

Colonial Legacies in Contemporary French Cinema

Jews and Muslims on Screen

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The displacements of immigrants, émigrés, and refugees from North Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Far East have dramatically inflected continental European geopolitics since the mid-1990s. French and francophone filmmakers have taken a particular interest in exploring this transnational landscape in feature films that reflect the multiple histories of Muslims and Jews in metropolitan France and in the Maghreb, and the challenges of assimilation into French society.¹ These multicultural cinematic narratives of immigration and emigration, with dialogue in several languages, foreground encounters between immigrants and their children, negotiating questions of subjectivity and community and contesting cultural, religious, and ethical notions of French identity. Following the trajectories of protagonists located in metropolitan French urban space as well as in Maghrebi settings, they portray a diasporan, globalized, creolized environment imbued with the legacies of France's colonial history.² Each addresses the intergenerational cultural barriers that connect and separate immigrants and their children, demonstrating linkages between personal and national history and foregrounding transformative experiences of exile, nostalgia, and return.

La Haine/Hate (1995)

Mathieu Kassovitz's début feature, *La Haine* (1995), was the first major French release to focus fully on the French *banlieue* (suburb) over the course of a fateful day in the life of three marginalized friends of immigrant descent: an Arab Muslim, a North African, and a Jew. Shot in black and white from the point of view of its working-class protagonists, the film garnered Kassovitz the directing award at the Cannes Film Festival and the Best Picture prize at the French César Awards.³ On the tenth anniversary of its release, *La Haine* returned to the spotlight as

A Companion to the Historical Film, First Edition. Edited by Robert A. Rosenstone and Constantin Parvulescu.
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civil unrest erupted in the fall of 2005, beginning in the Parisian *banlieue* of Clichy-sous-Bois and spreading to other *cités*. The *émeutes* (riots) were triggered when police were called to a construction site to investigate a possible break-in. Three teenagers, fearing arrest, climbed a wall to hide in a power sub-station, and this led to the electrocution of two boys, Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré; a third boy, Muhittin Altun, suffered electric shock injury from the power sub-station. The events resulted in an explosion of rage and resentment among the children of North African and African immigrants in the suburbs of French cities and in the declaration of a state of emergency by then president Jacques Chirac that remained in effect for three months.⁴ On his personal blog, Kassovitz attacked then Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy for polarizing, racist remarks that referred to the rioters as *racaille* (scum), to which Sarkozy offered a point-by-point rebuttal. During his election campaign for the presidency of the French Republic, Sarkozy further inflamed public opinion by proposing the creation of a Ministry of Immigration and National Identity; this was seen by many as a racist and xenophobic move designed to attract the nationalist voters of Jean-Marie Le Pen's far-right Front National, whose slogan was "France, Love It or Leave It."

The continuing influence of *La Haine* is attributable in no small measure to its status as a social document: the Criterion Collection DVD (digital versatile disc), issued in 2005, includes 30 minutes of interviews with sociologists on the plight of the *banlieues*, and a feature-length documentary about the making of *La Haine* opens with news footage of the *banlieue* riots that inspired it – a sequence that mirrors the opening scenes of the film itself, with its documentary footage of the riots. The archive material alternates with fictional narrative, intensifying the mood of documentary authenticity. Kassovitz employs numerous tracking shots and elaborately staged long takes that, together with a dynamic hip-hop soundtrack, imbue the film with a hyper-kinetic atmosphere; the real-time unfolding of events further intensifies its realism. The César Award-winning cinematography of Pierre Aïm calls attention to the cinematic apparatus in a provocative manifesto against the "bourgeois" filmmaking that had long dominated French cinema, in much the same way as *nouvelle vague* (new wave) filmmakers four decades earlier had rejected literary adaptations and studio-based productions of an earlier era (see Figure 24.1).

The director frames his figures in bold relief against the stark spaces of urban housing projects, heightening the sense of enclosure and hopelessness that led to the crisis in 2005 and suturing the viewer's gaze within the protagonists' rebellious stance. To critics who doubted the plausibility of the director's portrayal of friendship between a *beur* and a Jew, Kassovitz responded by affirming his bold argument in favor of a socially progressive agenda on behalf of the young people of French Arab ancestry populating the urban *cités*. *La Haine* galvanized a young generation of filmmakers committed to articulating these issues long repressed in French national discourse.



Figure 24.1 *La Haine* (1995). Director: Matthieu Kassowitz. Producer: Christophe Rossignon

La Petite Jérusalem (Little Jerusalem, 2005)

A decade after the release of *La Haine*, Karin Albou's first feature, *La Petite Jérusalem* (2005), is set in 2002, in the wake of the second Intifada, in the Parisian *banlieue* of Sarcelles known as La Petite Jérusalem.⁵ Albou's second feature, *Aïd el-Kébir* (1999; Grand Prix, Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival) focuses on Algeria, her parents' homeland; her most recent film, *The Wedding Song (Le Chant des mariées)*, was released in 2009. According to the director, herself from a North African Sephardic background,

People think that Jews live in the wealthy center of Paris, but a part of the Jewish population lives with Muslim and African immigrants in low-income suburbs and *cités* [...] Many *banlieue* films deal with other populations – Antillais, *beurs*, blacks, Arabs – but not Jews (Portuges 2009). I thought it was more interesting to place my story in this suburb, one of the most important, emblematic centers of North African immigration to France [...]⁶

Here, in an ultra-Orthodox Sephardic Tunisian family's cramped apartment, Laura, a student, rejects both her sister Mathilde's obsession with Halachic law and her mother's interpretation of Orthodoxy; she chooses instead the secular rigors of Kantian philosophy and her attraction to Djamel, an Algerian co-worker. Prompted by recent anti-Semitic attacks on a nearby synagogue, Ariel (her brother-in-law) orders Laura to suspend her evening walks in the *quartier* (neighborhood), a ritual she observes in honor of Kant's daily promenade along an unvarying itinerary, *le chemin du philosophe* ("the philosopher's route"). While Laura refuses to obey

Ariel, Djamel's Muslim family is equally opposed to his involvement with a Jewish woman and, when they insist that she convert, Djamel ends the relationship. In a key sequence set in Djamel's family home, his father asks him, in Arabic, why he could not have found a suitable Muslim partner: "*Laura ce n'est pas un nom arabe!*"⁷

Within this *mise-en-scène* of Jewish communal space, *La Petite Jérusalem* places gender, female desire, and the relationship of two sisters at the heart of its argument. The alternating dynamic between private and public stages the scene for Mathilde's and Ariel's inability to experience sexual intimacy and for the infidelity to which he is ostensibly driven by his wife's inhibitions. Two sequences set in the *mikvah* – the Orthodox Jewish women's ritual bath – focalize Mathilde's slender body and long, dark hair as the object of the camera's intense gaze; there, in that private women's space, in dialogue with the *tukerin*,⁸ the woman in charge of the *mikvah*, she begins to reconcile her commitment to Orthodoxy with a Talmudic acceptance of erotic pleasure within traditional marriage. Visually and discursively, the sacred is linked with the profane, allowing us to consider – with Kant – the possibility of an eventual synthesis. Similarly, the film explores the potential yet contested terrain of intimacy between Jews and Muslims, in a series of erotically charged shots of Laura and Djamel changing into work clothes, standing back to back in the locker room of the institution where they are employed as custodians. The camera's gaze unflinchingly observes their sense of danger, discomfort, and transgressive attraction, which culminates in a scene of passionate connection. (See Figure 24.2.)



