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EMPIRE AND EXOTICISM IN FRENCH FICTION CINEMA, 1930-1939

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Although exoticism is a prominent trope in French cinema of the 1930s, scholarly examinations of its deployment in narrative cinema have focused almost exclusively on colonial representations. While the colonies were undeniably important to the interwar imaginary, there remain many fiction films whose action takes place outside the realm of Western empire. Despite their lack of formalized imperial ties, these non-colonial exoticist films rely on narrative strategies that convey the ideological and/or cultural superiority of Western values. Thematically and ideologically, then, exoticist cinema merits a more inclusive criteria, one that looks beyond the fact of territorial affiliation with Western empire in order to examine how inter- and transcultural narratives figure the East-West divide on screen.

Using films and related contemporary discourse, this project aims to redefine the exotic in order to account for both colonial and non-colonial forms. In addition, this study identifies and analyzes recurring figures, plot devices, and narrative outcomes that dominate French exoticist film cycles between the arrival of synchronized sound in France and the outbreak of World War II in Europe.

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Dedication

To my parents and my husband.

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INTRODUCTION

The Exotic Imaginary in 1930s France

La sensation de l'Exotisme [...] n'est autre que la notion du différent ; la perception du Divers ; la connaissance que quelque chose n'est pas soi-même ; et le pouvoir d'exotisme, qui n'est que le pouvoir de concevoir autre [*sic*].

- Victor Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme*

Cinema's fascination with the exotic began almost as soon as the medium was born. Many of the early documentary short films – the *vues* – produced by the Lumière brothers' film company aimed to capture the same kinds of scenes that previous media could only describe in words or depict within a fixed image. Abel confirms that these travelogue-style films made up a sizeable portion of the Lumières' productions before the advent of narrative cinema, adding that early narratives also capitalized on “exotic” settings like Russia and Corsica to tell stories more lurid than the French bourgeoisie would accept within their national borders (*Ciné* 91, 145-50). The idea that French taboos could be more safely played out in a foreign setting was thus established fairly quickly in the normalization of film narratives. By the 1920s, narrative cinema had embraced the dramatic potential of the exotic, including colonial as well as entirely foreign territories as possible settings. In 1921, the runaway success of Jacques Feyder's *L'Atlantide* solidified for the French public the theme of exotic conquest with a distinctly imperial register. A sensation among French filmgoers, *L'Atlantide*

became the foundation for what has been known as the *cinéma colonial* and wielded influence over other, related subgenres whose influence persisted at least until the Occupation.

Adapted from a popular novel by Pierre Benoit, the film's appeal stems from both the alluring subject matter and Feyder's sheer ambition; he was the first French director to insist on location shooting in the colonial Sahara, a gamble that galled the contemporary French film industry. But Feyder's strategy paid off in spades as critics and spectators elevated the film to epic status – at last, the French had reason to crow over a homegrown blockbuster whose scope and accomplishment presented an effective challenge to the ubiquitous products of an increasingly dominant Hollywood. The aesthetic pleasure, intellectual curiosity, and technical challenge that made the Sahara attractive to ambitious filmmakers like Feyder intertwined with the thorny politics of empire. French colonies were thrust into the limelight, giving their administrations an opportunity to promote the colonial ideal under the guise of exotic adventure and illicit romance in an enticingly foreign (and potentially hostile) setting.

Cinema was hardly alone in catering to the widespread public taste for the exotic. Popular novels with exotic overtones enjoyed notable success, and many such books barely had time to find a readership before their stories were snapped up for a screen adaptation, as was the case for Benoit's *L'Atlantide*. In addition to novels, the music hall also staged interpretations of an appealing exotic in a variety of shows during the interwar period, several of which have become legendary for their sensationalism. The *Revue nègre* was one such show, and after a 1925 début in Paris its notoriety helped launch the French career of American-born dancer and performer Josephine Baker. Her rise to superstardom

in France quickly transcended the medium of the music hall, and after the coming of sound she starred in two films: *Zouzou* (Allégret 1934) and *Princesse Tam Tam* (Gréville 1935). While illustrative of the star image that Baker cultivated among the French public, nevertheless these films have held disproportionate interest for scholarship dedicated to images of the exotic other in interwar French cinema and/or in the broader culture.¹

Although publishing and show business continually offered new glimpses into various facets of the exotic imaginary, temporary exhibitions offered a government-sanctioned vision of the exotic whose impact lingered throughout the decade. Two such events stand out in historical memory. The 1931 Exposition coloniale internationale (ECI), whose opening was timed to celebrate the centenary of French rule in Algeria, transformed the Bois de Vincennes into – literally – a global village.² Attractions were designed to feature indigenous *colonisés* and their demonstrations of non-Western lifestyles, and in this context, explicitly pro-imperial ideology found supportive platforms of expression. The list of attractions included caravans, camels, merchandise made from colonial products or featuring colonial themes, and cuisine native to the colonies; Ageron adds that such popular fare was, by and large, tastefully presented (503). Nevertheless, anti-colonial activists reacted with vocal protests, and the Surrealists worked alongside the Parti Communiste français to set up a counter-exposition that aimed to interrogate and debunk the mythology that the ECI had

¹ For more on Baker's multimedia appeal, see Ezra, whose work is also discussed below. For an example of how Baker's films have been (mis)used as emblems of racism and xenophobia in French cinema, see Scherzer, discussed in Chapter Four. *Zouzou* and the issue of Baker's star image are also discussed in the same chapter.

² The colonial exposition was originally intended to host imperial countries besides France as well, but Ageron describes the considerable difficulty encountered in the organizers' recruitment effort (497-8).

been designed to enforce.³ Despite the highly charged political implications of the exposition, Ageron claims that advocates ultimately conceded that the ECI had failed to educate the “average” French citizen about the importance of maintaining an imperial France; despite the significant social presence of the exposition, it did not sway politicians or voters when it came to imperial policies (508-509).⁴

While politically the exposition could be considered a wash, aesthetically its influence was profound. In the realm of cinema, Bergfelder, Harris and Street claim that 1930s set design offers ample evidence of the ECI’s inspiration among French nationals and the myriad émigré filmmakers who worked in the French film industry throughout the decade (199-200). Thanks in large part to the ECI, “the authentic and the pastiche – the artifact and its reconstructed location – co-existed in French life in ways that were designed to appeal to the public’s desire for spectacle rather than to any need for education or documentary evidence,” particularly in filmic representations (Bergfelder, Harris and Street 200).⁵

Another important colonial spectacle, also located in Paris, likely contributed to this blurring between artifice and authenticity. The Exposition internationale – the World’s Fair – opened its doors in 1937, six years after the ECI. While in principle this event could be seen as less explicitly tied to the

³ Despite their intention to dismantle colonialist ideology, Norindr criticizes the Surrealists’ approach as identical to that of the Exposition itself, and its failure as a counter-ideology “lies in its conventional understanding of ‘primitive’ material culture and the multiple functions of its objects, what I will call the Surrealists’ ‘bourgeois’ logic.” (68)

⁴ In terms of cultural memory, Ageron argues that the 1931 exposition gained significance in the long term even if it lacked political implications in the more immediate aftermath; decades later, once the trauma of postcolonialism began to reverberate throughout France, many would point to the 1931 exposition as the very height of French imperial glory. However, this retrospective tendency conveniently obscures several subsequent imperial-themed events, including the 1937 World’s Fair (509-10).

colonial project, the French used their privilege as the host country to capitalize on the opportunity to show off the breadth and supposed strength of *la plus grande France* on a truly global stage. However, as Elizabeth Ezra points out, this time around the ideological backlash against European imperialism remained largely absent from public discourse, a shift she attributes to the drastically different political atmosphere of the late 1930s, when issues linked to the rise of fascism in Europe took clear precedence over any kind of colonial debate (29).

Openly questioning imperialist policies was thus implicitly frowned upon at a time when the French could rely on their colonial conquests to bolster confidence in their country, and framing empire as a point of national(ist) pride was a rhetorical tactic which commentator Jean Vignaud frequently employed in his editorial column for *Ciné-Miroir*. As early as 1935, Vignaud laments the fact that French filmmakers produce less (or at least less effective) cinematic propaganda than the Americans or the British, and (stunningly, in retrospect) he singles out the German film industry for strong praise in this regard.⁶ In early 1938, Vignaud also imagined a specific purpose for films directed at the colonized populations: “Il y a une tâche urgente à accomplir: celle de réaliser des films pour l’éducation des peuples noirs ou jaunes.”⁷ He also wanted colonial films to represent France at prominent events overseas; to this end, he advocated for the completion of Léon Poirier’s nationalistic hagiography *Brazza, ou l’Épopée du Congo* in time to represent France at the 1939 World’s Fair in New York City.⁸

⁵ With particular attention to the Indochinese section of the exhibition, Panivong Norindr executes a detailed study of the colonial imaginary and its impact on aesthetics, design, and ideology in *Phantasmic Indochina*.

⁶ “Notre Opinion: Propagande.” *Ciné-Miroir* 547 (27 Sept 1935): 610. Print.

⁷ “Notre Opinion: Une tâche à accomplir.” *Ciné-Miroir* (11 Feb 1938): 82. Print.

⁸ “Notre Opinion: Pour l’Exposition de New-York [sic].” *Ciné-Miroir* (27 Jan 1939): 50. Print.

In these and other similar comments on contemporary cinema in the 1930s, Vignaud declared his affiliation with a small but vocal chorus of right-wing critics who anxiously discerned a collective shrug from the cinematic community in response to the colonial question. In a 1945 treatise expansively titled *L'Exotisme et le cinéma*, fellow pro-imperialist Pierre Leprohon laments the scarcity of politically driven, colonialist films made in France, by French filmmakers, for both domestic and international audiences. Leprohon sums up the state of colonial films from a colonialist's perspective:

Colonial ou métropolitain, le cinéma est l'esclave du romanesque, de l'intrigue sentimentale, de l'anecdote où la convention et l'arbitraire règne sans discussion. [...] Les colonies y apparaissent comme la terre d'élection de l'aventure où pullulent les traîtres indigènes. C'est le domaine incontesté du 'baroud,' le pays des soldats et des caïds. On y parle beaucoup d'honneur, de devoir, d'héroïsme, sentiments dépourvus de nuances et réservés à la race blanche contre la fourberie de quelque indigène en révolte. On dramatise à longueur de films les conflits de races et de religion. Tout cela de façon si constante que le cinéma colonial peut sembler jusqu'alors résolument hostile au cadre dont il prétend vanter le charme. Il constitue ainsi une contre-propagande dont – et c'est là le comble – personne ne semble se rendre compte. (208)

Cannily identifying the latent anti-colonial strain evident in many films belonging to what later came to be known as the *cinéma colonial*,⁹ Leprohon pessimistically sizes up this subgenre as a victim of formulaic, "romanesque"

conventions. Without naming names or listing particular titles, Leprohon dismisses as inadequate prior French attempts at creating a more suitably imperialist narrative form. He offers a single example of a narrative film with a pro-colonial message: *L'Homme du Niger*, directed by Jacques de Baroncelli and released in 1940, after the Occupation had already begun (212-13); the other films and filmmakers he designates produced documentary rather than narrative films about the colonies. Despite these critics' continuous disappointment in the colonial narrative cinema of the 1930s, Leprohon and Vignaud offered few, if any, fresh ideas that might have helped create a resolutely imperialist strain of *cinéma colonial*, one more in keeping with their vision of empire.

This kind of contemporary hand-wringing – combined with the wide variety of more recent, retrospective cultural and sociohistorical studies that address this colonial obsession¹⁰ – can obscure the French public's interest in events and issues affecting regions well outside Europe and colonial territories. Lost in critical assessments of the *cinéma colonial* are many films where some kind of non-colonial exotic figures prominently in the narrative through setting, characters, or a combination of both. For instance, the Russian Revolution and its lingering aftermath contributed to a fixation on the country and its people that played out repeatedly in films like *Les Nuits moscovites* (Granowsky 1934), *Sous les yeux d'Occident / Razoumov* (Allégret 1936), and *La Tragédie impériale* (L'Herbier 1937).¹¹ Tensions between Russia and Japan date back to 1860 in *Yoshiwara* (Ophüls 1937), and the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War provided fodder for

⁹ This point about anti-colonial *cinéma colonial* is expanded in Chapter One.

¹⁰ To name only the most prominent and exhaustive of these recent studies, consider Abdelkader Benali's *Le Cinéma colonial au Maghreb*, David Henry Slavin's *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France, 1919-1939*, and Elizabeth Ezra's *The Colonial Unconscious* (discussed below).

¹¹ The cultural fascination with Russia is further explored in Chapter Two.

Port-Arthur (Farkas 1936). The tensions between Japan and China also drew a great deal of attention, and as Michael B. Miller points out, French culture in the 1930s accumulated a swath of conventional representations of the Far East, particularly China and especially Shanghai. Thus it is hardly surprising that Shanghai serves as the setting for two more East Asian-themed films: *Le Drame de Shanghai* (Pabst 1938) and *Mollenard* (Siodmak 1938).¹² Finally, the waning years of the Ottoman Empire are reflected in the domestic disagreements of *L'Esclave blanche* (Sorkin 1939, discussed in Chapter Four).

Although the *cinéma colonial* has already been a recurring object of study for cultural historians from several disciplines, as a category it has not yet been fully exhausted. Left un- or under-examined are other European nations' colonial exploits enacted in French film narratives; for instance, the British stake their claim to part of North Africa in *La Route impériale* (L'Herbier 1935) and share power with local royalty in *La Dame de Malacca* (Allégret 1937). Films set in sub-Saharan Africa have also been neglected, including the Jean Gabin vehicle *Le Messenger* (1937), a film released the same year as his more canonical colonial film *Pépé le Moko* (Duvivier 1937).¹³ However, given the broader context of international and intercultural interest generated in non-colonial films, even films like *Pépé le Moko*, which has been examined time and again,¹⁴ would benefit from the perspective offered by an exoticist framework instead of a strictly colonial one.

¹² All of the East Asian-themed films named in this paragraph are discussed in Part Three.

¹³ Gabin's colonial *oeuvre* is the subject of Chapter 1.

Theorizing the Exotic

Whether situated within or outside of colonial policy, the early 20th century saw two prevalent, ambient strains of thought pertaining to Western interaction with the exotic. One, akin to the Enlightenment-era idea of the “noble savage,” advocated a strict separation of cultures (disingenuously) justified by a desire to better preserve the admirable qualities of non-Western indigenous peoples. When Victor Segalen began to interrogate the idea of exoticism, he adhered to this line of thought, and he believed that the concept of the exotic was often corrupted by images and other cultural products labeled as such. His ruminations were eventually compiled in a text published as *Essai sur l'exotisme: Une esthétique du divers*, a collection of notes produced between 1904 and Segalen's death in 1919. Although these sketches never took the form of a completed essay, several connecting threads emerge to bind the whole together. What stands out is Segalen's extremely broad definition of exoticism, one that encompasses differences of all kinds, from sexual to geographic to cultural to temporal. For Segalen, the concept of *le divers* to refer to anyone and even any *thing* outside the perceiving self; in defining *le divers* so broadly, Segalen creates, in a sense, a proto-other that predates the existentialists' use of the term. His exoticist aesthetic underscores the role of art as a mediator for an individual's deeply personal sensations faced with *le divers* – translatable as *diversity* in order to distinguish this idea from the theoretically charged term *difference*.

With a definition of exoticist art that includes erotica and even historical narrative, large portions of Segalen's *Essai* are theoretically unwieldy and ill suited for the present study. However, some of his most strident criticisms of

¹⁴ See Vincendeau's book-length study of *Pépé le Moko* for a complete analysis.

Western conduct when faced with the exotic address a more conventional exotic other, one principally defined by geography and culture; these critiques are highly germane to the questions posed here. For instance, Segalen openly criticizes the tendency to equate exoticism with colonialism, and he regrets colonialism's tendency to homogenize diverse peoples by forcing adoption of Western sociocultural norms. Not only should Western cultures avoid an assimilationist stance, he argues, but the West should recognize that the entire essence of exoticist sentiment is rooted in the inability to grasp the Other in its entirety: "L'Exotisme n'est donc pas une adaptation; n'est donc pas la compréhension parfaite d'un hors soi-même qu'on étreindrait en soi, mais la perception aiguë et immédiate d'une incompréhensibilité éternelle" (43-4). Rather than seeing this incomprehension as an impediment to efficient colonial conquest, Segalen finds it useful as long as it is properly understood.

