



**Symbolism in the Algerian Revolution Cinema
-a semiological study on the film the Battle of Algiers -**

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Abstract:

In this paper I will discuss symbolism in the revolution cinema through the semiological analysis of the film « the battle of Algiers ». The research is based on a systematic plan in order to answer the problematic of the study. I have chosen semiology as a method of research and observation as a tool for collecting data. After the analysis, the study reached a set of results, the most important of which are: symbolism refers to something complex and abstract, the battle of Algiers film represents many symbols that occur in form of: characters, places, events that symbolize power, patriotism, rebellion, torture, occupation, oppression, responsibility.

Keywords: symbolism, cinema, Algeria, revolution, semiology

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1. INTRODUCTION

Symbolism is an essential element of storytelling that filmmakers use in order to convey complex meaning, perceptions, emotions, and themes. They occur in form of objects, characters, places, colors, music and events...etc. It refers to the use of different symbols in a cinematic work to represent something else more significant for the audiences who deduce them. Additionally, symbols combine an image with a concept, they can be private or public, national or international. In cinema, symbols were created to speak and they exist to tell and share something with the audience especially in cinema.

Cinema has played an essential role in documenting the historical events of countries and people in different parts of the world. The Algerian cinema shed light on the Algerian revolution for independence after 132 years of the French occupation and colonization. The war of Algerian people against the French colonialism left a clear impact on the cinematic production, especially in the sixties that was rich and professional and exceeded the borders of Algeria.

The historical films concerning the Algerian revolution portrays the colonial conditions, and the Frencho-Algerian struggle, in order to preserve the national memory for Algerian people. The film is a tool to document events and history of the nation, and remember the great sacrifices of our ancestors using the image as a tool for storytelling and evoke emotions and meanings.

The battle of Algiers in french (La Bataille d'Alger) is one of the most famous and influential films that used the events of the liberation war in Algeria which had been mainly described as one of the greatest revolutions in modern history. The film reflected the colonization conditions that resulted the erupting of the revolution under the leadership of the national liberation front (FLN). This latter launched guerrillas and varied attacks against the colonial regime.

This film is a very important cinematic work in relation with the great history of Algerian struggle after more than a century of French colonization using different symbols for the audience to deduct them in relation with many sociocultural contexts, because the image as a rhetorical tool plays an essential role ; it can educate, tell a story, inform, and the way the image is oriented has a profound impact on the audience. We may read the history of Algeria war of liberation, but also, we can understand it more by watching a film like the battle of Algiers. Therefore, I will try in this research to answer an important question : what symbols are contained in the film of the battle of Algiers ?



2. Concepts

2.1 The definition of symbolism

According to Oxford Dictionary, symbolism is from the verb "to symbolize: means to be a symbol of something, the use of light and dark symbolizes good and evil. A symbol: a person, an object, an event that represents a more general quality or situation. Symbolism is the use of symbols to represent ideas especially in art and literature" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2000).

For Barthes a symbol "an object becomes a symbol when it acquires through convention and use a meaning that enables it to stand for something" (John Fisk, 1990).

The word symbol derives from the Greek verb "symbollein" means to throw together, and its noun symbolon, mark. Thus, it is an object animate or inanimate represents or stands for something else (JA Cuddon, 1998).

A dove for example symbolizes peace, the lion strength, the rose beauty. In addition, symbols do not stand only on objects because gestures and actions are also symbolic, for example arms raised means surrender.

It is also "the practice of representing things by means of symbols or for attributing symbolic meanings or significance to objects, events, or relationships" (the American heritage dictionary of the English language).

In literature, a literary symbol combines an image with a concept, words themselves are a kind of symbols, therefore, all kinds of symbols are used as a language able to speak and give connotative meanings.

According to C.S Pierce, "a symbol is a conventional sign" (Bellucci, 2017), thus, conventionality is an essential element in the Piercean symbol definition

Cinema often uses symbols that are meaningful, the reader can determine if an object or an image is symbolic or not by observing how frequently the author uses those objects or events to symbolize something.

2.2 Definition of cinema :

The word cinema technically derives from the ancient Greek, Kinema, meaning movement. Historically, it's shortened version of the French cinematograph, an invention of two brothers, August and Luis Lumiere, that combined kinema with another Greek root, graphien, meaning to write or record (Sharman, 2020, p05).

According to Alain Badiou, cinema is an education, an art of living and a thinking (Badiou, 2013, p 12).