Figure 24.2 *La Petite Jérusalem* (2005). Director: Karin Albou. Producers: Laurent Lavole and Isabelle Pragier

By exploring the interplay between sexuality and religion, *La Petite Jérusalem* proposes a link between cultural intimacy and historical memory, evoking the lost harmony of an idealized North African past. Contemporary migrant subjects, Laura and Djamel are marked as originating from different nations as well as religions – he, from Algeria; her family, from Tunisia. What begins as an interrogation of the ostensible differences between Jews and Muslims proves ultimately to be over-determined by nationality and gender. When Laura finds a talisman under her bed, and when her mother uses a folk remedy to cure her depression, one is reminded of popular Maghrebi beliefs and practices ascribed both to Muslims and to Jews. When their Tunisian mother shows Mathilde a photo taken at La Goulette, the port of Tunis, 20 years earlier, she invites reflection on connections rather than differences between Jews and Muslims, recalling Ferid Boughedir's *Un été à La Goulette* (1995), set during the summer of 1966 in the small beach resort near Tunis shortly before the Arab–Israeli War; there three 16-year-old girls – Meriem the Muslim, Gigi the Jew, and Tina the Catholic – vow to lose their virginity at the same time, with a boy from a religion other than their own. The girls' decision tests the friendship among their fathers – Youssef the Muslim, Jojo the Jew, and Giuseppe, the Sicilian Catholic. According to the director,

How could I, as an Arab Muslim living in an Islamic country, speak as honestly as possible of the friendship and tolerance between Jews and Arabs, between Muslims and Catholics in Tunisia, at a time when people are killing each other because of their religion, and when fundamentalists try to impose a single thought upon others? How could I speak of the everyday sensuality of my society, which has always managed to put life above all dogma? By speaking of these simple things that I had experienced [...] in La Goulette. (Author's translation)⁹

But, unlike the restored intimacy between Mathilde and Ariel, the relationship between Laura and Djamel is doomed to failure: its emblems are Djamel's scars, presumably acquired in a violent attack against him as a journalist in Algeria, where, as an independent intellectual, he had begun writing a book on the first Arab woman Sufi poet. In the most literal sense, the scars on his body re-echo the violence that has claimed more than 150,000 lives since 1991. As a journalist critical of religion, Djamel had been targeted by armed Islamist groups, the film seems to imply, and had fled, without legal standing, to France. In a French context the scars are also emblematic of the torture and violence perpetrated by the French army and police during the Algerian War of Independence – a highly charged topic, which has reemerged in the last few years in a number of French productions.¹⁰ Djamel's status as an “undocumented” refugee (*sans papiers*) also references current French debates over the rights of undocumented migrants. Yet *La Petite Jérusalem* offers no seamless closure. The political and personal significance of Djamel's past is left unresolved, for he disappears from the narrative toward the end of the film; the final shot of Laura frames her alone, in French space, on the metro escalator in her neighborhood, inviting the viewer to reflect on the consequences of erotic violence, the violent eroticism of visual intimacy, and the legacy of colonialism.

That the camera focuses only rarely on public space beyond the domestic confines of the home further underscores the film's status as a chamber piece, particularly in view of the ways in which the world outside inflects the narrative. For, despite the location of Sarcelles and the fact that the Jewish family members speak both French and Hebrew together, the French nation is evoked only tangentially, as in a scene set in Laura's philosophy class where the professor asks her to elaborate on Kant's concept of freedom, and in exterior shots of the *cit  *'s multiracial population on the street and in the metro. The most notable and dramatic absence, however, is that of the Arab community – in particular the Muslim Algerians, figured through the character of Djamel.¹¹ The Jewish protagonists occupy the foreground, while the Muslims remain in the background; the viewer is led to assume that what transpires in this largely invisible, contested zone between the communities leads to the Jewish family's ultimate decision to make *aliyah* to Israel, being driven primarily by an unprovoked attack on Ariel during a soccer match (Shohat 1988). Yet the historical and political contexts are figured only as a shadowy backdrop, one that the filmmaker interpolates without offering the evidence that might more fully explain their importance (Valensi and Udovitch 2008). Laura tells Djamel's relatives that she was born in Djerba, an island off the southeast coast of Tunisia, "near the synagogue" – one of the most venerable Jewish communities in the Mediterranean, where in 1997 a suicide bomber detonated a truck bomb. Albou purposely set the film in 2002, referencing anti-Semitic attacks on schools in Sarcelles and on a synagogue in neighboring Goussainville. Although the violence occurred after the second Intifada, some reports made a connection between the two events. While the film implies that it is masked Arabs who attack Ariel on the soccer pitch, some historians suggest that the attackers were more likely neo-Nazi skinheads.

La Petite J  rusalem raises urgent questions of religious interpretation, interethnic conflict, and gender identity in contemporary French urban space; its allusive references to Muslims and Jews engage both communities in attenuated fashion, leaving the viewer with a somewhat elusive sense of what both unites and separates them (Benbassa 2001). In what is perhaps an unintended irony, Laura's Orthodox Sephardic family prepares to emigrate to Israel, hoping to exchange an overcrowded Paris flat in the *banlieue* for a four-story house, as fantasized by the children when they play a game of Lego. As Ella Shohat, herself a Baghdadi Jew, has argued, the imagined community of their dreams is likely to be rather less welcoming to this Sephardic family than to Ashkenazim Jews of European descent.

