attacks against the Axis powers. Instead, the Senussi forces were assigned sabotage operations and logistical support during the British advance (Ashour, Belkacem, Eidat, & Arqoub, 2022). Libyan forces also joined the Free French army as it advanced from southern Sudan to occupy al-Kufra, followed by al-Jaghbub. On the other hand, many Libyans who were serving in the Italian army defected to join the Libyan forces. Many British officials, including Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, acknowledged the contributions of the Libyan army during World War II. He pointed out that Libyan units were valuable allies of the British, especially during the significant military actions in the Western Desert. The British government expressed appreciation for the role of Sayed Idris al-Senussi and his team for their unmistakable contributions to the campaign against mutual adversaries (Brotchen, 1988, p. 266).

Furthermore, the Libyan forces and civilian population offered great support to the Allied forces during the conflict. They helped in directing Allied troops, provided critical intelligence, and secured supply routes, as pointed out by al-Zawi (1985, p. 23). The Senussi forces played a significant role in protecting supply lines, guarding ammunition depots, and monitoring radio communication centers, ports, and airports associated with the British Eighth Army in Egypt. These operations resulted in many casualties and deaths among the Libyans (al-Shinqiti, 1951, p. 174).

The Battle of El Alamein represented a turning point, as Senussi forces fought alongside the British under the Senussi flag. In 1943, British forces entered Tripoli and expelled the remaining Italian forces from Libya. In early 1942, Britain established a military administration in Cyrenaica and made Benghazi its capital. Senussi

volunteers, led by Idris al-Senussi, made significant contributions during this period, which was recognized by the British Foreign Secretary (Yaghi, 2019). Idris al-Senussi also played a prominent role in motivating the Libyan people to support the Allied forces, using multiple means, including newspapers and the media, to mobilize popular support, call for resistance to the fascist regime, and urge Libyans to join the struggle alongside the Allies (al-Shinqiti, 1951).

In conclusion, the contribution of North African troops demonstrates their extensive involvement in World War II by securing the victory of the Allies (Jubouri, 2020). Beyond their military significance, their involvement also represented a moment of political awareness, which later paved the road to the demand for independence. However, all these sacrifices are often overlooked in the European memory of World War II as a deliberate and systematic exclusion in official and historical representation. (Maghraoui, 2014).

4.2. The Issues of North African Soldiers during the Second World War

Since most of the African territories were colonized by the French and British, African soldiers found themselves fighting to liberate European countries while remaining under colonial rule (Myrice, 2015). Despite the considerable contributions they made to the armies they served in (Ginio, 2017; Shabub, 2018). North African troops faced a series of unequal treatments during their service, particularly in the French army (Shabub, 2018). Although their presence was decisive in shaping the majority of the army, as Maghraoui (2014) notes

French practices were an example that reflected the contradiction between the Republic's slogans and colonial policies. The mistreatment these soldiers faced was embedded as a structural characteristic of the military system through discrimination and unequal treatment. The disparity was evident in various aspects of distributing rights and privileges, with a significant gap compared to their French counterparts, as indicated by testimonies from a wide range of North African veterans (Shabub, 2018).

According to Blanchard (2003), the majority of what was called “the Army of Africa” came from Muslim backgrounds and formed the core of the Free French Army.

However, despite their numerical dominance, most officer positions were held by Europeans. This implemented division had a degree of irony and barely masked the systemic discrimination faced by Muslim soldiers, as Belkacem (2007) points out. While these injustices were presented in the army structure, imprisonment practices did not distinguish between European and North African soldiers, as, on many occasions, the number of North Africans subjected to captivity was significantly higher than French ones (Blanchard, 2003).

For example, when examining the issue of salary, the soldiers from Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco received less than half of what the French soldiers received despite performing the same combat and duties, which reflects the ethnic character of the French military regime (Belja, 2016; Zaddaqa & Belgazia, 2022, p. 75). The French authorities attempted to conceal this discrimination by projecting an image of kindness, pretending to be equal.

This is obvious in the official letter suggesting justice among soldiers regardless of their origins (Shabub, 2018). For example, Charles de Gaulle, in one of his speeches at the Albert Hall in London in 1941, stated that no distinction should be made between the French wherever they are, including the inhabitants of the colonies: “We are French people of all origins... who have decided to unite in the struggle for our country... In this respect, there is no distinction whatsoever to be made between the French of Brazzaville, Beirut, or Damascus…” (Amado, 2010).

However, the reality that France was performing was very different from what was actually happening. These slogans were primarily aimed at rebuilding the Free French Army and mobilizing what was possible to resist the Axis powers and liberate French territory. Zerrouki (2025, as cited in A.N.O.M., 1945) highlights that the military system set easier conditions for French soldiers compared to their counterparts from North Africa. This inequality led to structural discrimination regarding promotions in the army.

For example, promotion from the rank of petty officer to officer required only 10 years of service for the French soldier, while North Africans were required to prove loyalty to the colonial regime and pass additional tests to qualify. Lower-ranking soldiers also

faced similar discrimination, where they had to wait seven years for promotion, while French soldiers were promoted in just two years. Despite some decrees allegedly easing restrictions on Algerians' enrolment in military schools, these initiatives were only media interfaces imposed by the conditions of war and were essentially a superficial response to the state of emergency imposed by Nazi Germany at the beginning of the war (Shabub, 2018).

The unequal treatment extended beyond promotions and symbolic recognition to wages and social allowances. Comparisons between the salaries of North Africans from Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria consistently received much lower salaries than their French counterparts, even with equal family status. The growing mistrust of the French command towards Muslim officers and non-commissioned officers only deepened the resentment within the ranks (Belkacem, 2007).

In spite of the critical contribution of North Africans in serving the French army and liberating France. However, they remained constrained within colonial military structures that promoted ethnic and social hierarchies. The Brazzaville Conference represented an example of that disappointment, as it showed that France still wanted to keep its empire despite earlier promises of change. As Charles de Gaulle's speech in 1944 did not address independence as a right of colonial peoples but rather introduced administrative reforms within the colonial structure, it compounded the frustration and disappointment of the colonial peoples of North Africa (Ginio, 2016; Miot, n.d.).

This frustration led to increasing tensions in the North African colonies, as shown by the French authorities' reaction in Algeria. In May 1945, Algeria witnessed the horrific massacres of Sétif and Guelma, where French authorities brutally suppressed demonstrations calling for independence, resulting in thousands of deaths. (Jubouri, 2020). These tragic massacres have expanded to many African countries, such as Morocco and even Senegal.

World War two was considered a turning point in the political consciousness of African soldiers as many of them became more aware of the stark contradiction between the democratic ideals that France claimed and the colonial oppression they

imposed. This witnessed the participation of former soldiers in post-war liberation struggles, particularly in the Algerian War of Independence and the decolonization of Morocco and Tunisia (Myrice, 2015).

CHAPTER V

RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1. Methodology

This study adopted qualitative content analysis to examine how North African soldiers were represented in World War II films and explore the ways cinema contributes to their presence or erasure from cultural memory. This study applied Schreier's (2012) analysis model, which includes the development of a coding frame, segmentation, and categorization of the material. The reason for choosing qualitative content analysis is that it offers a structured method for systematically describing and interpreting qualitative data (Schreier, 2014).

Additionally, it enables an in-depth examination of recurring thematic patterns across various perspectives on the representation of North African soldiers. The coding process was based on the scene unit, which is the most appropriate for analyzing the relationship between representations in cinema and differences in intellectual perspectives. Furthermore, this study adopted a transparent coding procedure; the analytical process was documented and guided by a theoretical framework that offers a critical lens to understand how historical narratives are represented through different perspectives in film.

5.2. Sample and Criteria

The study utilized purposive sampling to select the five most relevant films, taking both the research questions and film availability into account. Since qualitative research is case-oriented for an in-depth exploration of each case (Schreier, 2014), Higginbottom (2004) assures that the sampling strategy in qualitative studies is typically chosen based on the methodology and research topic rather than the need to generalize findings. Therefore, each selected film for this study was picked to meet different cultural, historical, temporal, and political perspectives, allowing for a richer, more diverse, and well-saturated sample. Moreover, determining the appropriate

sample size is significant to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). However, as noted by Burmeister and Aitken (2012), since qualitative studies do not impose a fixed sample size, the size depends on the study's purpose and the richness of the data. To ensure sample saturation, specific criteria were established based on the study's objectives and focus, as follows:

- The films must depict World War II events involving or excluding North African soldiers
- It must include references directly or implicitly to North African soldiers
- it should represent a range of intellectual contexts, including Western and non-Western perspectives
- Selected films must span from the post-war period to the present to trace evolving memory narratives.

Table 5.1. Film Sample

Film Title	Year of release	Reason for Selection	Historical Period Represented	Period	Production
Tobruk	1967	Represents Hollywood war perspective that excludes North African soldiers.	During the North African Campaign in Libya	1942	USA
Patton	1970	A biographical war film focused on military leadership of USA and offers an American-centered perspective	During the North African Campaign in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria Additionally to Europe.	1942–1945	USA

Table 5.1. (cont.)

Days of Glory	2006	Provide postcolonial perspective that restores the recognition to North African Soldiers	Europe, France, and Italy	1943–1945	French/Algerian
Les Hommes d'Argile	2015	Provide postcolonial perspective that restores the recognition to North African Soldiers	Europe	1944 – 1945	Belgium–Morocco
Red poppies	2024	European perspective of WWII	Europe	1944	Polish

The aim during the selection process was to study films from the post-World War II period up to the present day. However, some films were difficult to access due to distribution constraints. The final selection was made based on historical facts, taking into account the diversity of scope and focus, initially involving the location and timeline of North African contributions to the war. Therefore, the selection was driven by the diversity of war theatres between North Africa and Europe, historical timelines, and narrative perspectives.

The selection from different production periods is an important factor in this study, as it assists in tracing the development of the representation of North African soldiers over the decades. The films are "*Tobruk*" (1967), "*Patton*" (1970), "*Days of Glory*" (2006), "*Les Hommes d'Argile*" (2015), and "*Red Poppies*" (2024)

These films allow comparison of the analysis through different stages, in which it can be examined whether fundamental shifts have occurred in the way these soldiers are depicted in WWII films. It allows us to reveal the changes in the cinematic representation of North Africans in different political and cultural factors in different production periods that influenced their representation.