The film industry is as important as any other sector of the growth of any nation's economy. Cinema is a reflection of society. It shows us the raw reality of society. It reveals things we didn't



know about. It also helps us to socialize better with others. It helps us to understand the pros and cons associated with various trends and habits in our lives. Cinema is a way to connect people and start conversations. Cinema enhances imagination, shows the world multiple perspectives, and expands our thinking and vision. It connects cultures, introduces us to different art forms, and adds new information and facts to our lives.

Cinema is very important like other arts, it is a source of :

- Entertainment
- Education
- Culture
- Social interaction
- Information
- Economic influence
- Agenda-setting
- Impact on public opinion

3- The importance of symbolism in cinema

Cinema is a complete system of communication that convey meaning, « according to Saussure meaning in semiotic system is expressed by signs which have a particular form » (Meyer, 2009, p 03)

Symbols are very essential for filmmakers for many reasons :

- ✓ The image exists to speak : the image can express more ideas and emotions rather than words.
- ✓ Significance of varied symbols : that means the use of different symbols to express the theme and more engaging stories.
- ✓ The symbols are used to overcome obvious meanings and emotions by filmmakers.

4- An overview on the film the battle of Algiers

The Battle of Algeria is an Algerian historical war film produced in 1966, co-authored and directed by Gilo Pontecorvo and starring Brahim Haggaj as Ali Lapointe, Jean Martin and Yusef Sadi. The film chronicles a period of the Algerian people's struggle in Algiers during the great national liberation revolution from popular heroics against French colonialism. It was filmed in a news pattern inspired by Rossellini – black and white with a documentary editing style – often associated with the new real-life cinema.

The film is a cinematic symbol



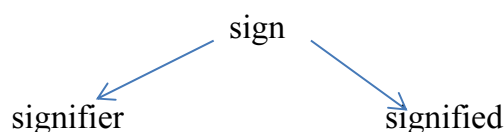
5. Methodology

The use of the method is an essential step in any scientific research, I have chosen to adopt semiology as a method as it is the most appropriate in image and symbolism studies.

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand De Saussure defined semiology as “the science of signs (Shappman, Christopher Routledge, 2009, p 120)

Roland Barthes has inverted the Saussurean postulation in his book elements of semiology i-e semiology is a part of linguistics, to be precise it is that part covering the great signifying unities of discourse” (Barthes, 1986, p 11).

According to De Saussure the linguistic sign is a concept and a sound image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound(De Saussure, 1959, p 66) , the impression that it makes on our senses” . He called them signifier and signified (Bouzida, 2023, p)



According to Roland Barthes, the signifier constitutes the plane of expression, and the signified refers to the plane of meaning.

The research is based on the Barthean approach of semiology which refers to signs and more elements of semiology to study visual communications like cinema, advertising ...etc. In more recent times Barthes asserted that while it is true that objects and images can signify , they never do so autonomously, that every semiological system has its linguistics admixture, and that where there is a visual substance the meaning is confirmed by being duplicated in a linguistic message for example in cinema (Jamieson, 2007, p 34)

The research based on the two levels of signification of semiology in the analysis of the film (The Battle of Algiers)

The denotation level refers to the simple reading of the film as a kind of image.

The connotation level refers with the deep reading of the film.

As semiology is used as a method of research, I have chosen observation as a tool of research and collecting data, by watching the film , the battle of Algiers, many times in order to get the different symbols.



6. Symbols in the Battle of Algiers film

The film of The Battle of Algiers is filled with symbolic images, it opens and closes with strong symbols.

A- The Algerian man

The symbols help the audience to fully understand all the film's complexities.

- the Algerian man in this film symbolizes, power, patriotism, struggling for freedom, the will, rebellion, and guerilla war.
- The main character in this film is the Moujahid Ali Lapoint who is a very famous Martyr in the Algerian revolution, he represents the power of the free Algerian man who denied the French colonialism that settled in Algeria for 130 years. He, like his friends, understood that liberation will not be achieved with peacedul means, and must prepare for military actions to defend their country.



Photogram n : 01

- Ali Lapoint is a symbol of Algerian revolutionary fighter and leader of the Algerian National Liberation Front guerrilla. He fought for Algeria's independence against the French colonial regime. He is an Algerian poor man like all Algerians in that period who rebelled against the French colonialism, The film portayed Ali Lapoint as a highly spontaneous, impulsive revolutionary young man who is inclined to life, also ready to die for his country, it is a war for defence.
- Ali Lapoint gained support among other Algerians in the city of Algiers to organize attacks

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against the French military forces.

