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CINEMA IN AN AGE OF TERROR

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FRANCE OVERSEAS:

Studies in Empire and Decolonization

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Cinema in an Age of Terror

North Africa,
Victimization,
and Colonial
History

MICHAEL F. O'RILEY

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Introduction

Crumpling trade towers, suicide bombers, burning embassies, and tortured bodies have become commonplace images of what one might term the age of terror. Such images not only highlight the victimization of the perpetrated but also of the author of such acts, the terrorist. These spectacles of victimization raise questions as to what we are to do with such images and what type of response is appropriate. When accompanied by discourses referencing imperialist oppression as an underlying motivation, they also demonstrate the centrality of victimization and imperialist history in terrorist acts that have become commonplace today. The history of Western imperialism, for instance, was noted by terrorists as a key motivation in the World Trade Center attacks. My use of the phrase “the age of terror” is meant to designate a tendency in the post-cold war era of reciprocal forms of terrorism and torture where victimization referencing colonial history functions as a central organizing tenet of national and international relations.¹ While it is beyond the scope

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of this work to examine all of the various instances of terrorism and torture and the ways they are designated by perpetrators as acts of terror or simply of retribution, it is my objective to elucidate the ways that victimization and imperialist history can be understood to shape violence, occupation, control, and representation between nations and within them. The works examined in this book illustrate how reciprocal forms of violence and territorialism common to larger geopolitical patterns operate, and how many of them go further to demonstrate how victimization and the return of colonial history intricately connect to terror.

What is frequently at stake in spectacles of victimization related to acts of terrorism is the return of a history of imperialist victimization and an attempt to occupy or fully represent the position of victim. If, as Edward Said has argued, imperialism is characterized by territorialist encroachment, a cultural drive to occupy the position of the Other, then we might say that what characterizes the return of imperialist history today is the desire to occupy the position or territory of the victim.² In this way, the victim's position is the new space of the age of terror, where the victimized might generate other victims, the terrorized might terrorize, and the terrorized nation state might establish, at a very minimum, the illusion of control through its victimization of other nations. What is at stake is a contest over the space and image of the victim.

In this book I seek to demonstrate how filmic representations of colonial-era victimization can be understood to inform these dynamics. By examining works that represent colonial history and the dynamics of spectatorship that emerge from them, I attempt to demonstrate how the centrality of victimization in certain filmic representations of colonial history can help us understand how the desire to occupy the victim's position — to create a visual spectacle around it — is a dangerous yet blinding drive that frequently plays into the vision of terrorism. I examine how, in some instances, the focus on victimization from the colonial era found in certain films and acts of viewing simply precludes an engagement with concrete

problems of the age of terror that the films seek to address. In such cases I examine how the importance accorded to victimization in postcolonial representations of colonial history simply exacerbates cultural tensions. The works examined here all exemplify, in different ways, how a focus on the image of victimization in the representation of colonial history can prove to be a problematic perspective — one that seeks to occupy an ideological territory.³ In this way, they tell a story about the larger role that victimization and colonial history play today.

Contemporary instances of terror tend to be distilled into Samuel Huntington's famous diagnosis of the "clash of civilizations," opposing the West and Islam. As a catchword "the clash of civilizations" has acquired currency particularly in the wake of September 11. This perspective, replete with the categorization of cultural territory where the West and Islam occupy cultural zones, organizes itself through the very notion of potential victims of a clash.⁴ In recent attention to Huntington's formulation, the age of terror becomes identified with the competing claims of victims of terrorist violence.⁵ The films examined in this book speak to the vicissitudes of victimization as an organizing principle of representation and cultural claim. Some of them suggest that the claim of victimization and the fascination with it can easily lead to a repetitive cycle whereby the victim and victimizer become one and the same. Others demonstrate how the focus on victimization as a form of resistance is a misleading perspective.