***Marock* (2005)**

The Moroccan–French co-production *Marock* (2005) is also a d  but feature directed by a young woman filmmaker: La  la Marrakchi (born in 1975 in Casablanca) is a Muslim married to a Sephardic Jew and educated at the Universit  



Figure 24.3 *Marock* (2005). Director: Laïla Marrakchi. Producers: Stephanie Carreras and Adeline Lecallier

of Paris III, where she received a DEA (Diplôme d'études appliquées) in Cinema and Audiovisual Studies. The film is based on the director's own adolescent experience. Provocatively challenging traditional Muslim taboos, *Marock* was the most successful Moroccan production of 2006: despite its controversial scenes, the film screened in cinemas without censorship or editing.¹² The main protagonist is Rita, a rebellious daughter in a family of Casablanca's high society who is approaching graduation from high school; she and her friends drink whiskey, smoke hashish, eat during Ramadan, and indulge in wild parties and romantic intrigue. Rita's youthful hedonism is challenged when she falls for the handsome daredevil Youri, a Sephardic Jew. While her friends accept the affair, she conceals it from her parents and her religiously conservative older brother. Marrakchi grew up in the world of the *jeunesse dorée* (gilded youth) depicted in *Marock*. Her experience in a Morocco renowned for religious tolerance, home to a centuries-old Jewish community, leaves her few illusions about testing the boundaries of that world: "I knew in making this film that some things were going to cause discomfort, notably the love relationship between a young Muslim and young Jew. But for me, it is a symbol of peace and tolerance in a complicated world" (*Marock* 2005; see Figure 24.3).

While anti-Jewish feeling has accompanied moments of political tension, and Jewish religious and community sites were targeted in bombing attacks in Casablanca in 2003, Moroccan Jews and Muslims have generally coexisted peacefully. Although some secularists and liberals championed *Marock* as a step toward greater freedom of expression, debating it for months in print media and on the Internet, others considered it a "needless attack on Islamic values," taking particular offense to a scene in which Youri places his Star of David medallion around Rita's neck.¹³ Upon its release in Moroccan cinemas in 2005, *Marock*

generated outspoken and conflicting reactions from its audiences. The film's audacious exploration of certain "taboo" practices of the Moroccan bourgeois youth was certainly a catalyst for many conflicting reactions from its viewers. Despite its wide appeal to young and urban viewers, *Marock* was attacked by numerous media outlets as well as by prominent individuals in political and the cultural arenas, in a political debate that reflected the tendencies of divergent political constituencies and ideological positions during an important historical conjuncture. Secularists and liberals praised the filmmaker's courage to embrace freedom of expression, while conservatives, especially political parties, exploited the film to promote their ideological stances, castigating Marrakchi for using profanity and for showing disrespect for Islamic values that allegedly unite Moroccans (Hirchi 2011).

Mauvaise foi/Bad Faith (2006)

Although similar to *La Petite Jérusalem* and *Marock* in its foregrounding of romance between a young Jewish woman and a Muslim man, *Mauvaise foi* (2006) considers this charged subject directly rather than tangentially. Despite its formal location within the French cinematic genres of comedy, romantic comedy, or *comédie dramatique*, to a French speaker familiar with French literary history its title implies a more philosophical subject than those genres might suggest. Invoking the existential concept of "bad faith" – inauthenticity and self-deception – and questioning the denial of one's own potential for freedom, the title is also a *jeu de mots* signifying those who do not share the same religion, and suggesting perhaps that it is the rigidity of religious observance itself that is "bad."

Ismaël (played by Roschdy Zem) is a conservatory music teacher of Maghrebi origin, Clara (played by Cécile de France) a psychometrician from a Jewish family. Together they compose a vibrant couple in multicultural, secular France – until, that is, they confront a moment of truth with the discovery of Clara's pregnancy, which forces the couple to confront the deeper implications of *mixité*, while their parents remain attached to the traditional customs, faith, and attitudes of their own ethnic origins. Such intergenerational disparities become the narrative core of *Mauvaise foi*, and they are handled at once with gravity and amused detachment in this directorial début by Roschdy Zem, the distinguished French actor of Moroccan descent who grew up in the *banlieue* of Seine-Saint-Denis.

One of France's most popular actors, Zem has performed in over fifty films with the industry's leading filmmakers, including Rachid Bouchareb, director of *Days of Glory* (*Indigènes*; France/Algeria, 2006), which has represented Algeria in the 2007 Oscars for Best Foreign Language Film. *Days of Glory* tells the little-known story of the *indigènes*, the African colonial recruits whose battalions played a key role in the 1944–1945 liberation of France and Italy. The film is set in 1944. Occupied France was on its knees, when General De Gaulle began a recruiting drive in North Africa that attracted some 230,000 men, many of whom had never set foot

in the *patrie* (homeland) they now pledged to help liberate. The ensuing campaign, which pushed north from Provence as far as Alsace, played a critical role in the war, diverting Nazi resources both from the Allied offensive in the West and from the Soviet army on the eastern front. In 1945 these soldiers were briefly hailed as heroes. Soon afterwards, however, while the Normandy landings and the battle of Stalingrad were enshrined in history books, the Armée d'Afrique (Army of Africa) was largely forgotten, even by the Arab community. Many of the cast members – children and grandchildren of veterans – knew little or nothing about this chapter of history, nor did Zem himself: “I only discovered in the archives that my grandfather’s brother had fought in World War II. My family had never talked about it. I think this is something very oriental. You don’t pass on the painful aspects of the past. It’s a way of protecting your children.”

Recruited in Africa in order to avoid control from the Nazi commissioners and Vichy authorities, the 130,000 *indigènes* (including North Africans, Africans, and *pièds-noirs* – that is, French colonials) confronted intense racism at every turn (*Indigènes/Days of Glory*). For Zem, who plays the role of the élite *tirailleur* (rifleman) Messaoud, *Indigènes* is

a humble film whose goal is that people know and remember [...] the character was created by combining all the historical documents Rachid had given us and by working on the attitude, the manner of speech, and the behavior of these Maghrebis, which are not the same as those of our second generation. I speak Arabic, so my own work concentrated more on mastering the French that was spoken at that time, with its particular accents, while avoiding caricature. (Author’s translation)¹⁴

Roschdy Zem was awarded Best Actor for his portrayal of Messaoud at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival, along with the ensemble male cast, which included Jamel Debbouze (Said), Samy Naceri (Yassir), Bernard Blancan (Martinez), and Sami Bouajila (Abdelkader), all of Maghrebi origin.¹⁵ It was the first time in the history of French cinema that such international recognition had been bestowed upon film actors of Arab/Muslim background. Depicting North African soldiers’ sacrifices for the French during World War II, Rachid’s wrenching tale of discrimination and valor brought new respect from France for these veterans – not to mention deserved pension increases.

