

Footprints of Fanon in Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* and Sembene Ousmane's *Xala*

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Abstract

This paper aims to offer an analysis of two important films—Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* and Sembene Ousmane's *Xala*—within the context of postcolonial theories. While its focus will be, in the main, on the post-colonial as a historical framework, the essay attempts to transcend this through its engagement with the postcolonial as awareness of identity, conflict and challenge on personal, communal and national levels. The issues broached cut across colonialism, decolonisation, neo-colonialism, violence, Fanonism, mimicry and neo-bourgeoisie. In the course of this analysis, recourse is made to Third Cinema¹ as it “anticipates and touches borders with

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¹ “Third Cinema” is a term coined by Fernando Solanas and Ocatvi Getino in the late 1960's. In their article, titled ‘Towards a Third Cinema’ (1969), they classify cinema into three categories. Unlike “The First Cinema,” which is the Hollywood production model that promulgates bourgeois values to a passive audience through escapist spectacle and individual characters and the ‘Second Cinema’ .i.e. the European art film, which is centred on the individual expression of the auteur director, “Third Cinema” appeals to the audience by presenting the truth and inspiring aggressive activity. In “Third Cinema,” traditional exhibition models are usually avoided: the films should be screened clandestinely, both in order to avoid censorship and commercial networks, but also so that the viewer must take a risk to see them. More importantly for our discussion, it decries both neo-colonialism and capitalism. See their article “Towards a Third Cinema.” <http://info.interactivist.net/print.pl?sid=05/09/15/205253>

postcolonial theory”² and its master concept of decolonisation. While the paper inaugurates the debate with individual close examinations of *The Battle of Algiers* and *Xala*, the discussion will be complemented by stringing the two films together on threads that bind them as two “great cinematic documents of the age of empire”³

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Postcolonial cinema, African cinema, postcolonial theory, Resistance literature, Post-Independence Africa

² Mike Wayne, *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 22

³ Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2001), 291.

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摘 要

本論文旨在以後殖民理論分析兩部影片—Gillo Pontecorvo 之 *The Battle of Algiers* (《阿爾及利亞之戰》) 與 Sembene Ousmane 之 *Xala*。論文一方面主要聚焦於作為歷史框架的後殖民面向，但是本文亦將嘗試藉由，視後殖民乃是對於身份，衝突及個人、社群與國家層面之挑戰的深刻意識，來超越前者。論文所觸及的課題橫互後殖民主義，去殖民化。新殖民主義，法農主義，摹態 (mimicry) 以及新中產階級。在論文分析過程中，會涉及「第三電影」Third Cinema，被定義為「預示以及與後殖民理論接壤」，也與去殖民化此一核心觀念有關。論文雖然與個別影片進行細部論辯，討論也會試圖連結兩者，藉助一條主線，即此兩部影片「是帝國時代的兩部偉大影片」。

關鍵詞：後殖民，後殖民電影，非洲電影，後殖民理論，反抗文學，後獨立非洲

The Battle of Algiers: A Fanonian Representation of Violence

[t]he Algerian revolution introduces a new style into the struggle for liberation [...] the form given to the struggle of the African people is such, in its violence and in its total character, that it will have a decisive influence on [...] future struggles.

Frantz Fanon

Introduction

Before delving into the discussion proper of *The Battle of Algiers*, we see it apposite to gloss its storyline. The film chronicles a painful episode in the Algerian war of independence. Vaguely based on Saadi Yacef's memoir *Souvenirs de la bataille d'Algier*, the film pieces together the main events in late 1960s colonial Algiers, starting with the organisation of the revolutionary cells in the Casbah. From there, the film portrays the widening hostilities between native Algerians and the *pieds noirs* and the ensuing introduction of French paratroopers (hereinafter paras) to uproot the FLN. The paras' victory in the battle is delineated through the neutralization of the FLN leadership after a bitter campaign of assassinations and captures. The film closes with a coda, depicting Algerians demonstrating for independence, which is suggestive of the French momentarily triumphing in the battle of Algiers but ultimately losing the Algerian War.

