

## A History, Several Stories, and a Dramatic Narrative: *L'Honneur d'un Capitaine* [*A Captain's Honor*], a Film by Pierre Schoendoerffer

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### Abstract

The film *L'Honneur d'un Capitaine* (1982), directed by Pierre Schoendoerffer (1928–2012), is the media option chosen to address the dramatic accounts of one French colonial soldier's struggles to rehabilitate his memory.

Objectives: Instead of writing a story essay or a novel, since he was a gifted author, he preferred to play the soldiers' drama in a film.

Result: As a fictional account, however, *L'Honneur* recovers the past in images imbued with the status of plausibility.

Conclusion: By taking advantage of his enormous experience as a documentary filmmaker, Schoendoerffer produces scenes of a brutal conflict and gives them great authenticity.

### 1. Introduction

The film *L'Honneur d'un Capitaine* (1982), directed by Pierre Schoendoerffer (1928–2012), is the media option chosen to address the dramatic accounts of one French colonial soldier's struggles to rehabilitate his memory. Instead of writing a short story, essay, or novel, though he was a gifted author, he preferred to portray the soldier's drama in a film.

This intermediation between media changed what Certeau called “from the servitude of the written word to the servitude of images” (Certeau, 1975). Instead of using the earliest time in the narrative as its starting point, the film begins in the present and then flashes back to the past. This creative choice is reminiscent of the observation by French historian Marc Ferro (1996), who suggested that a historical film is more about the time in which it is produced than the time in the past it intends to visit.

As a fictional account, *L'Honneur* recovers the past in images imbued with the status of plausibility. By taking advantage of his enormous experience as a documentary filmmaker, Schoendoerffer produced scenes of a brutal conflict and provided them with great authenticity.

Schoendoerffer evokes the Algerian war in his film, not as a general problem, but as an analysis of the actions of a humble captain in command of a small French Army unit, working to pacify a remote location in Algeria. The film contextualizes one episode of the colonial war that lasted from 1954 to 1961, a period that remains tragic and painful for France. Set in the 1980s, 20 years after the end of the conflict, the film shows the remains of the deep internal division in France, which was prolonged when the political left wing, the French Communist Party, disappeared with the dissolution of the USSR.

The film tells the story not of winners, but of the defeated—the losers—soldiers who fought the colonial wars and who were stigmatized as agents of the defeat and humiliated by the refusal of the French Republic to recognize their own institutional guilt. The independence of Algeria shows the great problem that was the failure of France to employ its institutional formulas embodied in principles such as republican government, citizenship and a constitution to make Algeria really a France. (Shepard, 2006, 272).

Today, viewers can reflect on the memory of these men, these “lost soldiers,” who now seem so out of touch with reality. This is similar to E. P. Thompson's comments on

the British craftsmen who revolted against the Industrial Revolution:

Their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy. But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not. Their aspirations were valid regarding their own experience; and, if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties. (Thompson, 1963, 13).

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Historical Context

After the Second World War, France sought to secure its colonial empire, assuming that doing so would ensure its continued stature as a great global power, find his lost greatness (Gildea, 2002). The new political context of the Cold War eliminated the European colonial empires, and because France insisted on keeping its possessions, its army eventually fought the national liberation movements.

Staffed by a professional army, the war in Indochina, some 10,000 kilometers from France, was and proved distant and incapable of sensitizing the national public opinion. Besides that, the French Fourth Republic was characterized by erratic and oscillating policies. He does not know what national policy to undertake. He wants a political goal: to recover the colony by means of a military action. (Clayton, 1994, 54). But if he delineates before him and the actors of the West, a war that they do not understand, the revolutionary war. So, it does not know what kind of war it is in Asia. It delivers the conflict entirely into the hands of the professional military. They wage a bitter war, since they do not understand politics well. French politicians and military of the Fourth Republic, disregarding the basic advice given by Clausewitz, in the sense that Fuller confers on him: to understand perfectly the war in which he engages. (Fuller, 2015, 303). On the other hand, his communist adversary is in his element. Wars and politics are drawn by the same actors for years on end. So did te Viet-Minh (Giap, 1963, 86), so the Algerian insurgents, at least until the independence.

For the newly elected Truman administration, decolonization could be postponed; the priority goals of its international policy were the reconstruction of Europe and the world economy beyond the world contention of communism. However, European issues were reflected in the Asia-Pacific region, vital to Harry Truman's strategy to make his country a leader in a world where the Soviets were considered an aggressive threat (E. William C. Martell, 2015, 240). The US government also proposed, in addition to providing material and equipment, to subsidize about 65 percent of military spending in Indochina that drained the French budget (Military Construction, 1954, 163).

