

Document Citation

Title	The battle of Algiers
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Larsen Associates</i>
Date	
Type	press kit
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	16
Subjects	Martin, Jean, France Yacef, Saadi (1928), Algeria Pontecorvo, Gillo Morricone, Ennio (1928), Rome, Italy Solinas, Franco (1927-1982), Cagliari, Sardinia, Italy
Film Subjects	La battaglia di Algeri (The battle of Algiers), Pontecorvo, Gillo, 1966

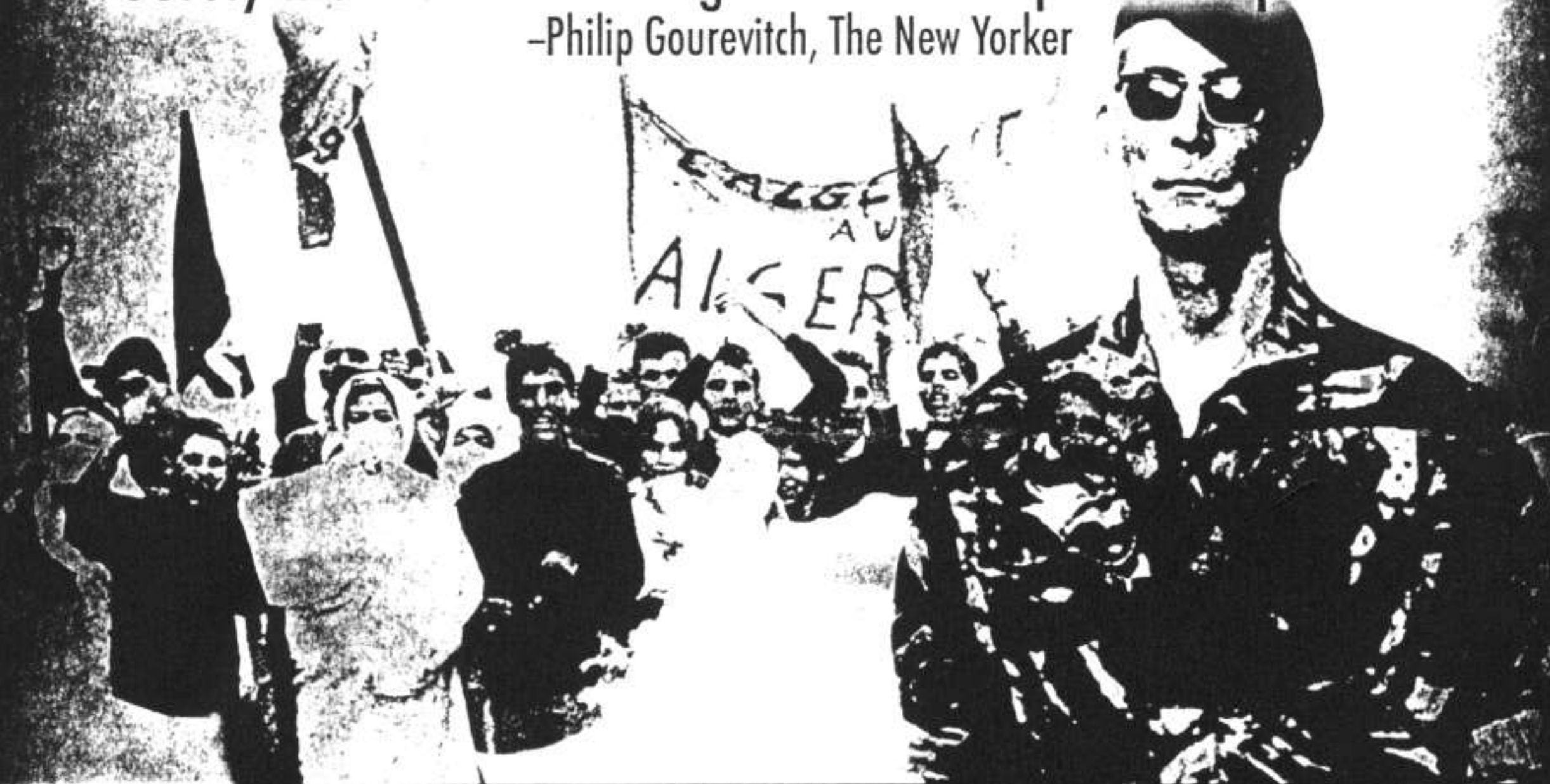
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**GILLO
PONTECORVO'S**



THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS

**"Pontecorvo's Masterpiece...
Surely the most harrowing and realistic political epic ever!"**
-Philip Gourevitch, The New Yorker



NEW 35MM PRINT • NEW SUBTITLES

Contact: Larsen Associates
Karen Larsen, Caroline Hanni
and Tim Buckwalter
telephone: 415-957-1205