This work emanates from a dearth of critical commentary on the relationship between contemporary incarnations of terrorism after September 11 and their relationship to colonial history. In the wake of September 11, cinema studies has not yet fully interpreted the status of cinematic representation and its relationship to terrorism. Cinema from and about North Africa remains an area that has received little attention despite its contextual relationship to terrorism and victimization. Recently, an upsurge in films focusing on North Africa's colonial history has been witnessed. The argument of this book centers on the ways this colonial history is represented against

the contextual backdrop of contemporary terrorism. Given that the colonial history germane to North Africa is often cited by terrorists as an underlying motive for their victimization of the West, it affords a particularly compelling case study. Moreover, the ongoing issues of cultural clash and negotiation emanating from the history of victimization and colonialism shared by North Africa and France provide important commentary on the context of terrorism and its relationship to imperialist history. An examination of some of the most popular international films from and about North Africa offers the opportunity to consider the relationship between victimization, colonial history, visual representations of terror, and terrorism.

Third Cinema, Resistance, and Victimization

Although the films I examine in this book would not all be considered strictly postcolonial by practitioners of postcolonial studies, they all address the status of the postcolonial representation of colonial history in our contemporary context. The works discussed in the following chapters present salient examples of the centrality of victimization in the visual representation of colonial history. More importantly, perhaps, they all provide the opportunity to consider the role of spectatorship in the return of colonial history. One of the central questions to emerge from this consideration is the status of resistance cinema within the age of terror, a relationship overlooked by theorizations of third cinema.

The most concerted effort to theorize the cinema of decolonization or postcolonial resistance cinema has been made in the conception of third cinema, which was first formulated in the late 1960s by the Argentine directors Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino.⁶ Solanas and Gettino imagined an aggressive cinema of political transformation that perceived of the camera as a weapon in nationalist struggle against Western imperialist ideologies. Characterized by the “long take” and realist aesthetics, third cinema was profoundly concerned with nationalist struggle and revolution. As a form of resistance to Western ideology, third cinema has become

known for its representation of colonial victimization. The exemplary case for most discussions of third cinema, for instance, has proven to be Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 film, *The Battle of Algiers*.⁷ Inspired by the Cuban revolution and the works of Frantz Fanon, third cinema was formulated against the conception of Hollywood cinema and conventional aesthetics. For Solanas and Gettino first cinema is a commercial cinema representing the values of the ruling classes. Hollywood cinema or the adoption of Hollywood style constitutes this category. Second cinema, although concerned with the cause of decolonization and the plight of formerly colonized countries and peoples, uses conventional cinematic technique and style. Third cinema, by contrast, was concerned exclusively with resistance through both style and technique.

The controversial Pentagon screening of *The Battle of Algiers* is one example that underscores the relationship of third cinema to the context of new forms of terrorism and hegemony that emerged in the wake of September 11. When the Pentagon screened Pontecorvo's 1966 film in late summer of 2003 as a pedagogical tool in its war on terror, it did so in the interest of understanding better the nature of Arab insurgency. Representing the plight of the colonized Algerian population and of the French colonizer during the Algerian War, Pontecorvo's film underscored the victimization at the heart of anticolonialist struggle. The Pentagon screening of the film was designed as a way for the U.S. government to understand the nature of Arab terrorism in relationship to Western occupation. This was particularly important given the beginning of American occupation in Iraq and the ensuing issues of terrorism it faced.

The irony of the Pentagon screening is that Pontecorvo's work is largely known as a leftist film, particularly as a new-leftist film of the 1960s and that decade of anticolonial struggle. *The Battle of Algiers* has become the emblem of anticolonial struggle and leftist-leaning politics. Viewed as a pedagogical tool for understanding analogous conflicts in Iraq after September 11 by the U.S. government, the film broadened its earlier spectator base to include those political groups

not readily identified with either leftist or anticolonial sentiment. The appropriation of the political film in the wake of September 11 raises questions about the return of the resistance film focused on colonial-era victimization in North Africa within the contemporary context. In particular the screening demonstrates how the spectacle of victimization and the victim's position can become appropriated in the name of terrorism. On one hand, the U.S. government's use of *The Battle of Algiers* represented a response to its perceived victimization by an Arab insurgency on September 11. On the other, it also represented a way of viewing the spectacles of victimization represented in the film in order to victimize others in the extension of its hegemony. This return of colonial history from North Africa on screen represents, we might say, a tactics of surveillance of Arab populations elsewhere and an attempt to repress resistance. In a larger sense the dynamics of spectatorship witnessed in the screening of *The Battle of Algiers* suggest the imperative of reevaluating third cinema in the age of terror and its attendant questions of victimization.