However, in Indochina, the French government did not hesitate to use the blood and sacrifice of the men of its Expeditionary Corps in exchange for millions of American dollars to finance a portion of the French reconstruction after the country's economy was ravaged during World War II (Le Goyet 27).

Though the Indochina war ended in defeat and the French retreated from the colony, in Algeria, the results were different. Conquered in 1830 and settled by one million French inhabitants, Algeria was not only near metropolitan France but was also run by a government that imposed French territorial divisions, *departments*, on Algerian territory.

The majority of Algeria's Muslim population is Arab-Berbers, rural and remained on the sidelines during the colonial period because the European colonists refused to integrate with them as equal citizens (Horne, 2012). When the colony was placed under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, Algeria received, around 1900, a political structure and the tribes and religious institutions are stripped of their lands. Further, without adequate British-style educational preparation for self-government, it made it difficult for Muslims to obtain future independence. The *colons* were producing in the best lands with modern and mechanized agriculture, exploiting raw materials, and the cheap local labor force. (Stora, 2001.) Algiers, Constantine, and Oran were great and beautiful cities with a standard of living higher than that of metropolitan France at the time. although a large Muslim population lived in bidonvilles. (Brown, 2007, 31-32)

The government of the Republic did not notice the beginning of the conflict, which erupted in Setif in 1945. After the French Army and colony militia's ruthless repression, the insurrection quieted down, only to erupt again after the NLF's (Front National de Liberation) brutal attack on Constantine and Philippeville in August 1955. For the French government, this was not a war but rather a breaking of the law, so they designated the insurgents as outlaws, or "*hors la loi*." The Algerians considered the war "the Revolution" (Horne, 2012). Alongside the professional army, the French government called up and sent divisions of reservists to Algeria with the aim of securing the maintenance of order in a territory that it regarded as part of the nation.

The young French people who were called up, *les rappelés*, were removed from the tranquility and comfort of their families and thrown into the brutal furnace of a revolutionary war. They found themselves in Algeria, an African country so different in time and space that they experienced a great deal of difficulty communicating with the local people. Some documentaries have portrayed this conflict, including *L'Ennemi Intime* by Patrick Roitman (2002), which depicted modern rafted (*rappelés*) soldiers with modern equipment fighting against an extremely elusive enemy. In many cases, Muslims were treated with racism and brutality. If the French soldiers traumatized the local people, the war also marked them deeply, such as with bitter remembrances of the Algerians they executed in cool blood (Stora, 1997).

The conflict quickly evolved into a civil war in both countries. The Muslims were divided between local movements, such as that of Messali-Hadj and the NLF, which espoused moderate Islam, and they received strong political support from liberal sectors and Arab nationalists, such as the Ba'ath party of Syria, which later emerged in Iraq. The Egyptian

nationalists, led by Colonel Nasser, also strongly supported the Algerians by providing them with armaments (Mansfield, 2003).

In France, there was a large division among members of the progressive arena, whose oppose the war, which was led by the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Gaullist nationalists, as well as on the Republican spectrum (Joly, X). French Communists in Algeria have tried, as Drew has shown, to change the conditions imposed by the colonization. However, major structural difficulties such as the complex Algerian social division and the ignorance of Arab and Berber languages, made difficult the expansion of communist propaganda. (Drew, 3)

As the war continued, the opposition against it grew, but there were also fierce supporters of the permanence of the colonial condition, mainly among Algeria's French settlers landowners, *les pied noirs*, who integrated with the French troops (along with 180,000 Muslims) who fought in the Garigliano at Monte Cassino and in the Allied Campaign of France and Germany. The remaining intransigence in defense was related to the point of view that Algeria was French and that Muslims were second-class citizens. As though they were charging a historical debt owed by the motherland, they defended the French presence in an irrational and intransigent manner.

The Organisation de l'Armée secrète, (Secret Army Organization, or OAS) was the terrorist organization of the French settlers. Its entrenched racism increased the gap between the Algerians and the French (Horne, 2012). Finally, upon determining that the war was lost and Algeria would gain its independence, the OAS turned its arms against the French themselves and attempted to kill President Charles De Gaulle, who pursued them relentlessly (Gildea, 2002). At the beginning of the insurrection, a large number of Muslims eagerly anticipated its outcome. Many decorated veterans of World War II quickly moved to support France; however, other Muslims veterans swelled the ranks of the ANL (Armée de Liberation Nationale) and fought for complete independence. As depicted in *L'Honneur d'un Capitaine*, the real war was an opposition of old military comrades, the French and the Algerians, on a new battlefield.