An appropriate way of addressing *The Battle of Algiers* might start with approaching the trope of anti-colonial violence as "a phase of a dialectic historical process that will lead to national liberation."⁴ Among the most significant issues represented in Pontecorvo's film is the emphasis on women's will to be full participants in the Revolution. In one of the most enthralling sequences of the film, the three women, Zohra, Hassiba and Halima are taking off their veils, tinting their hair and putting on their bright,

⁴ Neelam Srivastava, "Anti-Colonial Violence and the 'Dictatorship of Truth' in the Films of Gillo Pontecorvo," *Interventions* 7, no.1 (2005):102.

summery dresses prior to planting the three bombs in the heart of the European Quarter of Algiers. For the purpose of evincing the agency of these women executing an act that may seem to them so ignominious, the film locates the viewer within the space where the women are readying themselves to blend into the European city. As Lindsey Moore argues, “the use of the bird’s eye view and close-ups obviously indicates the ability of the film to orchestrate in Mary Ann Doane’s words, ‘a gaze, a limit, and its pleasurable transgression’”⁵. Thus, the film compels the viewer to breach the privacy of the changing room and to be complicit in a voyeuristic relation to these women.⁶

As Joan Mellon notices, the sequence is replete with close ups on the women’s faces “at those moments when [they] experience a change of consciousness.”⁷ One may cite the scene where the woman hesitates before cutting off her braids to look more European. No less pertinent is the episode of Zohra suffering a moment of revulsion (at the sight of the young faces sipping their milk shakes) before steeling herself by recalling Yacef’s account of the Rue de Thèbes. That Pontecorvo uses sound brilliantly throughout *The Battle of Algiers* is not hard to trace. To highlight the bloody drama inherent in the sequence, the director has recourse to indigenous Algerian drum-beat on the soundtrack which affirms an interconnection between the women’s activity and the revolutionary cause and replaces the original dialogue with the dramatic effect of “a heartbeat, like a liturgy of war.”⁸

More immediately germane to the discussion at this point is the reference to mimicry being “a source of anti-colonial resistance [and] an

⁵ Lindsey Moore, “The Veil of Nationalism,” *Kunapipi* 25, no.3 (2000): 67.

⁶ Moore, “The Veil of Nationalism,” 67-69.

⁷ Joan Mellon, *Film Guide to the Battle of Algiers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 39.

⁸ Gillo Pontecorvo, “The Battle of Algiers: An Adventure in Filming,” *American Cinematographer* 48, no. 4 (1967): 267.

unconquerable challenge to the entire structure of [...] colonialism.”⁹ As the sequence elucidates, the three women, in temporarily adopting the coloniser’s cultural habits and values through masquerading as Europeans, had turned their act of mimicry into a means of locating a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance. How else could the trio evade detection at the ubiquitous checkpoints of the *Casbah* to stage their reprisal bombings than by outwitting the coloniser with what Fanon terms as a “technique of camouflage?”¹⁰ Consonant with the aforementioned sequence is Fanon’s conception of the young Algerian women carrying the struggle to the heart of the metropolis. Although unused yet to this unveiled body, argues Fanon, the Algerian woman in the metropolis “must overcome all timidity, all awkwardness (for she must pass for a European), and at the same time be careful not to overdo it, not to attract notice to herself.”¹¹ In this vein, it is feasible to argue that in ultraconservative, patriarchal societies, it is only in times of crisis that women have some unmediated say of their own. In times of anti-colonial struggle, they may be presented as supplementary to the heroic male, but they can retrieve a voice of their own nevertheless, as in the Algerian war of independence, when the veil, becomes “a symbol of rebellion during the colonial period.”¹²

Whereas the veil has a highly erotic significance in colonial films, in *The Battle of Algiers* it is utterly political. Taking into consideration the factual and pathological side of the politics of resistance against the French, Fanon notices that the veil becomes one of the many codes of resistance to the coloniser, an attitude that applies to every human act against forms of repression. “The colonized”, he writes, “in the face of the emphasis given by

⁹ John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 55.

¹⁰ Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove, 1965), 46.

¹¹ Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 59.