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Directed by.....Gillo Pontecorvo
Produced byAntonio Musu & Saadi Yacef
Screenplay by.....Franco Solinas
Based on a book bySaadi Yacef
Director of photography..... Marcello Gatti
Cameraman Silvano Mancini
Music.....Ennio Morricone & Gillo Pontecorvo
Musical Director.....Bruno Nicolai
Editors Mario Serandrei & Mario Morra
Assistant directors Fernando Morandi, Moussa Hadda
Second unit director..... Giuliano Montaldo
Production Design Sergio Canevari
Special effects Aldo Gasparri
Make-up.....Maurizio Giustini
SoundAlberto Bartolomei
Costumes Giovanni Axerio
French Translation (2004).....Lenny Borger and Cynthia Schoch
Arabic Translation (2004).....Tarik Benbrahim
Laser Subtitle Processing.....LVT, New York

CAST

Ali La PointeBrahim Haggiag
Colonel MathieuJean Martin
El-hadi JaffarSaadi Yacef
Fathia Samia Kerbash
Hassiba.....Fusia El Kader
The Captain Ugo Paletti
Little Omar..... Mohamed Ben Kassen

1965 black & white Aspect ratio: 1.66:1 running time: 123 minutes

An Italian-Algerian co-production:
Igor Film (Rome) - Casbah Films (Algiers)

A Rialto Pictures release
In association with Janus Films and Homevision Entertainment

rialtopictures.com

SYNOPSIS

The action begins at dawn on October 7, 1957. An old Algerian nationalist, under torture, reveals to Colonel Mathieu the hiding place of the last surviving guerrilla leader, Ali La Pointe. Mathieu's paratroops surround the house in the Casbah, ready to blow it up unless Ali surrenders. From the pensive faces of the four freedom fighters within, we flash back to November 1, 1954, when a message from the National Liberation Front had launched The Battle of Algiers.

After this prologue, we follow the three-year history of the Battle. Terrorism escalates on both sides. A harmless Arab worker is accused of killing a policeman and in retaliation the French place a bomb near his home in the Casbah, killing many innocent people. In return, three Arab women disguised as Europeans penetrate the heavily guarded French sector, wreaking havoc with bombs in two cafes and at the Air France terminal.

But the elite French paratroopers, with their vastly superior resources and training and the ruthless use of torture, systematically destroy the Algerian guerrilla movement, cell by cell. When they finally arrest the intellectual Ben M'Hidi and the key leader El-hadi Jaffar, only Ali La Pointe remains. We return to October 7, 1957. Ali La Pointe dies and the Battle of Algiers ends, a victory for the French. But three years later the revolutionary phoenix rises again in the Casbah, leading to Algeria's independence in 1962.

THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS: PRODUCTION NOTES

Saadi Yacef, the elegant and handsome president of Casbah Films, had fought in the struggle for Algerian liberation as commander for the autonomous zone of Algiers. [After independence,] he went to Italy to set up an Algerian-Italian co-production dealing with that struggle. Of the three Italian directors he approached -- Francesco Rosi, Luchino Visconti and Gillo Pontecorvo -- only Pontecorvo was both willing and able to accept the assignment. He did so on the condition that he be given a very large measure of autonomy and creative freedom. Pontecorvo and screenwriter Franco Solinas then devoted six months to intensive research into the eight years of the campaign, studying everything from newsreels to police archives and interviewing thousands of witnesses -- French veterans of the war as well as Algerian revolutionaries. Saadi Yacef contributed his own view from the top. After the research came a further six months of scriptwriting.

Along with this patient pursuit of accuracy of content went a determination to achieve unparalleled verisimilitude in presentation. With the cooperation of the Boumedienne government, Pontecorvo was able to shoot on location in Algiers, both in what had been the European section and in the Casbah, where the streets were so narrow that only hand-held cameras could be used. He arrived there with nine Italian technicians, making up the remainder of his crew from local workers with no previous film experience, patiently trained by his cinematographer Marcello Gatti and others.

Brahim Haggiag, an illiterate peasant whom Pontecorvo discovered in the Algiers market, was cast as Ali La Pointe, a petty criminal who winds up as a rebel leader and martyr. Saadi Yacef recreated for the cameras the role he had played in life, as the Algiers military commander. Only one major role was assigned to a professional actor -- that of the French paratroop commander Colonel Mathieu -- played by Jean Martin; primarily a stage actor, he was blacklisted for signing a manifesto against the Algerian war. What Pontecorvo called his "choral protagonist" were the 80,000 men, women, and children of the Casbah, the film's true "hero."

Pontecorvo and Gatti achieved greater control over their effects through laboratory experiments. Telephoto lenses were used in crowd scenes to intensify the impression of a television newsreel and to "emphasize collective effort rather than individual heroism." In his interview with Joan Mellen, Pontecorvo said that for these extraordinary crowd scenes "we drew all the movements of the crowd with chalk on the actual pavement, 'action 1, 2, or 3, this group goes around,' etc. This is how we did the great crowd scene, the demonstration down the stairs. When this became automatic, I no longer looked at it and my assistant controlled it when we shot... I took the five, ten, fifteen people who were nearest to the camera and worked only with them. I didn't even look at the others. I looked to see if the expression on their faces was right. A crowd scene can be spoiled if the expression of only one person is not exactly what you want." So completely convincing were these techniques that the original U.S. distributor added this disclaimer "Not one foot of newsreel has been used in this reconstruction of *The Battle of Algiers*."