In contrast, the professional French soldiers, who were veterans from Indochina, were endowed with extensive experience in the revolutionary fight and swore never to abandon Algeria, which they considered an integral part of French territory. The fiercest French fighters were the foreign legionnaires and the colonial parachutists, whose 10<sup>th</sup> Division, commanded by General Massu, won the controversial Battle of Algiers.

General Charles De Gaulle (1890–1970), ascended to power following a series of complicated and Machiavellian political maneuvers, that brought about the end of the indecisive Fourth Republic. The support of extreme right-wing elements from Algiers, and ruling Army circles, was decisive to put him in power almost illegally (Joly, XVII). He maintained an astute and ambiguous political stance, oscillating between staying with Algeria until its complete withdrawal. Finally, it was decided that France would pull out of the colony unconditionally. De Gaulle initiated the peace accord between the French and the FNL signed on March 29, 1962, in the city of Evian, France. (Ben Khedda, 1998).

The colonial paratroopers and foreign legionnaires revolted, and De Gaulle punished the insubordinate military, "*les soldats perdus*," against outraging public order. The decolonization carried out by the government of the Fifth Republic, presided over by General De Gaulle, was perceived by the colonial troops and the OAS members as an abject surrender. These French soldiers, as a group, tended to regard these memories as traumatic, as Winter and Sivam explain, overwhelmingly painful, whose effects extend for a long time. (Winter, Sivam, 2000, 35).

### 3. Proedments

#### 3.1 The Memory Filmmaker as a Historian: Film as a Writing of History

The narrative of painful breakups reflects the history of Pierre Schoendoerffer himself. In 1871, his grandparents fled from their native Alsace-Lorraine to France because despite their Germanic origins, they were French in their hearts and minds. In 1952, unemployed and without expectations in life, like so many other young Frenchmen of his age, Pierre Schoendoerffer became a fisherman and a crewman on cargo ships. After discovering photography and the cinema, he later became a cameraman in the cinematographic service of the French Army.

In addition to producing documentaries, Schoendoerffer was also risking his life, like all other soldiers. In 1953, he parachuted with the first lead into Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam, and was injured in the process. Recovering in Hanoi, he learned that the battle was going badly and could be lost. He parachuted again at Din Bien to stay with his comrades until the end of the battle, but he was taken prisoner by the Vietminh troops. In Schoendoerffer writings, he exorcised the defeat, praising his undervalued comrades and the deceased, to whom he claimed to owe a special debt (Robic-Diaz, 2001).

As Winter and Sivam explain, civil society links the family to the state apparatus, which includes both the market through business or individual initiatives; includes the action where the, *homo actans*, both entrepreneurs and artists, especially a filmmaker, satisfy social needs, sometimes for money and others for personal gratification. (Winter, Sivam, 29). This seems to be the case with Schoendoerffer. work with war and trauma. But even if a colonial war like and a civil war simultaneously is a duplicating factor of social trait. Since we are dealing with an individualized group, *les soldts perdus*,

who have a memory, and who were greatly disturbed by the war in Algeria, this painful memory has broken the balance and requires a great effort to recover it. (Winter e Sivam, 28).

The memorialist's recollection began around 1964 when Schoendoerffer went to Cambodia to shoot *La 317<sup>ème</sup> Section* [*The 317<sup>th</sup> Platoon*]. This acclaimed and award-winning film, shot in strict black and white photography, narrated the saga of a small Franco-Vietnamese unit operating at the same time as the fall of Dien Bien Phu (Blum-Reid, 2003). The film was an adaptation of his novel *La 317<sup>ème</sup> Section*, which had been published in 1963. The film won the prize for Best Script and Scenario at the 1965 Cannes Festival.

The lead actor of *La 317<sup>ème</sup> Section* [*The 317<sup>th</sup> Platoon*] was Jacques Perrin, who was then a promising young actor. He played the adolescent Lieutenant Torrens, and he was in charge of the veteran soldiers. In *L'Honneur*, he plays the role of Captain Caron, demonstrating a fatherly demeanor while in command of young Alpine soldiers who could be his children.

In some viewers' opinions, *Apocalypse Now Redux* by Francis Ford Coppola contained references to *La 317<sup>ème</sup> Section* through the metaphor of the egg and Vietnam. One soldier says, "White goes away, but yellow remains" (Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/>).