Segalen coins the term *exotes* to describe individuals who become exceptionally well versed in such cross-cultural interactions. However, tourism alone cannot transform someone into an *exote*; such a shift in perspective requires a degree of assimilation and commitment to living a non-Western life that leisure travel leaves well out of reach. Similarly, Segalen laments that many accounts of overseas experience, whether fictional or grounded in actual firsthand experience, fail to capture true exoticism, and he denounces those who peddle such texts and images as "pseudo-Exotes (les Loti, les touristes, [... que je] nomme les Proxénètes de la Sensation du Divers)" (54). The transformation that must take place in a would-be *exote*, he says, demands a strong sense of self,

combined with an essential respect for the distance that separates him¹⁵ from his environment:

L'exotisme n'est donc pas cet état kaléidoscopique du touriste et du médiocre spectateur, mais la réaction vive et curieuse au choc d'une individualité forte contre une objectivité dont elle perçoit et déguste la distance. (Les sensations d'Exotisme et d'Individualisme sont *complémentaires*). (43-44, original emphasis)

Segalen suggests that the primary means to promote the good kind of integration is through sexual contact with native women.¹⁶ He writes at some length about the women he frequented during his stint in Polynesia (72-3), an admission of miscegenous dalliances that were far less outré at the turn of the century than they were in the 1930s. Segalen's deeply rooted, patently evident sexism also accompanies highly problematic descriptions of racial difference – for example, when he compares blacks to monkeys (86). These assumptions of white male superiority and the one-sided benefits entailed in sexual and interracial contact with other peoples ultimately undermine Segalen's call for a deeper, more immersive understanding of non-Western cultures.

Segalen's problematic juxtaposition of respectful separation and entitled (sexual) exploitation plays out in a different, though no less problematic way in another approach to relationships with the exotic, one founded on the ideals of cultural assimilation to Western norms and behaviors. Most pronounced in colonial ideology, in which schools and other infrastructure projects are designed

¹⁵ The masculine pronouns here are deliberately chosen; it is highly doubtful that Segalen aimed to include Western women in the category of potential *exotes*.

¹⁶ Shifting policies and social implications regarding sexual contact in the colonies are developed in Part Two. See Stoler for an in-depth analysis.

to inculcate Western values in rising generations of *colonisés*, the limitations of this approach are nevertheless evident in Homi Bhabha's concept of the mimic man, a colonized individual doomed to be "almost the same but not quite" due to irresolvable racial and cultural separations between colonizer and colonized (122). While Segalen elevates separation to a kind of virtue even as his idealized *exote* profits from a race-, class-, and culture-based hierarchy, in contrast, assimilationist ideology extols an ideal of unity made unrealizable by efforts to shoehorn indigenous peoples into a Western power hierarchy that systematically prevents them from attaining its highest echelons.

Neither wholesale separatism à la Segalen nor disingenuous assimilationism alone can adequately describe the ideologies made visible in exoticist fiction cinema of the 1930s. Instead, a blend of both approaches emerges in screen narratives. Non-Western characters act as mimic men or rebel against Western rule; non-Western women fall in love with Western men and face the consequences of their love. Meanwhile, Western characters outside Europe oscillate between isolation and belonging, between an inexorable desire to return home and the tantalizing possibility that they never need to return home again.

This theme of exile has been a staple of studies devoted to the so-called *cinéma colonial*. Every so often, a scholar sets out to reexamine the subgenre from a perspective in accordance with prevailing modes of scholarship. Pierre Boulanger tackled the subject in 1975 with a transnational assessment of the genre in *Le Cinéma colonial de L'Atlantide à Lawrence d'Arabie*, including in his corpus French, American, and British films. For Boulanger, these films are self-evidently colonial in their setting and, ostensibly, their ideology. Although

Boulanger's commentary is less than exhaustive, his work became a key precursor to the burgeoning array of critics who took up the cause in the 1990s and into the new century; works like Abdelkader Benali's 1998 book *Le Cinéma colonial au Maghreb* and David Henry Slavin's 2001 *Colonial Cinema and Imperial France, 1919-1939* unpack many of the same films with greater attention to detail, including historical events and other circumstances that contributed to the films' narrative structures and social impact.

Still, a major fault common to these and other studies of colonial cinema lies in the chronic limitation of geography. Although Andrew and Ungar assert that just 85 of the more than 1,000 feature films produced in France during the 1930s have narratives set outside the metropole (311),¹⁷ North Africa nearly always serves as the analytical locus for studies devoted to this perpetually recycled corpus, leaving out films set in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa even when the settings were part of a Western empire. Still other films were set in French protectorates, including *Yamilé sous les cèdres* (d'Espinay 1939, discussed in Chapter Three) and *Trois de St-Cyr* (Paulin 1938). Yet, even this revision to imperial inclusion would still omit films set in a region without direct French rule, but which deploy similar ideologies with regard to racial and gender differences, cross-cultural interaction, and general exoticism. As the Far Eastern examples (listed above) illustrate, this non-colonial corpus of exotic films could be construed as a separate cycle that runs throughout the 1930s and follows to a certain extent the changing tides of imperial and international politics. However, comparing the colonial to the non-colonial exotic throws into relief many

¹⁷ This figure seems to be of Ungar's determination, but it may have come from *Générique des années 30*. In either case, the criteria used to categorize these films are not divulged.

ideological mechanisms at work in *all* representations of non-Western difference. Instead of privileging Africa alone, this project aims to reclaim those films normally lost in this imperial tunnel vision and configure a single generic category that covers them all.

Evidence suggests that some early- to mid-20th century criticism encompasses both the colonial and the non-colonial in its treatment of the exotic. In *L'Exotisme et le cinéma*, for instance, Leprohon draws an important distinction in how places outside France are represented in the cinema. His notion of *cinéma exotique* – “exotic cinema” – refers to films produced by foreign film industries, narratives or documentaries that represent people, traditions, or ways of thinking that are unfamiliar to French audiences. Leprohon also designates this category by the name *exotisme d'importation*, the “imported exotic,” and, assuming a French audience, he names Scandinavian and Turkish national cinemas as contemporary examples (28-30). His second category, *cinéma d'exotisme* – translatable as *exoticist cinema*¹⁸ – focuses on narrative content rather than the cultural or national origins of the filmmakers. Exoticist cinema involves people and places beyond the filmmakers’ socio-geographic boundaries, an idea describable with the oxymoron “domestic exoticism.” Since exoticist films are produced by people intimately familiar (if not necessarily native to) the culture of production, but not the culture represented on screen, their perspective on cultural outsiders draws from conventional or stereotypical ideas rather than aiming for an objectively realistic portrayal of the non-Western culture.

¹⁸ While not a new term – for instance, the descriptor *exoticist* also appears in Bergfelder, Harris, and Street’s analysis of 1930s set design – the idea of exoticism has not, to my knowledge, been specifically defined or problematized in relation to narrative content of 1930s French cinema.

Bergfelder, Harris and Street argue persuasively that the aesthetic style of French films in the 1930s was not intrinsically French due to the influx of émigré filmmakers in influential production jobs. Filmmaking teams could be and often were international, and a French film could therefore be most accurately defined as a production with a predominantly, though not necessarily exclusively French infrastructure. While this project poses no objection to the validity of this assertion, it should be noted nevertheless that these émigrés came to France from cultures generally designated as belonging to Western civilization, mostly Germany and Russia. Non-Westerners were not yet part of this international industry, and their exclusion meant an inability to contest from within the representations that circulated within it. Sustained, critical attention can and should be paid to how Western filmmakers in France, regardless of their precise national roots, incorporated non-Western elements into French narrative cinema in such a way that a nearly unbridgeable chasm between Western and non-Western cultures emerges whether or not the latter were subject to imperial rule.¹⁹

Two subsets of exoticist cinema further refine our present corpus. The first subset designates exoticist films that aim to recreate a complete vision of a foreign culture from top to bottom; a foreign setting – whether a studio recreation or on-location – thus combines with actors (of any national origin) all playing characters that “belong” incontestably to that setting. Typically, the narrative deploys complementary efforts to include culturally significant objects,

¹⁹ A useful expansion of the current study would compare this phenomenon across European national cinemas. Such a study might echo Bergfelder, Harris and Street, but with a focus expanded to include exoticist ideology as well as aesthetics. This approach, however, is beyond the scope of this project.

ceremonies or traditions that contribute to what aims to be a hermeneutic portrait of the imagined foreign space. Reflecting this diegetic isolation, this subcategory can be called *integral exoticism*. In keeping with its status as an object of French fascination, Russia frequently served as an integral exoticist setting during the 1930s. Dudley Andrew's category of "atmosphere films," an idea that obliquely anticipates the current discussion of exoticist films, points specifically to several Russian films. Colin Crisp suggests that in the context of interwar cinema, "Russia was simply an alternative to France, with the added exoticism of distance" (*Genre* 35). Besides Russia, Julien Duvivier offers two other examples: *Golgotha* (1935) narrated the passion of the Christ in a film whose ambitions – lavish sets and location shooting in Algeria, a star-studded cast – outshined its lackluster reception; his *Le Golem* (1936), set in the Jewish quarter of 17th-century Prague, shows an insular setting despite the religious differences that divide the city's population and power structures.

The second subset of exoticist cinema involves more heterogeneity in both setting and cast, and these films typically feature a narrative that foregrounds and problematizes the cross-cultural contact it represents. These interactions fall into two loose categories, "civilizing" action and romantic coupling, with considerable and almost inevitable overlap between the two. Marking this tendency towards cultural intersection, this subcategory can be called *transversal exoticism*. Transversal exoticist films share a series of narrative patterns that rehash the trope of a clash of civilizations between East and West. A setting outside France does not signal transversal exoticism on its own; genres like the spy film also feature exotic locales and foreign characters, but the locus in these

narratives lie in political operatives rather than in culture clashes.²⁰ It is the transversal exotic's reliance on archetypal models of intercultural contact that makes it the basis for the present study.

Industry and Exoticism

During the interwar period, film directors both renowned and unknown dabbled in exoticism. Although Jean Renoir is known more for his intracultural rather than intercultural relations, in 1929 he directed *Le Bled*, a film commissioned in honor of the centenary of French colonization in Algeria (and now nearly impossible to obtain).²¹ Duvivier, a prolific director, made several noteworthy forays into the exotic that include integral as well as transversal exoticist films (see above and Chapter One), although his output for the decade also includes films set in France that set aside the question of intercultural contact. Other directors like Nicolas Farkas (see Chapter Four), André Hugon (see Chapter Two), and Léon Poirier made exoticism the backbone of their *oeuvres*, although their work has failed to earn them recognition in the same category of achievement as Renoir or Duvivier.

In addition to these directors, some stars also became associated with exoticism in the 1930s French film industry. Actors were frequently cast not just for their employability as a particular theatrical type, but for an even more specialized ability to stand for a nation- and class-specific role within exoticist contexts. Unsurprisingly, nonwhite stars were especially vulnerable to this kind

²⁰ To offer examples, the exclusion of the spy film from the current study prevents discussion *Mademoiselle Docteur / Salonique, nid d'espions* (Pabst 1936) and *Gibraltar* (Ozep 1938). The tendency for spy films to situate the exotic within Europe – albeit in liminal spaces like Greece or southern Spain – also precludes the intercultural friction required for transversal exoticism.

²¹ A detailed analysis of Renoir's colonial film and its production history can be found in Cantier.

of casting; Josephine Baker, as mentioned above, had music-hall appeal that carried over easily to the cinema in the early years of the decade. An outpouring of recent scholarly attention has focused on her multimedia career as a black American woman who became an undeniably French phenomenon; in this vein, Elizabeth Ezra offers a thorough assessment of Baker's role in and effect on popular culture in the interwar period. But Baker's popularity waned in direct proportion to the public's taste for film narratives derived from music hall conventions. After 1936, the stars realigned when the Japanese-American actor Sessue Hayakawa experienced a rebirth in the French cinema thanks to Max Ophüls' *Yoshiwara* and then *Forfaiture*, Marcel L'Herbier's 1937 remake of Cecil B. DeMille's *The Cheat* (1915), the film in which Hayakawa first found transnational stardom.²²

Besides Baker and Hayakawa, each a legendary star, an assortment of lesser-known but recognized nonwhite actors filled out the ranks of secondary and tertiary roles in exoticist films. Tela Tchaï, a dancer with gypsy origins, played the role of Tanit-Zerga in Pabst's 1932 adaptation of *L'Atlantide* and was also considered for the role of Aïscha la Slaoui in *La Bandera*.²³ The Antilles native Rama Tahé, also a dancer by training, had her film début in Poirier's early sound film *Caïn, aventure des mers exotiques* (1930) and went on to major roles in *Miarka, la fille à l'ourse* (Choux 1938) and *L'Occident* (Fescourt 1937, discussed in Chapter Three). The Vietnamese Foun-Sen, whose roles were far greater in number but more minor in scope, appeared in a number of East Asian films, including *La Dame de Malacca* (discussed in Chapter Three) and four films

²² Hayakawa's French career in the 1930s is the subject of Chapter 6.

discussed in Chapter Four: *Port-Arthur* (Farkas 1936), *Yoshiwara* (Ophüls 1937), *Le Drame de Shanghai* (Pabst 1938), and *Mollenard* (1938). Russian national Valéry Inkijinoff – usually credited as Inkijinoff – also amassed a considerable résumé in the 1930s thanks to markedly Asiatic features that belied his citizenship; among other exoticist films, Inkijinoff was featured in *Amok* (Ozep 1934, discussed in Chapter Two), *Le Drame de Shanghai*, and *La Bataille* (Farkas 1933, discussed in Chapter Four).

The case of Habib Benglia, a black actor born in French Algeria who appeared in a number of French films, exemplifies the limited range available to nonwhite actors in the industry during the 1930s. In an essay published in *Cinémonde*, Michel Gorel relays his first encounter with the actor's work: "Je l'ai vu débiter dans une toute petite troupe d'avant-garde [...]. Il incarnait un soldat nègre [...et] son jeu admirable nous réconciliait avec ce mauvais spectacle. Et puis, il fit du cinéma, mais personne ne songea à utiliser son génie de grand artiste."²⁴ Indeed, in his cinematic career as well, Benglia had a number of remarkable performances in largely unremarkable productions. In *Sola* (Diamant-Berger 1931), a vehicle for the realist singer Damia, Benglia plays the "Hindou," a clairvoyant who appears just long enough to foreshadow the protagonist's ill-fated future. There were also bit parts in legendary films, like the *tirailleur sénégalais* held by the Germans in *La Grande illusion* (Renoir 1937), but Gorel's complaint about the lack of opportunities for Benglia remained true throughout his career.

²³ John W. Martin claims that Duvivier intended to cast Tchaï in the role, but producers insisted on Annabella instead as a means of boosting the box office for the film (*Golden Age* 66).

²⁴ "Il y a un romantisme de 'couleur' mais... Qui saura utiliser la magnifique photogénie des noirs?" *Cinémonde* 207 (6 Oct 1932): 805-6. Despite the belittling insistence on "photogénie" in the

The notable exception to this pattern of small films or small roles is Benglia's work in Grémillon's *Daïnah la métisse* (1931), a cinéphilic cult film whose production history competes with attention to narrative content in critical studies.²⁵ In this enigmatic but beautiful film, Benglia plays the eponymous Daïnah's husband, named in the credits only as "le mari," who works on a cruise ship as an illusionist. The couple has a cordial, even chilly relationship – in conversation they call each other *vous* – and there appears to be a troubling vacillation in the husband's concern for his wife's well-being and his desire to control her. After Daïnah disappears from the ship, other passengers speculate and spread rumors about his violent relationship with Daïnah, and they consider him a prime suspect in the affair. The official inspectors, however, are unconvinced by such groundless scuttlebutt; instead, a brutish ship mechanic named Michaux (Charles Vanel, cast very much against the type discussed below) emerges as their primary suspect. Learning of the investigators' suspicions, the husband confronts Michaux in the machine room and pushes him over the rails to his death. This sequence is full of expressionistic contrasts and effects: long shadows, towering shot angles, Michaux's dirty work clothes that contrast sharply with the husband's formal suit, and no dialogue – only the ship's machinery grinding and humming over the soundtrack.

Actors Marcel Dalio and Lucas Gridoux were part of the most visible category of ethnic actors in 1930s France: the Jews. Their characters' ethnicity occasionally aligned with their own, as when Dalio played Rosenthal in *La*

title and some argumentation based on patently racist ideas, Gorel's point is that French cinema should aim to outdo its American rivals in terms of better roles for black actors.

²⁵ Jean Louis Schefer proposes an analysis of *Daïnah* in *Images mobiles: Récits, visages, flocons* (220-26) but his focus is on the articulation of desire; the questions of race and narrative patterns examined here are therefore not central to Schefer's reading.

Grande illusion and the Marquis de la Chesnaye (a more obliquely Jewish character) in *La Règle du jeu* (Renoir 1939). More often, though, his work illustrates the kind of transferable otherness that was also seen in contemporary Hollywood²⁶; an ethnic actor could cross ethnic lines, but only to play another nonwhite ethnicity (Foster 138). Dalio's other roles included a Tunisian in *La Maison du Maltais* (Chenal 1938) and the Ottoman sultan in *L'Esclave blanche* (Sorkin 1939).²⁷ As for Gridoux, an actor of Romanian Jewish extraction, he was typecast in villainous bit parts of all races after playing Judas Iscariot in Duvivier's *Golgotha*. Duvivier cast Gridoux again as the Arab inspector Slimane in *Pépé le Moko*, and he also played East Asians in *Forfaiture* (L'Herbier 1937) and *Les Pirates du rail* (Christian-Jaque 1938).²⁸

White actors, especially women, were also asked to cross ethnic lines that reduced or erased their whiteness. In two of the most extreme (but most popularly successful) examples, Annabella first played an upper class Japanese woman in *La Bataille*, then Gabin's Bedouin lover in *La Bandera*. Charles Boyer, one of the rare examples of a French leading man in full ethnic drag, also played the Japanese husband in *La Bataille*. But other white, male actors forged a connection with the exoticist genre even if their roles did not require ethnic reassignment. Charles Vanel played so many roles in colonial films – *Le Grand jeu* (Feyder 1934), *L'Occident* (1937), *Bar du Sud* (Fescourt 1938), *S.O.S. Sahara* (de Baroncelli 1938), among others – that *Ciné-Miroir* dubbed him “Homme du Sud,”

²⁶ Miyao mentions how Sessue Hayakawa was frequently called upon to play non-East Asian ethnicities during his career in Hollywood; similarly, Foster describes how the Jewish American actor Jeff Chandler played several Native American roles. In her study of ethnographic film, Rony also makes reference to the “arbitrariness of ethnic distinctions in Hollywood” (177).