- **Tobruk (1967)**

Director: Arthur Hiller

Production Company: Universal Pictures

Synopsis: The film portrays an Allied operation aimed at cutting German supply lines by destroying the fuel depots near the Libyan city of Tobruk during the Second World War. The film depicts a story of British soldiers and Jewish-German volunteers who gather to achieve this mission. The narrative shows the complexity of the operation, marked by dangerous desert crossings and constant exposure to enemy surveillance.

- **Patton (1970)**

Director: Franklin J. Schaffner

Production Company: 20th Century Fox

Synopsis: The film depicts the leadership of American General George Patton during his command in major battles of World War II, including those in North Africa, Sicily, France, and Germany, emphasizing his intelligence as a military leader. The film highlights the United States' role in Allied victories while also shedding light on the political tensions that arose from the competition between the Allies.

- **Days of Glory (2006)**

Director: Rachid Bouchareb

Production Companies: Tessalit Productions

Synopsis: During World War II, a group of North African soldiers joined the Free French Army. While they were involved in decisive military operations in Europe, particularly in Italy and France, the film depicts the contradictions between their sacrifice and the treatment they received in the French army, facing different forms of discrimination, in addition to the official disregard for their sacrifices after the end of the war.

- **Les Hommes d'Argile (2015)**

Director: Mourad Boucif

Production Companies: Un Souffle Production

Synopsis: The film tells the story of Suleyman, a young man living in a rural region of Morocco during World War II, whose life is turned upside down after he is conscripted into the French army, along with many Moroccans, to fight on the European front. The film portrays the realities of war experienced by Moroccan soldiers, shedding light on their suffering within a colonial system.

- **Red poppies (2024)**

Director: Krzysztof Lukaszewicz

Production Company:

Synopsis: The film depicts the efforts of the Polish Corps fighting under Allied command in Italy during the Battle of Monte Cassino. It portrays Poland's contribution in helping to open the road to Rome. The story of the film focuses on the final and decisive phase of the battle when Polish soldiers played a crucial role in securing Allied victory.

5.3. Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, it follows the established criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Elo et al. (2014), the trustworthiness of qualitative content analysis depends on how rich, suitable, and well-saturated the data is. Firstly, credibility in qualitative research can be enhanced through many techniques such as "prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and negative case analysis" (Lincoln and Guba. 1985, pp. 301–302), Prolonged engagement was conducted through repeated viewings the films with an extensive note-taking and deep analysis of each film context.

Persistent observation was also applied by focusing on the visual, narrative, and symbolic elements associated with representation. Furthermore, credibility is enhanced through triangulation techniques by relying on historical documents, facts, and archival materials to compare the findings with historical reality. Additionally,

peer debriefing was applied to verify and check the process of interpretation and coding, which involved the thesis advisor and an external researcher.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the audit process is designed to evaluate how the research was conducted and the outcomes it produced to assess the study's consistency and objectivity. To ensure dependability in this study, each step, from selecting scenes to identifying themes, was documented in an audit trail, allowing us to trace the research path. To ensure that the study's findings are shaped by the data rather than researcher bias, confirmability was supported through reflexive notes of the researcher and traceable records on how interpretations developed over time. Finally, to achieve transferability for this study, a thick description was provided for the analysis process, building coding framework, and interpretation, which adds to the overall methodological rigor and credibility of this study, making it, in the end, trustworthy.

CHAPTER VI

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

6.1. Analysis

According to Schreier (2012), it is important to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant material when conducting qualitative content analysis. Relevant material refers to any part of the data that directly relates to the research question, while irrelevant material does not contribute to answering it. There are two strategies to help minimize bias during this selection process: (1) using a coding frame to identify relevant content, and (2) working within a research team to make selection decisions collaboratively (pp 81–82). In this study, the first strategy was adopted, using a coding framework to guide the inclusion of material aligned with the research objectives.

Schreier (2012) explains that, after selecting the material, building a coding framework can be achieved in three ways: using a concept-driven strategy, a data-driven strategy, or a combined strategy (p. 84). In this study, the researcher used a combined approach. This strategy involved identifying key topics based on prior knowledge of the topic by using two main categories: erasure and visibility. This constitutes the concept-driven part of the process. In the next step, subcategories are generated from the material itself, which is referred to as codes, reflecting the data-driven aspect.

The interpretation was based on different elements, including the spoken dialogue, background music, gestures and movements performed by the characters, the costumes worn, and the periods and locations in which the events occurred. Defining each category within the coding framework is essential for qualitative content analysis, as it prevents shifts in meaning during the coding process and avoids generating inconsistent or invalid results (Schreier, 2012, pp. 94–95).

In this study, two main themes were developed, and each major theme category was broken down into sub-categories in the form of analytical codes. The first theme, “Erasure and Exclusion,” refers to the absence of North African soldiers in scenes

where they should have appeared or where information about their participation and decisive contributions to the Allied victory in World War II is missing. This theme was divided into two codes:

- **Code 1: Historical Omission**, which refers to the neglect of the historical role North African soldiers played in the war. This includes ignoring their presence in key battles.

- **Code 2: Directed Narrative**, which involves the use of storytelling that minimizes or redirects attention away from the contributions of North African soldiers, often by centering the narrative solely on European or American heroes.

The second developed theme is "Visibility and Recognition," which refers to the presence of North African soldiers in battle scenes and addresses the issues they faced, including discriminatory treatment, lack of acknowledgment for their sacrifices, and the structural problems they encountered within the military system. It also highlights that this distinct group of soldiers brought with them their own cultural identity during World War II. This theme was also divided into three codes:

- **Code 1: Cultural Identity**, which refers to scenes or dialogues that acknowledge the North African soldiers' ethnicity, religion, language, or traditions, presenting them as a culturally distinct group.

- **Code 2: Discrimination**, which captures instances where the film shows or implies unequal treatment, racism, or institutional bias against North African soldiers.

- **Code 3: Participation and Sacrifice**, which highlights the actual engagement of North African soldiers in combat and the hardships or losses they endured, including death, injury, or psychological trauma.

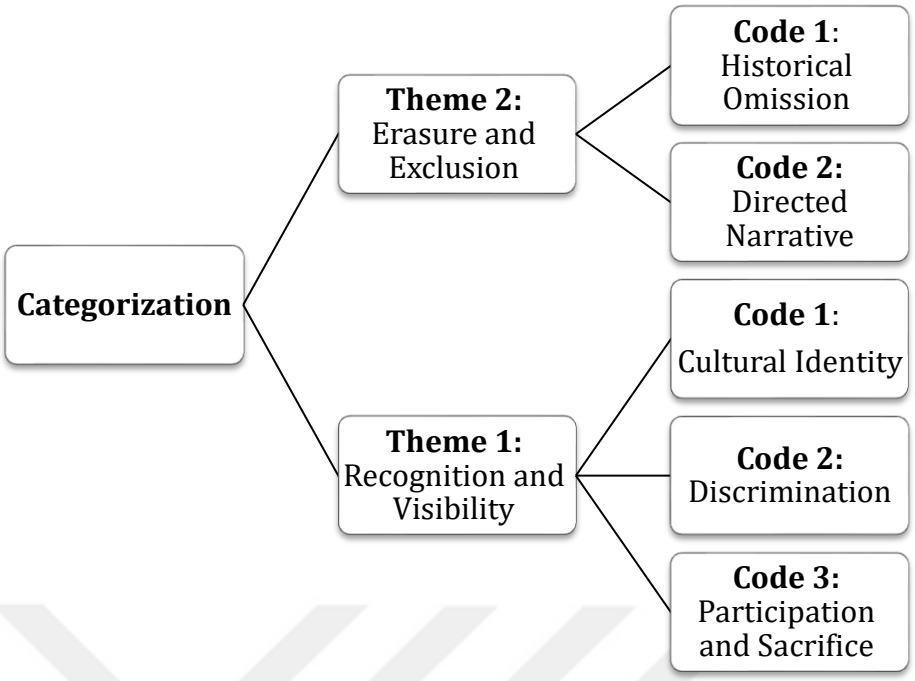


Figure 6.1. Thematic Categorization of Qualitative Content Analysis Codes and Themes

Table 6.1. Theme: Recognition and Visibility

Codes
Cultural Identity
Participation and Sacrifice
Discrimination

Table 6.2. Theme: Erasure and Exclusion

Codes
Historical Omission
Directed Narrative

During the analysis, a set of questions was first developed to address the fundamental aspects of representation. These questions seek to explore key dimensions of the presence of North African Soldiers in World War II films, including main themes, locations, periods, and costumes. The analyzed films were examined at two levels: the scene level and the contextual level. The table below presents these questions alongside the findings that were derived later.

Table 6.3. Analytical Questions and Key Findings

Questions	Answers
▪ What themes are associated with the portrayal of North African soldiers?	▪ Recognition and Visibility ▪ Erasure and Exclusion
▪ Which sounds or music are used to represent North African soldiers or their cultural identity?	Overall music is a blend of emotional, patriotic, and tragic music that reflect feelings of longing, sacrifice, and loss. Additionally, there are some scenes shown North African soldiers playing traditional indigenous and folk music using instruments such as the flute and hand drum and singing some traditional songs from their homeland
▪ Which props and costume refers to North Africans soldiers in the films?	▪ Algerian and Tunisian soldiers wore official French military uniforms, typically green olive color along with a French steel helmet for protection. ▪ Moroccan soldiers "Gourmiers" wore traditional long and loose Moroccan djellabas in brown or gray tones, with long sleeves often fastened at the waist with a leather belt used to carry traditional daggers. Also, traditional turbans, while others wore French military caps.
▪ Which locations are associated with the presence of North African troops in the films?	▪ Algeria ▪ Morocco ▪ Libya ▪ Italy ▪ France
▪ In which time periods are North African troops present in the films?	▪ 1942 ▪ 1943 ▪ 1944 ▪ 1945

- **Theme 1: Recognition and Visibility** Code 1: Cultural identity



Figure 6.2. Cultural Identity 1
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (10:14)

The cultural identity is shown in this scene when one of the main characters, after successfully hitting a target during a shooting exercise, says in Arabic: Alhamdulillah (Praise be to God), even though he wore a French uniform. This highlights the Muslim identity of the North African soldiers who were fighting under the French command.