At the height of the 1960s, during the conflict that Benjamin Stora called the "Vietnam War of America," Schoendoerffer shot the documentary *Section Anderson* or *Anderson Platoon* (1967, US) in South Vietnam in September of 1966; it went on to win an Oscar in 1968 for Best Foreign Film. Schoendoerffer also the film French war, in Indo-China, as a war waged by the poor French soldiers, who were returning to Vietnam. In *Anderson Platoon*, Schoendoerffer revisited the same war, this time a scientific, electronic, and industrialized one made "by the rich," the US (Stora, 2004).

Schoendoerffer was accepted as an embedded member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, a small platoon commanded by Joseph B. Anderson, an African American officer. The platoon's nomadic operations through the jungle metaphorically demonstrated the quagmire of the Vietnam War. Though a foreigner, he was accepted with sympathy by the American GIs, who seemed to feel a bit embarrassed in front of the intrusive camera of a foreign filmmaker, that filmed dramatic events, such as the deaths of American comrades in the field and in a tragic helicopter crash.

### 3.2 Between Writing and Image: An Effect of Reality

In *L'Honneur*, Schoendoerffer accomplished an operation that Certeau called "historiographical." The bias adopted to analyze and fabricate his object is fictional, so to develop it, he used various dramatic rhetorical resources. Despite their fictional nature, his films follow a documentary rhetoric, recovering the atmosphere of the drama and giving the impression of veracity.

Schoendoerffer's films do not enter into dialogues with any other films apart from his own documentaries; the camera is in his hands (*camera au poing*), moving in constant motion to follow the action. Schoendoerffer remained a great fan of films from his childhood, including Michael Curtiz's (1988–1962) *Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936) and *Ran* (1985), by Akira Kurosawa. Elsewhere, the interlocation between films, especially in the war genre, is constant. In the remarkable film *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016), directed by Mel Gibson, it is clear that this author could engage in an intense dialogue with several classic war films, both American and otherwise.

To present his film, Schoendoerffer preferred to build a narrative linked with what Paul Veyne described as the denominating effect of conspiracy or plot (1971). For Hayden White, in the elaboration of the story via the plot, a sequence of events is modeled on a story that reveals itself to be a tragedy (Hayden, 1973). Nothing is more appropriate than setting one's film in a place where all the protagonists can be judged metaphorically, including the Republic itself, as in the case of *L'Honneur*. The film unfolds within a court of justice, and the formalistic atmosphere allows the characters to gather to follow the trial. As with previous films of judgment, the truth brings about a release from the ghosts of the past.

But these past is not about common events. One remembers the events of war, a war that, in addition to being lost, is reflected daily in the reality of France. Each time the memory is agitated (as in the television program), everyone points the finger at the "soldats perdus," accusing them: you are the guilty ones! You are criminals! . As Winter and Sivam discuss, the nature of war, and in this case a revolutionary war, becomes critical in the activity of remembrance. (Winter, Sivam, 34). Especially when it comes to a series of wars, like Indo-China and Algeria. The Algerian trauma, however, is more crucial and more enduring. It does not only involve professional soldiers, it involves conscripts, innocents taken from their family lives and turned into beasts. And these last ones are especially vulnerable like the alpine soldiers of the film that we analyzed.

The narrative is constructed as a confrontation and summation of points of view in the forms of speeches and images. These are, according to Certeau's methodology, the sources he selects to justify his thesis (1975). It is an arbitrary construction because it is personal. He used some sources and rejected others when trying to construct for viewers a "way of understanding" when each interpretative procedure was employed as a means of defining and organizing their

significations to finally make the movie “thinkable.” In this sense, he reverses the chronological order of events, as previously noted (Certeau, 1975).

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1 *Lights, Camera, L'Honneur: The Story of the Film and Its Temporalities*

One of the first results and a work of tessitura between temporalities. Shoendoeffer suggests that they are distinct, because in one, the time of the war was the contemporary one, it was the present where the memory was produced .. The Italian philosopher Agambem states that the “contemporaneous and he who receives in full face the beam of darkness that they come from his time. “It is necessary, to be a reflection of the testimonies and authors who examine him. the events. And yet, for Roland Barthes (quoted by Agambem), the contemptuous and untimely.(Agambem,2008, 7).

In *L'Honneur*, the action of the present day begins in the 1980s during a televised debate about the war in Algeria. A prestigious leftist university professor, Poulet (played by Jean Vigny), accuses Captain Caron of being a criminal and a torturer. The wife of the military leader, Patricia (played by Nicole Garcia), decides to sue the accuser, retaining a lawyer, who is also her uncle (played by Georges Wilson).