Many critics noted the effectiveness of the film's musical score, written by Pontecorvo and Ennio Morricone. Jan Dawson wrote that *Battle* was shot and cut to the rhythms of the score which, "to the crew's amusement, Pontecorvo whistled throughout the filming so as not to 'lose the rhythm of the film.' The same music (in which the percussion is dominant and which finds its human equivalent in the eerie formalized wailing of the Casbah women) accompanies the atrocities on both sides, stressing the drama and the urgency of the action yet also underlining the similarities that link the opposing forces."

Of the much discussed use of a Bach chorale to accompany the dreadful torture scenes, Pontecorvo says that "the torture used by the French as their basic counter-guerrilla tactic is the low point of human degradation caused by the war. It seemed to me that the religious music I used in those sequences emphasized with even greater authority the gravity of that degradation. But at the same time torture creates a sort of relationship between those who do it and those who undergo it. With human pity the common bond, the music served to transcend the particular situation, making them symbols of an all encompassing characteristic -- that of giving and enduring pain."

Some critics, especially in France, regarded the film as a blatantly pro-Arab, anti-French work of propaganda, pointing out that it was, after all, sponsored by the Algerian revolutionary leader Saadi Yacef. The French delegation at the 1966 Venice film festival boycotted the screening, and also the ceremony at which it was awarded the Golden Lion as best film. *Battle* was banned by the French government until 1971, and even then screenings were postponed because of threats to exhibitors and actual bombings of theaters. The film was only widely shown in France, Pontecorvo says, due to the efforts of director Louis Malle.

However, this primarily right-wing view of *Battle* as Arab propaganda was rejected by many, and was remote from the stated intention of Saadi Yacef: "The idea of reliving those days and arousing the emotions I felt moved me greatly. But there is no rancor in my memories. Together with our Italian friends, we desired to make an objective, equilibrated film that is not a trial of a people or of a nation, but a heartfelt act of accusation against violence and war."

This is an accurate description of the film, in the opinion of its champions. Most frequently cited in support of this view is the scene in which the Arab women, having placed their lethal bombs in crowded places, sadly scrutinize the faces of those who will die. Again, the young paratroopers, having horribly tortured the old peasant into betraying Ali, congratulate him on holding out for so long and offer him cigarettes, as if hungry for his forgiveness. Colonel Mathieu, the nemesis of the Algerian guerrillas, is neither an ogre nor a psychopath but a highly intelligent professional who recognizes that if he is to win the war for France there is simply no alternative to torture. It's worth noting that Lieutenant Colonel Roger Trinquier, veteran of the Tenth Division of Paratroopers and author of *Modern Warfare* (1964), believed that the film was an accurate representation of the battle and, in a sense, a tribute to the French army.

-- John J. Michalczyk, excerpted from *World Film Directors 1945-1985*,
edited by John Wakeman (1988, The H.W. Wilson Company, New York)

THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On May 16, 1830, a fleet of 500 French ships headed from Toulon to Algiers. In less than two months, on July 5, 1830, the *dey* of Algiers signed the act of surrender to France, thus beginning over a century of French colonialism in Algeria.

The Algerian War of Independence (1954 - 1962) was a period of guerilla strikes, terrorism, counter-terrorism and riots between the French army and colonists in Algeria and pro-independence Algerians, the latter led by the *Front de Libération Nationale* (or FLN)¹. By 1954, when FLN became active in Algeria, France had already lost the colonies of Tunisia and Morocco, and only months before had liquidated its empire in Indochina.

Beginning of Hostilities

In the early morning hours of November 1, 1954, FLN guerrillas launched attacks in various parts of Algeria against military installations, police posts, warehouses, communications facilities, and public utilities. From their base in Cairo, the FLN broadcast a proclamation calling on Muslims in Algeria to join in a national struggle for the "restoration of the Algerian state, sovereign, democratic, and social, within the framework of the principles of Islam." The French Minister of the Interior, socialist François Mitterrand, responded sharply that "the only possible negotiation is war." It was the reaction of Premier Pierre Mendès-France that set the tone of French policy for the next five years. He declared in the National Assembly: "One does not compromise when it comes to defending the internal peace of the nation, the unity and integrity of the Republic. The Algerian departments are part of the French Republic. They have been French for a long time, and they are irrevocably French ... Between them and metropolitan France there can be no conceivable secession."

On the political front, the FLN worked to persuade the Algerian masses to support the aims of the independence movement. FLN-oriented labor unions, professional associations, and students' and women's organizations were organized to rally diverse segments of the population. The FLN's leading political theorists provided sophisticated intellectual justification for the use of violence in achieving liberation.

As the FLN campaign spread through the countryside, many European farmers in the countryside (called *pieds-noirs*²) sold their holdings and sought refuge in Algiers, where their cries for sterner counter-measures swelled. *Colon*³ vigilante units, whose

¹ FLN's main rival – with the same goal of Algerian independence – was the *Mouvement National Algérien* (MNA) who mainly gained support with Algerian workers in France. FLN and MNA fought against each other both in France and Algeria for the full duration of the conflict. There were a number of smaller pro-independence factions.