Discussion of resistance cinema has, by and large, remained framed by concerted attention to the terms outlined by Solanas and Gettino. Frequently, concern with the dialectical opposition of third cinema to first and second cinema organizes such discussions. Mike Wayne's recent work, *Political Cinema: The Dialectics of Third Cinema*, for instance, is deeply concerned with the theorization of the different categories of cinema and their relationship to one another.⁸ Ranjanna Khanna's recent discussion of *The Battle of Algiers* in relationship to the films of Assia Djebar situates the discussion of women's agency in relationship to both third and fourth cinema. For Khanna fourth cinema presents an oppositional term that cuts through the constraints of third cinema and its portrayal of women.⁹ Although Khanna admits that her work is less concerned with formulating a theory of resistance than in diagnosing the structural patterns that have led to the elision or inclusion of women in filmic narrative, her diagnosis proceeds through reference to third and fourth cinema and ultimately defines itself through the question of resistance.

Concern with the dialectics of the categories proposed by Solanas and Gettino reflects an ongoing desire to identify a cinema of profound resistance within the contemporary context. Teshome Gabriel's seminal work *Third Cinema in the Third World* encapsulates this desire to identify the potential for "a revolutionary transformation of society" in "films with social relevance and innovative style and, above all, with political and ideological overtones" (4). More recently, postcolonial cinema reflecting issues of cultural hybridity, multiculturalism, and diaspora has been compared to third cinema and, even when distinguished from it, understood to be synonymous with the resistance identified in third cinema. Hamid Naficy's discussion of North African films and cultural hybridity as an example of an "accented cinema" that shares the qualities of cinema *engagé* is perhaps the most important example of the way third cinema has become associated with other forms of postcolonial resistance cinema (31).¹⁰

My objective in evoking the debates surrounding third cinema and its variations is not to engage specifically with the terms of that debate, but rather to point out that what seems to be missing in the debate surrounding resistance and the representation of colonial history and its aftermath in cinema is an engagement with the context of terrorism. Even the recent volume *Rethinking Third Cinema*, which sets out to reconsider the status of third cinema in the contemporary context, makes no mention of the relationship of third cinema, or postcolonial cinema, to terrorism or the age of terror. Most works treating the status of postcolonial cinema, like those mentioned above, exhibit a policing of its terms, or an insistent attention to categorizations of resistance, in their concern with third cinema. What is most compelling in this attention to the resistant qualities of the terms of a cinema of decolonization is the critical fascination that still prevails with identifying resistance in films treating, by and large, the 1960s and that era's history of colonial resistance. Such attention raises a number of questions, some of which are evident in the Pentagon screening of *The Battle of Algiers*. First, do the issues raised by resistance films and the portrayal of victimization from

earlier periods of colonial history still hold relevance today in relation to neoimperialist issues? How might imperialist ideologies screen those portrayals of victimization and appropriate the very category of victim for their own uses to define the age of terror? What does the critical focus on colonial-era victimization in third cinema suggest about the ability of the critical response to confront the contemporary context? In other words, does a focus on the representation of colonial-era history as a political antidote suggest an incapacitated critical response with respect to the contemporary context? Lastly, does the victimization found in representations of colonial history present a dangerous ideology in the contemporary context?

In this book my concern is not to engage specifically with what constitutes resistance cinema or in a reevaluation of the aesthetic categories of third cinema. Rather, I am interested in what the return of colonial history and a focus on victimization within it in cinema from and about North Africa might mean within the contemporary context. I am concerned primarily with how returns of colonial history, such as those witnessed in the screening of *The Battle of Algiers*, inform the role of victimization in the representation of colonial history in our contemporary context. The films examined in this book and the dynamics of spectatorship they engage raise the question of whether the debate about resistance surrounding the representation of colonial history is still relevant given the nature of reciprocal victimization witnessed in recent manifestations of terror. In other words they ask whether the return of colonial history and victimization on screen might still constitute a form of resistance within the contemporary context.