From this moment on, the structure of the film becomes diegetic, featuring intermediating testimonials and places that recover temporalities and significations and trigger a succession of well-woven memory games, reconstructing an ignored and multifaceted past.

This film is about a specific war, though it interweaves its narrative with the symbolic highlights of three wars weighing upon France, the court, and its participants. In the beginning, the focus is on the “big one,” the true and legitimate war, World War II. It has already been described as a civil war among the Europeans, but it was also a watershed period that divided France ideologically between a Free Gaullist France, following the Allies, and the fascist Vichy supporters of Nazi Germany.

As the winners write history, the spell of the Gaullist-Allied victors is presented as a sacred memory. According to Pierre Nora, these memories are rooted in solid objects; in this case, they are displayed in the medals on soldiers’ garments and in their discourses about torture (Nora, 1997). In this way, history and the memory of the Second World War are an account forged by the victors that lie beside the good because there were “good” people on the side that won, and the “bad,” or evil, side was defeated.

The same is not true of France’s two colonial wars, Indochina and Algeria, where in French soldiers were cursed, and their memory embedded in suspicions, with history marked by irreconcilable ideological divisions.

##### 4.2 *Patricia: The Priestess of the Memory and the Dimensions*

In *L'Honneur*, the multiple games of the reconstruction of memory begin when Patricia realizes that her husband was a complete stranger. They lived apart for most of their married life because Caron was fighting in wars overseas until his death separated them permanently.

Patricia, a school teacher for teenagers, has a young man who seems to be her boyfriend, they exchange confidences even though he is apparently being despised by almost every other character in the film. She seems quite disturbed by Poulet’s speech on the Television Schedule. Faced with the surprising exhumation of the memory of her deceased husband, she decides to attack Poulet in an operation. as dangerous as a war operation. It is a war operation, but a judicial battle. He knows he will be exposed, attacked, heard unpleasant truths. But she seems determined to restore her life and restore balance in her world. She has to take Poulet to court, condemn him and prove her husband’s innocence ..

His decision to act in public may be referred to as a “social production,” as Winter and Sivam refer to the matter of memory in a court of law. The private memory of her husband, Caron, comes to exist in the court, a public space, in a collective *muldura*, in a decision to clear Caron that will be collective.(Winter, Sivam, 9). .

The couple is not completely separated because like an ancient priestess, Patricia communicates with her husband at the edge of the ocean in a very particular way that is closed to all others. Initiating the trial, she walks to the sea, where her image jumps about happily next to an anchored boat, as if greeting her decision. At the end of the film, emerging as the winner in the trial against Poulet, she runs to the sea, announcing her success to Caron.

Patricia is still in mourning. Perhaps that is why, in respect of the rigid traditions of mourning a frenetic widow, her boyfriend should always keep her distance, and be watched by others with contempt reserved for a human jackal. To return to live fully, she needs to rescue the memory and death of her husband and, thus, to separate from him definitely.(Winter Sivam, 32).

Caron’s name reminds us of Charon, the ferry man of Hades who carried the souls of the dead across the River Styx after being paid a token fee. At the end of the trial, Patricia wins a symbolic franc of victory, which becomes the price of the

ticket to be paid by Caron for the trip that would take him not to Hades but to the brilliant Elysium of the Memory.

#### 4.3 Making History: Bringing the Dead to the Stage

Making history calls for bringing a population of the dead to the stage (Certeau, 1975). Caron's memory becomes the object of an exchange between the living and the dead. Initially, to recover the institutional memory of the perennially absent husband, Patricia goes to the military academy where her young son is studying. The General, one of Caron's former classmates, opens the door of an inaccessible building and suggests to her a script to help her find the memory of the husband in the perpetual unknown.

Patricia will have to make a broad account of her husband's memory and the memory of her own country and herself. The memory of the Resistance is multifaceted, and there is the accursed memory of collaborationism with the Nazis and Vichy; in the French case, the memory of collaboration was replaced by the memory of the French collaboration with the Holocaust. (Winter, Sivam, 176).

In saying goodbye to the General, Patricia's diegesis guides her to a site that Pierre Nora calls the "place of memory," the Fort D'Ivry, which are the archives of the French Army. There, she finds documentation on the Indochina War.