² Literally, "black feet"

³ colonist

unauthorized activities were conducted with the passive cooperation of police authorities, carried out *ratonnades* (literally, rat-hunts; synonymous with Arab-killings) against suspected FLN members. The *colons* demanded the proclamation of a state of emergency, the proscription of all groups advocating separation from France, and the imposition of capital punishment for politically motivated crimes.

The Battle of Algiers

To increase international and domestic French attention to their struggle, the FLN decided to bring the conflict to the cities and to call a nationwide general strike. The most notable manifestation of the new urban campaign was the Battle of Algiers, which began on September 30, 1956, when three women placed bombs at three sites, including the downtown office of Air France. FLN terrorists carried out an average of 800 shootings and bombings per month through the spring of 1957, resulting in many civilian casualties and inviting a crushing response from the authorities. The 1957 general strike, timed to coincide with the UN debate on Algeria, was imposed on Muslim workers and businesses.

French General Jacques Massu⁴, who was instructed to use whatever methods were necessary to restore order in the city, frequently fought terrorism with acts of terrorism and used torture on captured FLN suspects to extract information⁵. Using paratroopers, he broke the strike and systematically destroyed the FLN infra-structure there. But the FLN had succeeded in showing its ability to strike at the heart of French Algeria and in rallying a mass response to its appeals among urban Muslims.

Despite complaints from the military command in Algiers, the French government was reluctant for many months to admit that the Algerian situation was out of control and that what was viewed officially as a pacification operation had developed into a major colonial war. By 1956 France had committed more than 400,000 troops to Algeria. Although the elite airborne units and the Foreign Legion received particular notoriety,

⁴ General Massu was the model for "Colonel Mathieu" in Pontecorvo's film (played by Jean Martin). A highly decorated officer who fought for France in every major conflict since World War I, Jacques Émile Charles Marie Massu joined the Free French forces in 1940 and commanded French troops in Vietnam after liberation. He was named military commander of Algeria in 1957 and would be hailed as "Le père de paras," the father of paratroopers, by Algeria's French settlers. In 1968, he was de Gaulle's chief military aide in dealing with the Paris student riots. In 1971 he wrote a book challenging the condemnatory tone of Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*. In it he wrote, "I think...the French military men obliged to [torture] to vanquish terrorism were choir boys compared [to] the rebels. The latter's extreme savagery led us to some ferocity... but we remained within the law of eye for eye, tooth for tooth." But, late in life, he publicly regretted the methods he employed in the Algerian campaign." He died in October, 2002 at age 94. (source: *New York Times* obituary)

⁵ In 2001 retired French General Paul Aussaresses, Massu's deputy in Algeria, acknowledged in his memoirs that 3,000 Algerians had "been made to disappear" in the battle of Algiers and that he'd personally taken part in the execution of 25 men. He also said his only real regret was that some of those tortured died before they revealed anything useful. French president Jacques Chirac promptly stripped Aussaresses of his Légion d'Honneur.

approximately 170,000 of the regular French army troops in Algeria were Muslim Algerians, most of them volunteers.

The French military command ruthlessly applied the principle of collective responsibility to villages suspected of sheltering, supplying, or in any way cooperating with the guerrillas. Villages that could not be reached by mobile units were subject to aerial bombardment. The French also initiated a program of concentrating large segments of the rural population, including whole villages, in camps under military supervision to prevent them from aiding the rebels. In the three years (1957-60) during which the *regroupement* program was followed, more than 2 million Algerians were removed from their villages, mostly in the mountainous areas, and resettled in the plains. Living conditions in the camps were poor. Hundreds of empty villages were devastated, and in hundreds of others orchards and croplands were destroyed. These population transfers apparently had little strategic effect on the outcome of the war, but the disruptive social and economic effects of this massive program continued to be felt a generation later.

Recurrent cabinet crises in France increased the misgivings of the army and *colons* that the security of Algeria was being undermined by party politics. Army commanders chafed at what they took to be inadequate and incompetent government support of military efforts to end the rebellion. The feeling was widespread that another debacle like Indochina was in the offing and that the government would order another precipitate pullout and sacrifice French honor to political expediency. Many saw in de Gaulle, who had not held office since 1946, the only public figure capable of rallying the nation.

On May 13, 1958, a military junta under Massu seized power in Algiers. The junta demanded that de Gaulle be named to head a government of national union invested with extraordinary powers to prevent the "abandonment of Algeria." De Gaulle became premier in June and was given carte blanche to deal with Algeria.

Europeans and many Muslims greeted Charles de Gaulle's return to power as the breakthrough needed to end the hostilities. On his June 4 trip to Algeria, de Gaulle calculatedly made an ambiguous emotional appeal to all the inhabitants, declaring "Je vous ai compris" (I have understood you). De Gaulle raised the hopes of *colons* and the professional military with his exclamation of "Vive Algérie française!" to cheering crowds in Mostaganem. At the same time, he proposed economic, social, and political reforms to ameliorate the situation of the Muslims. Meanwhile, he looked for a "third force" among Muslims and Europeans, uncontaminated by the FLN or the "ultras" -- *colon* extremists -- through whom a solution might be found.