²⁷ *La Maison du Maltais* and *L'Esclave blanche* are discussed in Chapter 4.

and declared him a “représentatif d’une race d’hommes qu’on trouve dans tous nos postes sahariens, une race de solitaires, vivant dans leur petit poste comme des religieux dans leur monastère.”²⁹ Likewise, Victor Francen created a similar niche for himself as a kind of colonial father figure/romantic lead, albeit one that connotes a higher class status than Vanel’s image normally allowed. For 1930s audiences, Francen’s name was so synonymous with military dignity in both colonial and non-colonial settings that the opening line of Nino Frank’s *Pour Vous* review of *L’Occident* reads, “On s’étonne que M. Victor Francen ne soit pas là.”³⁰ Between them, Vanel and Francen thus covered the entire spectrum of class-inflected roles involved in exoticist films, particularly the films in the *cinéma colonial*.

In the 1930s, the French film industry was well versed in the art of curating and dispatching the elements necessary to constructing a conventional exoticist atmosphere for the screen. With the benefit of hindsight over nearly a decade of this extensive exoticist cycle, René Wild writes in *Cinémonde*:

Il suffit d’aller au studio lorsqu’on y tourne un film d’atmosphère étrangère, voire exotique, pour admirer quelles merveilleuses ressources Paris offre aux ‘cinéastes.’ Il n’est pas un échantillon d’humanité qu’on ne puisse s’y procurer, mais, ce qui est surprenant, c’est qu’on arrive à le découvrir à point nommé, au jour et à l’heure voulus, pour figurer dans un film. Ça, c’est le miracle quotidiennement réalisé par le régisseur, [... et] je suis sûr qu’ils

²⁸ *Pépé le Moko* is discussed in Chapter 1; *Forfaiture* is discussed in Chapter 6. While *Pirates du rail* was not viewed for the current study, it forms part of the corpus discussed in *Générique des années 30*.

²⁹ Claude Bernier. “Charles Vanel: ‘Homme du Sud.’” *Ciné-Miroir* 678 (1 April 1938): 195.

³⁰ *Pour Vous* 483 (2 March 1938): 5. *L’Occident* is discussed in Chapter 3.

vous amèneraient des Esquimaux, s'il en fallait, une baleine
 grandeur nature et bien vivante ; un baobab haut comme un gratte-
 ciel, un Peau-Rouge garanti grand teint, tout cela sans sortir du
 département de la Seine.³¹

The exotic itself was an industry in 1930s Paris, and the cinema found great profit in feeding the public's appetite for it.

Goals and Range of the Current Study

This project's goals are twofold. First, in order to deal more effectively with all varieties of the exotic in French fiction cinema of the 1930s, we must expand the reductive category of the *cinéma colonial* to include locations, characters, and themes that lie outside Crisp's tripartite formulation of the genre (see Table 1). Both colonial and non-colonial exoticist narratives can be examined under the banner of exoticist cinema, and similar goals emerge to reflect their similar narrative structures.

Colin Crisp's <i>cinéma colonial</i> criteria (Genre 47-50)	Exoticist cinema criteria
Foreign legion	Any non-Western setting
Interracial relationships (with an implicit emphasis on romantic liaisons)	Socially structured interaction between people of different cultures, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Romantic coupling • Cross-cultural friendship • Military service • Religious or civil service mission
"Freudian drama"	Assimilation anxiety based on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) a threat of permanent alienation from Europe, and/or b) a Westerner's explicit effort to assimilate into a non-Western culture.

TABLE 1: Crisp's *cinéma colonial* versus exoticist cinema.

³¹ "Un illustre chômeur ! L'authentique Grand-Eunuque du Sultan Abdul Hamid a trouvé momentanément un emploi : conseiller technique pour *L'Esclave blanche*." *Cinémonde* 529 (7 Dec

Although many studies of colonial cinema presume that setting alone can suffice to justify the label, this is not the case, as Crisp implicitly acknowledges by leaving setting out of his criteria. Nevertheless, his details still fail to encompass many films that other critics have reasonably categorized within the subgenre. For instance, according to Crisp's standards, military imperialism situated outside of the Foreign Legion context cannot be considered a potential contributor to the generic label; this omission privileges the Legion myth above equally but differently mythologized branches of the French armed forces that also participated in colonial and territorial conquest and/or protection. Military drama – in which soldiers' honor and manhood are tested – was considered a separate subgenre of film during the 1930s, but these films occasionally overlap with a colonial setting in a way that merits consideration as *cinéma colonial*. For instance, in a review of *L'Occident*, *Pour Vous* labeled it a military drama despite its interracial love affair and clear intercultural conflict.³² *Trois de Saint-Cyr* (Paulin 1939) is another military-colonial film that sends its young cadets into service in the French protectorate of Syria, a region that qualifies as exotic even if it falls pointedly outside a typical North African setting. Despite the rich potential for colonialist posturing involved in such a location, *Trois de Saint-Cyr* focuses instead on the glory and importance of patriotic sacrifice; the government's justifications for making *la plus grande France* – namely, the non-

1938): 113.

³² This label is connoted rather than explicitly stated in the first few lines of Nino Frank's review: "Nous nous trouvons à bord d'un navire de guerre ou parmi des officiers de marine qui parlent honneur, discipline, traditions." *Pour Vous* 483 (2 March 1938): 5. This review is also discussed in conjunction with *L'Occident* in Chapter 3.

colonial protectorates – the primary beneficiary of such efforts are left unexamined.

Poirier's blockbuster *L'Appel du silence* (1936) offers another example of non-Legion military affiliation, albeit one whose primary colonial location is the Algerian desert. The film's protagonist, the historical figure Charles de Foucauld, abandons a military career for a life of the cloth as a missionary in the Sahara. This film, whose phenomenal box office marks it as (by far) the biggest success of the exoticist genre, fails to meet *any* of Crisp's criteria despite its clear colonial implications. An officer unaffiliated with the Legion, Foucauld has no interracial lovers either before or after taking his vows (at least in Poirier's version of the facts), and the narrative can lay only a vanishing claim to "Freudian drama" – if the aspiration to emulate an illustrious military forefather even counts. Likewise, *Itto* (Benoît-Lévy and Epstein 1934) has a clear colonial backdrop – Morocco during the Rif War – and emphasizes military action in the execution of the plot, but its militarism comes through mostly from the colonized people's perspective instead of the colonizers'. The forbidden romance in *Itto* also rejects generic expectations, since it takes place not across the Western/non-Western divide, but between members of two indigenous tribes in conflict with one another. For both *L'Appel du silence* and *Itto*, then, an exoticist reading would make them less anomalous than they appear within the *cinéma colonial* framework; a more accurate label for these works would be exoticist films that fall on the colonial side of a much broader spectrum of narrative possibilities.

The revisions to Crisp's criteria proposed here address their shortcomings within the *cinéma colonial* as they expand their critical range to common themes in all varieties of exoticist film. Broadly speaking, the criterion of the non-

Western setting encompasses both integral and transversal exoticism; beyond this baseline, a transversal exoticist film must also portray some kind of socially structured interaction between cultures and/or present evidence of assimilation anxiety among the Western protagonist(s). The nature of these interactions can be more or less implicated in colonial activity, and they are certainly not limited to romantic liaisons. While many interracial and intercultural relationships are featured in exoticist cinema, cross-cultural friendships are often equally important. Rivalries and foils like the ambiguous relationship between Pépé and Slimane in *Pépé le Moko* also figure into this criterion, as do the more straightforwardly adversarial conflicts that arise from military engagement, as in the Legion films. However, it is a misnomer to classify as a “relationship” the interactions between the legionnaires and the “salopards” they fight in, for example, *La Bandera*; the utter absence of these fighters as even minimally developed characters on screen leads to interactions seen from a single perspective rather than relationships like the give-and-take between Pépé and Slimane. Still, military conflicts *are* interactions of an epic sort, and battle lines drawn between cultures create situations ripe for cinematic exploitation whether the setting is colonial, as in *La Bandera*, or not, as in *La Bataille*.

The specter of assimilation also hangs over a majority of the films that fall into the exoticist category, and some of the ways that people approach long-term expatriation offer a tantalizingly subversive vision of the exotic life. Homi Bhabha’s mimic man embodies the extent to which Western and non-Western cultures are perceived as incompatible and therefore resistant to unproblematic hybridization. While Bhabha’s mimic man addresses the plight of the colonized who hit an impenetrable glass ceiling in their assimilation process, Western

individuals who find themselves overseas with slim prospects of returning to Europe also suffer from the feeling that they have been transformed into some uncanny hybrid of Western extraction but non-Western acclimation. Westerners generally react to this assimilation anxiety either by experiencing a near-paralyzing fear of permanent expatriation, or by taking clear steps to cast off their Western mantle for a more comfortably assimilated lifestyle. These ideas will be explored in Part One.

In addition to expanding the boundaries of how the exotic is read in French fiction cinema, this project will also examine the significance of the patterns that arise (or don't) across this selection of films. Extant criticism, by and large, has maintained a myopic focus on colonial films and their concomitant implications in French politics and society. The tendency to see these films as pro-imperial because they enact imperial activities – i.e. “pacification” of colonized peoples and/or commercial exploitation of colonial territory – has severely limited the realm of possible interpretations of the colonial and, by extension, the exotic experience. Leprohon's accusation of anti-propaganda aside, ambivalent readings of colonial films have rarely been offered despite the visible potential for such analyses. Moreover, the obfuscation of non-colonial exotic films in the critical literature has further reduced the range of interpretive possibilities embedded in the sheer variety of cross-cultural enactments made visible in screen narratives in 1930s France.

The potential corpus of films that might suit this project is, admittedly, relatively small. It becomes smaller still considering that few of the 80-some films that have been identified as set outside *l'héxagone* are currently available commercially, and a significant number of these films have probably greeted the

21st century in any viewable form.³³ Still, the poetic realist label has been applied to a comparable proportion of the decade's total output, and these films have earned the lion's share of critical attention devoted to French cinema of 1930s. As many films' trajectories confirm, a film's impact on initial release rarely corresponds in any meaningful way to its staying power among historians and critics.³⁴ For instance, *L'Appel du silence* occupies the number two spot on the top box office list for the entire decade, but has yet to be released to DVD despite its phenomenal success. In contrast, *Zouzou* has relied on star power and recurring appearances in critical literature to keep it consistently visible even as more commercially successful films (like *La Bataille*) have faltered (see Table 2 for detailed box office figures). Further complicating matters, the tendency to limit critical focus only to films classifiable as *cinéma colonial* has no doubt shaped decisions about which of these surviving films are restored and rereleased using successive audiovisual technologies. Moving beyond this well-tread path requires a fair amount of archival sleuthing and considerable reliance on documentation for films that are now difficult or impossible to view firsthand. Concisely defined, then, the corpus for this project consists of locatable narrative films produced and/or released by the French film industry between 1930 and 1939 that illustrate transversal exoticism.

TABLE 2: Top Box Office Earnings for Exoticist Films, 1930-1939

Title	Director	Year of initial release	Total Paris box office*
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³³ Refer to the Filmography for lists of films viewed.

³⁴ For a decidedly non-exoticist example of a cinematic ugly duckling that hindsight transforms into a swan, consider *La Règle du jeu* (Renoir 1939).

L'Appel du silence	Poirier	1936	887.000
Pépé le Moko	Duvivier	1937	821.000
La Bandera	Duvivier	1935	816.000
Le Grand jeu	Feyder	1934	597.000
La Bataille	Farkas	1933	596.000
Trois de St. Cyr	Paulin	1939	578.000
Légions d'honneur	Gleize	1938	472.000
L'Atlantide	Pabst	1932	458.000
La Maison du Maltais	Chenal	1938	456.000
L'Esclave blanche	Sorkin	1939	449.000
Les Hommes nouveaux	L'Herbier	1936	445.000
La Route impériale	L'Herbier	1935	435.000
Les Cinq sous de Lavarède	Cammage	1939	432.000
Zouzou	Allégret	1934	430.000
Courrier-Sud**	Billon	1937	401.000
Le Messenger	Rouleau	1937	367.000
Un de la légion	Christian-Jaque	1936	364.000
Sidonie Panache**	Wulschleger	1934	361.000
Port-Arthur	Farkas	1936	353.000
Feu!**	de Baroncelli	1937	351.000
L'Occident	Fescourt	1938	337.000
La Dame de Malacca	Allégret	1937	321.000

Itto	Benoît-Lévy & Epstein	1935	320.000
Sergent X	Strijewski	1932	316.000
Mollenard	Siodmak	1938	315.000
<p>* Indicates number of tickets sold. Data compiled in <i>Crisp Genre</i> (279-337).</p> <p>** <i>Film not viewed for current project due to lack of availability.</i></p> <p>Shading indicates a top-40 ranking box office draw for the decade (<i>Crisp Genre</i> 333)</p> <p>Boldface indicates a non-colonial exoticist film.</p>			

Approach and Outline

Whenever possible, films that fall into the parameters of the corpus defined above have been viewed in one or more available formats. Extensive descriptions of plot events and have been included for films viewed and to our best knowledge viewable *only* in the Centre National du Cinéma archives in Bois d'Arcy. In exceptional cases (noted throughout), films are discussed and analyzed based solely on accounts of the films published in one or more of the three major cinéphilic publications of the 1930s: *Pour Vous*, *Cinémonde*, and *Ciné-Miroir*. Besides filling the film gaps, these publications also provide ample complementary material for viewable films, including production reports, reviews, and feature articles related to narrative content, casting, and other aspects of each film. All three publications are cited throughout, but as a resource for this kind of research, *Pour Vous* stands out for its dedication to looking beyond the cinema to capture a more complete portrait of the contemporary zeitgeist through *reportages* of interest to cinéphiles and non-cinéphiles alike.

This study has three parts, each divided into two chapters. The first part focuses on the masculine experience of exile and empire-building in colonial and non-colonial settings. Chapter One examines Gabin's trio of exoticist films, of which *La Bandera* and *Pépé le Moko* are probably the most widely available and the most frequently studied films of this project's entire corpus. In contrast, Chapter Two includes close readings of two films – *El Guelmouna, marchand de sable* (Hugon 1931) and *Amok* (Ozep 1934) – that have been relegated to obscurity, but remain viewable in the Bois d'Arcy archives, although *Amok* has appeared in recent work.³⁵ Also included here are analyses of the phenomenon I call assimilation anxiety and the recurring figure of the rogue *colon*.

Part Two centers on a stereotypically feminine perspective on the exotic: the romantic couple. Chapter Three demonstrates that, contrary to current understanding, the interracial screen couple was not incontrovertibly doomed to fail in exoticist romance films. *Le Simoun* (Gémier 1933) – another rarely seen feature from the archives – shows how one such couple beat the odds, and *La Dame de Malacca* (Allégret 1937) offers an example of a successful pairing from the same director who kept Josephine Baker from getting her man in *Zouzou*. Chapter Four examines a subgroup of interracial couples that pair a Westerner with a *métis(se)*, a practice supported by French colonial policies that promoted the cultural repatriation of children born of mixed unions.

Finally, Part Three takes a strictly non-colonial view on exoticism by looking at the Far East through the lens of 1930s French cinema. Chapter Five examines the cycle from a broad perspective, assessing films set in Shanghai and Japan. Expanding on that chapter's study of *Yoshiwara*, Chapter Six charts Sessue

³⁵ See Andrew *Mists* and Bergfelder, Harris and Street for discussions of *Amok*.

Hayakawa's second coming in France, from L'Herbier's reimagining of DeMille's *Forfaiture* until the release of *Macao, l'enfer du jeu* (Delannoy 1939) was hampered by the dawn of the Occupation.