The second place she travels to is the snowy alpine region of Glières, where Caron was a member of the local Resistance and fought the German Wehrmacht, who were brutally suppressing the partisans in the area. Veteran friends of the guerrilla struggle praised Caron, saying that they fought against the Nazis through the bell towers of the French churches and recalling the Algerian insurgents, who claimed to fight the French for the "minarets of their mosques." This comparison is not without controversy, and for Sivam it remains almost incomprehensible. (Winter, Sivam, 171).

Now, more informed about her husband, Patricia is ready to go to court. In addition to the testimonies of the soldiers fighting in Algeria, she and the spectators are confronted with the original facts, thus establishing a historical connection between the past and the present.

The other rescued memories are those of Prof. Poulet and his lawyer, who represent the combative and intransigent segments of the left wing and the PCF. There, among liberals who thought that colonization was immoral, were communists obedient to Soviet politics. They also support the decolonization and fight the Republic, the Army, and its soldiers. In the sense of this mission, they want to avenge the murders of the Muslim militants that occurred 20 years earlier; however, they are astute in not accusing the Army, much less the Republic, of these crimes. When considering crimes perpetrated by the State, they prefer to blame one individual, alone and now deceased, Caron.

Despite the Nazi-Soviet treaty, the invasion of the Soviet Union, home of world socialism, facilitated the task of the PCF. He went on to fight the Nazis uncompromisingly, facilitating his national and international investigation, because he was fighting for the cause of France and the USSR. The PCF agrees to pathe the history and the French national memory and considers many of its leading, national myths (Joly, XV).

#### 4.4 The Trial as Archeology

For Foucault, the inquest had its inception in ancient Greece and was its great legacy for the West. The inquest granted the population the power to judge and to know the truth from opposing a truth without power to power without truth, revealing the occurrence of a crime and denouncing its author (Foucault, 2001); however, an inquest can conceal the fight for political power that is often interlaced with knowledge (Foucault, 2001). Oedipus ignored that Laio, whom he had assassinated, was his father. Not knowing the prophecy, he killed Laio and was taken to a court where the holder of the truth, a humble shepherd, clarified the obscure circumstances of the homicide.

Based on Arendt's conclusion, a solitary man, by nature, would never be a politician like Caron, who, dead or alive, is a solitary individual. In contrast, Poulet is an astute politician, a man of the masses and capable of establishing new limits for his political lies (101).

The thesis Poulet's lawyer suggests is that Caron was a criminal throughout the 19 days he spent commanding the Alpine company and killing innocent Algerians. What would be the effective basis of this accusation that turns Caron's image into a criminal? The defense retorts: the accusation is a lie. Alexandre Kouré argued that the notion of lying assumes the production of an image that results in a transformative action over reality capable of changing it to one's favor. By suggesting that Poulet and his lawyer are lying in their statements, he highlights their status as politicians, as the affinity between politics and action is the changing of the world, not its permanence.

The task of the PCF during the war in Algeria raised many theoretical and political problems. The PCF was fought and forced to take on difficulties. Surprised in 1954 by the eclosion of the conflict, he experienced great political and, above all, theoretical difficulties, in understanding the FSLN's political politics and its appropriation with Arab nationalism and the notion of Algeria as a nation in formation (Joly, 134).

#### 4.5 Chronologies in the Memory of the Story

What is a testimony? According to Kour é(1945), witnessing is an act, a promise, and an oath. The testimonial act in the film is also the construction of an epistemology capable of making history, while lying is a discourse performance (1945). The image contributes to accentuating the impression of truth, and according to Genette, the historical construction (as Schoendoerffer does) and diegetic approach emphasizes searches, movements, and displacements (1966).

Meanwhile, Certeau's chronology considers a masked law making its presence known in the film, placing discursive times capable of reuniting the disjunction and the contrary statements at risk (1975). If Caron became the commander of the Alpine Company on the 19<sup>th</sup> day, it must be kept in mind that one of the murders Poulet's lawyer attributed to him occurred the previous day, the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the campaign. Despite the defense proving that Caron only assumed command on the 19<sup>th</sup> day, which would exempt him from the participation and responsibility in the previous homicide, Poulet's lawyer protests indignantly. By lying and attempting to alter reality, he rejects the defense's thesis. It does not matter if Caron assumed command on the 18<sup>th</sup> day. What matters is, even *in absentia*, he was the commander, and this circumstance suffices to incriminate him (La Porte, 2016).

In this crucial phase of the trial, Schoendoerffer resorts to a memory recourse in the form of witnesses of the Alpine Company's soldiers' acts. Are witnesses who rely solely on memory trustworthy? Martin faced a similar problem while examining the Nixon tapes and the contents of the tapes and testimony when he discussed the memorialist mechanisms and the limits of the truth or the accuracy of words in personal testimony (Martin, 2006).