Postcolonial Theory and the Return of Colonial History

The visual representation of victimization and the return of colonial history in North Africa occupy a significant position in the theorization of postcolonial resistance. An important strain of postcolonial theory treating the representation of colonial history is implicitly built upon the visualization of victimization. Interestingly, North

Africa proves to be a privileged site for these dynamics in postcolonial theory. In many postcolonial films treating North Africa, as in many postcolonial theories that reference the North African context, a focus on projecting or viewing the victim from colonial history is central. Frequently, such representations of the victim are conceived as a way of formulating resistance or effecting transformation for minorities. At worst, the focus on the victim's position, or the return of the spectacle of victimization suffered in the past, mirrors the ideological contest over the control of victimization we see in the age of terror. This is perhaps best exemplified in the way the Pentagon screening of *The Battle of Algiers* was very much about understanding and controlling the perceived threat of victimization to the United States identified in the film while simultaneously using that information as a way of thinking about the U.S. occupation — or victimization — of Iraq. However, at best, the focus on colonial-era victimization in these returns of colonial history often proves to be severed from the contemporary context they seek to transform.

Rachid Bouchareb's award-winning film *Days of Glory*, or *Indigènes*, is one example of a postcolonial film that seeks to return the history of colonization to the former colonizer. Focusing on North African colonized troops that served for France during World War II, Bouchareb's film attempted to bring the victimization that these colonized soldiers faced both during and after their service to the attention of the wider public. Moreover, screened shortly after the 2005 riots in France that found youths of Maghrebian heritage disenfranchised, the film sought to speak to a younger generation of Maghrebian youths. Indeed, the film did attract the attention of France's president Jacques Chirac. After screening the film Chirac agreed to raise the frozen pensions of the North African soldiers who fought for France and bring them in line with those of the French soldiers. However, this gesture seemed to have little to do with the youths of Maghrebian heritage or with the larger forms of repression and terror witnessed during the 2005 riots — and earlier versions of them — by the French government, namely the imposition

of sovereign law dating to the colonial era.¹¹ Such repression was also a part of a larger geopolitical conception of the division of the West and its Arab other, and was widely viewed as a fitting example of the “clash of civilizations.”

I evoke Bouchareb’s film here to demonstrate how the return of images of colonial-era victimization can at times be disconnected from the contemporary context of terror. While Bouchareb’s film was clearly successful in motivating Chirac, it is unclear to what degree Chirac’s acknowledgement of colonial history proved a simple gesture with little relevance to the contemporary issues of terror affecting citizens of North African heritage and origin in France. Like Bouchareb’s film, a good deal of postcolonial theory concerned with the projection of the image of colonial-era victimization proves questionable within the contemporary age of terror. Postcolonial theory, like the films I examine in this book, often focuses on imagining or projecting the dramatic spectacle of the colonial-era victim’s plight in relation to the colonizer.¹² In this way, a spectacle of the historical victim’s return takes precedence in the images of history presented.

Perhaps the most famous return of the victimizing gesture of colonial history in North Africa can be found in Malek Alloula’s examination of the Franco-Algerian postcard in *The Colonial Harem*. Like Bouchareb’s film, Alloula’s project is concerned with demonstrating the way the formerly colonized were victimized by the European colonizer. Like Bouchareb, Alloula is concerned with forcing the former colonizer to view its former subjects differently. Indexing the objectification of Algerian women through the obsessive gaze of the colonizer and the colonial postcard, Alloula’s book seeks to “return this immense postcard to its sender” as a form of postcolonial resistance (5). Alloula’s project seeks to return the gaze of the victimized nation of Algeria back onto the colonizer in an act of postcolonial defiance and representative agency. However, colonial history and its victimization in Algeria are returned not only to the sender in Alloula’s work, but also to the contemporary age of terror. Certainly, Alloula’s work has the quality of an archive