The project for *Mauvaise foi* was proposed to Zem by his producer, who invited him to write a screenplay about an ethnically mixed couple; this Zem accomplished in collaboration with his close friend, the Sephardic Jewish actor and screenwriter Pascal Elbé, using as inspiration his own childhood experience, in a conscious effort to avoid the stereotypes associated with cinematic portrayals of Arab protagonists as villains, criminals, subalterns, or exoticized others.¹⁶

Such a transition from actor to writer/director would seem natural enough for Zem in the context of a film focused on issues of fundamentalism, secularity, and immigration in a French Republic dedicated to *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*, and

specifically to upholding *laïcité* (secularism) – in a nation, that is, in which large ethnic, racial, and religious communities coexist in varying degrees of harmony and tension.¹⁷

I'm a Muslim, my wife is Jewish, and we have two little girls. I was tired of hearing about a handful of crazy Islamists when the great majority of France's 6 million Muslims are respectful of the laws of the republic. I don't recognize myself in that face of Islam that's shown in the media. I grew up in Seine-Saint-Denis, where there were people of every religion, so we didn't discuss it – it was reserved for the intimacy of family life. We went to each other's apartments in the housing projects for a communion, a bar-mitzvah, or the feast of Eid-ul-Fitr without any problem . . . What bothers me is people who insist on making their religion take the foreground – kids of 12 who observe Ramadan ostentatiously. I think religion should be private and invisible. (*French Première* 2006)

What happens, the film asks us to consider, when traditional Muslim and Jewish practices are suddenly thrown into bold relief? Zem challenges his young protagonists with the consequences of a spiritual heritage they have circumvented, without suspecting its potential role as an integral factor of their familial and social environment. Having elided the matter of religious and ethnic difference in their own lives and in those of their respective families, they are unprepared for the intense – if not outright hostile – reactions they encounter in the face of what might be identified as a *prise de conscience* of the implications of their situation as a couple in contemporary France. The historical context of *Mauvaise foi* is pertinent: when Nicolas Sarkozy announced a reshuffling of his government, marking the end of appointments of high-profile women from ethnic minorities, Senegal-born Rama Yade, one of the most popular politicians in France, was dropped from the sports ministry after she made critical comments at the expense of her political mentor; at the same time, the left-wing feminist campaigner Fadéla Amara was ejected from her role as minister in charge of ameliorating conditions in the *banlieues*, having criticized the “inertia and sectarianism” she encountered while in office. Sarkozy also terminated one of the most controversial creations of his 2007 electoral campaign – the notorious Ministry of Immigration and National Identity. There was no suggestion that the president's fundamental stance on immigration, including the round-ups of Roma encampments, would change. Zem has said:

When there is suffering, people fall into the trap of extremism. The Islam that I wanted to talk about in *Mauvaise foi* – that of the second generation of immigrants – is simply spiritual. That's what we wanted to show: the Jewish characters are French before being Jews and the same is true of the Muslims. (Quoted in Bouchareb 2010)¹⁹

For Zem, Albou, and others of their generation, the structure of the couple is itself seen as a problematic and complicated entity; taking into consideration as well the question of *mixité*, the romantic pairing of two people of different faith, class,

ethnicity or race, the potential for conflict is intensified. If indeed *Mauvaise foi* may be considered to be a narrative about compromise, as the director has stated – if, for that matter, it is a story about differences between religious faith and cultural tradition – the film’s *mise-en-scène* places the cinematic apparatus in the service of a comedic genre in which religious difference and custom become a basis for sharing rather than dividing, for tolerance rather than conflict or antagonism. Narration, montage, and composition combine to produce in the viewer a sense of the connections among protagonists, a desire to encourage curiosity and discovery rather than fear of the other – as in the scene where Clara’s mother reacts to her daughter’s announcement that she is expecting a child fathered by her Muslim lover: “*Il n’est pas de chez nous?*” – “He is not one of us?” – she asks, fearing that her daughter’s partner may be Sephardic rather than Ashkenazi, like her family, not even suspecting a partner of Arab descent.

Ten years after *La Haine*, from Roschdy Zem’s optimistic perspective, “[w]e’ve got beyond films like *La Haine*. Today we want to show how much we’re integrated” (Zem 2007). Yet, although the register of *Mauvaise foi* is one of romantic comedy, friendship, and family, this film is also a piece of *cinéma engagé* with a deceptively light touch, a pertinent meditation on the importance of communication, of the possibilities of dialogue and debate in a country committed to secular society, to the principles of *laïcité*.

Complicating the conversation on secularism in a country that has legally banned the wearing of the burqa and other ostentatious symbols of religious identity in public space, *Mauvaise foi* weighs the impact of tradition and religious heritage on individual and collective choices and decisions. This bold effort, however slight it may appear to be at first, delivered as it is in the guise of a romantic comedy, nonetheless poses important questions: As a Jew, is it “inauthentic” to love a Muslim, and vice versa? Does one act more truthfully toward oneself by loving the “other”? Is it “inauthentic” to follow the parameters of one’s family traditions by marrying a partner of the same race, religion, and ethnicity? Interrogating the extent to which nationality precedes or supersedes ethnicity, *Mauvaise foi* offers no facile or ideologically circumscribed answers. In an era of polarization, crisis, and anger, this appeal for tolerance and compromise is laced with an anti-politically correct French humor that holds nothing sacred.

Three Films from 2007

Three productions premiering at major international film festivals in 2007 suggest the degree to which France’s colonial past figures ever more prominently in its cinematic representation by mid-decade. Developing themes of diversity and interethnic tension, the first of this group, Philippe Faucon’s *Dans la vie* (2007), takes place in contemporary France, in a *quartier populaire* where the three female protagonists negotiate their lives so as to accommodate one another. A young Arab

nurse, Sélima, is the target of racist comments during rounds; exasperated by such mistreatment from her patients, she is hired to care for Esther, an elderly Jewish woman. Sélima is surrounded by an anti-Semitic environment exacerbated by current Israeli military actions that distress and anger her mother, Halima. Within the logic of this dynamic, the Moroccan-born director examines both generational and religious differences through a morality tale about the possibilities and realities of Muslim–Jewish coexistence.

Esther is in fact a French Algerian who as a young woman has lived in Africa, where she and her family were victims of the era's anti-Jewish laws; hence her sensitivity toward Arab culture and society, which is not unlike that expressed by the Sephardic Tunisian mother in *La Petite Jérusalem*. When a young family friend in hijab, espousing conservative religious views, comes to stay with Sélima and her mother, Halima finds herself helping her daughter care for Esther and bringing together the two elderly women, who have shared a mutual prejudice. Tension erupts when the Arab family is forced to bring the ailing Jewish woman into its home. Each of the three is the repository of the inherited history of her own culture, yet all remain open to engagement with others. It is the fate of these and other immigrants that is Faucon's project, as is also evidenced in his 2005 film, *La Trahison (The Betrayal)*, in which he revisits the Algerian War.