PART ONE: MEN OUTSIDE THE MAINSTREAM

CHAPTER ONE

Jean Gabin, *le Cafard*, and Western Solidarity

The strain of melancholy known as *le cafard* acts in part as assimilation anxiety turned against oneself. Composed partly of nostalgia for the lost homeland and partly self-pity for the uphill struggles of an alien environment, *le cafard* names the common malaise that strikes those forced to stick it out in a foreign land without the possibility or the opportunity to return home. Some characters suffer more from nostalgia, while others, like Pierre Muller in *Le Grand jeu* (Feyder 1934), suffer more acutely from pervasive self-pity; nevertheless, an element of both components appears in each case. Normally made explicit in the *cinéma colonial*, this reflexive strain of assimilation anxiety also implicitly appears in non-colonial exoticist narratives. Characters living outside their homeland but also outside the colonies include, for example, Kay Murphy in *Le Drame de Shanghai* (Pabst 1938, discussed in Chapter 5) and Éliana in the little-known film *Sola* (Henri Diamant-Berger 1931), both of whom show the strain of living with a looming past while striking a new path as outsiders in a new land. These examples also show that *le cafard* strikes women as well as men, an idea epitomized in Blanche, the sympathetic bartender in Feyder's *Le Grand jeu*. Françoise Rosay's compelling performance exemplifies a genuine and powerful female *cafard* even in the overwhelmingly male-dominated *cinéma colonial*.

Despite these and other unconventional examples, the image of *le cafard* that has best stood the test of time is the one repeatedly incarnated by Jean Gabin. Some of his best-known films contain explicit treatment of the idea of *le*

cafard, calling it by its name and dwelling on it as a common affliction. Three of Gabin's roles, two of them famous and the third much less so, identify him as an appealing French everyman forced into exile in the colonies, far from his beloved Paris, a situation that creates a potent recipe for this kind of longing. Indeed, the physical manifestations of *le cafard* combine extremely effectively with the periodic eruptions of aggression that Ginette Vincendeau has identified as hallmarks of a Gabin performance. Gabin's ubiquity in films considered part of the "poetic realist" oeuvre also underscores a nostalgia that connects to *le cafard* even as it diverges from it. While a generalized nostalgia for lost time can provoke powerful sensations, to be alienated in both space and time creates conditions ripe for mythologizing the places and events that one recalls. *Le cafard* insists on this double estrangement in order to function within colonial narrative, adding this extra, mythical layer to a lost France implied by the wash of nostalgia that tinted exoticist and non-exoticist films alike during the 1930s.

Whether or not his characters appear in an exotic setting, Gabin's frustrated outbursts and longing for another place and time help define his image; his image, in turn, helps define the cinema of the mid- to late 1930s in France. This influence shaped contemporary audience expectations as well as our retrospective, 21st century analysis of the genres that produced his biggest hits, including the subgenre of the Legion film as well as a broader portrait of the *cinéma colonial*. Thus Gabin, *le cafard*, and the zeitgeist captured in many French films during the late interwar period intersect in what have become key films of the era, films in which an idealized Western solidarity comes face to face with the exotic unknown.

In her analysis of Gabin's star image as it evolved from his breakout performance through the postwar period, Vincendeau breaks down the sociological underpinnings of Gabin as an ideal French man – with both nationality and gender pointedly underscored.³⁶ Gabin's claim to an idealized Frenchness, she argues, comes through most clearly when it is set against images of non-Frenchness: Americans, immigrants, hippies, and foreigners of myriad races and national origins. His identity as a man, Vincendeau claims, is more complicated. Rather than amplifying the contrast between masculine and feminine or creating fundamental conflict around gender differences, instead, Gabin's masculinity subsumes feminine traits like empathy, sensitivity and vulnerability into his own cinematic personae.

Curiously, Vincendeau's focus on Gabin's national identity leans much more heavily on his postwar career than on his 1930s films. Still, in light of the centrality of Frenchness to Gabin's star image, it is intriguing that Gabin's first great success, *La Bandera*, situated Gabin as the ideological center of a band of French expatriates serving in (Spanish) colonial North Africa. It is also significant, as Vincendeau emphasizes, that the same thematic trifecta that shaped Gabin's stardom after *La Bandera* – military, Foreign Legion, and the colonies – did not shape Fernandel's future projects after his comic send-up *Un de la Légion*, directed by Christian-Jaque, proved a huge hit with the public in 1936 (Vincendeau 109-10).

While Vincendeau offers a detailed analysis of *La Bandera* on several levels, largely absent from her critique is a full assessment of the colonial

³⁶ *Jean Gabin: Anatomie d'un mythe*, Paris: Nathan, 1993. Now a classic of French cinema studies, the book also includes a section of period sources compiled and annotated by Claude Gauteur.

implications of the film and the impact it had on Gabin's national identification. Instead, she situates Gabin's star image more broadly throughout his career as a series of encounters with non-French and, occasionally, nonwhite others. Still, she addresses *La Bandera*, calling it

un film impérialiste qui révèle, par sa construction des indigènes comme 'salopards', la structure que l'on retrouve plus ou moins explicitement dans de nombreux autres films de Gabin: l'identité française de son personnage s'affirme contre 'l'autre' – Joséphine Baker dans *Zouzou*, la Casbah de *Pépé le Moko* [...]. *La Bandera* combine l'aventure coloniale à celle de la Légion, institution qui, comme on le sait, fonctionne comme 'fabrique d'identité.' Au-delà de l'idéologie colonialiste et raciste du film, on peut y déceler le récit d'un fantasme plus abstrait, celui d'une identité nationale idéale et consensuelle. (111)

Although the French buddies' fight against "les salopards" clearly gives the whole group the necessary contrast to unite against their common, non-Western enemy, the degree to which *La Bandera* can be read as a pro-imperialist film remains debatable. Such a discussion would take Vincendeau away from her subject, and she elides the specifics of the colonial framework of the 1930s in order to better situate her argument across several decades of Gabin's film career. Besides *La Bandera*, Vincendeau also underscores some pertinent colonial implications in *Pépé le Moko* within the context of Gabin's stardom, ideas that are further developed in her book dedicated exclusively to the film.³⁷ However, the

³⁷ E.g. *Pépé le Moko*. Here, Vincendeau acknowledges that the colonial elements of the film had been largely absent from her previous studies, including the Gabin study (55).

third Gabin film with a colonial setting, *Le Messager*, barely registers in her argument, perhaps due to its status as a theatrical adaptation not originally written for Gabin. Although Vincendeau raises many important questions with regard to how France approaches its national and cultural Others through Gabin, who plays France's nationalized (and gendered, and classed) avatar, her focus on his postwar career lends insufficient attention to how this dynamic played out during the imperial era. What this chapter therefore aims to do is add to Vincendeau's study by interrogating the smaller corpus of Gabin's films that relate specifically to imperialism made during an age when European empires still ruled a nearly unimaginable proportion of the earth.

Gabin's near-exclusive identification with the common Frenchman appears quite deliberate in the arc of his career. Many French actors, even big ones, turned up on screen throughout the 1930s in racialized roles, including Gabin's *La Bandera* costar Annabella (she also played a Japanese woman in *La Bataille*, discussed in Chapter 5), Arletty – playing an African queen for laughs – in *Les Perles de la couronne*, Danielle Darrieux as a Russo-Japanese *métisse* in *Port-Arthur*, and popular heartthrob Pierre Richard-Willm as an Indian prince in *La Dame de Malacca* (discussed in Chapter 4). Cultures and nationalities without visible markers of racial difference were also represented on screen; this trend is most evident in a sustained interest in Russian characters, themes, and source material that endured throughout the decade.³⁸ After *La Bandera*, Gabin's Frenchness remained a constant except for rare instances of this kind of integral exoticism, in which an entire cast of French actors represents a foreign nationality. This was the case, for example, in Renoir's *Les Bas-Fonds* (1936),

although this is a film where the Russian setting bears little weight on the import of the narrative (aside from character names and other such details). But a specifically, emphatically French identity emerged as an important component of Gabin's most influential roles, especially when these characters find themselves in foreign territory. All French soldiers and legionnaires operating in the colonies are expected to defend French honor through their service, but Gabin's position as the pinnacle of the French male ideal only deepens the spectator's need to see him react when an unfamiliar (and usually hostile) environment encroaches on his carefully constructed, nationally specific identity. Three of Gabin's 1930s films place him in such an environment: *La Bandera*, *Pépé le Moko*, and *Le Messenger*.

***La Bandera*: Cultural Cohesion and Colonial Mercenaries**

Duvivier's 1935 adaptation of Pierre Mac Orlan's novel *La Bandera* was a tremendous popular success. Colin Crisp lists the film as far and away the top box office performer of 1935, and the numbers suggest that the film played especially well outside Paris. At least one reader poll, a "best film" survey conducted annually by *La Dépêche de Toulouse*, put the film in second place for the year.³⁹ While several of Gabin's other films outperformed this one over the course of the decade, nonetheless *La Bandera* stands as the top grossing Legion film of the 1930s,⁴⁰ handily outperforming Feyder's *Le Grand jeu* and Pabst's remake/re-adaptation of *L'Atlantide*, two similarly themed films solidly within

³⁸ The Russian fad is discussed in Chapter 2.

³⁹ Box office rankings and spectator surveys cited in Crisp *Genre*, pages 317-9, 333, 302.

⁴⁰ In order to support this claim, we must classify Léon Poirier's *L'Appel du silence* as something other than a Legion film, an argument I make elsewhere.

the annual top ten box office draws in their respective years of release. Crisp also traces the film's transnational path, from British movie houses to screens in the United States, even noting that the Japanese named *La Bandera* among the ten best films of 1937. This marks the early stages of what Crisp identifies as a trend, launched in the mid-late 1930s, during which French films were finding larger and increasingly open-minded audiences in overseas markets (*Genre* 326).

After a lackluster film career in the early 1930s, the international success of *La Bandera* finally scored a solid breakthrough performance for Gabin, who plays a Legionnaire named Gilieth. Following the established pattern of a man drawn into the desert to escape from or atone for past misdeeds, Gilieth's *cafard* tends nonetheless more toward nostalgia than self-pity. One reason for this is that Gilieth's hardships are not suffered in vain, but rather provide him with a path to redemption after a heinous and highly publicized crime drives him out of France. Gilieth enters the ranks of the Spanish Foreign Legion along with a small band of fellow Frenchmen seeking asylum (or just a regular meal ticket), and together, the French legionnaires reminisce about their homeland with deep fondness despite the fact that their previous life there never cut them a break.

Gilieth's relationship to the *patrie* is further complicated by the fact that early in his tour, he comes to suspect that his break with the past was less than clean. Gilieth believes that one of his compatriots, Lucas (played by Robert le Vigan), is hiding his true motive for entering the Legion. From the start, Lucas pesters Gilieth with friendly overtures peppered with double-entendres that indicate a possible awareness of his crime. Using the French faction's common nostalgia as a cover, Lucas uses references to Paris to get under Gilieth's skin, whether they come through in questions about his previous life or pointed songs

he would sing at the Legionnaires' regular bar. These tactics bring Gilieth to the boiling point and spark an altercation in a vividly filmed sequence featuring off-kilter, shifting framing of the Legionnaires involved in the barroom scuffle. After news of the eruption reaches his commanding officer, Gilieth manages to convince him to transfer Lucas to a different battalion.

Thus granted a respite from Lucas's pursuit and the constant reminders of the sordid part of his past, Gilieth begins to envision a new way forward for himself. Visiting a brothel run by a European expatriate nicknamed *Planche-à-pain*, Gilieth meets a Bedouin dancer named Aïsha la Slaoui. The attraction between them is instantaneous, and the two are soon married in a makeshift ceremony officiated by *Planche-à-pain* and Gilieth's pal Mulot (Aimos). The ritual involves tasting one another's blood from a cross-shaped cut on the arm and commemoration with his-and-hers name tattoos.⁴¹ During the raucous reception, Gilieth even invites his bride to dance with him "*comme chez nous*," signaling that without Lucas's discomfiting presence, a more positive sense of nostalgia and connection to France can be rekindled. He even introduces Aïsha to his captain, who gives an implicit blessing to the union when he kisses her hand (much to her bewilderment). Thus, both the Legion and *Planche-à-pain* – Gilieth and Aïsha's respective employers and, in a sense, their foster families – demonstrate their approval for the union, although as Slavin points out, neither French nor Moroccan traditions would normally smile upon any kind of racially or culturally mixed marriage (168-9). Gilieth tells Mulot that he's never been happier, but as Slavin concludes, "the conventions of the genre dictated that

Gilieth's union with Aïcha [*sic*], both a racial transgression and an attachment outside the Legion, inevitably meet with tragedy" (169).⁴²

When rebel attacks on the Legion's road building project decimate its ranks, reinforcements must be summoned. Among the new arrivals is Lucas, who wastes no time in reattaching himself to Gilieth. Unaware of Gilieth's wedding to Aïsha and disrespecting Planche-à-pain's house rules regarding her girls' basic freedom to accept or reject potential clients, Lucas descends on the brothel, notices Aïsha, and boorishly pushes her to dance. Seeking to maintain the charade, Gilieth encourages her to accept the request, and a very upset Aïsha follows through with a strained performance. That night, with Lucas safely passed out at the bar, Gilieth takes her aside and explains the situation, asking her to help confirm his suspicions about Lucas's intentions. Gilieth also hatches a plan for the two of them to leave the post and go even deeper into the south; he even declares to Aïsha his intention to abandon his uniform and start living and dressing like the people "of her tribe" (a point developed below).

Barred from returning to France, with Lucas threatening to deny him an alternate path to absolution, Gilieth thus entertains the idea of assimilating in a new culture, a plan doomed by its very nature never to be realized in exoticist films of the 1930s without being cut short by tragedy. However temporarily, though, the couple's optimism takes over long enough for a delighted Aïsha to begin preparations for their flight south.

⁴¹ Slavin supposes, though without documentation, that author Pierre Mac Orlan, who wrote the popular novel adapted for Duvivier's film, describes this ersatz Legion wedding – "a scene of surpassing ethnographic surrealism" – based on firsthand experience (168-9).

⁴² The larger question of interracial and/or intercultural romance will be addressed in Part Two.

Back at camp, his path for a new future ostensibly laid out, Gilieth finally confesses his past crime to Mulot, whose blasé reaction makes it clear that friends would not hold Gilieth's crime against him. Mulot's response bolsters his confidence enough to allow Gilieth to let go of the past in other ways as well. But Gilieth must also confront the looming threat to his future; Aïsha succeeds in getting Lucas to talk, and as Gilieth had predicted he intends to reveal Gilieth's crime and send him back to France for his due process. After she recounts her findings to Gilieth, he confesses again to the murder in Paris; still, like Mulot, despite this revelation, her esteem for him remains unchanged. Once his crime becomes an open secret, Gilieth can better separate those who love and respect him – Mulot, Aïsha, even his captain – from those who do not. This openness liberates Gilieth from his *cafard* and boosts his confidence in the present so that he no longer feels pressured either to escape the past or to rely on an untenable plan for his future. Thus emboldened, Gilieth confronts Lucas and even confesses to the murder that Lucas aims to punish. Scoffing at Lucas's threat to put him in prison, Gilieth says that his life is done, and whether or not he makes good on his plans to head south with his Bedouin bride matters little to him now. Still, Gilieth's resignation to his fate is not fully complete, since he promises to kill Lucas and then himself if his story leaks.

Meanwhile, beyond the struggle between Gilieth and Lucas, the military situation has worsened. When the captain calls for “volontaires pour mourir,” the entire battalion steps forward, and together the band of Frenchmen are sent to hold an isolated outpost. The situation proves as dire as the captain had predicted – no food, poisoned water, and nowhere to bury the dead, whose numbers rise steadily as the mission wears into days. Left as the last two men

standing, with Gilieth promoted on the field of duty, he and Lucas reconcile their differences. But the friendship is short-lived; just as a bugle call announces the arrival of backup forces, a stray bullet fells Gilieth, leaving only Lucas to stand for the battalion during the roll call. After hearing Gilieth's name, Lucas confirms both his death and his promotion on the field of battle, a tacit acceptance of Gilieth's social redemption. Lucas also breaks the news to Aïsha at the brothel in the final scene – one that feels out of place after the intense, male-centered military bonding at the outpost, but nevertheless one that approximates the conclusion in the source text.

Geography and time are intimately linked themes in *La Bandera*, and both play out in Gilieth's trajectory from fugitive to hero. To experience *le cafard* means that a location identified as central to one's identity – in a word, "home" – becomes physically inaccessible while remaining mentally present during time spent in a new location shown to be starkly different from the one left behind. The ultimate effects of *le cafard* vary from character to character; an illustrative comparison can be drawn between Gilieth and P  p  , both characters played by Gabin under Duvivier's direction. Both Gilieth and P  p   have become quasi-involuntarily exiled from France, but Gilieth's memories of Paris are initially tainted by the recollection of his crime. P  p  's associates are not only well aware of his past misdeeds, they are also complicit in them; on the other hand, Gilieth initially keeps quiet about the reasons that pushed him into the Spanish Foreign Legion, even among his closest friends. P  p   thus comes to experience *le cafard* more and more intensely over the course of the film, fixating not on the criminal record that precludes his peaceful return, but on a more innocent time spent in the capital. After Gilieth comes clean to his new friends, Paris seems to fade in

his mind, a psychological decrescendo that inverts P  p  's experience in Algiers. Without grand tragedy or regret, Gilieth reconciles himself to either live a life in exile or face an untimely death, preferably an honorable one. His vision thus turns from the past to the possibilities of the future, even though the future he envisions leaves him no way to return to France. This ability to imagine himself in exile indefinitely contrasts, once again, with P  p  's increasing desire to return that, once thwarted, turns P  p   against himself and precipitates his death. Significantly, unlike P  p  's suicide on the docks, *le cafard* does not contribute directly to Gilieth's death, which is caused instead by a stray bullet on the battlefield after the Legion's victory is assured by newly arrived reinforcements. Thus, intermingled with tragedy, this victory fulfils Gilieth's wish for an honorable death and forecloses the possibility of a life spent in exile.