of one aspect of colonial history that is easily forgotten. However, as a work that is still widely read in the contemporary context, *The Colonial Harem* raises the question of how and whether the type of colonial-era victimization represented and returned by Alloula's work is still relevant to the contemporary context.¹³ Moreover, the gesture of defiance and victimization explicit in the work raises the question about whether the “clash of civilizations” between the West and its Other that has in many ways come to characterize the contemporary context does not upstage the work's revisionist qualities. The focus in Alloula's work becomes that of positioning or reversing the victim and victimizer positions to align with a division between the West and its Other. Although Alloula's work constitutes an attempt to expose the dynamics of the representation of colonial history, it is also a gesture organized around the victimizing position. My point here is not to align Alloula's postcolonial act of revisionist history with terrorist ideology, but rather to point out how works of postcolonial defiance focusing on colonial-era victimization frequently mirror divisions and cultural tensions that have come to define the age of terror. The question then becomes how we might view these works and the dynamics of spectatorship they engender as relevant forms of resistance within the contemporary context. Might it be better to view works such as *The Colonial Harem* as diagnostic tools for the dynamics of victimization rather than as defiant and resistant models for the contemporary context? Is the lesson to be learned from them not that the spectacle of victimization of colonial history remains central to divisions we see in the age of terror? Does a focus on victimization and divisions between a “Western” colonizer and the colonized that we see in postcolonial representations reproduce and exacerbate ideological divisions that often characterize terrorism today?

The fascination with the visual spectacle of colonial violence and victimization with respect to North Africa and, in particular, Algeria is common in much postcolonial criticism. Like Alloula, Robert Young is interested in the way the image of colonial-era victimization might

serve as resistance within the contemporary context. In *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* Young attempts to rethink political determination through a privileging of the anticolonial liberation struggles of North Africa.¹⁴ At the same time, however, Young's evocation of victimization in his discussion of the Algerian War fascinates the critical gaze with images of the colonial spectacle of violence, ultimately leading to a fixation with the colonial era that makes it difficult to see its relationship to the conditions of the age of terror he would like to resist. Young's interpretation of the images of colonial history demonstrates how the return of colonial history often focuses on victimization with little reflection on how that category and its contest contribute to contemporary tensions that, in part, produce the age of terror. I place particular emphasis here on the returning or projected images of victimization from colonial history as they relate to the contemporary context, because the films I examine in this work all raise the question of how we might see the relationship of colonial-era victimization to the present.

Young begins with an evocation of photos he claims disturbed him during the writing of the book and which provide a salient embodiment of the postcolonial according to him (ix).¹⁵ The first photo, titled "Les porteuses de bombes des stades: l'âge de Juliette, l'âme de Ravachol" (Stadium Bomb Carriers: The Age of Juliette, the Soul of Ravachol), presumably shows Djouher Akhor and Baya Hocine, the young unveiled Algerian women who were arrested for placing bombs in the Algiers and El-Biar stadiums on 10 February 1957 and whose history interested Simone de Beauvoir. Young's particular identification with victimization from colonial-era conflict in the photographic image obfuscates contemporary resistance and further removes his critique from the contemporary context.

In the intense gaze of the close-up shot of the two young women, Young distinguishes "a slightly sensual aura," a defiance that will turn the victimized women into victimizers (viii). The tension of this aura, found in the "defiant eyes" and "slightly parted" lips of one of the young women, is conflated with a solemn, if unveiled,

sexuality when Young characterizes the emancipatory nature of the photo as “Algeria unveiled indeed” (viii).¹⁶ The distancing of Young’s criticism by the conflation of the visual memento of victimization and fantasy of colonial-era sexuality and phallic dynamics is only reinforced by his evocation of a second photo, this time featuring a scene he identifies as homoerotic.

Young describes a “nature morte” depiction of four European men holding up a naked man, “clearly an Algerian,” as if “giving him the bumps, the homoerotic play of sportsmen” (ix). Here, Young detects the anxiety of the terrorized Algerian, whose exposed genitals evoke “a contorted ‘spread shot’ in a pornographic magazine,” in the man’s look of “abject fear, misery, and terror” (ix). The rather bizarre reference to homoeroticism here seems placed gratuitously to imbue the scene with the anxiety of a more historically situated, contemporary form of cultural conflict: “What were the colons about to do to him, as he was posed for the photograph, poised between life and death?” (ix). While it is difficult to imagine what is homoerotic in a scene of “abject fear, misery, and terror” defined by colonial struggle, it is clear that Young turns to the anxiety within the struggles of rape and seduction that permeate colonial space through reference to the affective dimensions of both homosexual and heterosexual psychic life. These colonial sites of victimization become an ideological space, according to Young, from which the ideals of postcolonial resistance might be derived. I evoke Young’s engagement with the visualization of victimization from the archive of colonial history to suggest how the spectatorship of colonial scenes of victimization can become invested in the desire to identify resistance to contemporary conditions of terror. Such desires, focused as they are on the victimizing impulse in colonial history, frequently signal an abyss between the represented images of colonial history and the contemporary context of viewing.¹⁷ Like many of the films and their receptions examined in this work, Young’s focus on and, one might say, imagination of the spectacle of victimization establish a questionable relationship between colonial history and the contemporary context of viewing.