- The man in this film represents the Algerian soldiers of FLN who organize different military operations and guerilla in the city of Algiers during the independence revolution.
- The Algerian man chose to fight and rebel for the independence of Algeria and this is an obligation from the religious Islamic perception that is called Jihad, Allah Almighty said in Quran : (fight in the way of God those who are fighting against you , and do not exceed the limits. Verily Allah does not love those who exceed the limits) (Surat Albaqara, verse 190). In this context the Algerians responded to the war by defending themselves.
- Guerrilla war was led by man in Algiers.
- The Algerian man represents strength, as a result of long process of resistance and popular movements for liberation.
- The Algerian man participated to internationalize the Algerian revolution.
- Algerian men disguised themselves as women.

b- The Algerian woman :

The Algerian woman played a pivotal role in the Algerian revolution between 1954- 1962, she disguised with her (Haik) which is a traditional Algerian modest, white dress that covers all the woman's body. The Algerian women pretended shopping in order to participate in the war of independence.



Photogram n : 02

- The film frequently claims that the woman is a heroine through the following symbols :
- Responsibility and rebellion : the Algerian woman joined the liberation movement in the urban and rural places. In this film the woman is a symbol of rebellion, fighting against the French military forces. Many women were an outstanding features of struggle and liberation war, they often disguise and dressed in a French style in order to participate in the guerilla of Algiers.
- most women in this film still hold on their Islamic and national identity by covering



themselves. when a French soldier wanted to inspect an Algerian woman, she told him : « Oh don't touch me , unbeliever ». :

- Power : the Algerian woman symbolizes power, from her deep belief of independence , they carry guns, letters discreetly because they were a source of confidence.
- Beauty : the use of woman in the Battle of Algiers film does not only symbolize fighting or rebellion, but she is also a symbol of beauty and gorgeousness.
- Martyrdom : many women died for their country, they sacrificed to liberate Algeria.
- Algerian men were presented in this film as a symbol of courage and perseverance, many French soldiers were killed by the Algerians by different ways and tools, in order to symbolize patriotism and consolidation between the Algerians.
- The FLN members were everywhere in Algiers to make many guerilla operations.

c- The Algerian child :



Photogram n :02

Children appeared in this film many times to express deep meanings and symbols. For example an Algerian intellectual child of a primary school reads a letter to Ali Lapoint in French. The child here was used to discuss many social, cultural, and political contexts that refer to the settlement of France in Algeria for more than a century, and its emphasis to delete the Algerian identity that is based on Arabic as a language and Islam as religion, also Algeria as a nation and homeland of all Algerians.

The child was used in this film to represent the Algerian's association to his homeland in a young age.

The child symbolises :

- Consciousness in a young age : children were used in the Algerian revolution, they represent consciousness.
- Culture and education: for example when Ali Lapoint told the child : « do you know reading ? » the child answered him : « yes I do », and he read the letter written in French. This event is related to socio-cultural dimensions and contexts, because education during the French colonization was in French language as an attempt to

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destroy the national identity of the Algerian people concerning language, religion, traditions ...etc

- Innocence: many children in the film were playing, laughing enjoying their childhood in the streets of Qasbah which is an outstanding example of the popular neighborhoods.
- The future : the Algerian children in the film are symbols of future generations that will participate to liberate and devolp their country.
- Happiness : the child represents the source of joy and happiness, Allah Almighty said in the Quran (wealth and children are the endornment of this worldly life, but the everlasting good deeds are far better with your Lord in reward and in hope) (surat Elkahf, verse 46).
- Love : children symbolize pure love, they are white pages and innocent.
- Nationalism as a sacred principle from childhood to death.

d- The French colonization:

France came to Algeria in order to settle and consider Algeria as a French part, thousands of settlers in Algiers and other cities came to live as a French Policy for settlement and apply its colonial projects using different ways like; delete the Algerian identity, ignorance of Algerian people, expulsion of Algerians abroad and many other ways to steel their lands that Marshall Bugeaud claimed in his famous slogan « par le feu et la charrue » ; « by fire and plow ». In this film they lived like landowners and took root.



Photogram n : 04

The settlement policy transformed the mosques to churches, making all the education systems under the French administration.

- France abused the human rights in Algeria, and practiced discrimination in all aspects of life between settlers and Algerians.
- France practiced more horror and torture to kill Algerians.
- Military forces everywhere, control the city of Algiers. A french millitant told an Algerian young man : « where do you go ? he answered : « I will go to the beach with my friends, few seconds he saw him again, and started to inspect him, and pushed him away in a bad



way, few seconds the Algerian young man killed him. This event symbolizes the French occupation and oppression.