In the historiographical operation of his work, Schoendoerffer uses the depositions of the Alpines as primary sources, weaving a panel with fragments of their memories that, as Veyne (1971) says of history, are always imprecise and always incomplete. He uses the fragments as the testimony with which he constructs his plot. The soldier Shuster, recollecting the events of the day prior to the Captain's arrival, remembered that they were ambushed and suffered serious losses, including fatalities, injuries, and captures. As retaliation for this defeat and humiliation, the soldiers undertook the insane initiative of kidnapping an informant of the FNL and torturing him to death (2006).

On following day, the 19<sup>th</sup> day, the Captain assumes command of the Alpine Company. He is aware of the previous day's events and reproaches the soldiers for their act of retaliation. "Soldiers are there to make war," he says, "not to take revenge." Having said that, he initiates a strict training program designed to leave the men with the same agility and mastery of the ground as their Algerian antagonists.

#### 4.6 The Torture and the Torturer

In *L'Honneur d'un Capitaine*, torture is present in the bio-power action exerted on the body and the memory, a systematic practice of the French Army in Algeria.

The trauma of the Nazi occupation and their torture returns to the debate in the trial when Poulet's lawyer accuses the French military of behaving like the Gestapo. If the French fought against the Nazis to defend the bell towers of their churches and their territory, Poulet's lawyer says that the Algerians fought for the towers of their mosques and their landscapes.

The torture practiced by the Gestapo against members of the French Resistance was reborn in a disturbing way: now, it was the French who were inflicting torture on the Algerians. Journalist Lucien Bodard (1914–1998) noted that in Indo-China, the use of torture was common in all French units, even though it was a taboo subject. The military did not like to talk about the practice and hated anyone who did. A French person in dialogue with an unnamed officer asked:

"Did you torture him?"

He replied calmly,

"I tortured."

"Ofentimes?"

His voice remains impassive: "When it's necessary."

"And when does this happen?"

"It is up to me to decide." (Bodard, 1997, p. 281)

In Algeria, to combat the urban terrorism adopted by the FNL, torture became an almost institutionalized practice and was carried out on the battlefield and in remote facilities. Ambler stated that "no aspect of war in Algeria, produced more passionate controversy [or] more violent attacks on the French Army, than the extensive use of torture by governmental forces" (1968, 236). This practice produced specialists in the field and a great deal of literature on the topic, and the issue of torture had an impact on French public opinion despite the government's desire not to publicize the progress of the conflict. To keep its operations secret, the French government prevented the press from reporting on the war

independently. In 1957, according to Knightley, Tom Brady, reporter of the *New York Times*, recalled that censorship prevented the news about the French massacre in Setif from being spread. He declared, "All information in Algeria is controlled by the French." It may be ironic, but the *Stars and Stripes*, the US Army newspaper, shows contempt for the French censorship and published the complete story as "the true picture of events" (2004, 393).

Knightley went on to note:

The Pentagon is not the slightest bit worried about public unease over Coalition attacks on journalists because it is convinced that the public, especially the American Public, would support its view and its actions, and if not, then they know how to employ the kind of media strategies that successfully drum up support. (2004, p. 548)

In the "war on terror" and the 2001 Iraq War, given the practices used at the Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib prisons, it can be said that the use of torture increased and was justified fully by the Bush Administration in the face of enemies who they said were targeting innocent civilians (Hersh, 2004, 5). When covering the Iraq War in 2001, media reports on military operations were centralized at the Headquarters of the Coalition in Qatar, thereby filtering the flow of information so that one could not obtain a complete picture of the conflict.

During the Algerian war, the French high command and civil authorities took ambiguous positions in relation of torture; in some cases, they closed their eyes, while in others, they issued

frank encouragements to torture (Ambler, 1968). Schoendoerffer depicted this torture, practiced on the spot and without apparent sadism, but took it only to the point of obtaining from the prisoner what the authorities needed to know. The Alpine Company caught a young pastor in the area of operations and subjected him to a simulated defense. Then, the Alpine soldiers, with Caron at their helm, were attacked and immobilized by well-aimed enemy fire until they could counterattack on the top of a hill, killing one militant and capturing another. Therefore, Caron, who was down at the base of the hill with his Harki, the Algerian interpreter, ordered that the prisoner be lowered to him so he could interrogate him about the enemy's tactics. The phrase "bring him down" in French can also mean "kill him." The soldiers on the hill top ask for confirmation of the order, and Caron confirms, referring to the prisoner, saying "*descende-le*," "bring him down." This is understood as an order to kill him.