Figure 6.3. Cultural Identity 2
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (14:15)

This scene shows a North African soldier offering coffee to his officer beside the campfire. The French officer thanked the soldier using the local Arabic phrase, “Sahhit” (thank you), in North Africa, and then informed him that they would go into battle the next day. His words were followed by “Inshallah” (God willing), a culturally significant expression used by Muslim communities in the Middle East and North Africa. It also reflects the presence of North African culture in the French army.



Figure 6.4. Cultural Identity 3
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (14:56)

This scene also shows North African soldiers during their prayer and performing ablution. This scene represents their religious identity as a Muslim group in the French army. It also illustrates how they maintained their religious practices and cultural identity despite the context of war and the army they served in.



Figure 6.5. Cultural Identity 4
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (26:36)

In this scene, one of the soldiers, after the end of the battles of Italy in 1944, recites the Surah "*Al-Fatiha*" over the graves of his fallen comrades. This is an Islamic tradition following death. In the background, emotional music underscores the weight of that moment. The scene also depicted graves marked with Christian crosses, and Muslim graves with a stone on top of them, symbolizing the shared sacrifice of soldiers from different backgrounds. The scene breaks away from the stereotypes of Muslim soldiers in war films and assures a historical fact that the North African Muslims were part of the Free French Army, as historical sources assert.



Figure 6.6. Cultural Identity 5
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (35:14)

This scene shows the celebration of French people after the successful of Provence landing in 1944 where a North African soldier telling his adventure during the war to a French lady stating some Arabic words while he talks in French language such as *"La Alhamdulillah"* (praise be to God) and *"mankadibch alik*" (I won't lie to you). All refer to their identity in film. Although North African soldiers served in the French army and were required to speak French in the military space, they carried their cultural identity in their mother tongue by using some phrases and expressions related to their cultural identity.



Figure 6.7. Cultural Identity 6
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (36:19)

The scene shows a group of soldiers from North Africa wearing traditional Moroccan clothing, playing traditional musical instruments from their country, and dancing traditional dancing. This moment is a collective expression that serves as an assertion of their cultural identity.

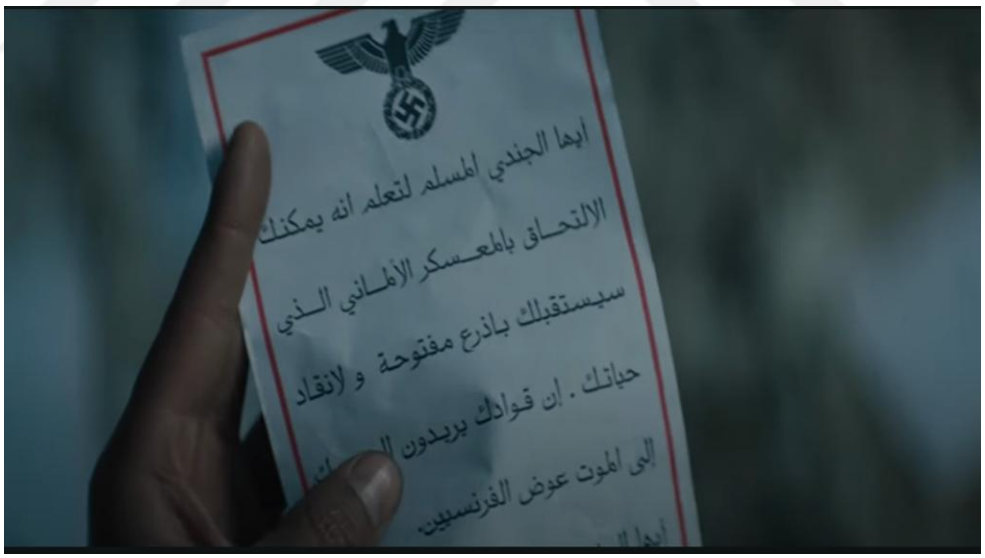


Figure 6.8. Cultural Identity 7
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (59:03)

This scene depicts the propaganda warfare between Axis and Allied powers showing German leaflets being dropped over the battlefield targeting North African Muslim soldiers. The flyers encourage them to leave the French army and join the German side implying: Muslim soldiers, know that you can join the German camp, which will

welcome you with open arms and save your life. Your commanders want to send you to die in place of the French. This scene also reveals soldiers' identity as Muslims making their religion and colonial background key targets of manipulation.



Figure 6.9. Cultural Identity 8
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (01:03:55)

This scene features one of the North African soldiers singing traditional folk songs in Arabic from his homeland, accompanied by playing a flute with his friends. The moment conveys a sense of cultural and emotional connection to their origins.



Figure 6.10. Cultural Identity 9
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (01:38:32)

This scene depicts North African soldiers praying just moments before the arrival of Nazi forces to Alsace, which is the region they safeguard at the time with suspenseful music that plays in the background, signaling the imminent danger.



Figure 6.11. Cultural Identity 10
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (01:53:32)

This scene depicts an elderly North African veteran visiting the graves of his fallen comrades who fought alongside him during World War II. The graveyard where he prays is distinctly Islamic, as indicated by the shape of the gravestones and the recitation of the Quran. These elements highlight the soldiers' cultural and religious identity, underscoring their North African and Muslim heritage.



Figure 6.12. Cultural Identity 11
Reference: Les Hommes d'Argile (2015) timestamp (57:18)

This scene shows a group of officers in the French army speaking to their commander in the camp. During their conversation, the sound of the adhan (Islamic call to prayer) is heard in the background. The commander asks his officers, "What is that noise?" One of them replies "The soldiers are praying together".



Figure 6.13. Cultural Identity 12
Reference: Les Hommes d'Argile (2015) timestamp (01:11:00)

This scene depicts Moroccan soldiers running across the battlefield after heavy bombing by Nazi Germans. As one of the French soldiers' shouts, “For France,” while a Moroccan soldier cries out, “Allahu Akbar.” This moment draws attention to the distinct cultural and religious identity of the North Africans. It highlights the fact that although Moroccan soldiers were sacrificing themselves on foreign soil under the French flag, they expressed themselves through a religious exclamation.



Figure 6.14. Cultural Identity 13
Reference: Les Hommes d’Argile (2015) timestamp (01:19:04)

This scene shows two soldiers sitting beside a dead soldier who had been injured in the battle. After the soldier's death, the North African man begins to recite verses from the Qur’an, which are traditionally recited upon death in Islamic culture. As the camera moves to the show the body a soft voice is heard saying: “Ashhadu alla ilaha illa Allah” (I bear witness that there is no god but Allah). Additionally, another character begins screaming, “He died!” adding emotional intensity and highlighting the shock and sorrow of the moment.

- **Results**

The selected scenes from *“Days of Glory*” (2006) and *“Les Hommes d'Argile”* (2015) consistently show the cultural identity of North African soldiers with quiet respect. These films highlight several aspects of their identity through spoken expressions, music, costumes, and rituals; they emphasize their distinct presence as groups that fought in World War II. In *“Days of Glory”,* cultural identity is presented through the

use of spoken language by saying expressions such as *"Alhamdulillah"* (10:14) and *"Inshallah"* (14:15). These scenes distinguish their presence in the French army despite wearing French military uniforms in their formal units, such as Algerian and Tunisian regiments.

Moreover, religious practices such as reciting the Quran over the graves (26:36) stand as a clear articulation of their religious identity. Also, the scene at (14:56) shows ablution and prayer before the battles. Scenes like the one at (35:14), where Arabic phrases are integrated into spoken French. The use of religious expressions such as *"Allahu Akbar"* shouted during combat, "Les Hommes d'Argile" (01:38:32), demonstrates that. Similarly, the Qur'anic recitations following a comrade's death in both films, "Les Hommes d'Argile" (01:53:32), emphasize cultural practices. Moreover, another scene depicts how they were targeted by their cultural identity when German propaganda targets Muslim soldiers (59:03). This scene reveals how colonial and religious identities became strategic points of manipulation.

When comparing the uniforms of North African soldiers during World War II, two distinct categories emerge: the formal military units integrated into the French army, such as the Tunisian and Algerian regiments, and the irregular troops known as the "Goumiers." The analysis of both uniforms reveals an alignment between cinematic representation with historical facts in *"Days of Glory"* (2006) and *"Les Hommes d'Argile"* (2015). These films authentically depict North African soldiers in their historical context despite the difference in their roles as either regular or irregular forces.

For example, in *"Days of Glory"* (2006), Moroccan soldiers are shown wearing traditional costumes associated with their homeland, as they typically wore a "djellaba," which is a long-striped robe signifying their tribal origin, over American military uniforms. They often combined different pieces of equipment, such as a British steel helmet worn over a turban, and American webbing designed to carry rifle ammunition; these irregular troops were recruited by the Allies and participated as the French Expeditionary Corps in Italy in 1943. (McNab, 2002, p. 83). This historical accuracy in costume depiction is an example observed all over the *"Days of Glory*,"

such as scenes at (05:39), (08:29), and (36:19), where the djellaba functions as a symbol of cultural identity and a distinguished mark for these units.

- **Visual comparison between cinematic and historical representations of Moroccan Goumier soldiers during World War II**



Figure 6.15. A North African from Moroccan Goumier Soldier in Italy

Reference: Days of Glory (2006)



Figure 6.16. A Moroccan Goumier Soldier in Sicily (4e Tabor)

Reference: (Zaloga, 2007, p.26)

Furthermore, the dances and traditional music in both films *"Days of Glory"* (2006) at (36:19) or the film *"Les Hommes d'Argile"* (2015) at (59:50) when the music in the background further shows the cultural dimension of North African soldiers. Finally, auditory elements such as the adhan heard in *"Les Hommes d'Argile"* (55:18) further recognize North Africans among other colonial troops.

- **Theme 1: Recognition and Visibility:** Code 2: Discrimination



Figure 6.17. Discrimination 1
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (11:04)

This scene reveals the mistreatment experienced by North Africans who served in the French army. In this scene, the North African soldier was struck with a rifle by his French officer and made him fall down. However, the Algerian corporal intervenes with his French sergeant, assuring the soldier is not mistaken because he is not trained yet. In response, the French sergeant declares he can do whatever he wants with his soldiers. This scene illustrates the harsh conditions that North Africans faced during their service.