- Algerians were called « assassin » by French settlers, which means killer in French language, they humiliated an Algerian man in the street of colonials, and told him to move, here, we ask the question : who is supposed to go ? few moments later, he was arrested by the French army.
- The colonials lived a French style of life in Algeria.
- Racism and unequal opportunities between settlers and Algerians.

e- Algiers

in French Algiers is called “Alger la blanche” which means the white city, the French colonial built a lot of buildings in order to settle forever using French architecture style, therefore, Algiers symbolizes:

- History: Algiers is the most important city in Algeria, played a pivotal role in the independence war, and its symbolic effects upon the people who belong to it. There are descriptive images, buildings, people, events ...etc that present more significant meanings.
- Culture: culture in Algeria is varied, thus, the capital Algiers has a specific culture as shown in this film like:
- The dressing style of women
- language and traditions
- system of life
- beauty in different manifestations
- Rebellion and freedom



Photogram n : 05

The Kasba appeared as an essential part of Algiers, it is an outstanding example of traditional settlement, representing the Muslim culture, and many traditions, it witnessed many guerrilla wars between 1954-1962.

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Photogram n :06

The kasba symbolizes:

- The Muslim culture: this culture occurs in many aspects of life like dressing, rituals in many manifestations like weddings, associations ...etc
- The traditions and national identity.
- It played an essential role in the liberation struggle of Algiers.
- Solidarity between the people of this popular settlement
- It was the epicenter of FLN attack planning against the French forces and settlers.
- The French armies launched many military operations in the kasba.

f- Music/ sounds/ voices

The filmmakers used specific and different musical pieces to symbolize in order to evoke emotions and tell something.

Table n:01 the symbol of music/sound/ voices

Music	symbols
Kerkabou (an Algerian musical instrument)	Algerian identity, danger, anxiety,
Piano and violin, saxophone	Danger, rebellion, worry, fear, sorrow
Ululations of Algerian women	Joy, freedom, revenge, victory
Narrator's voice	Power, fluency, serious



Screaming	Torture, oppression, pain
Gunfire/ shoot	Death, danger, fear

7- Symbols and representations in the battle of Algiers film

Symbolic representation is very powerful to convey meanings and discuss ideas, or stimulate emotions, in this film the symbols as we have seen participated in shaping representations about the Algerian history by:

- Showing the struggle of people in Algeria for independence
- Discover the contribution of all Algerian categories in the revolutionary war, as we have seen, men, women, children
- Independence and liberation have a heavy price
- Death is a source of birth for the future generations.
- France committed genocides and tortures against the Algerian citizens to protect its benefits.
- The film portrayed the French project to settle forever in Algeria.
- Algeria is considered as a French Part, and the colonist have the full rights.
- There was discrimination between the colonists and the Algerian citizens, in education, work opportunities and all aspects of life.
- The Algerian people struggled to protect their national identity although the bad policies to delete it.
- This film presents us with the ways we think and represent things, also with ideological perspectives.



8. CONCLUSION

This research provides us with insightful results and conclusion :

- ✓ Symbolism refers to abstract meanings and ideas.
- ✓ The battle of Algiers film represents the symbolic dimensions of the Algerian revolution for liberation.
- ✓ The filmmakers in this film used symbolism to document the struggle for Independence in the city of Algiers.
- ✓ The symbols derive from many contexts : political, social, cultural, religious.
- ✓ Symbols in this film occur in form of characters like : Ali Lapoint, the children, woman and the French colonial.
- ✓ Symbols also occur in form of places like the city of Algiers which is the capital of Algeria.
- ✓ The symbols related to socio-cultural dimensions of the Algerians and their identity and their system of life.
- ✓ Many symbols appeared in the music, sounds and voices like ; fear, danger, joy, torture
- ✓ The main abstract meanings of symbols are: power, patriotism, struggle, freedom, martyrdom, fight, responsibility, beauty, consciousness, culture, love, occupation, torture, genocide, oppression.
- ✓ symbols help the audience to understand the events significantly concerning the Algerian revolution ; the battle of Algiers in special.
- ✓ The film is a source of historical information about the different events in Algiers during the revolution for liberation.
- ✓ Symbols in this film are the building blocks of visual storytelling. They can range from recurring motifs, such as a red rose symbolizing love, to more abstract representations. These symbols connect with our subconscious and evoke emotions that enrich the cinematic experience of the audience.
- ✓ Metaphors and allegories allow filmmakers to tackle complex themes and societal issues in a way that engages the audience's intellect.
- ✓ By placing characters in symbolic situations, directors can comment on real-world scenarios without being overt.

To sum up, the film of the battle of Algiers contains significant symbols to express hidden meanings and ideas for audience and give more clarifications to the cinematic work that need different systems of communication that convey meaning.



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