The second film in this group, *Algérie: Histoires à ne pas dire (Algeria: Unspoken Stories; 2007)*, is set in Algeria and directed by Jean-Pierre Lledo. To speak openly of the still unassimilated and unreconciled past is to risk censorship, repression, or worse, the filmmaker suggests. In Algeria the memory of recent history remains a potentially explosive subject: recalling the country's violent independence struggle can be read as an act of courage and even resistance, and it is the power of memory that drives this documentary filmmaker, himself a French Algerian transplanted back to Europe. In a probing odyssey through his former homeland, Lledo asks what might have happened had the 1 million refugees – Arab, Berber, and European, Muslim, Christian, and Jew – who fled the country after independence in 1962 been able to continue living together in mutual tolerance, as they had done for so many decades.

This extraordinarily difficult and painful exploration takes place in four segments, located in four cities – Skikda, Algiers, Constantine, and Oran – traversing Algerian memories of combat, adversaries, and daily life before and after the conflict. Four Muslim Algerians – Aziz, Katiba, Hamid, and Kheïreddine – bear witness by revisiting that contested terrain. In Skikda, Aziz Mouats, an agronomist whose uncle had fought with the National Liberation Front (FLN, Front de Libération Nationale) against the French, recounts how a relative protected French farmers the day when the FLN gave the order to execute all colonists, women and children included, in the bucolic villages where French and Algerians had lived together in relative peace until 1955. In Algiers, Katiba Hocine, a radio journalist, remembers her French nanny and argues with the militant Louise Ighilhariz on methods used by the FLN, recalling the day when news of the Battle of Algiers reached her while she was

playing with the nanny, irrevocably changing their lives. In Oran a young theater director, Kheireddine Ladjam, discovers a city that he had never known, populated by Arabs, Jews, Spaniards, and French. Older residents speak together in Castilian as a veiled grandmother sings *Besame mucho*. Kheireddine exhumes his memory of the massacre in Oran that followed the declaration of independence and resulted in dozens of deaths among the French population; in so doing he invokes his idol, the Algerian-born French Nobel writer and playwright Albert Camus, in order to find the courage to come to terms with this murderous history. The segment located in Constantine was to have centered on the figure of Cheikh Raymond, a figure of Jewish origin, important in the world of Arabic Andalusian music and assassinated a few months before independence. Following Algerian reaction to the film, the witness who was to speak of this episode asked that his image and words be withdrawn from the film, leaving only the chilling words of an aging militant to explain that the artist “was not worth the bullet that killed him.” Lledo’s intertextual narrative resonates in a recursive thematic structure: harmony among faiths and cultures, followed by sudden eruptions of horrific aggression – neighbors and friends becoming enemies. *Algérie: Histoires à ne pas dire* thus becomes a brief of oral history and testimony conducted by witnesses and participants connected to their past – in the 1950s, en route to independence, and later, during the Islamist terror of the 1990s.

La Graine et le mulet (*The Secret of the Grain*; France/Tunisia, 2007), the third example in this group of productions from 2007 (See Figure 24.4), was directed



Figure 24.4 *La Graine et le mulet* (*The Secret of the Grain*, 2007). Director: Abdelattif Kechiche. Producer: Claude Berri

by the Tunisian-born filmmaker and actor Abdellatif Kechiche and premiered at the Venice Film Festival; it received a ten-minute ovation following its screening at the Toronto International Film Festival.²⁰ The Mediterranean community around the main protagonist, Slimane, includes the children's generation, planted in French soil and interspersed with ethnically mixed couples and children, and that of the father, an Arab immigrant made redundant from his job in the naval shipyards of the port of Sète – the “Venice of Languedoc.” The *graine* of the title refers to citizens descended from first-generation immigrants, while the *mulet* (a fish adapted to various oceans and seas), is Slimane himself, who has no desire to return to the *bled* – the old country, Algeria – or to remain unemployed after having endured humiliation working for 35 years under brutal conditions to provide a better life for his children. Separated from his family and living with a mistress, he engages two rival families in a project to transform an old barge into a restaurant. Winner of the prestigious Prix Louis Delluc, the film has an intimate pacing; its suspension of conventional narrative resolution speaks for the director's central concern: a humane indictment of prejudice against people of Arab origin in France, *issus de l'immigration* (descendants of immigrants).

Villa Jasmin (2008)

The following year saw the production of *Villa Jasmin* (2008), an amalgam of documentary and fiction based on the autobiographical novel of Serge Moati, the French Jewish writer of Tunisian origin (born Henry Haïm Moati) and host of the popular French television program “Riposte.”²¹ Likewise addressing the complex relations among multiethnic communities and the history of French colonialism in North Africa, the film recalls *La Petite Jérusalem* in its investigation of multicultural urban space and the films from 2007 discussed above in its evocation of colonial history. Set not in metropolitan France but in the Maghreb, and narrated in first-person voice through provocative use of flashbacks, it is directed by the Tunisian filmmaker Ferid Boughedir²² with a screenplay by Luc Béraud. Traversing French and Tunisian national identities, Tunisian locations, and both French and Tunisian history, *Villa Jasmin* has a transnational trajectory that encompasses Mediterranean cultures during the era of French presence in Tunisia.²³

The film's narrator, Serge Boccara, returns with his pregnant wife to Tunis, the city of his birth, for the first time in two decades. Serge – who was born Henri, but adopted his father's first name – exemplifies a Mediterranean constellation of identities: Tunisian, Jewish, French, and Italian. His father, a socialist journalist and a militant activist in the resistance movement for Tunisian independence, was ultimately deported to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.²⁴ The film is a compelling double love story that follows the contemporary trajectory of Serge and his wife in tandem with the evolution of his parents' lives, interweaving the history of his father's anti-fascist activities from the 1920s through to World War II.

Intoxicated by the scent of jasmine wafting from the shore, which remind Serge of the exquisite gardens and lemon groves of his youth,²⁵ he and his wife, immediately upon their arrival, set out in search of his parents' tombstones in the cemetery of Tunis. There a young Arab boy offers to guide him to his favorite plot – “Catholics, Italian Jews, Tunisian Jews, or French Jews.” Once he locates the original Villa Jasmin, where he was born and lived as a child, in the rue Courbet (now rue Palestine), Serge discovers an imposing building: the actual Villa Jasmin (whose repainted façade was used in the film). Reunited with Rachel, his Jewish nanny, he rediscovers the remains of the Rossini Cinema, where his father once worked as a director and where his parents met and fell in love. Their relationship scandalized Moati's mother, who opposed her son's marriage to a Jewish woman from a lower-class family. *Villa Jasmin* contextualizes these conflicted relations among Tunisia's Jewish communities, each with its own rabbi, synagogue, neighborhoods, and cemetery. The *Livournais* – originally from Livorno in Italy, but further back descendants of Sephardic Jews driven from Andalusia – considered the Maghrebi Scemamas (the family name inscribed on Serge's family tombstone) to be inferior.²⁶ “We are the chicest Jews, the aristocracy of Livorno, elegant and refined, the best of all the Mediterranean,” says Tsia Eugenia, Serge's grandmother (see Figure 24.5).