Figure 6.18. Discrimination 2
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (28:23)

This scene depicts discrimination, where a cook refuses to give tomatoes to a Black African soldier while serving French soldiers. The unfair treatment leads the North African soldier to question his officer about the inequality. In response, he is deprived of his right to a meal quota. The soldier then angrily crushes the box of tomatoes, ensuring that no one receives special treatment. At that moment, the rest of the soldiers begin protesting against the officer's treatment who leaves the soldier. This scene shows the discrimination that existed in the structure of the French army when North Africans got less rights than their French counterparts as historical facts assure.



Figure 6.19. Discrimination 3
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (30:13)

This scene shows a dialogue between an officer who reports the food distribution incident to his superior. He explains that the soldiers are ready to die for France, but any injustice may lead to rebellion. However, his superior dismisses the concern with a racist remark by saying: "They are not French citizens" and "They are bad Muslims," implying distrust and othering was existing in the French army based on religion and attitude. This scene affirms the existing historical facts regarding the discrimination based on race and religion.



Figure 6.20. Discrimination 4
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (30:30)

This scene follows the two previous ones regarding the incident. It depicts the dialogue between the North African soldier and his captain who looks at him with a dismissive gaze asking about what happened. In response, the soldier demands fairness and equal rights in food by saying: “We fight alongside our French brothers... in the same battles... against the same enemy” as “German bullets do not distinguish between French and colonial soldiers”. This statement exposes the double standards within the army and highlights the growing frustration among North African soldiers over their marginalized status despite their shared sacrifices.



Figure 6.21. Discrimination 5
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (57:10)

This scene shows a conversation between two French officers. One of them talks about the unfair treatment his North African soldiers face compared to the French soldiers. He says, “The French get leave, but there are no ships for us,” showing his frustration that the French were able to go home after only 20 months, while the North African soldiers are still here, freezing and forgotten. He continued to as*k,* “Were there ships just to bring them here?” and adds, “We want to see our families too, just like the French. This is not fair.” He also points out that “And the French get promoted before anyone from North Africa*”*



Figure 6.22. Discrimination 6
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (01:02:57)

This scene shows a French officer congratulating two French soldiers on their promotion while the camera moves to a North African standing nearby and looking disappointed at being excluded. This scene shed light on discrimination implemented in the structure of the French army. This scene is confirmed by many historical sources which assure that French soldiers are rewarded for their contribution while North Africans are not even though they fought in the same battles and made the same sacrifices.



Figure 6.23. Discrimination 7
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (01:51:56)

This scene shows a North African soldier trying to speak to his French colonel, who had promised in the previous scene (01:14:55) to grant them medals and promotions for their sacrifices in the Alsace battle. However, the colonel ignores the soldier, as another officer stops him from speaking due to the army's strict hierarchy of communication, asking, where is your sergeant?" The soldier replies that his sergeant is dead along with the rest of his group. The expression on the North African soldier's face reveals his shock and pain. This scene portrays the hypocrisy embedded in the army's structure, highlighting how colonial soldiers were used in battle but denied recognition and respect.



Figure 6.24. Discrimination 8
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (01:52:42)

In this scene, a North African soldier is shown walking near a group of people being filmed by a French soldier, who states that "the French have liberated Alsace". This scene comes after all his friends lost their lives defending Alsace. It also highlights how the contributions of North African soldiers were ignored, and the victory was portrayed as solely French. It clearly points to the exclusion of north African participation from collective remembrance

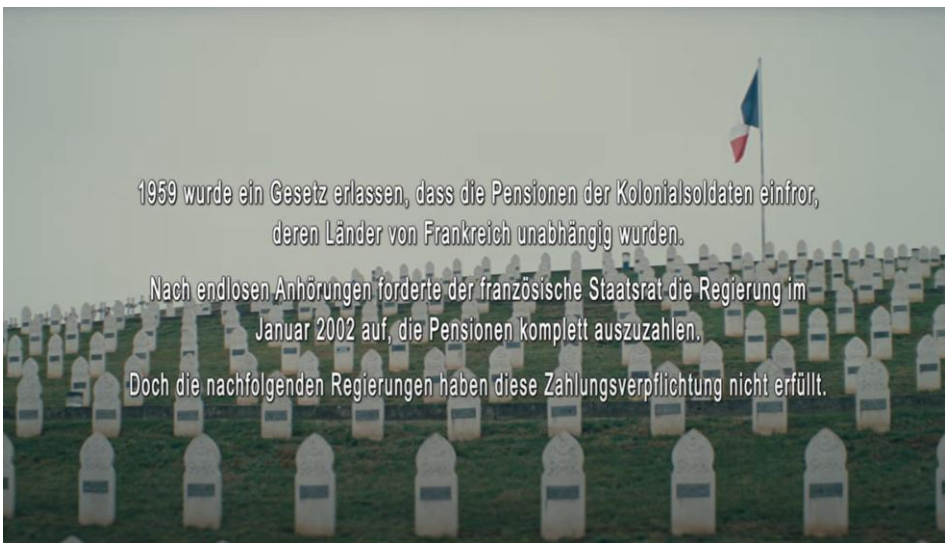


Figure 6.25. Discrimination 9
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (01:58:07)

This closing scene shows a graveyard in Alsace accompanied by text on screen summarizing the issue of freezing the pensions of veterans from French colonies highlights the paradox between the sacrifices of North African soldiers represented by the cemetery in the background and the ongoing issue. It reminds the viewer that their struggles did not end with the war but continued long after.

- **Results**

The selected scenes from the films "*Days of Glory*" (2006) and "*Les Hommes d'Argile*" (2015) uncover a consistent portrayal of discrimination and systemic inequality faced by North African soldiers during their service in the French army in World War II. This appears clearly through visual narrative and dialogue. In "*Days of Glory*," the issue of racial and hierarchical abuse is depicted in the scene (10:15) when a North African soldier who joined the army voluntarily was violently struck by a French officer while an Algerian corporal defends him by explaining his inexperience.

The French sergeant's response was his absolute power over all soldiers. It occurs in another scene at (17:22), where a cook refuses to give tomatoes to a Black African soldier, then a North African soldier protests, and as a result, he is punished by being denied his meal right. According to many sources, such as Shabub (2018), discrimination was embedded as a structural characteristic of the military system governing the treatment of North Africans compared to those serving on the front lines or employed to perform other duties.

At scene (19:03), the matter is further depicted by showing how French officer feel superiority and look at North Africans and colonial troops as low class by addressing the matter they are not French citizens also it shows another type of racial discrimination based on religion by saying they are "*bad Muslims*" revealing the intersection of racial and religious discrimination rooted in colonial ideology. This discrimination was challenged at the scene (20:47) where a North African soldier speaks to his commanding officer about the unequal treatment, they receive by addressing the fact that they are fighting the same enemy, as their bullets do not distinguish between French and colonial soldiers.

Furthermore, at the scene (48:50), two French officers discuss the unequal treatment regarding leave and promotions, referring to their hard conditions. Another scene that depicts this issue is at (49:11), where two French soldiers are promoted while a North African soldier stands in the background, disappointed**.**

- **Theme 1: Recognition and Visibility:** Code 3 Participation and Sacrifice



Figure 6.26. Participation and Sacrifice 1
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (02:50)

This scene takes place in Algeria in 1943, during a mobilization campaign to recruit North African soldiers to fight in World War II. It shows a man urging Algerians to defend France by declaring with a powerful voice: “We should cleanse the French flag with our blood,*”* in an explicit call to liberate France from its crisis.



Figure 6.27. Participation and Sacrifice 2
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (03:41)

This scene is a dialogue between a mother and her son trying to convince him not to go to war. She reminds him of his ancestors' sacrifices with a tone of fear and tenderness, saying: "Your grandfather went with the French, and he never came back." This statement represents the sacrifices made by North Africans across generations. It also underscores the painful legacy of serving under colonial rule. However, he expresses his desire to help France as he asks her to pray for him.



Figure 6.28. Participation and Sacrifice 3
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (07:10)

This scene depicts North African soldiers who are recently recruited, singing a patriotic military song in French language. Their words express pride sacrifice, and devotion to France by these words:

> We are Africans, we came from distant lands. We came from the colonies to the land of our ancestors. We left behind our families and our homes. In our hearts, an unbreakable passion. We will endure hardships to reach glory. And to protect the flag of beloved France. We are here to die at her feet. To prove our love for our precious homeland. We came from afar to die.

The scene captures their presence and their devotion to France. However, this contradicts some other scenes during the film where they faced significant racism and discrimination regarding their colonial and Muslim identity.



Figure 6.29. Participation and Sacrifice 4
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (08:53)

This scene shows an Algerian soldier from the 7th Algerian Infantry Regiment introducing himself to a French officer. This historical fact also corresponds to many records that confirm Algerian involvement in the French army as formal units during World War II.



Figure 6.30. Participation and Sacrifice 5
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (23:31)

This scene shows African soldiers from French colonies raising the French flag on a hilltop after their victory in one of the battles in 1944 on the Italian front. It also shows a North African soldier from the Goumier units standing beside them holding the flag and wearing a traditional Moroccan djellaba and shouting in a passionate voice: "Vive la France!*"* (Long live France). The scene conveys that colonial troops were fighting believing in their mission to sacrifice for France.



Figure 6.31. Participation and Sacrifice 6
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (23:49)

This scene shows the volume of sacrifice made by north African soldiers during their service in liberating Italy following furious battle as it shows many victims and injuries. It included wounded soldiers being transported on a mule accompanied by a medic and another soldier wearing a traditional headscarf. It reflects the lack of proper medical support and the physical toll the war took on these men.



Figure 6.32. Participation and Sacrifice 7
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (51:31)

This scene shows a colonel in the French army delivering a speech to his soldiers about a mission to liberate France during the Vosges Mountains operation in 1944. The officer draws attention to the responsibility they should carry stating that “French people have placed their fate in their hands” The scene sheds light on the diversity of backgrounds served in the French army including North Africans, and others from the colonies. The scene also corresponds with many historical sources that confirm the participation of North Africans soldiers including Tunisian soldiers (the ministry of Tunisian defense (n.d) in the Vosges Mountains located in eastern France, near the German border, within the Alsace-Lorraine region.