Other soldiers share this resignation to permanent exile, some in much clearer ways than Gilieth's. This inclination appears most obviously in the tattooed soldier, whose facial ink, by the soldier's own admission, represents his willingness to give up for good any shot at (Western) social rehabilitation. Slavin claims that, for a contemporary audience, tattoos would have retained connotations of the criminal established by 19th century studies of social deviants (169). Tattooing therefore provides visible, symbolic evidence of the unsavory pasts that the Legion otherwise attempts to mask in its soldiers, including Gilieth. But the tattoo motif in *La Bandera* also covers a more general alliance with an outsider status. Gilieth's tattoo, far less extreme than his comrade's, may render physically visible his criminal connection, as Slavin suggests, but it simultaneously underscores his unconventional – and, for traditional culture, patently unacceptable – marriage to a Bedouin woman. It is the wedding itself

that prompts the tattooing, and Aïsha is similarly marked, although perhaps not for the first time, if we interpret her facial markings as permanent tattoos and not semi-permanent henna.

Furthermore, as Vincendeau points out in her study of Gabin, the French bourgeoisie tended to view the French working class in a way that specifically recalls racial stereotypes. Worthy of bourgeois suspicion and susceptible to violence and other dangerous social or medical illnesses, the working class was compared to “bandes de nomades et de barbares.” Citing historian Louis Chevalier, Vincendeau adds: “La condition ouvrière et le genre de vie sont décrits par analogie avec la condition sauvage” (*Anatomie* 147). Despite the “savage” state of the working class, their criminality and their “misérabilisme,” bourgeois opinion never turned against them entirely; on the other side of the coin, as Vincendeau points out, was their esteem for the lower-class aesthetic, identifiable by its “beauté des images, pittoresque des vêtements, du langage et des décors” (*Anatomie* 149). Deviousness and poverty offset by picturesque settings – this combination of fear and attraction applies just as easily to colonized populations as they do to working-class French men and women, particularly in a cinematic context.

This class-based analogy between the French *ouvriers* and the “nomads and barbarians” under colonial rule can be taken even farther if we read the Gilieth/ Aïsha couple as an example of the doubling Vincendeau describes in her discussion of Gabin’s masculinity:

La femme, face à Gabin, n’est pas tant l’ennemie ou ‘l’autre,’ qu’un double / projection d’un aspect de son personnage [... qui] est placé au centre d’un groupe masculin qui rejette ou ignore le féminin,

mais celui-ci n'est pas banni – au contraire, il revient en force dans le personnage de Gabin. (*Anatomie* 190-191)

Despite their racial and cultural differences, Aïsha and Gilieth share a similar isolation rooted in their loyalty to their respective, sex-segregated groups. Not even their “marriage” succeeds in breaking them free from these communities, and they never become a truly autonomous couple; Aïsha stays with Planche-à-pain and Gilieth remains with the Legion.

However, during a low point in his ordeal with Lucas, Gilieth reveals a will to abandon it all for a life with Aïsha in permanent exile. Of course, such intentions could only be taken at face value coming from a European; had Aïsha declared a wish to become, for example, a florist in Montmartre, neither Gilieth nor the spectators could have taken her intentions seriously.⁴³ Gilieth's momentary feeling of solidarity for the colonized Other amounts to an attempt to embrace rather than resent his life on the margins of society, a space occupied by colonized peoples and Legionnaires alike.⁴⁴ In keeping with Vincendeau's description of Gabin's rejection of the feminine, once Gilieth expresses this fleeting wish to assimilate with Aïsha's people, he sees her only once more before meeting his death in the desert. Gilieth's path to self-acceptance thus begins with his interracial, intercultural marriage, leads to a brief flirtation with an even more intensive cultural immersion, and finally concludes with his coming to terms with his crime just in time to fulfill his duty to the Spanish

⁴³ While Gilieth is free to fantasize about ditching the West for a new life, neither cross-cultural enterprise would be likely to succeed; this, in fact, is the theme of *L'Esclave blanc*, discussed in Chapter 2.

⁴⁴ Despite the fact that the working class and the colonized peoples of North Africa had social oppression in common (though in different forms), the colonial enterprise put each side at odds with the other. The Legion is filled with the lower classes in *La Bandera* – just as in other Legion

Legion. Paradoxically, then, the prospect of assimilation into the culture of the colonized Other sets Gilieth on the path to win readmission, as it were, to Western society.

Despite Gilieth's brief foray into the idea of cross-cultural assimilation, the need for Western solidarity in a film that underscores intercultural interaction means that Gilieth's interracial marriage can serve little narrative purpose other than acting as a catalyst for his reconciliation with Western society and with his own conscience. Solidarity on the non-Western side, however, appears much more porous in the film. Interestingly, and no doubt in part because of her affiliation with Gilieth/Gabin, the Moroccan Aïscha's loyalty to her French husband remains unquestioned in the narrative despite his status as a mercenary employed by the Spanish colonizers. No other Moroccans appear to be so complicit with the operations of the Legion, as Aïscha quite literally sleeps with a man considered to be the rebels' Western enemy. She also works for a European – Planche-à-pain herself – and alongside an unnamed woman who Mulot identifies as an expatriated German. The range of cultures represented by the women in Planche-à-pain's employ and their unproblematic cohabitation work to alleviate the urgency of the question of cultural loyalty, since the conditions of their employment appear to grant them the same status of *sans-patries* that the Legionnaires obtain upon enlistment.

The theme of cultural or racial solidarity plays a major role in other contemporary exoticist films, including both versions of *L'Atlantide*, *Baroud*

films, even if there are non-French Westerners in addition to Frenchmen – and their enemies are the “salopards.”

(Ingram and Terry 1931), *La Bataille* (Farkas 1933) and *Yoshiwara* (Ophüls 1936).⁴⁵

The cohesion of Western culture even takes precedent over romantic interracial attachments in *L'Occident* (Henri Fescourt 1937) and, arguably, *L'Esclave blanc* (Paulin 1936). Aïsha's narrative import is therefore more symbolic than literal; her very swift marriage to Gilieth represents his victory in a romantic conquest that presents an idealized parallel of the colonial conquest already underway.⁴⁶

Planche-à-pain's women are all portrayed as sexually "conquerable" for the legionnaires, since this "intellectual" madam's house rules dictate that they should be won over rather than (or before they are) simply paid for. Here, once again, we should consider the German woman – one of the few details not lifted directly from the source text – whose inclusion and emphasis can be read as a subtle reminder of the French and Allied victory over the Germans in World War I. With the addition of this minor character, the spectator can consider the light-skinned, fair-haired German to share the same status as the Arab and Bedouin Moroccans, and not coincidentally, they represent populations either already conquered (Germany) or as good as conquered (colonized North Africans).

Although the metaphor of a feminine Africa ravished by a conquering, masculine Europe is complicated by the inclusion of other Europeans in Planche-à-pain's coterie, this well-worn trope plays out in the central romantic relationship between Aïsha and Gilieth. Author Mac Orlan's description of the women in Bir Djedid relies almost exclusively on misogynist stereotypes of North African women, whom he describes as:

⁴⁵ *Baroud* is discussed in Chapter 3, and *La Bataille* and *Yoshiwara* are discussed in Chapter 5.

⁴⁶ This common metaphor connecting the native woman to colonizable land is discussed in Chapter 3.

...douces et réservées avec les Européens. Elles gardaient pour elles les mille ressources diaboliques et les inventions quelquefois cruelles de leur enfantine méchanceté. Elles ne différaient des prostituées européennes que par leur extrême soumission, leur élégante courtoisie, leur goût très vif pour la poésie. (143)

Leaving its misogyny aside, Mac Orlan's description underscores perceived cultural (if not racial) differences between European women and the Moroccan prostitutes. The terms "childish" and "submissive," the latter a word repeated especially often in passages describing Aïsha, can also apply to Annabella's uneven performance, which she fills with sudden, capricious gestures and overwrought emoting. Film critics of the time, however, generally appreciated Annabella's race drag, including André Lang in his review for *Pour Vous*:

[Duvivier] a transformé notre exquise Annabella en une petite Berbère éclatante, qu'on ne reconnaît qu'à la voix et qu'à un français qui, moins correct, eût rendu l'illusion complète (seule réserve que je veuille formuler), une Annabella inconnue, sauvage et sensuelle, farouche et rusée, ardente et fière petite bête de sang et d'amour, qui ne fera qu'accroître le nombre des admirateurs de l'autre Annabella, sage et tendre, celle qui vit, je crois, à Paris...⁴⁷

Annabella's performance, marked by stereotypes similar to those that litter Mac Orlan's prose, thus won high praise from the critics despite the missed opportunity to cast a native ingénue in the role, Téla Tchaï, as Pabst did in his adaptation of *L'Atlantide*. In fact, Duvivier considered giving Tchaï the role, but

⁴⁷ Annabella's appeal in the role of Aïsha la Slaoui is exemplified in Lang, André. "Un film de Duvivier: *La Bandera*." *Pour Vous* 357 (19 Sept 1935): 6.

producers for the film, concerned about box office returns, insisted that he stick with the established star.⁴⁸

Lang's emphatic description of Annabella's interpretation as "sauvage" and "farouche") notwithstanding, Aïsha's vulnerability is written into the role, and it gives Gilieth the means to demonstrate his recovering masculinity after dishonorably dodging punishment for his crime in Paris. While in the end Gilieth's virile power cannot save him from rebel gunfire, he succeeds nonetheless in winning the "heart and mind" of his Bedouin lover. This vision of masculinity, embodied in *La Bandera*'s Gilieth, ultimately becomes associated with Gabin the star. As Burch and Sellier point out, Gabin's 1930s persona not only situates him as an ideal male among his peers, but also distances his attitude from that of his lover, a figure who is portrayed at worst as an oversexed opportunist (e.g. Madeleine in *Gueule d'amour*), or at best utterly inscrutable (e.g. Michèle Morgan's various incarnations of the mysterious young woman) (48-9). Compared to Gabin's other love interests in the 1930s, in *La Bandera* the courtship is exceptionally short, and the deal is sealed with a "marriage" involving tattoos and the tasting of blood instead of a more typical (or legal) union. Moreover, after the wedding, Gilieth frees himself to move on to other, more pressing concerns (like Lucas) and uses Aïsha only as a pawn in the central male rivalry, thereby illustrating Vincendeau's observation that Gabin's circles of masculine friendship actively reject the presence of women (*Anatomie* 180-184).

Importantly, while Gilieth's romantic victory marks a personal high point, this individual triumph contrasts sharply with the overwhelming collective

⁴⁸ John W. Martin. *The Golden Age of French Cinema*. (66)

defeat of his battalion. According to Martin O'Shaughnessy, this defeat can be traced to the legionnaires' lack of dedication to the task at hand:

The French characters [in *La Bandera*] are almost completely unconcerned by their official mission, [and] volunteer to die in an act of collective suicide rather than to wage war, and spend most of the film fighting amongst themselves while at the same time seeking national unity (always clinging together as Frenchmen rather than seeking comradeship with their fellow *légionnaires*). It is only in death that they achieve community when, in a moment more akin to the shared suffering of the Great War than imperial triumphalism, the names of the fallen are called out, like an oral *monument aux morts*. (248-9)

It is true that in *La Bandera* the Legionnaires do not really “wage war” in the same sense as the soldiers of the Great War, a time whose hardships and losses would have been vividly remembered by many filmgoers. Indeed, in a feature in *Pour Vous* titled “Les Femmes et *La Bandera*,” the author overhears a wife remarking to her husband, “Il nous était moins insupportable de voir mourir ces braves légionnaires dans le Riff [*sic*] que d’être témoins de la mort des pauvres soldats de la Grande Guerre.”⁴⁹ But the mission given the Legionnaires in *La Bandera* does not seem to call for much in the way of warfare, and in fact the work the Legion requires of the soldiers meets with some internal resistance.

As a quintessential Foreign Legion film, *La Bandera* simultaneously extols the virtues of this particular branch of military service while raising, albeit

⁴⁹ Vogt, Blanche. “Les femmes et *La Bandera*.” *Pour Vous* 360 (10 Oct 1935): 5. Also quoted in Slavin 144.

briefly, some explicit but unanswered questions about the merit of the Legionnaires' mission. Their primary task in Morocco appears to be road construction, backbreaking work made even more difficult by the natives' attacks from the nearby mountains. One disgruntled legionnaire (Gaston Modot) bemoans the work, dismissing the road as a ploy to draw tourists (however unlikely this proposition seems amidst persistent gunfire!) and roundly declaring, "Je suis soldat, j'suis pas terrassier!" It is not the first time this soldier expresses his unhappiness with his lot in the Legion, but the only response to his disgruntled remarks is punishment for insubordination. Even the superior officers have little to offer in the way of inspiring speeches extolling the righteousness of their mission in North Africa. In the captain's call for volunteers to hold the post, his language veers toward legal rather than moral obligation as he sets out the details of the mission:

Légionnaires! Vous êtes des sans-patries. L'Espagne que vous êtes engagés à servir a besoin de vous. Elle vous demande sans scrupule et sans aménagement de mourir pour une cause qu'elle défend et en vertu du contrat que vous avez signé. Au moment de vous conduire à la mort, elle ne vous doit aucune autre explication.

No explanation for the mission is forthcoming, since none is owed. Yet, the captain adds, by way of explaining their situation, "Toute une région du Rif est en révolte." Each soldier has signed a contract whose legitimacy precludes any other question of validity that might be applied to the mission. The logic of the colonial enterprise can only be taken for granted; the underlying cause of the revolt remains unexplored, and the only solution made available is an equally violent counter-campaign.

The Legion's enemies are truly faceless in *La Bandera*; Slavin points out that of all the briefly glimpsed Moroccans in the film, only Aïsha has a name and a background story (168). Spain's motivation for "pacifying" a region that so clearly and violently resists the effort remains obscured in spite of the calls for hard labor and occasional bravery that nevertheless hints at the futility of the colonial struggle. The "act of collective suicide" that O'Shaughnessy identifies is, in fact, not a substitute for war as he suggests, but a subtle yet powerful metaphor for the entire imperial enterprise. It is also no accident that the disgruntled soldier's questions of purpose are put to the Spanish instead of the French Foreign Legion; as in the Russian political dramas of the same decade, some lessons are more effectively learned when they are linked to other countries' problems. Had similar musings been scripted for a soldier (of any nationality) under French military command, such messages would certainly have been seen as inflammatory among right-wing critics eager to bolster France's own colonial efforts – including their campaigns alongside the Spanish in Morocco.

Despite its reputation as an imperialist film, *La Bandera* subtly underscores the futility of colonialist ideology by pointing to the similarly marginal situations of European Legionnaires and the colonized people they are ordered to subjugate to imperial rule. The Legionnaires seem to grasp the Sisyphean nature of their struggle, and Gilieth even toys with the idea of assimilating into native culture as a means of escape, however unrealistic this solution may be. But the flicker of assimilation anxiety introduced by Gilieth's notion is quickly extinguished by his reaffirmed commitment to the Legion, a move that cements Gabin's emerging image as the lost soul seeking to restore his social legitimacy,

but also leaves lingering questions about the utility of the entire colonial enterprise. The same ambiguous approach to Western imperial rule in North Africa would creep into Duvivier's next film with a colonial backdrop, *Pépé le Moko*.

***Pépé le Moko* and the Multiethnic Exotic**

In the role of the eponymous gangster in *Pépé le Moko* (1937),⁵⁰ Gabin performs what is probably the most famous example of *le cafard* in all of 1930s cinema. Featuring the appealing combination of Gabin at his prewar peak, a poetic realist sensibility, and an alluring colonial setting, this film has ascended to a level of prominence in film history unique among exoticist films produced in interwar France. Yet many of these components that elevate *Pépé le Moko* to a rarefied status in the eyes of a 21st century viewer also marked the film as standard fare for contemporary reviewers. Praising the filmmaking while pinpointing the lack of novelty in the subject matter, Nino Frank declared in *Pour Vous*:

Voilà un Duvivier de la bonne série. Musclé, rapide, nerveux. Rien de bouleversant, bien entendu; mais, comme un roman policier de bonne facture, il tiendra le spectateur en haleine par les vertus conjuguées d'un découpage adroit, d'un dialogue aux raccourcis savoureux – le meilleur qu'ait signé Henri Jeanson – et de la très belle interprétation de Jean Gabin. Pourquoi tout cela n'est-il pas

⁵⁰ While the finished film shares the title of the original novel by Ashelbé, judging by a report published in *Cinéma* in December 1936 the working title *Les Nuits blanches* was temporarily assigned to the project. "Quand la Casbah d'Alger s'installe à Joinville." *Cinéma* 426 (17 Dec 1936): 978. Print.

bouleversant ? Eh bien, parce qu'on ne bouleverse jamais personne avec des scénarios de ce genre, mélange de factice et de banalité, collection de faits sans consistance, de couleur locale et de personnages conventionnels.⁵¹

Frank's review underscores the extent to which the themes of this particular film infiltrated cinema culture of the 1930s as a whole, particularly within the realm of exoticist film. The character Pépé is certainly conventional fare for Gabin – a Parisian working-class tough guy eluding capture for crimes against the upper classes – and the “local color” of the Algerian Casbah serves to boost the potency of Pépé's *cafard*, which situates Gabin's usual malaise within a specifically exoticist context.