De Gaulle immediately appointed a committee to draft a new constitution for France's Fifth Republic, to be declared early the next year, with which Algeria would be associated. Muslims, including women, were registered for the first time with Europeans on a common electoral roll to participate in a referendum to be held on the new constitution in September 1958.

De Gaulle's initiative threatened the FLN with the prospect of losing the support of the growing numbers of Muslims who were tired of the war and had never been more than lukewarm in their commitment to a totally independent Algeria. In reaction, the FLN set up a government-in-exile based in Tunis, which was quickly recognized by Morocco, Tunisia, and several other Arab countries, by a number of Asian and African states, and by the Soviet Union and other East European states.

Pro-independence commandos committed numerous acts of sabotage in France in August, and the FLN mounted a desperate campaign of terror in Algeria to intimidate Muslims into boycotting the referendum. But 80 percent of the Muslim electorate turned out to vote in September, and of these 96 percent approved the constitution. In February 1959, de Gaulle was elected president of the new Fifth Republic. His call on the rebel leaders to end hostilities and to participate in elections was met with adamant refusal.

In 1958-59 the French army had won military control in Algeria. During that period in France, however, opposition to the conflict was growing. Thousands of relatives of soldiers suffered loss and pain; revelations of torture and the indiscriminate brutality the army visited on the Muslim population prompted widespread revulsion; and a significant constituency supported the principle of national liberation. International pressure was also building on France to grant Algeria independence. France's seeming intransigence in settling a colonial war that tied down half of its armed forces was also a source of concern to its NATO allies. In a September 1959 statement, de Gaulle dramatically reversed his stand and uttered the words "self-determination."

Claiming that de Gaulle had betrayed them, the *colons*, backed by units of the army, staged an insurrection in Algiers in January 1960 that won mass support in Europe. As the police and army stood by, rioting *colons* threw up barricades in the streets and seized government buildings. In Paris, de Gaulle called on the army to remain loyal and rallied popular support for his Algeria policy in a televised address. Most of the army heeded his call, and in Algiers the insurrection was quickly diffused. The failure of the *colon* uprising and the loss of many ultra leaders who were imprisoned or transferred to other areas did not deter the militant *colons*. Highly organized and well-armed vigilante groups stepped up their terrorist activities, which were directed against both Muslims and pro-government Europeans. To the FLN rebellion against France were added civil wars between extremists in the two communities and between the ultras and the French government in Algeria.

The Generals' Putsch

Important elements of the French army and the ultras joined in another insurrection in April 1961. The leaders of this "generals' putsch" intended to seize control of Algeria as well as topple the de Gaulle regime. The putsch marked the turning point in the official attitude toward the Algerian war. De Gaulle was now prepared to abandon the *colons*, the group that no previous French government could have written off. Talks with the FLN reopened at Evian in May 1961; after several false starts, the French government decreed that a cease-fire would take effect on March 19, 1962. In their final form, the Evian Accords allowed the *colons* equal legal protection with Algerians over a three year

period. At the end of that period, however, Europeans would be obliged to become Algerian citizens. The French electorate approved the Accords by an overwhelming 91 percent vote in a referendum held in June 1962.

During the three months between the cease-fire and the French referendum on Algeria, *colon* "ultras" unleashed a new terrorist campaign aimed against the French army and police enforcing the accords, as well as against Muslims. It was the most wanton carnage that Algeria had witnessed in eight years of savage warfare; an average of 120 bombs per day were set off in March, with targets including hospitals and schools. Ultimately, the terrorism failed in its objectives and a truce was declared on June 17, 1962. In the same month, more than 350,000 *colons* left Algeria. Departing *pied-noirs* destroyed their farms and factories and carried off public records. Within a year, 1.4 million refugees, including almost the entire Jewish community and some pro-French Muslims, had joined the exodus to France. Fewer than 30,000 Europeans chose to remain.

On July 1, 1962, some 6 million of a total Algerian electorate of 6.5 million cast their ballots in the referendum on independence. The vote was nearly unanimous. De Gaulle pronounced Algeria an independent country on July 3. The Provisional Executive, however, proclaimed July 5, the 132nd anniversary of the French entry into Algeria, as the day of national independence.

The FLN estimated in 1962 that nearly eight years of revolution had cost 300,000 dead from war-related causes. Algerian sources later put the figure at approximately 1.5 million dead, while French officials estimated it at 350,000. French military authorities listed their losses at nearly 18,000 dead and 65,000 wounded. European civilian casualties exceeded 10,000 (including 3,000 dead) in 42,000 recorded terrorist incidents. According to French figures, security forces killed 141,000 rebel combatants, and more than 12,000 Algerians died in internal FLN purges during the war. An additional 5,000 died in the "café wars" in France between the FLN and rival Algerian groups. French sources also estimated that 70,000 Muslim civilians were killed, or abducted and presumed killed, by the FLN. The war also uprooted more than 2 million Algerians, who were forced to relocate in French concentration camps or flee to Morocco, Tunisia, and into the Algerian hinterland, where many thousands died of starvation, disease, and exposure. Additional pro-French Muslims were killed when the FLN settled accounts after independence.