Figure 6.33. Participation and Sacrifice 8
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (57:51)

This scene shows a North African soldier trying to warm up his friend in the middle of the woods while it is snowing. This scene symbolizes the sacrifices made by North African soldiers during their fight in the harsh winter conditions of Europe



Figure 6.34. Participation and Sacrifice 9
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (01:14:55)

This scene captures a conversation between a corporal from North Africa and his French colonel regarding an operation to liberate Alsace in France. The soldier expresses his willingness to volunteer saying: *"*I will fight with my body and soul for this as always". In response, the colonel promises to award him and all his friends a medal and recognition for his bravery.



Figure 6.35. Participation and Sacrifice 10
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (01:17:59)

In this scene, a North African soldier is devastated when his best friend is killed by a trap that takes the lives of many other soldiers on their way to Alsace shouting in Arabic dialect: "Alash ya Rabbi?!" (Why, God?)



Figure 6.36. Participation and Sacrifice 11
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (01:41:43)

This scene captures a North African soldier collapsing after being hit by a German shell. He falls, covered in his blood, portraying the brutal reality and violence of war.



Figure 6.37. Participation and Sacrifice 12
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (01:48:15)

This scene depicts two North African soldiers escaping from nazi gunfire. As they run across a bridge, the soldier is shot and collapses. His friend tries to help him, but he realizes that he is already dead.

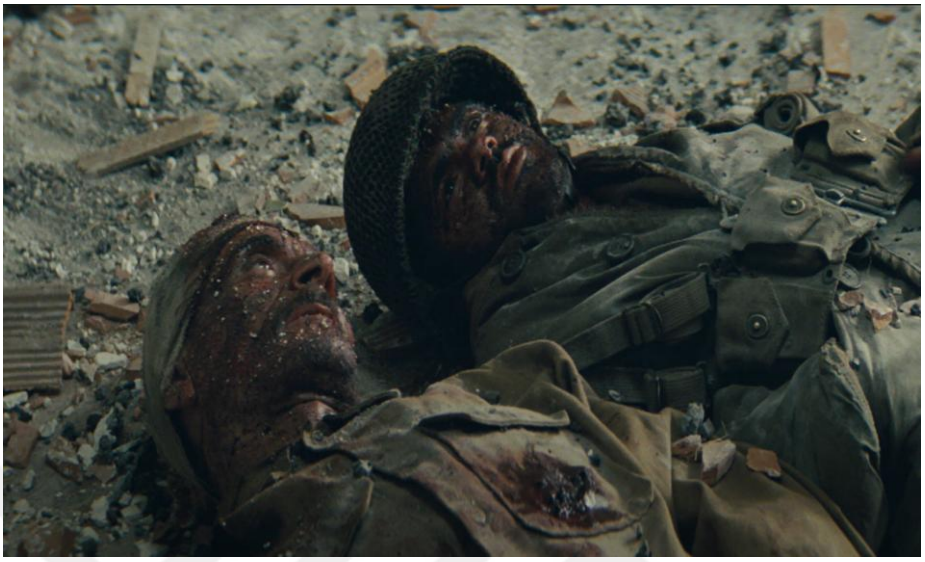


Figure 6.38. Participation and Sacrifice 13
Reference: Days of Glory (2006) timestamp (01:48:15)

This scene shows a French officer lying next to a North African soldier, both wounded among the rubble of battle. The scene conveys a symbolic meaning that North African soldiers stood side by side with their French counterparts facing the same dangers and paying equal price in the war.



Figure 6.39. Participation and Sacrifice 14
Reference: Les Hommes d'Argile (2015) timestamp (58:20)

This scene shows a Moroccan soldier proudly declaring before the battle: “We came to fight for freedom; we are the Lions of the Atlas.” On one level this statement reflects the active participation of Moroccan soldiers during World War II under the French army. This statement asserts that these soldiers are not just anonymous colonial troops, but they were distinct soldiers who have their identity.



Figure 6.40. Participation and Sacrifice 15
Reference: Les Hommes d’Argile (2015) timestamp (01:09:17)

This scene depicts a Moroccan soldier who is wounded after a heavy bombardment during combat. As he lies on the ground, he speaks his last words to his fellow soldiers: “Don’t let them… kill themselves.” Moments later, he dies from his injuries as another soldier comes asking “Is he dead?”. This scene highlights the personal cost paid by Moroccan soldiers serving in the French army.



Figure 6.41. Participation and Sacrifice 16
Reference: Les Hommes d'Argile (2015) timestamp (01:06:17)

This scene depicts the French commander approaching the Moroccan soldiers among the bodies fallen in the battle. He speaks in a celebratory saying these words in French: "What courage, what bravery!... You truly are heroes! Today we have made history!" "What an exceptional day!". This scene portrays the sacrifices made by Moroccans during the war. It becomes even more intense on the soldiers when the French commander repeats the phrase "Allahu Akbar" a term with deep religious and cultural significance for the Moroccan soldiers. However, its use with this context seems to be a form of symbolic appropriation of their identity, employed in service of the colonial narrative.



Figure 6.42. Participation and Sacrifice 17
Reference: Les Hommes d'Argile (2015) timestamp

This scene shows Moroccan soldiers lying on the ground in a state of full alert, holding their rifles ready to attack or defend at any moment. On soldiers saying "the French have all left" this statement reveals how they pushed to their deaths while the French commanders retreated or held their soldiers in safer positions. This scene demonstrates the magnitude of the sacrifices made by them as they have been left to confront their fate

- **Results:**

The scenes from *"Days of Glory"* and *"Les Hommes d'Argile"* highlight the significant participation and sacrifices made by North African soldiers during various phases and locations of World War II, including Italy and France. The values of sacrifice, courage, and endurance are clearly portrayed in both films. The early recruitment scene in *"Days of Glory"* at (02:50) shows a mobilization campaign in Algeria, 1943, where a man is urging Algerians to stand beside France in the war and join its army. This scene presents an accurate depiction of France's mobilization campaign at that time.

According to many sources, such as Baljah (2015–2016), France relied on local and social networks, including large families, clerics, local leaders, and veterans, to facilitate the mobilization of North Africans in the French army. Additionally, the dialogue between a mother and her son reminds him of the ancestors' sacrifices made at (03:41), underscoring the weight of colonial contribution to the French army. Furthermore, the scene where newly recruited soldiers sing a patriotic song in French (07:10) expresses their devotion to France. However, this loyalty is contrasted later by many scenes which uncover the unequal treatment and suffering they faced during their service.

Additionally, the scenes when North African soldiers faced harsh weather conditions, including freezing temperatures and fighting in cold weather, such as (57:51), offer an accurate representation of the hardships they faced, according to many sources (Tunisian Ministry of Defense, n.d.; Maghraoui, 2014). Both films depict North African contributions on the battlefield. In *"Days of Glory"*for example, colonial troops raise the French flag after a victory in Italy at (23:31), and the following scene (23:49) highlights their combat. As Maghraoui (2014) points out, North African units contributed significantly to the Italian campaign, including the Third Algerian Infantry

Division and the Moroccan Goumiers. The film also shows the emotional and mental struggles of these soldiers as observed in scenes like (01:14:55), and losing friends in the war (01:17:59).

In *"Les Hommes d'Argile,"* the same theme of sacrifice was also depicted. From the scene at (58:20), which shows Moroccan soldiers getting ready for combat, to the death of a Moroccan soldier following heavy attacks (01:09:17), the film portrays these soldiers as forgotten heroes. A particularly symbolic moment occurs when a French officer praises the Moroccan troops (01:06:17), even repeating the phrase "Allahu Akbar." While this appears to be a gesture of appreciation, it also suggests a symbolic appropriation of cultural and religious identity to serve the colonial need.

In another critical scene (01:06:17), Moroccan soldiers declare, *"The French have all left."* This reveals how they were pushed toward death. This scene demonstrates the extent of the sacrifices made by North African soldiers as many began to recognize the stark contradiction between the democratic ideals France claimed and the reality of colonial oppression (Myrice, 2015).

- **Theme 2 Erasure and Exclusion** Code: Historical Omission



Figure 6.43. Historical Omission 1



Figure 6.44. Historical Omission 2
Reference: Patton (1970) timestamp (12:05) - (15:00)

This sequence shows Moroccans as negative soldiers in the context of war while celebrating the Americans' arrival with drums and trumpets. They only appear in two consecutive scenes lasting for three minutes. This depiction minimizes their role in the overall events in the film and the war narrative. They are shown in a way that lacks historical depth, making their contribution to the audience seem secondary or marginal. Stereotyping them as performative folkloric soldiers reinforces their absence as impactful soldiers in World War II. However, many historical sources confirm their extensive participation in Tunisia, Sicily, Corsica, the liberation of Marseille and Toulon in France, in Addition to their involvement in the liberation of Paris, providing manpower for the invasion of Germany (Maghraoui, 2014).



Figure 6.45. Historical Omission 3
Reference: Patton (1970) timestamp (02:19:15)

This scene shows archival footage of the allied forces entering Paris while a voice announces, “Paris has been liberated” followed by “the French troops led the way.” referring to the liberation being carried out under the command of the French 2nd Armored Division led by General Jacques Leclerc. This scene only highlights the role of French and Allied forces without any mention of colonial troops including North African soldiers. According to historical facts, the Free French forces were composed of two-thirds colonial soldiers recruited from North Africa and other French colonies. Black soldiers were either replaced or confined to barracks, and only those from North Africa or the Middle East who could “pass as European” were allowed to continue participating. (Financial Times. 2024)



Figure 6.46. Historical Omission 4
Reference: Tobruk (1967) timestamp (01:29:35)

The scene depicts British soldiers attempting to sabotage and blow-up supply depots in a critical mission aimed at disabling Axis forces in the region. This operation is portrayed as a strategic effort by the British soldiers to disrupt the supply lines of the Germans in the city of Tobruk, Libya. However, according to many historical sources, these actions frequently witnessed wide participation from Libyan forces under the command of the Senussi leader, because the British command avoided using their troops in major attacks against the Axis powers. Instead, the Senussi forces were assigned sabotage operations and logistical support during the British advance from Barqa, which they captured in early 1941 (Ashour, Belkacem, Eidat, & Arqoub, 2022).