As a director, Duvivier worked in a variety of settings scattered throughout the globe. It was hardly unusual for directors of the time to dabble in exoticism – even Jean Renoir made *Le Bled* in 1929⁵² – but Duvivier returned again and again to subjects that offered an unusual perspective on foreign lands and a certain acknowledgment of non-European ways of thinking. Of the five films Gabin made under Duvivier's direction during the 1930s – *Maria Chapdelaine* (1934), *Golgotha* (1935), *La Bandera*, *La Belle équipe* (1936), and *Pépé le Moko* – all but *La Belle équipe* were set outside of France. *Maria Chapdelaine* tells a story set in the far-flung reaches of the former French territory of Québec, making it a kind of post-colonial story even in an era of continued French

⁵¹ Rev. of *Pépé le Moko*, dir. Julien Duvivier. *Pour Vous* 429 (4 Feb 1937): 4. Print.

⁵² However, as the career of Marcel Carné would later prove, experience with exotic themes was hardly a requirement for a successful film career. Still, directors at all levels of prominence (and competence) demonstrated an interest in the exoticist themes that were Duvivier's particular specialty.

imperialism.⁵³ For *Golgotha*, both a work of integral exoticism and an eminently religious film due to its focus on the life of Jesus Christ, Duvivier (in)famously cast Gabin in the role of Pontius Pilate. Of the Gabin/Duvivier collaborations, only *La Belle équipe* keeps the narrative set in France.

Previously that decade, before Gabin and Duvivier began to work together, Duvivier made *Les Cinq gentlemen maudits* (1931). Like many of Duvivier's other films, including *La Bandera* and *Pépé le Moko*, *Gentlemen* was adapted from a popular novel. It was also the first of many exoticist films in the first decade of sound to be remade from a first, silent adaptation, one directed by Luitz-Morat and Pierre Régnier and released in 1920. A German version of the film was also produced with a different cast. Set in Tunisia, but filmed in Morocco, *Gentlemen* showcases the director's perspective on North Africa and marks his continued transition to sound after *David Golder* and *Au Bonheur des dames*, both released in 1930. But Eric Bonnefille emphasizes the difficulties that Duvivier encountered with the combination of location shooting and dialogue recording; extreme temperatures and ambient noise plagued most of the shooting (109). Bonnefille mentions still other problems that befell the filmmakers, including an illness that struck most of the crew, including Duvivier, then the unexpected death of star Harry Baur's wife during shooting. After the team had returned to France for studio work, a fire destroyed their sets; finally,

⁵³ According to Colin Crisp, North Americans offered a unique brand of exoticism to French audiences during the 1930s (*Genre* 37). While most representatives from the continent hailed from the United States and were seen as fundamentally different from Europeans in several ways, this Canadian example presents an intriguing case study, although one that remains outside the scope of the present discussion.

the technicians in the photo lab bungled a portion of the hard-won location footage, rendering it useless for the final cut (109-110).⁵⁴

While Bonnefille – not entirely without reason – calls the film “un des rares échecs artistiques de Duvivier durant les années trente,” he concedes that contemporary reactions were largely positive (110-11). Critics examining the film in retrospect should notice that many aspects of *Gentlemen* distinguish it markedly from the two canonized colonial films that Duvivier went on to make just a few years later. Visually, the location shooting allowed Duvivier to incorporate many “picturesque” images (Bonnefille, rightly or wrongly, applies the term dismissively) of Moroccans going about their business in alluringly exotic settings. A brief montage in *Pépé le Moko*, described below, serves a similar purpose, but in *Gentlemen* Duvivier’s interest in the film’s setting is more pointedly underscored throughout the film. In terms of the narrative, the plot contains a bait-and-switch move that foreshadows the way in which Duvivier maintains focus on his French protagonists amidst constant, but often nearly invisible pressure linked to the non-French setting.

Soon after the arrival of a group of five French tourists, an indigenous man takes offense at their public behavior and puts a curse on them. One by one, they begin to die, and the mysterious circumstances that surround their deaths seem to point to the curse. But the mystery unravels when the survivors discover that some of the travelers had agreed on the ruse in order to extort money from the millionaire traveling with them – thus the guilt for the con falls squarely on French shoulders. What remains is a native population visibly and

⁵⁴ Bonnefille adds that in the 1960s, Duvivier attempted to launch a remake of *Les Cinq gentlemen maudits* (one that might have avoided the production pitfalls of the first attempt), but he was

vocally disgruntled at the intrusion of oblivious French tourists, although the only people with enough power and ill will to do real harm are other French citizens. The Legion narrative in *La Bandera* necessitates an escalation in the natives' hostility, but still, Gilieth's main personal concern is not the rebel forces, but his standing among his fellow Frenchmen. Likewise, the biggest threat to P  p  's situation comes not from within the Casbah, but from the French police, who are forced to enlist Slimane's (and, indirectly, In  s's) assistance in their effort to capture him. Duvivier's later films confirm what *Gentlemen* first suggests: that for cinematic purposes, at least, the colonies' weightiest conflicts have little to do with the very real divide between *colonisateur* and *colonis  *, but take root instead within the confines of the French expatriate community.

Given *P  p   le Moko*'s setting in colonial Algiers, this film is unsurprisingly considered an example of colonial cinema, a classification that is usually asserted and accepted without much examination. Yet, under closer scrutiny it becomes clear that the narrative only barely complies with Colin Crisp's key criteria for the subgenre (see Introduction). Of his three tropes – Foreign Legion, interracial romance, and “Freudian drama” – only interracial romance applies to *P  p   le Moko*. Two such couples emerge in the film – P  p   and In  s, of course, along with P  p  's prot  g   Pierrot and his girlfriend A  scha⁵⁵ – but the fact of their interracial unions never advances to the rank of a central narrative problem. Boredom and the arrival of competition in the form of a decadently dressed Parisienne named Gaby conspire to turn P  p  's attention away from his longtime lover In  s, rather than a sudden repulsion for her race. The affair between P  p  

unable to secure the necessary funding (111).

and Gaby becomes the narrative focus of the film, not the crumbling liaison between P  p   and In  s. Still, race is not entirely irrelevant to the triangle that emerges in the narrative; In  s's gypsy roots are so entangled with racial stereotypes of underhanded dealings and betrayal that her traitorous act of turning P  p   in to the cops appears nearly inevitable once P  p  's affair sparks her jealousy. In contrast, the Pierrot/ A  scha couple shows no romantic strife until Pierrot falls victim to a police-inflicted gunshot wound, leaving A  scha distraught and bewildered (and effectively foreshadowing P  p  's death by suicide as In  s begs forgiveness, even though her role in his entrapment cannot be overlooked). The trait that establishes *P  p   le Moko* as a candidate for the *cin  ma colonial* label thus has relatively low impact on the trajectory of the narrative. In this case, then, setting alone seems to have played the pivotal role in fixing the generic assignment of one of the 1930s' most treasured films.

However, instead of using the Algerian setting to pigeonhole the film into the colonial subgenre, critical analysis of *P  p   le Moko* would be better served by the broader perspective of the exoticist label. The criteria for an exoticist film set out in this project – non-Western setting, intercultural interaction, and transcultural assimilation – offer a more accurate rubric through which the film might be read. Several aspects of the film rely on these narrative characteristics. Indeed, at the heart of the film lies a unique insistence on multicultural cohabitation within the realm of the Casbah, a fact aptly foregrounded in the documentary-style visual sequence narrated by Inspector Meunier in the film's opening exposition:

⁵⁵ The parallel couples illustrate the mirroring/ foreshadowing phenomenon that Ginette Vincendeau identifies as a recurring motif in the film (*P  p  * 36-38).

Ils sont 40,000 là où ils ne devraient être que 10,000 – 40,000 venus de partout, ceux d’avant la conquête, ceux du passé barbaresque, et leurs descendants, honnêtes traditionalistes et, pour nous, mystérieux. Des Kabyles. Des Chinois. Des Gitanes. Des *Heimatlos*.⁵⁶ Des Slavs. Des Maltais. Des Nègres. Des Siciliens. Des Espagnols. [...] Colorée, vivante, multiple, hurlante – il n’y a pas une Casbah, il y en a cent, il y en a mille.

This mixture of non-natives from every corner of the globe – southern Europeans, East Asians, sub-Saharan Africans – all converging on the Casbah creates a very different atmosphere from the clearly delineated battle lines drawn between the hegemonic culture imposed by the European colonizer and the unified culture of the non-Western colonized. Legionnaire films like *La Bandera* appear designed to emphasize and even exacerbate this rift, repeatedly deemed a “clash of civilizations” in surrounding discourse; meanwhile, in *Pépé le Moko* the hyperbolic emphasis on the essential multiplicity of the Casbah and the peoples who inhabit its mazelike streets underscores the idea of a society without a single, native hegemonic group that dominates the culture. The absence of Arabs in the inspector’s description, while justifiably considered evidence of anti-Arab racism,⁵⁷ can also be read as a deliberate omission made in order to highlight the underlying polyvalence of Casbah culture, since eliding the most obvious candidate for cultural dominance prioritizes instead the many minority populations who cohabit the same geographic space.

⁵⁶ A German term meaning “homeless” and translated in the Criterion DVD as “stateless.”

⁵⁷ See Vincendeau *Pépé* 58-59. However, Vincendeau also (rightly) points out elsewhere that the racism in *Pépé le Moko*, while undeniably present for this and other reasons, is less visible than it is in other contemporary films.

Clearly, though, the French are attempting to stake their claim as the administrative authority of this space despite their status as outsiders to the Casbah. It is neither an accident nor a coincidence that the film opens on a shot of the inside of the French police headquarters in Algeria, the very heart of power and authority for the colonial population.⁵⁸ The indigenous masses, however, never submit themselves fully to this European influence, a fact evidenced by the powerlessness of the French cops to arrest P  p   as long as he remains in the Casbah and by their concomitant reliance on Slimane to keep tabs on him. Moreover, the multiculturalism among the inhabitants of the Casbah reveals a level of tolerance that the French colonizers never aspire to duplicate. The demographics of Algiers situate in the Casbah the natives and the socially undesirable immigrant groups – including disenfranchised French citizens – while the French colonizers are free to reside or visit everywhere else. Many, including Gaby and her friends, are tolerated in the streets of the Casbah as well, a point developed below.

So that this environment can function at all – especially given the crowded conditions the inspector describes – intercultural cooperation must be made both routine and mutually beneficial. In the quest to capture P  p  , intercultural complicity appears on both sides of the fight: the French police (reluctantly) put the Arab inspector Slimane in charge of the operation, and P  p   appears to have drawn the entire Casbah into his corner as he resists official interference in his affairs. Yet even if these two sides have clearly divergent motives, Slimane and P  p   develop an ambiguous relationship rather than an openly antagonistic one.

⁵⁸ Charles O'Brien discusses how this authority is visualized during the police station sequence in "The 'Cin  ma colonial' of 1930s France: Film Narration as Spatial Practice."

For instance, in one sequence, P  p   wanders down the street with some members of his gang, sampling some of the vendors' delicacies as he goes with only a gesture of thanks given as payment. P  p  's obvious level of comfort in these surroundings indicates the bonds of friendship he shares with the locals. The fact that P  p   also walks and talks with a congenial Slimane during the stroll makes evident his sense of immunity from arrest – and Slimane even admits to the police that P  p  's defense in the Casbah relies on the strength and number of his myriad connections there. Yet, as the clich   would have it, P  p  's safe haven also serves as his prison. Tired of the same surroundings and newly enamored with Gaby, P  p  's itch to return to France nonetheless conflicts sharply with the cops' judgment that he truly belongs in his current surroundings – the inspector concludes his description of the Casbah by declaring that “P  p   est ici chez lui.”

Yet, as the inspector quickly ascertains, it will be P  p  's “caprice” for this woman that precipitates his downfall and gives Slimane his moment of glory. Time and again, critics have outlined the reasons why P  p   falls so hard and so quickly for Gaby.⁵⁹ They share a working-class Parisian background, including familiarity with the same neighborhood (e.g. the famous “Place Blanche” dialogue). They also share a taste for the finer things, even if they acquire them through morally suspect means – P  p   is a jewel thief on the lam, and Gaby is, essentially, a five-star call girl kept by a wealthy business magnate. Before Gaby arrives and infiltrates his territory, P  p   has a setup that meets his every need

⁵⁹ In her book on the film, Vincendeau proposes that “Gaby’s visual beauty, like P  p  ’s, covers her more sordid existence and humble origins, and she attracts P  p   precisely because of this duality, as a projection of his own desires and split identity” (50). Janice Morgan also points out the “parallel pattern of cross-identification” that draws Gaby and P  p   together (260). Martin O’Shaughnessy even remarks that it is Gaby who is truly exotic in P  p  ’s love triangle, and the gypsy In  s becomes associated instead with oppressive domestic obligations, e.g. “T’es pas une femme, t’es un r  gime !” (“Impossibility” 256).

despite the geographical limitations imposed by his fugitive status; besides the bevy of women attributed to him by his own legend, he has Inès, a live-in lover who, one imagines, maintains his living space and takes care of him. Aside from Inès, who as a woman would be granted ancillary status regardless of race, Pépé surrounds himself with fellow French expatriate men who form their own community within the Casbah. Also French are some of their women, although none has the glittering jewels or the Western wardrobe that Gaby displays. Despite the constant presence of fellow French men and women in the Casbah, for Pépé, meeting Gaby awakens a strong fear of becoming an entrenched and permanently expatriated European; in short, she provokes his assimilation anxiety.

The question of assimilation is complicated by Pépé's multiethnic milieu. Although many ethnicities coexist in the Casbah, the French community lives decidedly outside it, whether in the colonial neighborhoods of Algiers or, even more obviously, back in the metropole. While each of the groups in the Casbah appears free to form its own micro-society with or without an insistence on ethnic conformity, a shared ethnic or national background does not automatically create a community of equals. Within the French community, a group excluded from those that "belong" in the Casbah, tourists like Gaby and her upper-class companions can enter and leave both the Casbah and the country at will. Meanwhile, the French expatriate community, comprised of the criminal and lower classes, may have the freedom to roam the city, but they appear doomed never to return to France whether or not they are encumbered by an extensive rap sheet like the one that keeps Pépé trapped in the Casbah. Nor do they seem to belong in the sections of Algiers that are, unlike the Casbah, firmly

under French rule. The colonial part of the city is largely absent from the film; aside from interior shots of Gaby's hotel and the police station, only the docks provide an exterior setting germane to the progression of the narrative. Left without the option to leave, French expatriates appear obligated to eventually come to terms with their assimilation – that is, their becoming a fixture in a place far from where they feel they belong.

This separation of present physical location from the timeless spiritual “home” feeds the *cafard* that permeates *Pépé le Moko*. Pépé is hardly alone in his impulse to wallow in a desire to recover a bygone place and time. Tania, the long-suffering lover of one of Pépé's henchmen and famously played by realist singer Fréhel,⁶⁰ epitomizes the process of settling in (and for) a place that cultivates a feeling of alienation from one's true roots. The character accomplishes this weighty association in so little screen time due in large part to the fixed image of Fréhel in 1930s cinema. As Kelley Conway points out – offering yet another reason why *Pépé le Moko* has enjoyed such cultural longevity and critical interest – Fréhel's turn as Tania

offers us the richest, most layered vision of the realist singer in 1930s French film [...and] represents in her purest form ‘the past.’ This ‘past’ has a number of components [... of] her own personal history, including the memories of childhood poverty, early stardom, her vertiginous fall, and, finally, her partial recovery.⁶¹

Part of the fall from grace that Conway describes was more than a decade of travel outside France, mostly in Eastern Europe, which she calls “a self-imposed

⁶⁰ Kelley Conway discusses Fréhel's film career in *Chanteuse in the City: The Realist Singer in French Film* and particularly her role in *Pépé le Moko* (95-101).

exile" (94). Included in this nomadic period were five years spent in Istanbul, a snippet of personal background not immaterial to Fréhel's incarnation of Tania, also an expatriate living in the near East.

An expatriate's fear never to return home infuses at least one character in nearly every exoticist film – although some films manage to bury this feeling beneath a pro-colonial or pro-fantasy stance⁶² – and the frequent recurrence of this theme no doubt contributes to the sensation of déjà-vu that Nino Frank bemoaned in his review of *Pépé le Moko*. An element of this alienation is also embedded in the Legion myth, but the military context lacks the geographic specificity of Pépé's confinement; as in *La Bandera*, legionnaires may be far from home, but they are nearly always on the move. A character must remain stationary – which is not to say *stuck* – in order to become conscious of the sensation of assimilation and, in turn, the anxiety that goes with it. Thus a two-pronged *cafard*, with equal parts nostalgia and self-pity, develops as the very heart of Pépé's character, and both of these feelings culminate in the assimilation anxiety that drives him to his ill-fated decision to attempt an escape.