-- source: *Library of Congress Country Study of Algeria*

CRITICAL PRAISE FOR THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS

"Probably the most emotionally stirring revolutionary epic since Eisenstein's *Potemkin* and Pudovkin's *Mother* (1926)... No one has carried 'immediacy' farther than Pontecorvo -- neither Rossellini, from whose post-Second World War films, such as *Open City* (1945) and *Paisan* (1946), he learned so much, nor Francesco Rosi, who had experimented in a similar direction in *Salvatore Giuliano*, a 1962 political 'created documentary' ... In none of the political melodramas that were to follow [Pontecorvo's]

epic is there any sequence that comes near to the complex overtones of the sorrowful acceptance with which each of the three bomb-planting women looks to see who will be killed by her bomb.” – Pauline Kael

“One of the great scenes in *The Battle of Algiers* is the besieging of a FLN hideout, a frantic scrambling in a wet clammy Arab house. It's a perfect scene of shock and terror constructed with a multiplicity of detail, a palpable tremor working through the inner court of a four-story building. But the real hammer in *Algiers* is its vengeful, ferocious women, who seem to go on their own: three Arabs, dressed as Europeans, planting bombs in a crowded cafe and dancehall, a fifteen-year old bride whose incredibly thin-limbed body projects a flower's delicacy blended with suicidal courage.” -- Manny Farber

“The most extraordinary film about a revolution since classic Soviet cinema.” --Elliott Stein, *Village Voice*

“So far it has won nine widely assorted prizes at Festivals all over and sets something of a record by deserving them.” – Archer Winsten, *New York Post*

“*The Battle of Algiers* is one of those extraordinary films that doesn't need to be explained. Just seen.” – Joseph Gelmis, *Newsday*

“One of the 10 greatest films of all time.” – Ken Loach, Mira Nair, Tim Robbins. (2002 BFI *Sight & Sound* filmmakers poll)

ORIGINAL NEW YORK TIMES REVIEW

A most extraordinary picture for an opener at the New York Film Festival was placed before the first-night audience in Philharmonic Hall last night. It is Gillo Pontecorvo's ferocious *The Battle of Algiers* ...It is extraordinary, first, that such a picture ...should have been picked to open a festival that has been kicked off in the last four years by noticeably avant-gardish and thematically exploratory films⁶.

The supposition is that this departure was made because *The Battle of Algiers* is an uncommonly dynamic picture that has proved its pulling power at festivals. ...But more extraordinary and therefore more commanding of lasting interest and critical applause is the amazing photographic virtuosity and pictorial conviction of this film. So authentically and naturalistically were its historical reflections staged...that it looks beyond any question to be an original documentary film, put together from newsreel footage...

Yet Mr. Pontecorvo assures us there's not a scrap of newsreel footage in his film -- that he and his crews shot the whole thing very much after the facts, with native amateurs and a few professional actors playing the key and leading roles.

⁶ *The Battle of Algiers* was the opening film of the 5th New York Film Festival. Previous openers were Bunuel's *The Exterminating Angel* (1963), Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet* (1964), Godard's *Alphaville* (1965), and Milos Forman's *Loves of a Blonde* (1966).

This becomes apparent as one follows the narrative account of the violent upsurge of rebellion in Algiers in 1954 and the establishment of a rebel stronghold in the Casbah, from which hit-and-run forays of snipers and women bomb-planters into the French section of the city are made. And it is clear, to anyone who remembers, when the French paratroopers move in and begin the systematic clean-out of the Casbah under the command of a Colonel Mathieu.

This lean and relentless officer, [is] played by Jean Martin, [whose] manner is so intense and forceful, and his fairness and even respect for the resistance leaders are so well drawn, that one feels as though one is truly watching the spectacular and compassionate [General Jacques] Massu. Likewise, the roles of rebel leaders, played by Brahim Haggiag and Saadi Yacef, are done with such ferocity and fervor that they certainly convince me.

Essentially, the theme is one of valor -- the valor of people who fight for liberation from economic and political oppression. And this being so, one may sense a relation in what goes on in this picture to what has happened in the Negro ghettos of some of our American cities more recently. The fact that the climax of the drama is actually negative, with the rebellion wiped out and its leaders destroyed, has immediate pertinence, too. But eventual victory for the Algerians -- and therefore symbolic hope for all who struggle for freedom -- is acknowledged in a sketchy epilogue.

-- Bosley Crowther, September 21, 1967

HAROLD CLURMAN⁷ ON *THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS*

We expected the [5th New York Film Festival] to begin with "experiment"; it began with excellence. *The Battle of Algiers* is a first-rate picture. From the specialist's point of view this film ... is remarkable for being an entirely convincing "documentary" of which not one foot is composed of stock shots or newsreel material. .. In appearance and movement, the crowd scenes convey reality more strikingly than do the techniques of *cinema vérité*.

The Battle of Algiers creates the impression of total objectivity. Folks with a particular political bias will contradict this. (A Parisian journalist told me that the picture was under official ban in France and that the Algerians had contributed not only their land but funds to the film's making.) The film may be "read" in various ways according to one's sentiments and convictions without our being oppressed by a feeling that a prejudiced view is being foisted upon us. Yet a specific emotion is communicated: the film is saying something. It embodies an idea without engaging in argument or special pleading.