Moati evokes the German occupation of Tunisia and the rifts between the Tunisian left, which promoted an anti-fascist alliance, and a minority of nationalist leaders who supported an alliance with the Nazis in order to free themselves from the yoke of French colonial domination – as the propaganda broadcast from Berlin Radio to the people of the colonies claimed (Stillman 2003).²⁷ When the Pétain regime came to power, the colonial authorities promulgated anti-Jewish



Figure 24.5 *Villa Jasmin* (2008). Director: Ferid Boughedir. Producer: Image et Compagnie

laws, including the suppression of the Jewish press. French-language reviews of *Villa Jasmin* cite Tunisian Jewish viewers who recall that the reigning Bey of the Tunisian Protectorate (a French colony) refused to enforce the wearing of the yellow star, as did King Mohamed V, grandfather of King Mohamed VI of Morocco (Moati 2003).²⁸ Sequences dramatizing these events display immense portraits of Pétain and Hitler on the elaborately carved walls of the Villa Jasmin, which was requisitioned by the Nazis (Barlet 1998).²⁹

Suspended between his seemingly irreconcilable identities as French subject and native of Tunis, Serge shares the nostalgic and ultimately doomed illusions of the émigré seeking to retain both identities in equal measure. Rejecting the evidence that he may in fact be no more than a tourist in his “true homeland,” Serge insists that he is “chez moi [. . .] c’est mon pays,” despite the fact that he remembers not a word of Arabic. The notion of homeland and national belonging – *chez moi* or *chez nous* – resonates in *Villa Jasmin*, as elsewhere in films that reference the postcolonial legacy.³⁰ Informed that, as a Tunisian Jew, he is “hardly French,” Serge retorts that his family has been “French for three generations.” The first reporter to return to Tunis after the Liberation of Paris, Serge’s father gives a stirring speech, paying homage to his comrades from Tunis who perished in the death camps arrested as resistance fighters or murdered as Jews. As the Internationale is sung (“*C’est la lutte finale . . .*”), he experiences shame and guilt for being among the survivors who escaped from Sachsenhausen, when so many others perished. Tracing modern Tunisian history through the lens of a single family, with flashbacks, newsreel footage, and archive photographs ranging from pre-World War II Tunis through to Tunisian independence, the film concludes on a note of intergenerational reconciliation, with the final verse of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*: “*l’amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle*” (“love that moves the sun and the other stars”: Paradiso XXXIII, l. 145).

Rien à déclarer/Nothing to Declare (2010)

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century several films further experiment with genres of satire and comedy, while maintaining a focus on interethnic topics. *Rien à déclarer* (*Nothing to Declare*; 2010) is a Franco-Belgian co-production directed by Dany Boon, writer/director and (like Roschdy Zem) one of Europe’s most popular actors – the star of *Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis* (*Welcome to the Sticks*; 2008).³¹ This period piece is localized on a fictional border-crossing area between France and Belgium that will be rendered obsolete once the European Single Market officially comes into being on January 1, 1993. Following the creation of the EU’s Schengen passport-free travel zone, customs posts are to be dismantled along the Franco-Belgian border. For customs officials Mathias Ducatel of France (played by Boon) and Ruben Vandevoorde of Belgium (played by Benoît Poelvoorde) – arch-enemies incessantly insulting each other’s countries of origin – this means a new assignment, which forces them to work

together to prevent drugs and other contraband from infiltrating their neighboring territories.

Boon – born Daniel Hamidou, son of a Kabyle father and French Catholic mother in Armentières, France, on the Belgian border – plays the principal role in this fable inspired by his own experience as a child of mixed race: the Kabyle, an ancient population of Judeo-Christian and Muslim origin, constitute a minority in Algeria, where as a child Boon was forbidden to speak the Berber language. The poignant candor he brings to the role offers a foil to his screwball counterpart, played by the Belgian Poelvoorde in an inspired synthesis of pomposity and exaggerated ultra-nationalism.

The film's comedic genre conventions allow the director to indulge his critique of xenophobia in a pre-globalized economy by satirizing the agenda of the European Union and by probing the dynamics of the prejudice that targets Jews and Muslims (among others) in a country where the extreme right constitutes some 30 percent of the vote. Claiming to enjoy his embrace of three religious faiths, Boon has characterized *Rien à déclarer* as “hyper anti-racist” in its portrayal of the most absurd and surreal aspects of cultural, regional, and ethnic stereotypes. Foregrounding the cultural similarities and lack of visible difference among Flemish, Belgian, and French citizens, Boon deconstructs the seemingly paradoxical practice of “othering” in the face of apparent likeness, a dynamic he interprets as a form of “auto-racism.” From his observation that racism appears “especially stupid when the antagonists look alike and speak (more or less) the same language,” the writer/director transforms into farce the traditional stand-off between salt-of-the-earth Belgians and their supercilious neighbors, satirizing beleaguered nationalist sensibilities on both sides of the border (Schofield 2011).³²

Mauvaise foi opened a space for other taboo-breaking films such as *Il reste du jambon? (Is There Any Ham Left?)* (2010), directed by Anne Depettrini – a love story between a blonde Parisian Catholic girl and a French Muslim from the Parisian *banlieue* of Nanterre. Justine, a charming reporter, falls in love with a seductive surgeon, oblivious to his Arab roots. While *mixité* is no issue for the young couple, as in *Mauvaise foi*, their respective families do not share their view; it would be difficult to find two families of greater social disparity than the bourgeois Lacroix from a chic Parisian *arrondissement* and the Algerian Boudaoud from the Parisian *banlieue*. In a political climate of precarious equilibrium, such commercial features nonetheless display a commitment to deconstructing the most pressing issues of diversity, immigration, *laïcité*, and identity.