Poulet's lawyer uses this comment as the most complete proof that Caron was a cold-blooded murderer; however, that was not what the group's testimonials present in court. Even though the Captain might appear to be the unpolluted image of a French hero, Schoendoerffer suggests that he was not an angel but rather an ordinary man (like Caron). To understand the content of the depositions, Halbwachs (1997) pointed out that collective memory, like the one employed in the plot of the film, gains the strength of permanence because it was born of a group of men whose memories are based on the memories of the others. Each individual memory is a portion of the collective memory.

Faced with an impasse in the debate over whether or not Caron ordered the shooting of the prisoner, Minh, who was next to Caron during the firefight, recalls the event, and testifying again, he provides a summary of the murder version, evidencing the semantic error committed.

The Algerian local school where the Alpine Company was camped was bombed, and many children were left dead or wounded. Enraged, Caron calls for reinforcements, planes, tanks, and the Foreign Legion, willing his troops to eliminate the elusive opponents who disguise themselves among the local population. He quickly sweeps the region, and then, suddenly, after a difficult fight in an abandoned *mechta* (the Arabic term for small farm), he receives the precise information he needs about where the enemy is hidden.

In the construction of intrigue and tragedy, the fatal outcome comes only after hard questioning and torturing as an Algerian reveals the location of the enemy.

#### 4.7 Truth, Lies, Action, and Duplication

In attempting to overcome the elation explanation, a captain is accused of being a war criminal, and Schoendoerffer's account of the events proves the thesis of the civil war between the French and the Algerians. He demonstrates that this war is composed of duplicate images. Thus, Caron's command of his troops repels the opposing unit, the *katiba* (his effectiveness was a company), stationed in the same territory. Caron and his adversary both have impeccable military service records: both are veterans of the Second World War, the Indochina War, and have been awarded the French Medal of Honor.

Caron follows the information, which he obtained interrogating prisoners in a strong way, in French, "interrogatoire musclé." The information seems to have been planted to lure him to a spot where he would be easily ambushed. He is later shot and falls dead on the rocky, snow-covered ground. After the shots, cries echoed in the snow-covered landscape: "He is dead! He is dead!" What does the death of a god mean? It means that a page in the history book is being turned. Dead



gods do not reappear anymore. Thus, if an ignored voice shouts that Caron has died, it is as though he is declaring the end of the French presence in the territory.

After Caron's death, the Alpines carry the corpse of their symbolic father and commander for 18 days. In the courtroom, one of Caron's lawyers, Maitre Valouin (played by Claude Jade), reads his last letter to his wife, where in he expresses his disappointment with the course of the conflict, repeating each phrase and showing how the war had become hopeless. The act that finally clears the Captain and establishes closure for the story becomes a tomb for Caron, the fallen soldier.

## 5. Conclusion

At the end of the trial, Arendt's historic and poetic speech is invoked, recalling hearing of Ulysses, the hero, during the trial at the palace of King Alcinoüs on the island of Feaces (Homer). The catharsis occurs when the hero listens to an account of his own adventures and misadventures and is touched by it. In hearing of his own life, he realizes that it is poetry and history simultaneously reconciled with reality. The essential reason for history and poetry to appear in their remarkable purity is to be reconciled with reality so that the listener, actor, and the sufferer are one and the same person (Arendt, 45).

Most of these alpine soldiers were composed of contingent was conscripts, who fought not an army, but small groups of muslims. . For many of these draftists, the war was meaningless. It was incomprehensible and they hated her for making them brutal and violent .. In 1962, there were 500,000 drafting soldiers permanently in Algeria. (Winter, Sivam, 163-164).

Through his films, Schoendoerffer recovers the memory of his comrades following the recent practices of his home country and its efforts to close a historical injury. The French government answered a call expressed in a manifesto signed by eminent intellectuals, apologizing for the politics of the Vichy regime with respect to Jews. In the 1990s, when the French Republic reestablished relations with Vietnam, the French President, while speaking in Dien Bien Phu, apologized to the Vietnamese for the tragic war and to the veterans of the CEFEO (Corps Expeditionnaire Français du Extrême Orient) for the mistakes made by the Republic. Today, the remains of these soldiers rest in the National Memorial in Fréjus, France. Nevertheless, it was only in 1997 that the ANF recognized the police action unleashed in Algeria as a war.

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