Figure 6.47. Historical Omission 5
Reference: Patton (1970) timestamp (36:52)

This scene shows General Patton standing beside a soldier near a cemetery, where the graves are marked with Christian crosses and the Star of David. This sign suggests the cultural identity of those buried soldiers as it suggests they came solely from Christian and Jewish backgrounds, neglecting North Africa compared to the Muslims. The scene entirely overlooks the presence of soldiers from other cultural and religious identities, particularly indigenous troops from the colonies, who fought alongside the Allied forces during World War II during the North African campaign in the context of the film. This narrow representation fails to reflect the historical reality, as many sources confirm that the Allied armies included large numbers of Muslim soldiers from North Africa and Black African troops who were recruited from French and British colonies.



Figure 6.48. Historical Omission 6
Reference: Tobruk (1967) timestamp (01:04:33)

The scene depicts British soldiers attempting to sabotage and blow-up German supply depots in a mission aimed at disabling Axis forces in the region. This operation is portrayed as a daring and strategic effort by the British to disrupt the supply lines of the German and Italian troops stationed in Tobruk.



Figure 6.49. Historical Omission 7
Reference: Patton (1970) timestamp (01:08:49)

This scene depicts American troops under command of General Patton invading Sicily and moving toward Palermo during a violent battle with heavy artillery fire. However, the scene only shows American troops, ignoring the contributions of North African soldiers. According to Maghraoui (2014), General Patton employed North African troops such as the Moroccan Goumiers unit namely "Fourth Tabor" which had already fought alongside the Americans in Tunisia. While Patton aimed to move northwest toward Palermo, he formed a temporary corps that included the Third Infantry Division, the 82nd Airborne Division, and the Fourth Tabor. Their mission was to take control of the mountain areas. The goumiers advanced through tough mountainous terrain.

- **Results:**

The analysis of selected scenes from "*Patton*" and *"Tobruk"* reveals a consistent pattern of historical omission regarding the representation of North African soldiers. The findings indicate that even though North African soldiers participated significantly in several military campaigns, their role as active soldiers in the war was completely erased.In the "*Patton*" film, at the scene (12:05) Moroccan soldiers are shown as negative characters to the overall war and events, as they appear only in one scene playing on drums and celebrating the arrival of American troops, showing that North Africa was only a background to the war, neglecting the indigenous contributions during the war. This representation is superficial and lacks historical depth, as it reduces the role of Moroccan soldiers to a stereotypical and fleeting image, ignoring the real context and the significant part they played in the course of the war.

Furthermore, in "*Patton*," the Paris liberation scene at (02:19:15) depicts the French 2nd Armored Division entering Paris, with no mention of the North African soldiers who fought alongside them. The scene features archival footage and a voiceover declaring, *"Paris has been liberated,*" presenting the liberation as a victory led solely by French and Allied troops. This use of black and white footage adds a sense of historical credibility to the narrative, yet it covers the complexity of the actual events. In reality, the liberation of Paris was far more than the film proposed, according to several historical sources, including the Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration (n.d.).

Colonial troops, such as North African soldiers, played a significant role in the liberation of Paris. Maghraoui (2014) also notes that two-thirds of the Free French forces were composed of colonial soldiers, many of whom were from North Africa and actively contributed to the broader liberation of France, including Paris. The film's omission of these forces reinforces a Eurocentric view of the war and erases the essential contributions of colonial soldiers, even as it celebrates a narrative of French victory.

Their absence from the visual narrative reinforces the narrative that centers on white European troops, thus rewriting history through cinematic omission. As the Financial Times (2024) reports, black and non-European soldiers were deliberately excluded from visible roles in liberation parades and celebrations to maintain a Eurocentric image of military triumph. The scene at (01:29:35) in "*Tobruk*" follows this trend by depicting British forces executing a sabotage operation with no mention of Libyan forces under the Senussi command, who were historically assigned to do similar missions because the British command avoided using their troops in major attacks against the Axis powers. Instead, the Senussi forces carried out these operations on their behalf by sabotage operations and logistical support (Ashour, Belkacem, Eidat, & Arqoub, 2022).

The cemetery scene at (36:52) in "*Patton"* further repeats this pattern. As the religious symbols shown Christian crosses and Stars of David imply that the buried soldiers come exclusively from Western or Jewish backgrounds, omitting Muslim identities of the majority of North Africans despite the extensive participation of Muslim troops from North Africa besides, Jews, and European settlers who were recruited to serve mainly in the French and Italian armies with fewer joining the British forces (Stenner, 2025). This form of symbolic exclusion contributes to what Edward Said (1978) would identify as Orientalist discourse that renders the non-Western "other" invisible or subordinate as this trend assured by the same scene when General Patton speaks to his soldier that he does not wants Arabs to steal the graves by says, "I want guards on these graves to prevent Arabs from stealing them,".

Moreover, the same orientalist view in the scene at (8:27) shows North Africans stealing clothes of American soldiers after their defeat in the Kasserine Pass in 1943.

This scene presents them as opportunists taking advantage of American losses instead of helping in the war. Instead of showing them as allies, the film treats them as outsiders and not important characters. The scene showing the combat in Sicily (01:08:49) illustrates American troops moving toward Palermo with no acknowledgment of the presence of North African soldiers such as Moroccan Goumiers, who historically played a role in that campaign. Maghraoui (2014) points out how the Fourth Tabor of the Moroccan Goumiers supported Patton's forces through the difficult Sicilian terrain. Their erasure from this scene makes the Allied forces appear less diverse and gives all the credit for victory to Western troops alone.

- **Theme 2: Erasure and Exclusion** Code 1: Directed Narrative



Figure 6.50. Directed Narrative 1
Reference: Patton (1970) timestamp (08:34)

This scene depicts North African civilians robbing American soldiers after the defeat at the Battle of Kasserine Pass in 1943. This scene reproduces an Orientalist stereotype that portrays North Africans as opportunists, stripping soldiers of their possessions rather than acknowledging their contribution to the Allied power during the North African campaign. This scene comes to deliver a meaning about the singular heroism of American heroism as the only moral force in a chaotic and uncivilized world.



Figure 6.51. Directed Narrative 2
Reference: Tobruk (1967) timestamp (16:47)

This scene depicts a British colonel explaining a strategic plan to sabotage a Nazi German fuel depot to a Canadian major who was brought to help in the operation. The conversation focuses on the operation's details and affirms the strategic role played by the British. However, it completely overlooks the involvement of other forces such as North Africans particularly Libyans This poetry provides a narrow and exclusive narrative of the war effort.



Figure 6.52. Directed Narrative 3
Reference: Tobruk (1967) timestamp (13:30)

This scene shows German Jewish soldiers joining an operation to destroy German fuel depots in Tobruk alongside the Allies. This soldier is presented in an active role in the military operation, reflecting Western cinema's recognition of the contribution of European Jewish soldiers in World War II. However, there is an absence of any representation of North African Jews who participated in a pivotal role alongside the Allies, whether within the French armies or through their involvement in the local resistance against the Nazi occupation. (Stenner, 2025).



Figure 6.53. Directed Narrative 4
Reference: Tobruk (1967) timestamp (30:51)

This scene shows British soldiers besides Jewish German soldiers getting ready to attack Italian forces during World War II in Libya. The soldiers are working together and planning their move. In the background, there are Italian tanks which they are preparing to attack it.



Figure 6.54. Directed Narrative 5
Reference: Tobruk (1967) timestamp (46:10)

The scene depicting the battle and the bombing of Italian tanks only show the Allied forces consisting of British and Jewish-German soldiers. There are no depiction of the Free French forces, North African soldiers or the Senussi forces, who historically fought alongside the British and the Allies.



Figure 6.55. Directed Narrative 6
Reference: Patton (1970) timestamp (01:11: 09)

This scene shows General Patton entering the city of Palermo welcomed by crowds of Italians. It symbolized a purely American victory. While Americans are presented as the sole hero leading the triumph, there is not any mention or depiction for any other forces such as the North African Goumier including the “Fourth Tabor unit” who were

conscripted to Sicily by General Patton during the advancement toward Palermo. According to historical sources Patton created a temporary corps that included the Fourth Tabor who were assigned to control the mountains along the road from Agrigento to Palermo. (Maghraoui, 2014). This representation ignores the broader military context, which involved multinational cooperation, and reflects a one-sided view of victory that highlights only American heroism while overlooking the contributions of soldiers who fought through difficult mountainous terrain and helped pave the way for the city's fall.

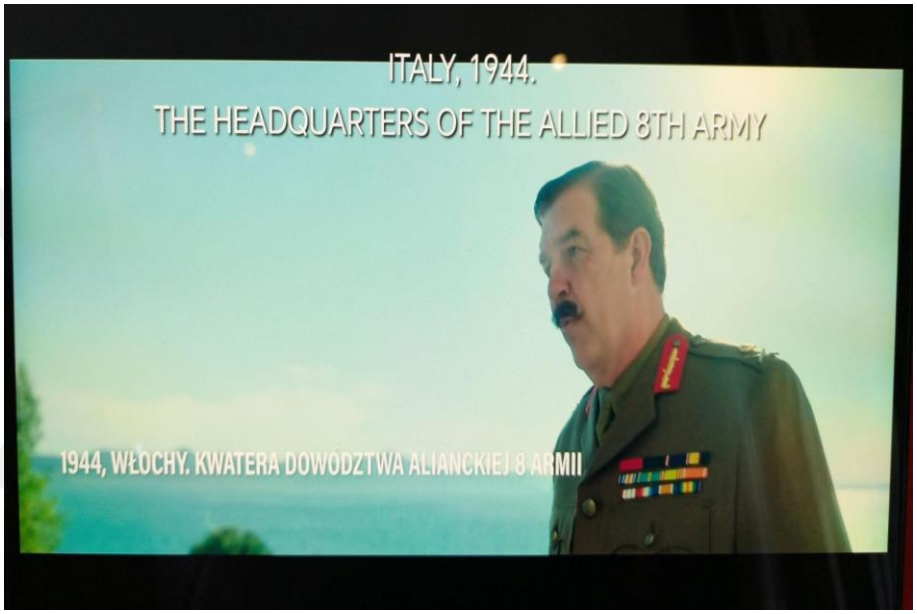


Figure 6.56. Directed Narrative 7
Reference: Red Poppies (2024) timestamp (09:00)

This scene depicts a military meeting in Italy in 1944, held at the headquarters of the Allied Eighth Army. A senior British officer announces that the Eighth Army has received a strategic mission to open the road to Rome by taking control of the hills around Monte Cassino. The scene depicts how the responsibility for the significant battle of the Italian campaign is assigned to the Second Polish Corps.