Le Nom des gens/The Names of Love (2011)

France has the fourth largest Jewish community in the world (after Israel, Russia, and the United States), a community that encompasses some 500,000 (or approximately 1 percent of the population) first- and second-generation Jews

from North Africa, as well as families that have been living there for many generations. But France is also home to a Muslim population ten times greater in number than that of the Jewish community. The nation is acutely aware of the tensions between them, as the films referenced here strongly suggest. Within this framework, Baya Kasmi and Michel Leclerc's feature film *Le Nom des gens* (*The Names of Love*; 2011) focuses on the encounter between Arthur (Jacques Gamblin), a shy middle-aged Jewish man, and Baya (Sara Forestier, César Award for Best Actress), an extraverted young woman from a Muslim background, reversing the gendered ethnicities of *Mauvaise foi* and *La Petite Jérusalem*. Arthur's mother survived the Holocaust as a hidden child in France, while Baya's father was a victim of French imperialism and wartime hostilities during his youth in Algeria. Sequences depicting a young girl, Arthur's mother, walking through the streets of occupied Paris, separated from her parents whom she is never to see again, parallel those of Baya's father as he observes French troops waging war near his home in Algiers. The young girl survives the war, marries, gives birth to Arthur and lives her life without mentioning her traumatic past, as has often been noted in the case of survivors of the Shoah. Although she was not born in France, her identity is not an issue until late in the film, when she must apply for an identity card and is unable to provide proof of citizenship. Similarly, Baya's father arrives in France as a penniless street peddler without papers or documentation, where he meets a society woman attracted to his otherness. The couple marry, and a daughter, Baya, is born. Here again, the question of national origin figures as a French obsession, and it is precisely the filmmakers' project to expose the consequences of this obsession, as they do throughout the narrative. The film was awarded the César for Best Screenplay.

Arthur and Baya each have an "undocumented" parent impaired by the trauma of war; each meets and marries a French citizen and is subsequently assimilated into the *mélange* of French society. Arthur is a government ornithologist responsible for taking necessary precautions to minimize the risk of endemic disease in the bird population. Despite his scientific prowess, he has not succeeded in love. The uninhibited Baya has no visible means of employment; she spends her time as a lovely free spirit, seeking to heal the world by seducing men whose political convictions are diametrically opposed to hers and hoping thereby to persuade them of the error of their ways. Their improbable attraction gestures toward what the French call *le devoir de mémoire*, the duty of memory: is the next generation – and its descendants – responsible for remembering and transmitting the parents' history and memory? If so, to what extent do both Jews and Muslims bear this burden of obligation? When for example Arthur's mother faces the trauma of obtaining new identity papers, both Arthur and Baya encourage her to talk about her war experience, leaving open to debate the question of whether opening wounds from the past can lead to healing and prompting further reflection on the dynamics of witnessing and testimony, reported by researchers who have worked with Holocaust survivors. *The Names of Love* emanates an optimistic vision of a future

in which those of different backgrounds, personalities, religions, and identities can overcome difference in the interest of joyful, if challenging, coexistence.

Conclusion

Although this chapter touches upon only a few selected representations of the legacies of colonialism, French and francophone filmmakers continue to widen their scope and deepen their inquiry (Portuges 1996). Sharing space in metropolitan France and in the Maghreb, their protagonists are neighbors and families, fellow immigrants, political allies and opponents, friends and lovers. Ethnic and religious groups with potentially conflicting loyalties, the complex parameters of their encounters deconstruct the French nation and its contested approaches to immigration in contemporary discourses of nationhood, citizenship, and identity. I have sought to chart the shifting perspectives that read the legacy of Jewish–Muslim relations alternately, through a lens of antagonism, conflict, and violence; from a perspective of potential interethnic rapprochement and tolerance; and within the framework of satire, comedy, and romance. It is hoped that this comparative perspective may also invite re-readings and reappraisals of other cinematic and historical encounters between Jews and Muslims in the francophone world.

Notes

- 1 “Return” may also be construed as a visit for the first time to the land of one’s parents, as in *Villa Jasmin*.
- 2 I thank Mark Reid, Françoise Lionnet, and Sylvie Blum for inviting me to present this research for the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (“A (Re)New(ed) French Cinema of Tricolor: Beur, Blanc, Black”), the UCLA Mellon Seminar in French and Francophone Studies, and the France-Florida Institute, University of Florida Gainesville, respectively.
- 3 Kassovitz is also well known as an actor, having played a major role in Jean-Pierre Jeunet’s *Amélie* (2001), one of the most popular films in the history of French cinema.
- 4 The BBC reported that French society’s negative perceptions of Islam and discrimination against immigrants had alienated some French Muslims and “may have been a factor in the causes of the riots.”
- 5 2002 marked the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Algerian War of Independence.
- 6 Author’s personal interview with the filmmaker, Walter Reade Theater, New York City, February 2005.
- 7 “Laura is not an Arab name!” Nor, for that matter, is it necessarily a Jewish name, signaling an acknowledgment of the ongoing negotiation faced by those of North African heritage with regard to their French identities.
- 8 Yiddish noun derived from *tukn*, “to immerse”; in Hebrew, *balanit*, feminine form of *balan*, “bathhouse keeper.” Being alone with the bather during these sessions, she may serve as an informal psychological counselor.

- 9 *Comment pour moi, arabe et musulman vivant en terre d'Islam, parler le plus justement possible de l'amitié et de la tolérance vécue entre Juifs et Arabes, entre musulmans et catholiques en Tunisie, à l'heure où dans le monde on s'entretue pour sa religion et où l'intégrisme voudrait imposer partout une pensée unique? Comment dire la sensualité quotidienne de ma société qui a toujours réussi à placer la vie au-dessus de tous les dogmes? En parlant de ces choses simples que j'ai vécues [...] à La Goulette.* Férid Boughedir (1994). La communauté juive dans le cinéma tunisien, in *Confluences méditerranée* 10 (spring). At <http://www.dar-eldhekra.com/index.php/dar-dart/cinema-theatre-et-photo/48-la-communaute-juive-dans-le-cinema-tunisien> (accessed June 2012).
- 10 Michael Haneke's 2005 film *Caché* (*Hidden*) explores with haunting power the terrain of France's repressed colonial past; here Djamel says that he was "forced to hide" (*obligé de me cacher*).
- 11 The resulting asymmetry is discernible in the film's publicity, which focuses on images of the romantic couple constituted by the Tunisian Jewish woman and the Algerian Muslim man.
- 12 *Marock* screened in the "Un certain regard" section of the 2005 Cannes International Film Festival.
- 13 Marrachki began exploring these transnational themes in her earlier award-winning short film *Lost Horizon*, which documents Abdeslam's final hours in Tangiers as he prepares to leave his lover, Rhimou, and his country for a supposedly better life on the other side of the horizon. As a clandestine voyager en route to Spain, he reminisces about Rhimou, his country, and what he is leaving behind.
- 14 [U]n film humble qui veut que les gens sachent et se souviennent [...] Le personnage est né d'une composition associant tous les documents historiques que nous a donnés Rachid et un travail sur l'attitude, la façon de parler, le comportement de ces Maghrébins qui ne sont pas les mêmes que les nôtres, nous, la deuxième génération. Je parle arabe, mon travail a donc plus porté sur la maîtrise du français parlé à l'époque, avec les petits accents – en évitant la caricature. *Indigènes*: Messaoud par Roschdy Zem (n.d.).
- 15 The film played an important role in bringing about a change in French law by allocating compensation to Maghrebi soldiers who had fought in World War II and who had previously been denied the pensions allocated to their fellow combatants.
- 16 With a Jewish wife, Zem is a product of *mixité*, like many of his counterparts referenced in this essay.
- 17 The French Interior Ministry has estimated that 5–6 million Muslims are living in France, or 6 percent of the country's population (2009 Pew Research Center Report); French media have repeatedly expressed alarm with regard to anti-Muslim attacks. Home to the world's fourth largest Jewish community, France has undergone a rise in reports of anti-Semitic violence in recent years. In 2009 the number of reported incidents doubled by comparison to that of the previous year.
- 18 Seine-Saint-Denis is known to be one of Paris's toughest suburbs; in local slang it is known as *quatre-vingt treize* ("ninety-three"), after the official administrative designation of this *département* of Ile de France – where the French Communist Party has maintained a stronghold since the suburb's creation in 1968. A commune of Seine-Saint-Denis, Clichy-sous-Bois, was the scene of the death of two youths; this sparked the nationwide riots of autumn 2005, when 3,000 rioters were arrested.