¹² Daphne Grace, *The Woman in the Muslim Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature* (London: Pluto, 2004), 128

the colonialist to this or that aspect of his traditions, reacts *violently*¹³(emphasis added). In a telling scene, a veiled gun-bearer rises up to a soldier who attempts to lift her face-veil while crossing one of the French barricades. The soldier is instantly reprimanded by one of his colleagues: "you should never touch *their* women'. By donning the veil, the Algerian woman is creating a situation of non-reciprocity. It is through her that the dominated society in its entirety is symbolically refusing to establish any reciprocal relations. In this way, it becomes evident why all attempts at assimilation have taken the discarding of the veil to be their foremost taret. In a subsequent scene, as the camera focuses upon the crossing of the unveiled blonde woman (modelled on the legendary Zohra Drif) with a group of veiled women, 'Algerian woman' becomes the perfect epitome of cultural and political impenetrability. "The European masquerade brings about similar concern to that provoked by veiled women: both are impenetrable and conceal something."¹⁴

Foremost among the key Fanonian motifs in *The Battle of Algiers* is the permeating role of violence within the colonial structure. It follows, therefore, that some of the most prominent violence-related sequences are imbued with a Fanonian spirit. There is an illuminating moment in the film when Ali la Pointe, still a street urchin, is intentionally tripped by a young *pie'd noir* in the course of a police chase. Instead of attempting to abscond, Ali rises to his feet and punches the man on the mouth before being manhandled to prison. The scene resonates with Fanon's conception of anti-colonial violence, once properly directed, as psychologically liberating for the colonised; that is, it liberates the colonised from despondency and passivity. In an oft-quoted passage, Fanon makes plain that "[a]t the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex

¹³ Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove, 1965), 47.

¹⁴ Lindsey Moore, "The Veil of Nationalism" *Kunapipi* 25, no.3 (2000): 66.

and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect.¹⁵

An equally vital implication of the sequence needs to be noted. As Ali la Pointe is being taken to prison, his résumé is heard in the voice-over depicting him as a petty criminal and an uneducated hoodlum. Analogously, the para Colonel Mathieu is first introduced with the same type of voice-over; his record, by contrast, accentuating his previous military victories. What makes the two characters dissimilar, however, is the way they interact with and within the space of the film. The viewer's first encounter with Colonel Mathieu occurs as he leads his troops into the heart of Algiers. Parading triumphantly ahead of the troops and within a distance from the people lining the street, Mathieu is kept distant from the viewer. In contradistinction to Mathieu, Ali la Pointe always seems identified closely with the space of the city and its dwellers. This is evidently the case when Ali is first introduced in the film operating a Three Card Monty game on the pavement before his imprisonment. The incarceration sequence invites commentary in terms of Ali la Pointe's radicalization. Ironically enough, it is during his two-year sentence in Barbarousse Prison that Ali, like Malcolm X, is politically baptised. Unlike in *Pépé le Moko*, where the Algerian inside a French space would have no aspiration of asserting his own power, in *The Battle of Algiers*, nevertheless, this colonial space is essential for the creation of Ali's political agency. Ali is shown locked up with his prison mates as an Algerian resistance fighter shouts 'Long live Algeria' while being marched off to the guillotine. The camera cuts back to Ali who now seems visibly invigorated. He jumps to a barred window overlooking the yard where the nationalist is now being led to be decapitated. Interestingly, the shot does not go back to a close up on Ali's eyes, but to the prison wall marked by tiny slits of windows. The shot is suggestive of the likelihood of many other men like Ali gaining political awareness of the repercussions of the colonization of their country. With the fall of the

¹⁵ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 94.

guillotine, the sound track pipes with a melancholic solo flute and the camera cuts to a close-up on Ali's face. The entire prison space now seems to collapse into his resolute face.

Nevertheless, should one consider the *process* of the political evolution of Ali la Pointe as among the key objectives of this sequence, then *The Battle of Algiers* "fails to offer an adequately complex engagement"¹⁶ with that process. Throughout the sequence, we discern no communicational intercourse between Ali and the other political detainees. Straight after the guillotining of the nationalist, we see Ali taking orders directly from Djafar, the head of the FLN in Algiers. But, as Mike Wayne argues,¹⁷ with the understatement of the process of Ali's politicisation, *The Battle of Algiers* failed in touching on one of the principal areas of concern of Third Cinema. This is a point of entry into some succinct criticism of the film as a whole.