In a similar manner, Iain Chambers focuses on the return of colonial history that might give rise to a questioning of contemporary forms of oppression while ultimately overlooking contemporary contexts. Chambers's attempt to visualize and situate the remnants of colonial history in North Africa within the European metropolis represents a broader postcolonial emphasis on the visual mapping of colonial history — an attempt to visually locate the traces of colonial history on the European cultural map. Like Bouchareb in *Days of Glory*, Chambers is concerned with situating and mapping colonial history within Europe as a mode of resistance. Although this mapping process is designed to awaken consciousness of colonial history, it is based on the concept of returning victimization and an ensuing division between the West and its Arab other.

Chambers turns to postcolonial France and its legacy of Arab immigration to illustrate the concept of the return of colonial history as a disruptive presence capable of transforming the Western consciousness into a victim-witness of its own history. Referring to an Arab scribe with a portable desk, wrapped in a *djellaba* and wearing a turban, Chambers claims that he can discern a disruptive presence in the history of colonial subjugation that the image provides (*Culture* 206). Chambers says that this encounter embodies a limit for occidental consciousness as it is haunted by the Arab and the history of colonialism and its failure that he represents: “The Arab scribe as referent of my discourse both unfolds towards me and away from me, is both object of my narrative and a subject in a world that is never simply mine” (206). In this situated encounter Chambers focuses on a form of postcolonial “anxiety” that comes from the encounter with colonial history, the return of the colonial repressed in the form of the Freudian *unheimlich*, or unhomely (207). This scene that “exceeds immediate understanding” for the Western witness, according to Chambers, provides an example of how the return of colonial history is frequently constructed as a haunting or victimizing spectacle (207).¹⁸ Here, the spectacle of the return of colonial history is based upon an artificially constructed

divide between the West and a removed Arab world. Indeed, it is difficult to see precisely what is “interruptive” in this normal encounter. Moreover, Chambers’ example is representative of the way the visualization of North African colonial history often serves as the basis for theories of resistance while remaining severed from the contemporary context. How, for instance, does the colonial history of North Africa relate to the contemporary context Chambers is addressing? What is the nature of the relationship between the Arab scribe and forms of globalization, for instance, as he waits, as Chambers tells us, for illiterate clients — immigrants from the Maghreb and elsewhere — to pay him a meager sum to write letters in Arabic? What is the relationship between the French colonial legacy and the contemporary forms of oppression experienced by Maghrebian immigrants?

In attempting to situate North African colonial history within the European metropolis, Chambers attempts to return colonial history to the European center, much like Malek Alloula. This return, not unlike the cinematic portrayal of colonial history on screen, functions as an attempt to inscribe or map colonial history as a visually victimizing presence within the contemporary context.

Like Alloula, Chambers, and Young, Homi Bhabha turns to the concept of the visual projection of colonial-era images of victimization as a way of placing the victims of colonial history on the European map. Rachid Bouchareb’s *Indigènes*, much like these postcolonial theories concerning the returning images of colonial history, is also structured by the cartographic process of placing victims on the European map. As the North African soldiers’ campaign moves from North Africa through the regions of France to the north, aerial maps serve as narrative devices that tell the larger story of the soldiers’ sacrifice and victimization. The maps not only locate the movement of the soldiers’ campaign but also serve to symbolically situate the history of their colonial victimization within France. Bouchareb demonstrates, like Bhabha and other postcolonial theorists, a keen interest in projecting the occluded

history of colonialism and its victims within the heart of European consciousness through the mapping process.