Figure 6.57. Directed Narrative 8
Reference: Red Poppies (2024) timestamp (27:22)

The scene shows a group of Polish officers walking through a military site discussing that each one of the allies won a battle in the mountain from various nationalities during the battles around Monte Cassino. One officer says: “The French, the English, the Americans, the Māori, the Indians, the Moroccans” this scene direct steer the narrative toward Polish heroism.



Figure 6.58. Directed Narrative 9
Reference: Red Poppies (2024) timestamp (01:47:22)

This scene depicts two Polish officers talking near the battlefield surrounding the Monastery of Monte Cassino. One of them says that they have paved the way to Rome for the Allies, referring to the military achievements of the Polish forces in this decisive battle. The other officer responds that the world will forget them, and that once the Western Front is successfully opened in France, their contributions will be ignored.

- **Results:**

The analysis of scenes from *"Tobruk*," "Patton,*"* and *"Red Poppies"* reveals a pattern of narrative technique where the story is directed to focus on the efforts of a single group, usually the British or Americans, in multinational military operations. This approach simplifies the complex historical context of World War II and neglects the significant roles played by North Africans. In the scene at (16:47) from "*Tobruk*", a British colonel outlines a sabotage operation to a Canadian major. The dialogue emphasizes British strategic leadership. The absence of any reference to local forces, especially Libyans who historically assisted in sabotaging Axis supply lines and logistically engaging in intelligence operations (Ashour, Belkacem, Eidat, & Arqoub, 2022).

This representation reinforces a narrow view of the war and marginalizes colonial contributions constructing a version of history where heroism is exclusive to Western officers and soldiers. This omission on screen also aligns with a pattern of historical erasure, minimizing the North African roles and reinforcing narratives of Western military powers (Jubouri, 2020). In the scene at (13:30), shows a German Jewish soldier who joins a military operation to destroy German fuel depots appears among the Allied ranks. This soldier is presented as an active role in the military operation, reflecting Western cinema's recognition of the contribution of European Jewish soldiers in World War II. However, there is an absence of any representation of North African Jews who participated in a pivotal role alongside the Allies, whether within the French armies or through their involvement in the local resistance against the Nazi occupation (Stenner, 2025).

Similarly, the combat scenes at (30:51) and (46:10) continue this pattern. While British and Jewish-German soldiers are shown engaging Italian forces and destroying tanks,

there is no mention or depiction of the Free French troops, North African contingents, or Senussi fighters. Their absence from the screen reduces the rich diversity of the Allied forces and replaces the historical complexity with a narrow narrative focused solely on European actors.

This tendency becomes even more pronounced in Patton (1970), particularly in the scene at (01:11:09), where General Patton enters Palermo to the cheers of Italian civilians. The scene constructs a powerful image of American triumph, positioning Patton and his troops as the sole liberators. However, historical records such as those cited by Maghraoui (2014) highlight the involvement of the Moroccan Goumiers, specifically the Fourth Tabor unit, which was integrated into Patton's temporary corps for the Sicily campaign. These troops endured harsh mountainous terrain to support the Allied advance, yet their efforts are entirely omitted from the visual and narrative space of the film.

This emphasis on single-nation heroism not only misrepresents historical fact but also serves ideological purposes. As Stuart Hall (1980) suggests, dominant media representations tend to naturalize specific power structures by repeating familiar codes of authority and legitimacy. In this case, the focus on British and American actions reaffirms a Eurocentric understanding of World War II, where colonial troops are not remembered as agents of history, but as marginalized figures omitted entirely.

The scenes in *"Red Poppies"* (2024) film reflect a distinctly Polish perspective that centers the narrative of heroism and sacrifice on Polish soldiers during the Battle of Monte Cassino in the Italian campaign of World War II, 1944. The scene at (09:00) highlights the strategic significance of the Second Polish Corps in opening the road to Rome for allies, as it symbolizes emphasizing, they were assigned not only a combat mission, but also a symbolic role phrase loaded with heroic and political connotations that serve the film's national message.

Despite this exclusive perspective, many historical references suggest that this strategic breakthrough resulted from joint efforts involving several forces, including North African troops. The 4th Tunisian Infantry Regiment, in particular, played a key role in breaking through the front line at Cassino and surpassing the Gustav Line.

Marshal Juin, commander of the French forces, praised the performance of these troops, specifically noting the heavy price paid by the Tunisian regiment to capture key positions such as the Belvedere, calling their efforts Additionally, Moroccan Goumiers and the Third Algerian Division played a decisive role in breaching the Gustav Line and clearing the way to Rome (Bimberg, 1999, p. 50; Maghraoui, 2014; Tunisian Ministry of Defense, n.d.).

The Moroccan Goumiers engaged in intense combat in the rugged terrain south of Monte Cassino, successfully penetrating German positions in areas such as Monte Majo and the Aurunci Mountains. These advances directly contributed to the collapse of German defenses and enabled Polish forces to approach the monastery from the north. Despite the strategic importance of this contribution, the film only makes a brief mention of Moroccan soldiers in a passing line of dialogue acknowledging the multinational composition of the Allied forces (27:27), without offering any meaningful visual or dramatic representation.

In scene (27:22), the film briefly expands its scope through a dialogue among Polish officers, acknowledging the multinational nature of the Allied troops, including North Africans. However, the narrative quickly shifts back to focus solely on Polish heroism, offering no visual representation of the others mentioned. This reflects a selective representational strategy that acknowledges diversity only to ultimately reaffirm national identity and ownership of victory.

As for the scene (01:47:22), an officer appears who fears historical oblivion, saying that the contributions of the Poles will be marginalized once the French Front is opened. These scenes reveal how cinematic discourse is used to retell the war from a marginalized national position. Although the film criticizes the marginalization of Poles in Western memory, it indirectly reproduces a similar marginalization of other soldiers, mainly from North Africa.

6.2. Findings

The findings identified two main directions in the representation of North African soldiers in World War II films: one reflects recognition and visibility, while the other involves erasure and exclusion.

- **Recognition and Visibility**

The findings indicate that North African soldiers were portrayed as active participants in the films "*Days of Glory* (2006) and "*Les Hommes d'Argile" (*2015) by highlighting their cultural identity, which was expressed through language, rituals, costumes, religious practices, and music, reflecting a distinguished presence within the French military context. The results also highlight the contributions of North African soldiers in many scenes showing their sacrifices, combat, and enduring harsh conditions.

The analysis also reveals issues of racial and religious discrimination experienced by North African soldiers during their service in the French army. This was represented through scenes that showed physical abuse, unequal treatment, and discrimination in promotions. Furthermore, the film "*Days of Glory"* (2006) also addressed the theme of broken promises, whether in appreciation or promotions.

- **Erasure and Exclusion**

The findings illustrate that although some films made efforts to portray and recognize North African soldiers, such as *Days of Glory* (2006) and "*Les Hommes d'Argile" (*2015), other films either ignored or marginalized their contributions. This was especially in Hollywood narratives such as "*Tobruk"* and "*Patton"* as well as in nationalistic portrayals in "*Red Poppies"* (2024). On many occasions, North African soldiers were either completely erased or mentioned briefly in the narrative without a visual or dramatic presence that shows their actual role. These films are often reproduced to display an oriented version of history that revolves around the American European victory, while neglecting the colonial effort in the war. This symbolic absence further reflects the marginalization of North African soldiers from the cultural memory of war.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the representation of North African soldiers in mainstream cinema, specifically in World War II films, is subject to a system of symbolic and ideological selection, which cannot be separated from the political and cultural contexts where these films were produced. This system ultimately contributes to building a cultural memory that differs in its recollection and focus. While some of these productions shed light on the presence of North African soldiers under its microscope by bringing them into the spotlight, other films make them out of focus, which leads to their erasure from the cultural memory.

Starting from the point that Hall (1997) makes in his theory of representation, the media do not represent a neutral reflection of reality, but a deliberate process influenced by cultural and ideological factors. This helps us better understand the disparities in cinematic narratives regarding history in general and the depiction of North African soldiers in particular. These differences come on screen, are deliberately designed according to specific reasons and conditions, and differ according to phase and perspective.

In films such as "*Patton*," "Tobruk," and "Red Poppies," North African soldiers are clearly erased from the cinematic representations. Although the sample includes five films, only two of them depict the place of North African soldiers in the historical period covered. It is important to note that they had no presence in three films, "*Patton*", "*Tobruk*", and "*Red Poppies*", except for one sequence in "*Patton*", which presented them as stereotypical and negative actors in the overall war context. These representations provide a narrow vision of the conflict, while it is centered around Western heroism that deprives North Africans of their recognition in the cultural memory.

To understand this direction, it is necessary to look at the context in which these films were produced. For example, the "*Patton*" film was released when the United States was going through a deep national crisis because of the political and moral effects of the Vietnam War. Hollywood sought to restore the American hero's image by recalling World War II's victories (Greene, 2019). Hollywood prioritized portraying American heroism as a means of promoting national unity during the war rather than offering a comprehensive representation of historical events. And what assures that is the film influenced political decision-making as it prompted President Richard Nixon to invade Cambodia after watching the film several times, as Gady (2019) describes.

Similarly, "*Red Poppies*" further shows how cinema builds cultural memory around national identity. Much evidence confirms this explanation, as it shows the strong support from the Ministries of Defense and Culture and the Polish Army, which consolidated its position as a collective memory project aimed at immortalizing the Polish contribution (Polskie Radio, 2024). Furthermore, the film "*Tobruk*" presents a distinct example of the exclusion of North Africans. While North African geography is depicted, it is shown as an empty land detached from its population, as if North Africa were a land without people. The dominant Western narrative overlooks local communities, erasing their experiences and suffering. This exclusion also extends to non-white soldiers, including North Africans who served in the British and French forces (Kingsepp, 2018).

Although the film "*Tobruk*" includes German Jewish soldiers participating in the combat, it completely ignores North African Jewish soldiers, who played important roles alongside the Allies in North Africa (Stenner, 2025). All the main characters in the film are Western, reinforcing the image of the white soldier while erasing North Africa's history and population. It is important to note that Hollywood, as a dominant cultural force, often promotes American ideology and traditional values by embedding them within its representational practices. (Bozkurt Avcı & Ergüney, 2022).