Notwithstanding Edward Said's praise for Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* and *Burn!* as the "two greatest political films ever made,"¹⁸ it is nonetheless necessary to point out some serious shortcomings of *Battle*. Besides its evasion of gender and the failure to record the importance of the "class difference within the liberation struggle,"¹⁹ *The Battle of Algiers* has also downplayed the struggle in the countryside. As the focus was conclusively on the FLN, the film had regrettably overlooked the historic role played by the largest nationalist movement in Algeria, the Mouvement National Algérien, led by Messali Hadj, which, to be fair, *preceded* the FLN. It ought to be noted also that, even with the FLN, the film, with the single exception of a brief mention of Sartre, took no account of the ideological ties between the FLN and the French left. To end, it is especially noteworthy that

¹⁶ Mike Wayne, *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 16.

¹⁷ Wayne, *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema*, 16.

¹⁸ Edward Said. *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2001), 283.

¹⁹ Wayne, *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema*, 21

Pontecorvo did not include in *Battle* the important support provided for the Algerian national movement by its immediate neighbours as well as Egypt's Nasser. It would suffice to say at this stage that citing these imperfections should not be seen as an endeavour to eclipse *The Battle of Algiers*' achievement as one of the most remarkable films of all time.

.....
Xala: Pitfalls of African Consciousness

[...] we have to see, feel, and understand ourselves through the mirror of film. For us, African filmmakers, it was then necessary to become political, to become involved in a struggle against all the ills of man's cupidity, envy, individualism, the nouveau riche mentality, and all the things we have inherited from the colonial and neo-colonial systems.

Ousmane Sembene quoted in *The Cinema of Ousmane Sembene: A Pioneer of African Film*, 1984

Introduction

If *The Battle of Algiers* depicts a struggle for independence, Ousmane Sembene's satirical film *Xala* focuses on post-independence struggles. The film draws on a very different strain within Fanon's writing: his scathing critique of the indigenous neo-bourgeoisie, what he refers to as "the pitfalls of national consciousness." The film hinges on a fable of impotence, in which the protagonist's xala, a divinely sanctioned curse of impotence, epitomises the neo-colonial subjugation of the black African elite. The protagonist, El Hadji Abdoukader Beye, is a polygamous Senegalese businessman who becomes plagued with xala on his wedding night with his third wife. Searching for a panacea, El Hadji visits multifarious marabouts, who attempt in vain to cure him. Simultaneously, he suffers setbacks in his business and ends up being expelled from the now Senegalese-controlled Chamber of Commerce after being accused of embezzlement. Eventually, he finds out that his xala has resulted from a curse inflicted on him by a Dakar beggar whose land El Hadji

had expropriated. He finally recovers by subjecting himself to the beggars' demands that he strip and be spat upon. The film closes with a freeze frame of his spittle-covered body.

Shortly after the opening of the film, French statuary is unceremoniously removed from the Chamber of Commerce. But the reality of postcolonial politics is not far behind. However, the white men, while reclaiming the statuary and taking their leave, go back immediately to deliver to the new black government ministers briefcases full of cash. Allegory is ushered in early in the film. It becomes even more conspicuous with the equation between the council president and the president of Senegal, Leopold Senghor, whose picture we now see hung on one of the Chamber's walls. The viewer is thus alerted to read the upcoming sequences of the film in an allegorical fashion.

It needs no great stretch of the imagination to see that the three women in Sembene's *Xala* are "equated with Africa at different periods of its evolution."²⁰ El Hadji's eldest wife, Awa Adja, symbolizes the traditional Islamic phase of Senegalese history. According to Françoise Pfaff, "Awa truly appears as the embodiment of African traditions even if her environment is no longer truly traditional."²¹ Besides her dramatization of how traditional ways are ill-adapted to the exigencies of post-colonial Senegal, her *philosophy* is delineated through her most incisive comment in the film: "If patience could kill, I'd have been dead long ago." Through the character of Awa, Sembene, like Cabral and Fanon, seems to be suggesting to the viewer the delusion of the retreat to Africanity/Africanness.

In *Xala*, the contrast between Awa and El Hadji's second wife, Oumi, is discerned during a scene of the third wedding where the two sit together. With close ups on both women, Sembene conveys the further breakdown of

²⁰ Françoise Pfaff, *The Cinema of Ousmane Sembene: A Pioneer of African Film* (London: Greenwood Press, 1984), 155.