Bhabha's conception of a "belated" return of colonial history as a visual map of victimization is rooted, much like that of the films examined in this book, in the colonial history of victimization in North Africa. Much of Bhabha's theory of the belated return of colonial history can be traced to his engagement with what he calls "scenes" of oppression located in the work of Frantz Fanon and his discussion of colonial history in North Africa. A scene of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* describing how a Negro is subjected to racist terms serves as a recurring scene in Bhabha's work from which he devises the notion of a haunting colonial temporality, what he identifies as "the belatedness of the black man" (*Location* 236). Bhabha argues that Fanon's repetition of the scene/seen of oppression serves as a point of identification through which the colonial past and its scenes of oppression are reiterated and projected into modernity as a means of questioning "the ontology of man" (238). This belated return of colonial history, according to Bhabha, revises the very dynamics of the black man's subjection and of the white man's supremacy.

According to Bhabha the belated temporality of colonial history and its repressed subjects is an essentially disruptive force. Bhabha thus draws upon what he calls the "memorial map" of "Slavery, War, Holocaust, migration, diaspora" as histories that might counter contemporary experiences of transnational culture that create inequalities ("World" 203). The colonial past is "repeated" or "projected" in the present and therefore disrupts "the continuum of history" (*Location* 254, 257). This disruption is based upon a mapping process that attempts to visually project colonial history and its attendant questions of victimization into the present. What remains central to this belated return of colonial history, we might say, is the territory of the victim or the spectacle of the victim's claim to space and territory within the contemporary context. My claim in this book is that the spectacle of victimization we see in many films about North Africa is problematic because it ultimately

reveals an ideological contest over the territory of the victim — a contest to occupy the victim’s position or to control the territory that we frequently see displayed in the spectacular events of terror within our contemporary context.

Cartographies of Victimization

The intersection of history, visual plotting, and ideology has recently been identified in cinema as a mapping process. Tom Conley’s formulation of cinema as a cartographic process that maps or situates history and the imaginary of the spectator is similar to the cartographic processes implicit in postcolonial theories of the return of colonial history and its victimization. For Conley a film can be understood in a broad sense to be a map “that plots and colonizes the imagination of the public it is said to invent and, as a result, to seek to control” (1). A film, like a topographic projection, is an image that incites the viewer to see the world in relation to its own conception of space and being. Implicit in Conley’s conception of cinema as a cartographic process is an underlying conception of victimization. The projected image acts upon the viewer and space in a contest to occupy ideological territory or “to victimize” the spectator.¹⁹ In a similar manner, the postcolonial conception of the return of colonial history, as I have outlined above, is frequently based upon the projected image of victimization and its control over the ideological position or territory of the victim. What is imperative is the process of putting colonial history on the map.

The returns of colonial history examined in this book all engage with the creation of what we might call cartographies of victimization. The representations of colonial history and its aftermath that they portray all engage with what it means to “map” the history of colonial victimization within the age of terror. Although all of the films and the issues of spectatorship examined in this work don’t necessarily include literal maps showing victims, they do raise the question of what it means to project colonial history as a history of victimization within the present. In this sense, they all raise the

fundamental question of the ideological consequences of the return of victimization as a central organizing structure. As such, they underscore how the desire to control the projection or representation of victimization remains at the heart of the representation of colonial history.

It is not surprising that North Africa plays a central role in postcolonial discussions of victimization and colonial history. The desire to imagine or map colonial history from North Africa is understandable. The extended history of French imperialism in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia has created an intermingling of Western and indigenous cultures. That mixture of cultures and the tensions it has produced have proven particularly difficult for Algeria and Tunisia to realize the promises of independence from the colonial power that were implicit in the decolonization movement — namely, democracy and peaceful coexistence of populations. The centrality of the Algerian War as a point of reference for the struggle between the West and colonized Algerians is an important explanation for a great deal of the postcolonial interest in North Africa; it served as a defining moment for North Africa and for the Western imaginary that sympathized with the decolonization movement.²⁰

The reason for my focus on North Africa in this book is based in part on the prevailing tensions of colonial history found in the area. It is also based on the fact that North Africa remains a region where larger issues of the age of terror are reflected through the projection or insistence of that colonial history. The confrontation of Western ideals and more extremist versions of Islamic fundamentalism, particularly in Algeria, has produced a civil war replete with terrorist attacks, suicide bombers, and executions. In many ways this situation has simply reproduced the anticolonialist framework of the 1960's independence struggle that opposed the French to North Africans. In this case, though, the conflict is filtered through the opposition of the West and Islamic fundamentalism, an opposition that has come to structure the conception of the

age of terror. Most importantly, perhaps, oppositions related to culture, history, and territory that one finds in North Africa are also emblematic of larger patterns.