In this context, Golan (2014) confirms the proposition by highlighting the erasure of North African Jews, especially in war films, which represent a deliberate pattern of exclusion. This is due to an exclusionary perception that North African identity does not fit into the self-centered European visual narrative. Golan links this exclusion to

narrow European standards for documenting and deserving recognition, which has led to what she calls a “Site of Amnesia.”

The same logic applies to the absence of Muslim soldiers from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, who formed the core of the Free French Army (Maghraoui, 2014). These people were not represented fairly in Western cinema despite their effective contributions, and the reason again is that their image does not match the European model of the hero that Golan (2014) referred to.

For instance, the story of a Tunisian Muslim who saved the lives of Jewish families during the Nazi occupation shows how perceptions of courage are conditioned on the European criteria of heroism (Golan, 2014). This suggests that dominant cultural perspectives shape the definition of heroism. In contrast, we observe many examples celebrating European heroes in cinematic depictions, such as in “*Schindler’s List*”.

Kingsepp's (2018) study also reveals a hierarchical structure in memory representation where Western narratives dominate over narratives by excluding Indigenous peoples from the scene. For example, as in the case of Egypt, it was a decisive arena in the Battle of El Alamein during World War II. This symbolic structure gives a pure character to the war, as if it were devoid of people and history, and contributes to the absence of North African soldiers from global cinematic memory.

As the representation is a process of reproducing specific meanings aligned with the ideological and cultural standards of that media, as Hall (1997) argues, this selective framing often leads to the marginalization of other groups, especially in processes of remembrance that is because memory is not a faithful reproduction of the past, but rather a continuous process of reconstruction (Candau, 2009). Therefore, this selectivity of what is remembered cannot be regarded as mere incidental forgetting; rather, it reflects an underlying cognitive and cultural structure. As a result, cultural memory is saturated with forgetting (Assmann, 2008).

On the other hand, the production of films such as “*Days of Glory*” (2006) and “*Les Hommes d'Argile*” (2015) can be understood as part of a broader cultural and political response to decades of historical marginalization that came after growing awareness

of multiculturalism in Europe, as Maghraoui (2014) points out. This issue has brought the question of minority histories to the forefront, including the colonial troops, who are a clear example of this history that has been marginalized. By referring to minorities here, it does not mean the numerical representation of the colonial soldiers, because they formed the majority of the French army at that time. Instead, their minority lies in their representation. (Maghraoui, 2014).

As historian Dipesh Chakrabarty states, the term minority histories now refer to all those pasts that democratically oriented historians have sought to recover in response to the exclusions and omissions of national mainstream narratives (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 97, as cited in Maghraoui, 2014). Therefore, it pushed historians, artists, and filmmakers to revisit marginalized histories and recover voices previously silenced in narratives. The portrayal of North African soldiers in these films challenges the erasure of their contributions and challenges the imposed reality about the purely European American war effort. This process of integrating ethnic communities and indigenous peoples into history reflects a new approach to historical writing aimed at a more democratic history (Maghraoui, 2014).

This is what makes many filmmakers such as the director of film "*Days of glory*" to choose the Second World War as the historical background for addressing colonialism and the discrimination issues faced by colonial soldiers. It allows the film to participate in the rewriting history by offering an alternative historical narrative that challenges the dominant discourse (Adler, 2013, p2). Stora (2014) further highlights that the years between 2005 and 2007 saw an explosion of cinematic productions addressing colonialism and the Algerian War, especially after France passed the February 23 law, which called for teaching the "positive aspects of French colonization". This legislation sparked wide criticism from historians, intellectuals, and particularly from Algeria, as it was seen as an attempt to reframe colonial history within a favorable national narrative.

Films like *"Days of Glory*" and *"Les Hommes d'Argile*" confront this erasure by shedding light on North African characters, giving them names, emotions, and roles to play that resist exclusion in mainstream cinema. These cinematic efforts align with a new wave of historiography that advocates for more equitable memory, aligning with

what Ricœur (2009) calls just memory. By doing so, these films contribute to reshaping a just cultural memory not built on their forgetting but on their recognition and visibility.

In the context of cultural memory studies, the concepts of canon and archive can be used to explain the mechanisms of presence or absence in cultural narratives, such as presenting the existing tension between what is shown cinematically and what is ignored in the representation of North African soldiers, based on the concepts of canon and archive as proposed by (Assmann, 2008).

The concept of "canon" refers to the collection of texts, images, and rituals that are reread, interpreted, and circulated within a culture, and are effectively employed in reviving collective memory and establishing a dominant narrative identity (Assmann, 2008). Films such as "*Patton*", "*Tobruk*", and "*Red Poppies*" can clearly be considered the canon of Western cinema related to World War II, consisting of recurring narratives about Western heroism, especially American or European, with white soldiers highlighted as the main actors in the victory. These films not only exclude North African soldiers but also reproduce an ideal image of the "Western hero".

In contrast, "*Days of Glory*" and *"Les Hommes d'Argile*" demonstrate a clear effort to re-account the dominant cinematic canon of World War II, which had long celebrated Western heroism and excluded North African soldiers from appearance. These films, by departing from that canon, present counter memory that highlights North African soldiers as key actors in history, refusing to reduce them to marginal roles or stereotypes.

The absence of North African soldiers despite their historically influential participation indicates that they belong to what Aleida Assmann (2011) calls the cultural archive, that is, the possible memory that has not been activated within the dominant narrative, but is still latent in documents, oral experiences, and marginalized sources.

However, the representation of North African soldiers in *"Days of Glory*" and *"Les Hommes d'Argile"* is a kind of recovery of a forgotten archive. That is, these films

delve into excluded memory and evoke testimonies and experiences that were not archived in classic films or Western narratives. It reshapes cultural memory from being centered around their absence to becoming about their presence and recognition of their existence. In this way, cinema transforms from a mere artistic medium into a symbolic tool of resistance that reshapes what is remembered and restores respect to what was deliberately excluded.

The absence or presence of North African soldiers in World War II films is not a neutral matter of historical accuracy, but rather a result of complex ideological and cultural decisions that shape cinematic narratives. This study demonstrates, the ideological frameworks and institutional nature of cultural memory that play a critical role in determining which history is remembered and which is forgotten. The selective focus of each film influences how cultural memory is formed and transmitted across generations.

Said (1993) argues that references to the past are among the most common practices used to make sense of the present, as this tendency stems not only from the disagreement over historical facts or interpretations, but also from a more profound uncertainty about whether the past is truly over, or it continues to shape the present in different forms. Considering this, memory can be seen as the living past, which is transmitted and revived through cultural practices, narratives, and representations that keep the past present within the collective consciousness.

The increasing focus on memory in contemporary societies is mainly due to the decline in confidence in writing an objective version of history. In response, people turned to memory to compensate for the lost sense of meaning and belonging. Interestingly, this return to the past is not just driven by nostalgia but by a need to use memory as a stable reference point to deal with an uncertain future. Memory, therefore, becomes more than a record of the past to shape identity and self-understanding. When memory is disrupted or distorted, it can lead directly to an identity crisis, affecting how individuals see themselves and how others see them (Candau, 2009, pp. 4–5).

This mechanism is especially relevant when applied to representing North African soldiers in World War II film narratives. When Western cinematic productions focus

exclusively on European or American heroism, this narrative distortion not only denies their historical role but also undermines the identity and visibility of North African communities by failing to acknowledge their place in the collective past.

What is even more concerning is that the absence of cinematic and cultural representation significantly shapes global perceptions about North African peoples. In the collective perception, North Africa is often constructed as a marginal historical space, portrayed as passive, marginal, and undeserving of recognition or heroism. This narrative contributes to the reproduction of a new form of Orientalism, one that no longer operates solely through language and political discourse but increasingly through the mechanisms of cultural memory itself, including cinema, and media. Such forms of symbolic exclusion not only distort historical reality but also sustain hierarchical structures of visibility and value in global narratives.

Cinematic representation has profound implications for the historical consciousness of audiences, as it contributes significantly to shaping cultural memory over time. It creates a lasting form of remembrance, as in our case study, whether it highlights the visibility of North African soldiers or erases them from the narrative altogether. However, when cinematic representation is shaped by ideological framing, it can distort the collective understanding of history conveyed through the media, leading to a manipulated or biased historical consciousness.

A distorted cultural memory here can shape public perception in ways that reinforce the erasure of certain groups. Such implications extend beyond cinema to inform extensive cultural and political discourses, affecting how history is taught, remembered, and controlled. This selective representation not only distorts the historical record but also influences how contemporary audiences perceive marginalized communities, associating them solely with negative or insignificant roles.

In conclusion, it can be said that the representation of North African soldiers in cinema is not simply a matter of absence or presence, but rather a reflection of a deeper struggle over identity, history, and authority of what should be remembered as history. As a result, the one in charge of production institutions is the one who has the

capability to shape the cultural memory regarding the absence or the presence of any group or event on screen, despite some attempts to restore recognition about North African soldiers' roles, for example. Cinema still often needs a comprehensive critical deconstruction that restores respect to suppressed and absent narratives.

7.2. Conclusion

This study does not claim to offer final answers, but rather, it aims to raise essential questions, leaving the door open to further studies. This thesis started with the representation of North African soldiers in World War II films as a major gateway to understanding how cultural memory is constructed. It also shows that cinema is not just a means of entertainment or a visual narrative tool but a cultural actor in historical remembrance. Also, it raises concerns regarding the representation of some groups in cinema other than Western communities.

Questioning cinema's ability to determine what is visible or forgotten and whose histories are remembered or marginalized? However, unexplored areas remain that require further study, especially in audience reception and interaction with these representations, which calls for field studies to complement this aspect.

The significant contribution of this study goes beyond the direct results revealed to the deep theoretical questions it raised: How can cinema be a tool for narrative resistance? Does it have the ability to restore recognition to groups that have long been visually and historically marginalized? Several films analyzed in this study have emerged as a response to a long history of exclusion, which indicates the power of cinema to counter the dominance of mainstream narratives.

Academically, this study illuminates an unexplored area that has not been explored before and remains on the margins of academic research. Despite the importance of the results achieved by this study, cinema remains an open space for changes that require keeping up with. In sum, this study calls for a rethink of the close relationship between cinema, history, and memory, and urges researchers to explore more deeply the ability of cinema to raise historical awareness.

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