²¹ Françoise Pfaff, "The Three Faces of African Women," *Jump Out* 27 (1982): 27.

traditional customs and the encroachments of Western consumerism into the post-independence Senegalese society. Oumi wears European clothes, a wig, make-up and dark glasses. Throughout the film, Oumi's treatment of her husband is abusive and despotic. Their marriage revolves around the exchange of money and services, representing a harsh judgement of economic and social relations under colonialism and neo-colonialism. At this point, it might be interesting to consider N'Gone, El Hadji's third wife, whose "role in the film [...] is little more than a *femme objet*."²² Reduced to a mere fetishistic object than a person, N'Gone is more of a peripheral figure in the film. During the wedding celebration, she appears more like the white figure of a bride on the lavish wedding decoration inspected closely and disdainfully by Oumi. N'Gone is identified through her photograph on the wall, seen while she is being undressed with her back to the camera as her mother lectures her on the importance of being obedient to her husband. In point of fact, the two photographs of her clothed and unclothed are more discernible to the viewer than N'Gone herself. Eventually, she is downgraded to the clothing on the broom stick which appears again in the final scenes of the film depicting El Hadji's ignominy. In sum, Sembene presents N'Gone as the upshot of a neo-colonial society: a fetish, with no identity, no voice, no language but rather a symbol of the ramifications of cultural impotence. In *Xala*, she is the perfect antithesis of Rama.

Rama's function in the film is vigorous. Sembene visually accentuates her freedom as a character by "presenting her alone in many more shots than the other female characters."²³ In the film, she ardently supports the Wolof language as a mark of her identification with the struggle for independence from European culture. When she pays a visit to her father in his office, Sembene intentionally places her before a map of Senegal, and Rama's costume visibly reproduces the colours of the Senegalese flag. It is especially

²² Pfaff, *Cinema*, 153.

²³ Pfaff, *Cinema*, 155

noteworthy that El Hadji later follows in the footsteps of Rama as regards the use of Wolof in his verbal battle with the other ministers. El Hadji asks their permission to give his final speech before the chamber in Wolof but he is denied such permission much in the same way as he had previously reprimanded Rama for addressing him in Wolof. He is told to voice his remarks in the colonial language, the newly - adopted language of the Senegalese neo-bourgeoisie.

It is particularly this post-colonial/post-independence phenomenon that Sembene's film is emphatically meant to resist. In *Xala*, El Hadji becomes a symbolic incarnation of the African *nouveaux riches*. His wealth, however, is tenuous. It is that of the national bourgeoisie, whose ostensible power is reliant on its ability to trade with former colonial 'metropoles', the dictates of which he has to endure. Frantz Fanon scornfully acknowledges the superficiality of such a bourgeoisie along with its precarious status. "The national middle class," Fanon eloquently writes, "which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime is an underdeveloped middle class. It has practically no economic power, and in any case it is in no way commensurate with the bourgeoisie of the mother country which it hopes to replace."²⁴ *Xala* is very much a critique of this 'kleptocracy' and its ensuing repercussions for the entire post-colonial Senegalese society. Thus, from its inception, the film draws a dividing line between the two main classes in Senegal (read: Africa): the neo-bourgeois class incorporating the exploiters who share money stolen from the government treasury, and the oppressed subject class who, after dancing in the celebrations of independence, soon discover that the cycle of delusion, ostracism and despondency goes on unabated.

The importance of contrast for an understanding of Sembene's film as a whole can hardly be overestimated. In *Xala*, the water images contrast the superfluous affluence of the bourgeoisie who "presents a much more insidious

²⁴ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 149.

and sinister force than the openly exploitative European colonialists,²⁵ with the abject destitution of the beggars. The viewer may well call to mind that, at the time when there is drought in Senegal and the population is starving, El Hadji indulges in nourishing his imported car and himself with imported mineral water. It is worth stressing in this respect that Sembene yokes the fetishism of the imported goods to that of the El Hadji's sexuality: though El Hadji disdains the traditional idea of sitting on the mortar with the pestle between his legs on his wedding night, the viewer can see him riding across the countryside with a bottle of mineral water between his legs on the way to the first marabout.