⁷ One of the most influential figures in the history of the American theater, Harold Clurman (1901-1980) was the co-founder, with Lee Strasberg and Cheryl Crawford, of the Group Theatre in 1931. Clurman directed over 40 plays from 1935 to 1980 and was drama critic of *The Nation* from 1953 until his death. This is a rare film review.

The picture mirrors events in the Algerian uprising against French dominance of their country. At first we witness incidents in the terrorist campaign initiated by members of one cell of the National Liberation Front (the FLN). We are shown parts of the French counter-terror bombings, etc. The Algerians kill a number of the French European policemen; the French retaliate with even greater ferocity. The Algerians then blow up several cafes and an air terminal largely frequented by the Europeans.

The French army formally intervenes through a paratroop division headed by a Colonel Mathieu. With quiet and deadly efficiency he rounds up the leaders of one of the most active of the terrorist units. Though the army code does not contain the word, torture is resorted to. When the last of the terrorists is trapped (along with his aides) the group is liquidated: the FLN rebellion is quelled [in 1957]. After two years of "peace," massive and apparently spontaneous street rioting breaks out. The struggle takes on wider scope...

No matter who is being destroyed, we shudder at the terror of the events. We take little satisfaction at the "triumph" of one side or the other in the mutual slaughter. (We even pity the poor cops.) In one of the cafes we see a crowd of Europeans (French) at their drinks and a baby licking an ice cream cone. When the place is blown up we remember that child. We are outraged at the wantonness of this "senseless murder."

We of course are equally infuriated by the French when we witness the terrible pain inflicted on the Algerian prisoners from whom their captors are determined to elicit information. The variety and ingenuity of the means employed add to the horror of the procedures. We admire the cool austerity, the intelligence and soldierly self-discipline of the French colonel but we realize that he is a killer. (He points out that he was a member of the underground against the Nazis and is thus no Fascist.) We respect the terrorist leaders for their determination, courage and steely pragmatism but they are as ruthless as the French. Even in its most violent scenes the film indulges in neither sentimentality nor delight in cruelty. It contains none of the sadism common to so many pictures presented as entertainment.

The objectivity of *The Battle of Algiers* is not indifference. We might conclude that the picture's final statement is pacifist. But I doubt that that is its intention. Pacifism is an untenable position unless one is willing to die rather than to resist evil through fighting. Only the saintly are capable of such a course, and very few of us are that.

In the context of the picture alone I found myself partisan of neither side. Some in the audience equated the struggle in Algiers with the war in Vietnam. Others thought of the more violent aspects of the civil rights movement: Watts, Detroit, Newark, and so on. Such analogies are misleading or false. The French had much more justification for the repression of the Algerian revolt than we have in intervening in Southeast Asia: they had been in Algeria for 130 years, had developed the country and given full rights of citizenship to the Algerians.

Is the picture "revolutionary" then, as we understood the term in the thirties? Not precisely. Still what it communicates is not nebulous or indeterminate in its implications. What we may gather from it politically is that ultimately no people will allow itself to be ruled by alien force. In many respects the Algerians profited from the French presence in their country and were treated better than we have treated the black man in ours. They still wanted to be free of any governing class not of their stock, language, tradition, or religion....

[The film's] acting, as well as its other elements, is in the vein of a simple and direct expressiveness. Particularly striking in this regard are Jean Martin as the French colonel: dignified, hard, tempered, keen, and the two men of unalterable commitment and resolution who play the FLN leaders. (Are they professional actors?) ...*The Battle of Algiers* is a film of which it may be said, without absurdity, that it is a masterpiece of epic realism.

-- *The Nation*, October 9, 1967

GILLO PONTECORVO (Director/Co-screenwriter/Co-Composer)

Gillo Pontecorvo was born into an Italian-Jewish family of Pisa in 1919, the son of a factory owner who employed 1500 workers. He was introduced to communism in the late 1930s by his older brother, Bruno⁸, who worked as an atomic physicist in Paris, and by Bruno's circle of anti-fascist friends.

During World War II, while studying chemistry, Pontecorvo worked as a journalist and courier for the Italian Communist Party⁹. He helped organize a network of anti-Fascist partisans and served as a leader of the Garibaldi Brigade, using the *nom de guerre* "Barnaba." After the war, working as a journalist in Paris, he happened to see Rossellini's *Paisan* and was so moved by the experience that he left his job, bought a camera, and began making documentary shorts.

Pontecorvo's narrative efforts began in 1956 with the short *Giovanna* -- an episode of the East German sketch film, *Die Windrose* -- which he described as "a feminist film before there was feminism." That same year came *The Wide Blue Road*, his first narrative feature, starring Yves Montand and Alida Valli, and adapted from a novel by Franco Solinas, who collaborated on most of the director's films, including *The Battle of Algiers*. This was followed in 1959 with *Kapo*, the story of a 14 year-old girl's fight for survival in a concentration camp. It was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film in 1960, but didn't find a U.S. distributor for four years.