- 19 For Rachid Bouchareb (2010), “[t]here is a big difference between the Muslim extremists of today and the Maghreb people of Algeria who were fighting with guerilla actions fifty years ago against the French army and the police – not civilians. Today we’re stuck with the notion that religious extremists are only Arabs and Muslims, but terrorists come from many different countries and beliefs, so I think that view of Arabs is a problem of western misperception.”
- 20 Kechiche’s previous feature, *L’Esquive* (2005), triumphed at the French César ceremony with awards for best film, best director, best “espoir féminin,” and best scenario. *L’Esquive* foregrounds a group of youth from a *cit * whose social and emotional intrigues are brilliantly interwoven with the plot of Marivaux’s play, *Les Jeux de l’amour et du hasard* (*The Games of Love and Chance*), which they are in the process of staging for a school presentation.
- 21 Originally conceived of as a telefilm coproduction between France and Tunisia, co-produced by Arte and shot partly in Sidi Bou Said near Tunis, the film is anchored during World War II and in the years preceding Tunisian independence from France in 1956 under Habib Bourguiba. To date, the film has not been distributed commercially beyond the festival circuit.
- 22 The director is also a film theorist and historian, writer and professor at the University of Tunis. His first fiction feature, *Halfaouine, l’enfant des terrasses* (1990), based on the director’s memories of adolescence, observes without nostalgia a rich variety of characters from the traditional neighborhoods of Tunis.
- 23 Moati’s autobiographical novel resonated for the director, who recognized himself in this search for identity and paternity; it recounts a critical and rarely filmed period in Jewish–Muslim relations and Franco-Tunisian history. The writer’s father and the director’s father were acquaintances and fellow journalists.
- 24 The SS (Schutzstaffel) opened the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Oranienburg, north of Berlin, on July 12, 1936. See United States Memorial Holocaust Museum (n.d.).
- 25 A traditional symbol of good luck that unites the multiple ethnicities and cultures of the Mediterranean, jasmine is also the metaphor given to the recent revolutions of the Middle East.
- 26 Moati’s father later earned a living as a journalist for the gazette *Tunis Soir*, then for *Le Petit Matin*, the official newspaper of Tunisian Jews, before being fired for his political activities. He also wrote for *Tunis Socialiste*, the central outlet of the socialist party to which he belonged, and which he served as a deputy in the 1930s. His party fought against colonial capitalism and its local potentates, against the colonialist racism that victimized the native population, the *indig nes*, the subject of Rachid Bouchareb’s film of the same name, and for equal rights between colonialists and native peoples. Moati’s own anti-colonialist and progressive engagement earned him a six-month imprisonment from the colonial authorities; he supported the freemasons, whom he considered to represent universalist ideals of the age of enlightenment.
- 27 It is worth noting that *Villa Jasmin*’s subtext alludes to the period in Tunisian history leading up to and following the anti-Jewish riots in Tunisia that erupted in the wake of Israel’s victory during the Six-Day War of 1967, to which Tunisia (and other Arab states) provided supplies.

- 28 When the villa was requisitioned for the German ambassador, the nationalist leader, Benromdane, gave shelter to the Moati family. The mother would later live with his parents in a *hammam*. Prior to that time, Moati and 16 militant Jews who had established a resistance network were arrested by a pro-Nazi colonialist militia and deported to the camp of Sachsenhausen in Germany. He was the only survivor, having been thought to be Italian. The French Resident-General François Peyrouton is portrayed as a reactionary fascist who does not hide his admiration for the Nazis.
- 29 Boughedir has called the trend of Arab nationalism “an exaggerated nationalist sentiment, partly exacerbated by a series of defeats from 1967 until the Gulf War,” which he considers to be opposed to traditions of Tunisian egalitarianism and tolerance.
- 30 Interpreting the loud whistling that disrupted the traditional playing of La Marseillaise at a soccer match between Tunisia and France at the Stade de France in Seine-Saint-Denis, one of the hardest hit Parisian *banlieues*, Lilian Thuram, a French world champion of Caribbean origin, commented: “*Vous n’êtes pas d’ici, vous êtes des étrangers*” (“You are not from here, you are foreigners”).
- 31 This comedy – the most successful in French film history – also stars the stage and screen actor Kad Merad, born Kaddour Merad to an Algerian father and French mother in Sidi-bel-Abbes, Algeria. His attempt to secure a transfer from Salon-de-Provence to the more glamorous Côte d’Azur seacoast backfires and he is instead banished to the village of Bergues in northern France – the Nord Pas-de-Calais, typically considered by the French to be a destination of unemployment and alcoholism. For the first time the region was depicted as attractive and having a distinctive local cuisine and a regional language: Ch’ti or Ch’timi, from which the locals also take their name, a survival of the Picard dialect of early French, with some additions from the Flemish.
- 32 Author’s translation from an interview in French with Dany Boon on “Cinemas Magazine,” broadcast February 13, 2011, TV5 Monde (host: Serge Moati). In this interview Boon described himself as a “recomposed man,” having converted to Judaism on account of his wife, an observant Jew.

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