The spectacles of victimization that result from such oppositions raise the question of the specter of colonial history. In focusing on films from and about North Africa, this book seeks to explore the larger role that the focus on victimization from colonial history plays in terror. The films I examine all demonstrate how the return and insistence on victimization from colonial history can align with the ideological divisions of the age of terror. These divisions between the West and an Arab world are based upon the image of victimization and the desire to appropriate that image as witnessed in the Pentagon screening of *The Battle of Algiers*. The films I examine speak to our understanding of the contemporary geopolitical context because they demonstrate how victimization remains at the center of a neocolonial dynamics of terrorism that divides the world into Manichean spheres.

This book could be considered a compilation of reflections on the process of mapping colonial-era victimization — its returns, appropriations, and spectacles — in the age of terror. In the first two chapters I consider, respectively, the role of victimization in the returns of colonial history in Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* and in Bouchareb's *Days of Glory*. In the first chapter I examine how films like *The Battle of Algiers* are viewed as being subversive in relation to the "age of terror" as a way of reformulating notions of third cinema after September 11. This chapter explores how postcolonial resistance cinema becomes appropriated and what the appropriation of visual scenes of victimization from colonial history implies for terrorism and its responses. In the second chapter I explore how Bouchareb's attempt to bring the history of North African soldiers who fought for France to the attention of the public functions in the context of the widespread terrorism and riots that France experienced in 2005. This chapter tackles the political stakes of the representation of colonial history and its relationship

to what was termed the “clash of civilizations” in France. In the third chapter I examine Michael Haneke’s film *Hidden*, or *Caché*. The film demonstrates how Algeria and its former colonizer remain haunted by the colonial era, victims of the intransigent hold of a colonial past that remains invisible, yet continues to structure cultural memory today. Haneke’s film ultimately demonstrates that the desire to view and retrace the history of colonial victimization is symptomatic of the postcolonial inability to see outside the recurring paradigm of victimization from colonial history. Chapter 4 explores how the popular cinema of Maghrebian filmmakers of North African heritage, such as Yamina Benguigui, Soraya Nini, Azouz Begag, and Merzak Allouache, represents the Maghreb in relationship to the process of “Arab” cultural integration in the West. In this chapter I demonstrate how victimization is frequently integral to the establishment of an East-West polarity in films that portray the immigrant legacy of colonial history. I examine how different filmmakers treat the question of the “clash of civilizations” and argue that its representation within the context of terrorism today is a problematic move. My objective in re-reading these popular films in this way is to examine the stakes of their focus on victimization and cultural integration projected within the contemporary context. A comparison of these works demonstrates that the refusal of the victim’s posture is central to arresting the cycle of victimization in the age of terror. In chapter 5 the work of Algeria’s award-winning author and filmmaker Assia Djebar is of central concern. In that chapter I examine how Djebar’s turn to Julien Duvivier’s famous colonial-era film, *Pépé le Moko*, serves as the basis for commentary on the pervasiveness of the victim’s attitude in North Africa. Djebar’s work explores how the inability to see outside the victim’s paradigm established by the French colonial presence has perpetuated a bloody cycle of victimization in North Africa. Through an interpretation of Djebar’s use of Duvivier’s colonial film, I show how the filmmaker addresses the politics of fundamentalism in Algeria and identifies the role that colonial

history plays in terrorism today. Djébar's rewriting of Duviérier opens the door to the interplay of history and the contemporary world as well as to a rupture in the cycle of victimization.

The works examined in this book all accommodate the spectacle of victimization from colonial history. Their return of colonial history to our contemporary context, although frequently problematic, enables us to see how victimization is very much about territory — cultural, spatial, and ideological. In so doing they demonstrate that the nature of resistance to new forms of imperialist warfare and terror today must be located outside the haunting images of victimization from colonial history. Such images ultimately only return as spectacular acts that draw our attention away from the cyclical contest over territory that they embody. This said, those images of victimization shall have the last word.