Le Messenger, or the Failure to Adapt

The only Gabin film from the 1930s set in Africa and *not* directed by Julien Duvivier is *Le Messenger* (1937), a production helmed by actor-turned-director

⁶¹ *Chanteuse* 101

⁶² In *L'Appel du silence* (Poirier 1936), for example, Charles de Foucauld returns to France after a lengthy tour of duty in North Africa only to realize that he misses the quietude of the desert. He then gives up his military career, turns his back on France's nascent modernity, joins the clergy and begins a new, ascetic life as a missionary alone in the deserts of North Africa. The overtly pro-Catholic, pro-imperial message in *L'Appel du silence* helps ensure that de Foucauld is never shown as doubtful or regretful of his decision to leave France behind him. The eponymous naval captain in *Mollenard* (Siodmak 1938, discussed in Chapter 5) also finds domestic life in France to

Raymond Rouleau. In the film, instead of the usual criminal on the run, Gabin plays the newlywed and newly hired director of a Ugandan mining outpost. There, the focus of his work is economic gain (both personal and corporate) rather than political control over the area. Without an expatriate community to sustain him in this remote region of the Dark Continent, Gabin's character suffers an intensely personal crisis of *le cafard* that stems less from a loss of place than from his sudden and prolonged separation from his new wife.

Le Messenger is an adaptation of a stage play written by Henry Bernstein and produced at the Théâtre du Gymnase in Paris – which, at the time, was under Bernstein's direction – with Victor Francen taking the lead role of Nick. Gabin was cast in Francen's role for the screen version,⁶³ and Gaby Morlay took the role of Marie in both Bernstein's play and Rouleau's adaptation. The film's low profile in studies of Gabin's career⁶⁴ probably results from the fact of its adaptation from the Parisian stage to the big screen, a situation that obliged Gabin to put his own stamp on a preexisting role instead of wielding his growing influence from the writing stage through the production. While Gabin's performance as Nick for Rouleau's film refers obliquely to some of his nascent star imagery, the story's roots in the theater push into the margins other aspects that critics have since identified as essential to his persona.

be much less rewarding in emotion and adventure than a life of illicit adventure on the Far Eastern seas.

⁶³ While the cinéphile press coverage does not reveal any circumstances that may have dissuaded Francen from reprising his stage role, it appears that he was occupied with other film projects when Rouleau was adapting Bernstein's play for the screen. Although a fairly well-known actor in both media, in the late 1930s Francen was unlikely to have been seen as a box-office draw in the same league as Gabin.

⁶⁴ An admittedly minor film in Gabin's *oeuvre*, *Le Messenger* is virtually invisible in Vincendeau's study of Gabin's career. This omission is likely due to a combination of the fact that Gabin's role in it was created by another actor before the screen adaptation was made and its near-total obscurity today.

For his part, Bernstein commended the casting decision and Gabin's performance in an essay published in *Cinémonde*: "Nick, c'est Jean Gabin. Quelle force de pensée dans ce regard, quelle menace dans ce masque, quelles réserves de violence, de puissance – de sensualité aussi – dans le jeu sobre, direct et vrai de ce superbe acteur."⁶⁵ Such a characterization contrasts with Francen's usual type, an honorable patriarch persona on display in films like *Forfaiture* (L'Herbier 1937, discussed Chapter 6) and *L'Homme du Niger* (de Baroncelli 1940) that could both suggest and display power and violence, but rarely sensuality. Taking the film as a whole, *Pour Vous* derides Rouleau's film as "plus théâtral encore que du théâtre"; as for Gabin's performance, the reviewer notes that he "représente avec énergie et avec des nuances un bonhomme très différent de ceux qu'il joue le plus souvent."⁶⁶

It is not so much that Nick fails to corroborate Gabin's previous and subsequent roles – in the 1930s, only Duvivier's *Golgotha* seems to have achieved the feat of casting Gabin sharply against type – but rather that the situation in which he must enact Nick's character's story differs considerably from the conditions that his star image normally required. For instance, absent in *Le Messenger* is the usual band of buddies that surrounds him in *La Bandera* and *Pépé le Moko* as Vincendeau describes:

Placé au sein d'un groupe d'hommes divers – mais toujours
'inférieurs' à lui – Gabin est à la fois l'exception de ce groupe et son
condensé. Alors que ses amis ou complices sont unidimensionnels,
il est complexe : chacun d'entre eux est porteur d'une valeur

⁶⁵ "Ces belles images, ce mouvant récit d'un drame de l'absence et de l'amour." *Cinémonde* 464 (9 Sept 1937): 800.

traditionnellement codée comme masculine (force physique, autorité, pouvoir sur les femmes, sagesse), tandis qu'il les amalgame toutes.⁶⁷

In *Le Messager*, Gabin is left without a bevy of supporting characters to “condense” into his own. Instead, he has only one foil against which he can be compared: his coworker and companion-turned-rival Gilbert. Nick thus stands largely alone against the forces of isolation and betrayed trust, a paucity of relations that renders a play more believable (and more easily realizable) than the bevy of supporting actors called for in film scenarios; however, as the *Pour Vous* review notes, this decision to stick to the original love triangle without adding any supporting roles renders the film quite plainly theatrical (although faithful to the play) and therefore ill-suited for the cinema as Gabin normally participated in it.

In some ways, Nick's background differs from the formative years imagined for a more typical Gabin hero. Instead of a life among the working class, as in *La Bandera* and many other prewar films,⁶⁸ or a youth spent in transition from the working class to the status of underworld kingpin, as in *Pépé le Moko*,⁶⁹ here Gabin's character begins the film among the upper echelons of society before plummeting to a lower socioeconomic rank. The film begins with Nick at work, wearing a well-tailored suit and fielding business calls in a well-appointed office. A secretary enters – Marie, his wife Florence's newest hire –

⁶⁶ Lucien Wahl, *Pour Vous* 460 (9 Sept 1937): 4.

⁶⁷ *Anatomie d'un mythe* 180.

⁶⁸ Gabin's films with Marcel Carné and Jean Renoir all situate his character squarely in the working class, to name only the most famous films that came after Gabin “became Gabin,” i.e. after *La Bandera*.

⁶⁹ This gangster leader/father figure returns with much greater frequency in Gabin's later work, as Vincendeau discusses in detail in *Anatomie d'un mythe*.

and after their brief, strictly professional encounter, Nick makes an abrupt decision to divorce his socialite wife in order to win Marie's heart. He initiates messy and financially devastating divorce proceedings even before asking Marie out. Although taken aback by Nick's brash strategy, Marie soon accepts his unexpected proposal. They marry, but Florence, furious over Nick's sudden change of feeling, calls in her powerful social and business connections to blacklist her ex-husband from every form of employment available in Paris. Unable to secure a job that would allow them to live a respectable middle-class existence, Nick announces to his new wife that their savings are gone, and their only remaining source of income is the occasional buyer for the toys that Marie makes. Yet, even faced with such precarious finances, the couple manages to keep their housekeeper, a reliable signal of their aspirations to maintain their middle-class status even at great sacrifice (and a departure from the rock-bottom social status of Gabin's more well-known roles). Broke and desperate for a job, Nick accepts a lucrative position at a corporate mining site in a sparsely inhabited region of Uganda. Marie is deeply upset by the 18-month separation required for the job, but resigns herself to Nick's decision.

Several exoticist set pieces smooth the transition into the film's second act. The camera's first shot of Africa shows a procession of African villagers wearing loincloths and face paint. Some of them haul a collection of luggage; others carry a litter with Nick lounging in the seat, both a witness to and a participant in the parade. Once they arrive at headquarters, Nick makes the acquaintance of his predecessor, a man who introduces himself as Morel. Drenched in sweat, Morel wears an exhausted, glazed look on his face and absently fans himself with a paper printed with an abstract picture of a black woman. Morel begins to

describe the hardships of life at the mining outpost – the mosquitoes, the fever, the crushing loneliness.⁷⁰ Nick downplays his warnings, claiming that he served for three years in Gabon, but Morel assures him that his time in Uganda will be different. As the men speak, Morel's native lover comes to the porch – like all the women in the Uganda sequences, she is blatantly topless. She sits at Morel's feet, and he caresses her head as though she were some kind of pet; as if to reinforce this image, in the foreground a monkey on a leash moves about as Morel assures Nick that she will allow him to pick up where he left off. Once again, Nick brushes off Morel's comment about Ugandan women's sexual availability. As a transition, the visual track cuts to a dance sequence marked by disorienting camera angles and movement as well as extradiegetic music that punctuates the singing and clapping that trace the (male) dancer's frenetic rhythms.

What follows is Nick's almost shockingly brief descent from his principled conduct into the same, near-permanent state of half-drunken lassitude in which he found Morel. However, unlike Morel, Nick keeps one aspect of his early determination intact: his fidelity to Marie. At this point, with Nick steeped in his surroundings yet fixated on his love left behind, a young man named Gilbert joins him at the outpost. They warm to each other quickly, and Gilbert listens to Nick talk about Marie as they go about their daily tasks and over whisky during the hot, humid nights. Moved by the depths of Nick's feeling and his own sense of loneliness at the outpost, Gilbert also falls for Marie, but manages to mask his interest with stories about an ex-lover of his who, coincidentally, is also called Marie.

⁷⁰ Morel is a standard example of the rogue *colon*, an exoticist figure discussed in Chapter 2.

After several months in Uganda, Gilbert comes down with a fever that worsens to the point of delirium. The company sends him back to France for better care, and Nick asks him to visit Marie once he has recovered. Meanwhile, back in Paris, Marie has started to tire of her situation as the wife left behind, talking with her friends about her boredom and her mounting frustration at Nick's sudden departure after an equally sudden wedding. However, once Gilbert arrives with news from Nick and stories of their time together, she recovers some of the old spark for her husband. They become friends, gradually spending more and more time together, until Gilbert reveals that he, too, has fallen in love with her. Marie first resists the idea, but soon she and Gilbert embark on an affair, reprising her earlier about-face when presented with Nick's unexpected marriage proposal.

When Nick's tour in Uganda finally ends, he arrives in Paris and surprises the couple during a night on the town. After a slow-burning confrontation – which despite its intensity never erupts into a full-blown Gabin moment – Nick leaves them and promptly signs up for a second long-term position in Africa in order to retreat once again into self-exile. Marie arrives at the train station to face him, and this time, Nick's anger comes through at nearly full force. He tries to leave her on the quay, but she follows him onto the train to tell him that Gilbert has committed suicide. The couple appears to reconcile as the train pulls out of the station with both of them still inside.

This ending resembles the conclusion of *Gueule d'amour* (Grémillon 1937) in that the protagonist, caught in a bad situation, hastily embarks on a return voyage to Africa as a means of self-exile. But the main difference between Gabin's two protagonists highlight the reasons why *Gueule d'amour* resonates

better as a Gabin film than *Le Messenger*. In *Gueule d'amour*, Lucien murders the woman he had loved in a fit of rage that epitomizes the explosive anger that Vincendeau identifies as central to his star image, and his subsequent flight into Africa helps him evade punishment for the act. In *Le Messenger*, while Nick suffers deeply from the betrayal perpetrated by Marie and Gilbert, his self-exile comes in reaction to their affair and thus cannot be read as an attempt to efface or dodge the consequences of an act of his own doing.

Acting more like a respectable patriarch than an impetuous rebel – hardly surprising in a role originated by Francen – Nick thereby foregoes the agency normally granted to Gabin's leading roles and simply tries to get on with his life. Instead, it is the petulant Gilbert who takes the more definitive exit, committing suicide off-screen. While this unseen suicide lacks the drama of Gabin's numerous scenes of self-destruction, in other films it retains a crucial importance to the conclusion of *Le Messenger*. As Nick, Gabin never loses control, not even during the slow-burning confrontation with Marie and Gilbert. At the outpost, in a few key moments Nick's *cafard* almost gets the better of him, but even these loaded instants fail to reach the required intensity to qualify as an unambiguous deployment of Gabin's signature rage.

Asked to play the patriarch before his time, in a sense, *Le Messenger* forces Gabin to cede his typical youthful impulse to his costar Jean-Pierre Aumont, who wins over his friend's wife before turning against himself his deep remorse for this betrayal. The central love triangle also denies Gabin's star magnetism by reflecting it onto a dissimilar and entirely unworthy double. The original play suggests that Marie, in spite of herself, considers Gilbert as a (probably temporary) stand-in for Nick during his absence; as Wahl describes it, after

Gilbert returns to France and finds Marie, “il y a là un phénomène profond et étrange qui fait que Gilbert s’assimile à Nick et que, peut-être, Marie, en aimant Gilbert, a le souvenir chaleureux de son mari.” In Rouleau’s film, however, the nontransferable nature of Gabin’s distinctive aura makes such a scenario nearly impossible to believe.

Nick’s love for Marie also falls short of the usual contribution that a romance makes to Gabin’s roles and performances, evidenced by a brief recap of the other films discussed above. In *La Bandera*, racial difference and a similarly oppressed class status allow Gilieth’s conquest of Aïsha to represent far more than a simple love story with a Legion backdrop. Gaby in *Pépé le Moko* also stands for much more than a pretty *parisienne* – she represents all that Pépé left behind in France and reminds him that he will never again have a chance to reclaim it. But in *Le Messenger*, Marie has no symbolic value beyond herself, at least for Nick. For Gilbert, however, Marie represents love in its purest and most inaccessible form. Yet as soon as Gilbert succeeds in obtaining what he had idealized as the unattainable, his affair with Marie is doomed even without Nick’s intervention. Already divorced once, and with a comparatively impoverished view of his own wife, Gabin’s character has little justifiable recourse to the same level of dramatic action as his rival, whose illusions about love have been shattered for the first and most painful time.

As an exoticist film, *Le Messenger* also falls short of its more illustrious contemporaries in the genre. Central to the narrative is a combination of cultural and geographical distance and its effect on a newly formed relationship. The cultural divide is at least as important as the physical distance; had Nick taken a job in a European or even an American mine, the sense of limited access would

have been drastically reduced. More importantly, the non-Western setting also provides the narrative with a means to isolate the protagonists in a cultural bubble while simultaneously providing ample temptation for moral decline in the form of booze and native women willing to offer sexual favors. On film, such an exotic setting needs to include certain generically required visuals, details that were very likely absent from Bernstein's stage production. Since the setting is sub-Saharan Africa, these images include the loincloth-clad villagers at work and at leisure – as in the dance sequence described above – as well as bare-breasted women alluringly angled to flatter their assets on camera. Wahl, singling out one such woman named in the credits, even mentions in his review (with more than a taste of irony) that “l'artiste noire nommée Princesse Kandou montre une jolie nudité” – a state of undress on which is based her entire performance.⁷¹ These images are awkwardly integrated into the narrative, if they can be described as “integrated” at all, but at the very least they provided some striking, publicity-ready photographs of Gabin surrounded by the Ugandan extras, like those on display in *Cinéma* 473.

The sorrow that haunts both Nick and Gilbert during their stint in Uganda ultimately fails to amount to *le cafard* as Gilieth and Pépé experienced it. In *Le Messenger*, the Europeans' suffering does not come from the isolated life they lead among the Ugandan villagers – indeed, the village barely makes a dent in the substance of the narrative – but instead stems from a simpler, geographically unfettered feeling: pining. Nick pines for the new wife he barely got to know,

⁷¹ Unlike a great many native extras in exoticist films of the day, “Princesse Kandou” is indeed named in the credits for the film alongside French actors with comparable screen time. Less clear is which of the native women in the film matches that name, although the likeliest candidate would be the one who, during one sequence, is fortunate enough to interact with Gabin. For a structuralist analysis of film credits, see *Général des années 30*.

and Gilbert, vicariously seeking a remedy for his past heartbreak, also comes to desire the same woman, one he has yet to meet. The idea of Western solidarity also fizzles in such a spare narrative structure, since with only two men on site at the mine, solidarity retracts to fit a single bond of friendship. That this association dissolves in France and not amidst the pressure of their isolated workplace underscores once again the basic lack of threat that the exotic setting poses in *Le Messenger*. Neither the Europeans nor their way of life appears in any way encroached upon as a result of their long-term residency in Uganda; their determination to remain faithful to Marie proves insulation enough from the pull of promiscuity, and their uncontested position as authorities at the mine keeps the colonial hierarchy intact and unquestioned.