After Algerian independence was declared in 1962, Pontecorvo and his collaborator Franco Solinas became "convinced that the anti-colonial struggle was an urgent and important struggle against 'an invincible capitalism in Italy,'" as Solinas put it in an interview. In 1964, FLN leader Saadi Yacef arrived in Italy looking for a leftist director

⁸ In 1950, Bruno defected to the Soviet Union, where he remained for many years.

⁹ He became disillusioned with the party with the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, but did not abandon his communist convictions

to make a film about the struggle for Algerian independence and decided on Pontecorvo. The result was *The Battle of Algiers*. Banned by the French government until 1971, it won 11 international awards, including the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival.

His next film, *Burn!* (1969), another story of revolution, this time set in the 16th century, starred Marlon Brando. It would be ten years before the release of Pontecorvo's next film, *Operation Ogre (The Tunnel)*, the story of the 1973 assassination of Franco's successor. To date, this is Pontecorvo's last feature-length narrative work. In a 1983 interview with the U.K.'s *Guardian* newspaper, Pontecorvo said, "I am not an out-and-out revolutionary. I am merely a man of the Left, like a lot of Italian Jews." He lives today in Rome.

SAADI YACEF¹⁰ (Producer/Story/"El-hadi Jaffar")

Saadi Yacef was born in Algiers in 1928. Trained as a baker, he became involved in Algerian political movements in 1947. After the outbreak of the Algerian revolt in November 1954, he came in contact with the FLN and became the organization's military leader, with "Ali La Pointe" (a pseudonym) as his deputy. Between the fall of 1956 and the summer of 1957, he organized a series of bombings in public places around Algiers. On Sept. 24, 1957, his hide-out in the Casbah was surrounded by French paratroopers. Sentenced to death by a military tribunal in 1957, he was released in March 1962, after Algeria was granted independence.

Yacef created Casbah Films to produce *The Battle of Algiers*, based on his own film treatment. He also took a principle role in the film, essentially playing himself. In January 2001, he was appointed senator by Algerian president Bouteflika.

JEAN MARTIN (Colonel Mathieu)

Born in 1922, Jean Martin made his stage debut after the war under the aegis of director Roger Blin. He appeared in Blin's watershed productions of such famous French avant-garde plays as Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) and *Endgame* (1957) and the plays of Eugene Ionesco and Arthur Adamov. He has been a supporting player in over 70 films, including Jacques Rivette's *Paris nous appartient* (1960) and *La Religieuse* (1966) Jules Dassin's *Promise at Dawn* (1971), Fred Zinneman's *The Day of the Jackal* (1973), Otto Preminger's *Rosebud* (1975), and, more recently, Claude Berri's *Lucie Aubrac* (1997). He also lent his voice to the eponymous bird in Paul Grimault's animated feature, *Le Roi et L'oiseau (The King and Mr. Bird)*, 1980). At 6 ft., 2 inches, Martin physically resembled the statuesque General Jacques Massu, on whom his *Battle of Algiers* character was primarily based. Martin lives today in Paris.

¹⁰ Yacef is often referred to as "Yacef Saadi," in the North African fashion of last name first. We have standardized his name in the Western style.

FRANCO SOLINAS (co-screenwriter)

Born in Cagliari in Sardinia in 1926, Solinas collaborated on all of Pontecorvo's films, from *Giovanna* (1956) to *Burn!* (1969). A Marxist novelist and screenwriter, he wrote the novel on which Pontecorvo based his movie *The Wide Blue Road* (1957). Solinas also wrote or co-wrote Francesco Rosi's *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), Costa-Gavras's *State of Siege* (1973), and Joseph Losey's *Mr. Klein* (1977). His other credits include a handful of spaghetti westerns, such as Damiano Damiani's *A Bullet for the General* (1966), Nicholas Ray's *The Savage Innocents* (1959) and Roberto Rossellini's *Vanina Vanini* (1961). He died in 1982.

ENNIO MORRICONE (co-composer)

Born in Rome in 1928, Morricone is Italy's most famous and prolific living film composer. His hundreds of credits include Bertolucci's *Before the Revolution* (1964) and *1900* (1976); Leone's *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966) and *Fistful of Dollars* (1964); Bellocchio's *Fists in the Pocket* (1965) and *China is Near* (1967); Pasolini's *Hawks and Sparrows* (1966), *Teorama* (1968) and *Salo* (1975); Elio Petri's *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* (1970); Dario Argento's *Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970); John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982); Sam Fuller's *White Dog* (1982); Roland Joffé's *The Mission* (1986, Oscar nomination); Brian De Palma's *The Untouchables* (1987, Oscar nomination) and *Casualties of War* (1989); Warren Beatty's *Bulworth* (1998); and Pontecorvo's *Burn!* (1969).

Morricone collaborated with director Pontecorvo on the music of *The Battle of Algiers*, of which Pauline Kael wrote: "In *The Battle of Algiers*, music becomes a form of agitation: at times, the strange percussive sound is like an engine that can't quite start; pounding music gives the audience a sense of impending horror at each critical point; the shrill, rhythmic, birdlike cries from the Casbah tell us that all life is thrilling and screaming for freedom."