Another no less indicative image of the polarisation of Senegal's postcolonial society is the car. The chauffeur-driven cars of the ministers proceeding in a cortège to El Hadji's wedding ceremony together with the blue wedding present for N'Gone, which is never seen used in the film, are obvious synecdoches for the colonial culture incarnated in consumer goods. The car can be singled out as a perfect epitome of what Sembene calls "technical fetishism." While the car stands for the power that resides in the accumulation of wealth, it also denotes the subjection of the masses. As it is apparent throughout the film, the car turns out to be a perfect symbol of African capitalism. In *Xala*, the car is neither easily obtainable nor even useful. When the officer comes to take El Hadji's Mercedes, none of his assistants knows how to drive it away.

To conclude the discussion of the disparities inherent in post-colonial Senegal, it makes perfect sense to broach the issue of the beggars as "important to the film's social analysis."²⁶ In *Xala*, the beggars are Sembene's instrument for evoking the history of the material exploitation of the

²⁵ Teshome Habte Gabriel, *Third Cinema: The Dynamics of Style and Ideology* (London: University Microfilm International, 1979), 170.

²⁶ Sarah Turvey, *Barthes' S/Z and the Analysis of Film Narrative* (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1985), 86.

countryside and of the urban poor. The beggars provide the viewer with the most vivid images in the film, especially those whose crippled limbs reduce them to creeping about. Ironically, this is the only means of moving around available to them in spite of the superfluity of cars owned by the ministers. The scene of the rounding up of the beggars is far more central to the drama of *El Hadji* than the viewer instantly thinks. It is worth noting that the distributor of the Wolof language newspaper is also trapped at the same time and forced to be carted away with the beggars. By this Sembene conveys to the viewer an equation between the city and the country poor. When the beggars get back to the city, the newspaper man is still seen with them, as they are in the final scene when they achieve their victory over *El Hadji*. The enactment of their final ritual stands in parallel with the form of the film, which can be seen as an attempt at purification. Thus, the beggars turn out to be the satirists, the real *medical* men. Sembene is intent on implying that all who are dispossessed can aspire to this power as can those who get rid of their fondness for accumulating wealth.

By way of conclusion, it is possible to say that *Xala* is a high-spirited assault on the postcolonial elite. Its opening sequence has been mythicized into an unforgettable set-piece of the post-independence 'transfer of power'. The film brilliantly examines the paradoxes which colour an African world emerging from a history of French colonial rule. The post-independence weaknesses of the Senegalese economic structures are mirrored by Sembene's depiction of the social world—in particular the relationship between men and women. Sembene's immediate concern in *Xala* is with the problems created for the Africans with the advent of political independence in the twentieth century, in particular with "cultural imperialism". Cultural imperialism, as he sees it, encourages false aspirations in the form of consumer capitalism, the continuing inequality of caste and class, and profound divisions between town and country, rich and poor and foreign and indigenous cultures. Moreover, the imposition of French as an official language rather than Wolof by the new ruling class has cast doubts as to the

authenticity of the country's independence. *Xala*'s success derives largely from the fact that it has scathingly revealed the true nature of the political independence of many African states. It is no surprise that it is hailed as "a magnificent critique of the neo-colonial structures that have sprouted from the ruins of colonialism."²⁷

Conclusion

It ought to be clear by now that, as two films deeply indebted to Fanon, *The Battle of Algiers* and *Xala* have outstandingly incorporated some of the more radical elements in his political philosophy to portray the Franco-African conflict and its ensuing repercussions. In their scathing critique of colonialism, neo-colonialism and the capitalist system with its bourgeois values, both movies touch on the major areas of the Fanonian concern of "Third Cinema". With the two films, the viewer is given a deep insight into the plights that have befallen Africa because of the Western colonial project. At a time when the quest for domination and hegemony still goes on unabated, *The Battle of Algiers* and *Xala* prove to be as significant as ever they were. It is naïve not to see in Algiers a besieged Baghdad or in Colonel Mathieu a modern day American war general. With *The Battle of Algiers* and *Xala*, we are given a front row seat to history.

²⁷ Gupta, cited in Françoise Pfaff, *Twenty Five Black African Film Makers* (London: Greenwood Press, 1988), 252

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