The lackluster content of *Le Messenger* thus relegates the film to a footnote not only in Gabin's *oeuvre*, but also in the overarching filmography of French exoticist cinema in the 1930s. However, within the context of the present study, the film offers an instructive point of comparison for films that give more ideological weight to the multifaceted concepts of *le cafard* and Western solidarity in the context of exoticist narratives. By their very absence in *Le Messenger*, we begin to understand the various elements that forge a strongly felt, deeply symbolic *cafard*, like the one that pervades the entrenched Europeans in *Pépé le Moko* and the Legionnaires in *La Bandera*. By the paucity of characters in *Le Messenger* we understand at once Gabin's need for a gang of compatriots to bring out his star power, and we can also begin to intimate the spectator's pleasure at seeing among different Western characters an equally wide variety of approaches to their isolation in an exotic setting. By the lack of tension between the European bosses and the Ugandan villagers we see with new clarity the

narrative power both of the military conflict between the Spanish legion and the rebellious Moroccans and of the flux of multiculturalism that makes the Algerian Casbah a perpetually renegotiable territory. Common to all of these scenarios, for better or worse, is Gabin, an iconic figure whose indubitable Frenchness underscores by its difference the salient exoticism of non-Western surroundings in these prewar films.

CHAPTER TWO

Assimilation Anxiety and Rogue *Colons*

Intercultural contact provides a considerable range of thematic and cinematic possibilities in fiction cinema throughout the 1930s. Characters who seek such contact have a variety of reasons for doing so, including evading the authorities, fulfilling military obligation, escaping the pain of heartbreak, trying for a piece of colonial wealth, and even feeling bored with life in the metropole. But whatever benefits this experience may bring, extended contact with exotic lands, peoples, and pleasures tends to change those who experience it in ways that can inspire anxiety in those who surround them and, in turn, in the spectators who follow their story. Several exceptional characters in interwar cinema keep their Western identity relatively uncompromised after years of overseas living, for example, Nick in *Le Messager* (discussed in Chapter 1) and the businessman Bourron (Harry Baur) in L'Herbier's *Les Hommes nouveaux* (1936). However, in these cases, the plot treats the exotic setting as only marginally relevant to the events that unfold. In films where setting plays a more evident function, such as interracial love affairs that begin or continue there, a pervasive apprehension builds around characters who drift across the limits of conventional Western identity and start to resemble something fiercer, more unstable, a person more non-Western than Western, more Other than self. This apprehension – what I call “assimilation anxiety” – stems from the fear that prolonged, intensive contact with non-Westerners will inevitably bring two consequences: a loss of Western identity in the eyes of other Westerners and lasting psychological damage in the “assimilated” individual.

Exoticist films from the 1930s show examples of men – and they are always men – who have gone far beyond the acceptable limits of assimilation in their adjustment to exotic surroundings. While women are not entirely absent from exoticist films, the long-term settlement required to spark assimilation anxiety appears largely off-limits to women for a number of reasons. In reality, women enjoyed far less freedom to settle overseas without a (Western) husband, but a marriage between Westerners appears to prevent the brunt of assimilation anxiety for women and men alike; both Blanche in *Le Grand jeu* and Bourron, who marries a French widow early on in *Les Hommes nouveaux*, appear immune from the effects of their prolonged colonial sojourns. Even women who end up alone overseas, like the eponymous singer in *Sola* (Diamant-Berger 1931), are prevented by strong social taboos from forming the same casual intercultural or interracial liaisons that were standard practice for men traveling or living abroad; instead of bedding one (or more) of the locals in Singapore, Sola's romance involves a French soldier obsessed with her music. The major exceptions to this sexual double standard (discussed in Chapter 3) involve men of high social standing with a legitimate marriage to a Western woman.

The men who emerge as the most egregious examples of this assimilation are rarely protagonists, yet even as minor players these characters reveal the high stakes of the intercultural struggle that develops around the main character. These are men who live openly with native lovers, men who sabotage a socially sanctioned marriage or engagement to pursue the indigenous lifestyle, and/or men who fail to reintegrate into the mainstream after returning to Europe. Their offenses vary in detail, but all of them represent an unmistakable affront to Western values. Each time they face a neophyte fresh from the continent, these

seasoned residents emit a warning, whether implicit or explicit, aimed directly at the newcomer: succeed in your struggle to preserve your Western cultural identity amidst overwhelming Otherness, or else you will turn out like *me*.

Men Who “Stayed Too Long”: Rogue *Colons*

A recurring example of this secondary figure is the rogue *colon*. The term *colon* stems, of course, from imperial discourse (*colonisateur*), although it can also be understood in a military context (as a familiar form for the rank of *colonel*). Here, I apply the term to military men and civilians alike. In the context of exoticist films, the term’s implication of rootedness in a non-European locale gives the term some purchase with characters living either in territories under imperial jurisdiction or outside the bounds of Western rule. His most important characteristic is that he has abandoned all pretense of abiding by Western standards of conduct and forsaken all hope of ever returning to live in the West, thereby demonstrating or even openly declaring a preference for his new, non-Western way of life.

Referring to M. René Maunier’s 1932 study *Sociologie coloniale*, Ann L. Stoler locates an emerging distress in the early 1900s with regard to the well-being of *les coloniaux*. As this trepidation spread, people in the *métropole* began to [focus] not only on the Otherness of the colonized but also on the Otherness of colonials themselves. In France medical and sociological tracts pinpointed the colonial as a distinct and degenerate social type, psychologically identifiable and with recognizable physical characteristics. [...] What were identified as the degraded and unique characteristics of colonials by European

observers—‘ostentation,’ ‘speculation,’ ‘inaction,’ and a general ‘demoralization’—were ‘faults’ contracted from native culture that marked colonials as *décivilisé* as much as the colonized. (*Carnal* 66)

This notion of the communicability of Otherness meant that non-Western identity was treated much like a social disease. The longer one lingered in the exotic *ailleurs*, the more likely one would be to contract this Otherness, whose symptoms are described as clearly visible to the attentive Western eye. If Otherness could be considered a disease, doctors were also ready to offer a cure. According to Stoler, when faced with an overly assimilated Westerner, early 20th century medical practitioners recommended either repatriation or “adherence to an ethic of morality and work that valorized sexual moderation, abstemious diet, and physical exercise” in the context of a strictly Western social and family life, including a European wife and children (*Carnal* 67). The rogue *colon* thus emerges as the cinematic variant of this socially documented *décivilisé*, the man who “stayed too long” in the colonies and forfeited his Western identity in the process.

Like many features of exoticist films, this figure can be traced back to Feyder’s 1921 adaptation of Pierre Benoit’s novel *L’Atlantide*. However, in this early configuration of what would become a generic convention, two different characters fulfill the duties that typically would be covered by a single character in the 1930s. The hopeless addiction that comes with colonial life – a key signal of problematic colonial excess⁷² – comes through in Massard, the romantic

⁷² Both Schneider and Nye point to alcoholism as a major sign of degeneracy for people of the time. The tendency of seasoned *colons* to consume excessive amounts of alcohol shows that not only were the colonies seen as a last resort for criminals and degenerates who were pushed out of France, but also as an incubator for certain forms of degeneracy.

predecessor to Morhange and Saint-Avit who remains in thrall for Antinéa despite her indifference towards him. Massard serves as a “bad example” for the newcomers, a man who truly loses himself in the face of unrealizable desire for the exotic. While his addiction seems purely psychological rather than drug- or alcohol-induced, his delirious devotion to the mysterious queen Antinéa represents an unnatural attachment to this unsustainable way of life. His suicide, occurring in quick succession after his introduction in the narrative, also prevents him from serving the second key function: provider of information and advice.

In Feyder’s *L’Atlantide*, this task falls to the palace archivist, a bearded, erudite old man whose role in the film is expository rather than exemplary. The film’s fantasy element, a component that distinguishes it from other exoticist films of the era, requires more explicit and detailed coverage than what a fleetingly important figure like Massard might provide. The archivist introduces a full range of bad examples by showing the new arrivals to the mausoleum for Antinéa’s discarded and deceased lovers, of whom Massard is only the latest of a long and distinguished line. According to the archivist, just one of the men managed to escape, but even he returned, only to meet the same fate as those who came before him. This lone exception foreshadows Saint-Avit’s destiny, since the film ends with his decision to embark on a quest to find Antinéa once again, this time knowing full well what this prospect holds for him.

Pabst’s reimagining of Benoit’s novel in 1932 shifts the dynamic between these two forces in significant ways. The predecessor in the palace is not a soldier like Saint-Avit and Morhange, but a man named Ivar Torstenson, and he now has a confirmed drug habit to go with his lovesick delirium. After trying to

strangle Saint-Avit out of jealousy, Torstenson gives his prediction – “Vous finirez comme moi, exactement” – before breaking a wine glass to slit his wrists as a horrified Saint-Avit looks on. L’Hetman de Jitomir, a character from Benoit’s novel that did not appear in Feyder’s adaptation, then serves as Pabst’s stand-in for the archivist, and he plays a more active role as go-between for Antinéa and her prospective lovers. He also provides important expository information, indicating Pabst’s different reading of Benoit’s novel. Once Saint-Avit’s jealousy begins to corrupt his friendship with Morhange, Jitomir reveals Antinéa’s true origins: she is his own illegitimate child, born to her mother, Jitomir’s lover Clémentine, after she married a Targui prince and moved to North Africa.⁷³ Although not a rogue *colon* in the typical sense, Jitomir nonetheless provides the necessary functions of instruction and exposition that viewers in the 1930s expected from the figure.

In fact, the rogue *colon* appears in most of the films presented in this project, however fleeting their appearance. With a generalized tendency towards excess, common signals of the rogue *colon* as a character type are conspicuous (and copious) drug and/or alcohol consumption, an unusually high tolerance for isolation (which is usually self-imposed), and sexual improprieties that normally include a regular or live-in native sex partner. While both versions of *L’Atlantide* present the highly detailed back story via the rogue *colon*, who acts as a more or less neutral intermediary, in most other instances the information passed from the seasoned rogue *colon* to the neophyte protagonist amounts to a dark

⁷³ While this segment of Antinéa’s origin story does not appear in Feyder’s version, it follows Benoit’s novel. In Pabst’s narrative, Antinéa’s European bloodline complicates her symbolic identity as the embodiment of North African exoticism and suggests that he was aiming at some other meaning.

foreshadowing of the protagonists' impending misery. Both *Le Messenger* and *La Dame de Malacca* feature a rogue *colon* in this basic vein; he is an employee or officer on his way out – and only too happy to pass the baton – who lists for the newcomer what kinds of hardships he can expect. He may also provide some (unsolicited) advice about how to overcome these obstacles, for example, Morel giving Nick some pointers on life in the Ugandan mine village in *Le Messenger* (discussed in Chapter 1). *L'Esclave blanc* shows a predecessor so entrenched in indigenous life that replacement is no longer an option. This man, the lone European living among the tribe, advises the distraught protagonist to forget his troubles by settling in with a native woman and going with the flow of tribal life – in short, by joining him in his unconventional lifestyle. The film adaptation of *Amok* invents a rogue *colon* character, one with no basis in Stefan Zweig's source text, whose purpose is more comparative than informative; he demonstrates that, by comparison, the protagonist has not sunk to an entirely unsalvageable level in his assimilation process.

In *Le Grand jeu*, another doubling of the rogue *colon* figure emerges: one a legionnaire, the other a civilian. The film touches briefly on the seventeen-year service of the legionnaire Gustin, a foreshadowing of the inevitability of the protagonist Muller's renewed contract with the Legion. Not exactly a "rogue" per se, Gustin nonetheless illustrates the trope that the desert, once experienced, is ultimately inescapable; those who attempt to leave only find themselves coming back with even more fervor than they felt the first time. The more fully stereotypical rogue *colon* figure is Blanche's husband, the ironically named Clément, who puts his roguishness front and center. He drinks heavily and disposes of even basic Western courtesies in his behavior towards all who come

in contact with him. In keeping with his boorish manners, Clément's sexual impropriety involves repeated advances on the housekeeper, who finally quits, and then an attempted sexual assault on her replacement, Irma, who also happens to be Muller's girlfriend. Muller catches Clément *in flagrante* and goes after him; then, during their brawl, Clément breaks the balcony railing and falls to his death. *Le Grand jeu* is therefore one of the rare instances of a rogue *colon* meeting death as a matter of course. While Blanche shares the same expatriate situation as her husband, her core decency towards Muller and the other patrons at the bar boost her narrative importance in the film. Adding to this the fact that she's a woman, all of these characteristics situate Blanche outside the bounds of the role of the rogue *colon*.

A second, less common variant of the rogue *colon* situates both the assimilation anxiety and the reintegrated (or reintegrating) character well in the bounds of the *métropole*. More accurately deemed an *ex-colon*, this man returns to France a loner, prone to being misunderstood or isolated because his experience abroad has marked him as different from the people around him. Père Jules in *L'Atalante* (Vigo 1934) perfectly incarnates this type for the 1930s. His inclinations toward distraction, awkward interaction or violent confrontation add intrigue to life on the eponymous vessel, and while the skipper and the cabin boy seem accustomed to dealing with his quirks, Juliette, the captain's bride and a newcomer on the boat, has difficulty learning how to deal with him. But after a tour of Père Jules's collection of trinkets and artifacts gathered during his extensive travels, Juliette warms to the old eccentric in spite of her evident repulsion at some of the items in the collection (especially the embalmed hands in a jar). Père Jules's body, covered in tattoos, stands as further evidence of his

travels and his outsider status in France. Casting the inimitable, reliably odd Michel Simon in the role demonstrates a will to identify Père Jules from the start as an unconventional man, but instead of relying entirely on the fundamental idiosyncrasy of Simon's star image – which had already been made clear in his stage and screen performance in *Boudu sauvé des eaux* (Renoir's film version was released in 1932) – Vigo's narrative situates overseas experience as the primary catalyst for defining and developing Père Jules's weirdness.

An even more violently unstable *ex-colon* appears during the Occupation, in Jacques Becker's 1943 film *Goupi Mains-rouges*. The narrative focuses on the provincial Goupi clan, whose ranks include two black sheep who go by the nicknames Mains-rouges and Tonkin. At the beginning, both are relegated to the margins of the Goupi family, but Mains-rouges is finally reinstated to his rightful place in the family circle while Tonkin suffers from a downward spiral widely attributed to lingering effects from his five years in the jungles of Indochina. With a nickname that points so unambiguously to his role as the family *colon*, family members reinforce the connection by dismissing him as a lazy good-for-nothing ridden with "Chinese diseases" – ailments with the same symptoms that Stoler attributes to colonial doctors' observations of long-time *colons*. His actions do nothing to dispel this negative impression; Tonkin lives in a hut built to the same specifications of his home in Indochina, complete with exotic baubles for decoration and a hammock in place of a bed. He also drinks more and more often as the narrative progresses, and he begins to reminisce out loud about the glories of his colonial experience. Revealed as the murderer of his aunt, Tonkin's attempted escape from Mains-rouges and the cops concludes with him in a

treetop, shouting about the colonies one last time before a branch gives out and sends him plunging to his death.

Through the Tonkin character, the narrative in *Goupi Mains-rouges* clearly and repeatedly contrasts the benefits of placid provincial living with the destabilizing effect of even a temporary departure from familial property. Those who have stayed home or plan to return for good are rewarded, since not only does Mains-rouges find acceptance in the family home, but the narrative also shows a long-lost son from Paris who visits the family and comes to respect their way of life, even making plans to marry his cousin Muguet to continue the Goupi line. That Muguet was first courted by Tonkin (to the family's chagrin) only to choose the prodigal *parisien* in the end further reinforces the imperative to privilege a strongly localized and family-based form of solidarity. This ideology of hearth and home is common in Vichy cinema, as is a visual and narrative emphasis on immobility⁷⁴; the *colon* thus poses a double threat to the status quo in Occupation-era cinema that exacerbates the outsider quality of the rogue colon in 1930s cinema and strengthens the punishment meted out for failure to reassimilate.

Reassimilation is a recurring theme in French cinema before the war years, and it reaches beyond the figure of the rogue *colon*. Three French films from the early- to mid-1930s situate the assimilated Westerner not as a bit player, but in a pivotal role. *El Guelmouna, marchand de sable* (Hugon 1931) features a wealthy Russian as an enigmatic villain living near a military outpost in Algeria, a man who pays the ultimate price for his infractions against the West. On the other

⁷⁴ For more on tendencies of French cinema under the Occupation, see Williams (245-71) and Ehrlich.

hand, both *Amok* (Ozep 1934) and *L'Esclave blanc* (Paulin 1936) focus on the remedy for such depravity, dramatizing not punishment but a complete process of cultural rehabilitation that brings their respective heroes back from the brink – in social esteem if not in the flesh. Each of these three films will be discussed below.

El Guelmouna, marchand de sable: Rivalry in Rural Algeria

With sixteen films to his name from 1929-1939,⁷⁵ pied-noir director André Hugon was practically destined to address the exoticist trend more than once over the course of the decade. In fact, this prolific director had even made several exoticist films before the 1931 release of *El Guelmouna, marchand de sable* (also known as *Le Marchand de sable*; shortened hereafter to *Guelmouna*). Of these pictures, Claude Beylie and Philippe d'Hugues name *Yasmina* (1926), *La Vestale du Gange* (1927) and *La Femme et le rossignol* (1930) as some of the better examples of his exoticist *oeuvre* (86). However, in the decades that have passed since Hugon's heyday, few of his films have found a foothold outside the confines of film archives; despite an extensive filmography that covers more than 80 films that span both world wars and beyond, film historians have generally acknowledged little historical importance in Hugon's work. Those of his films that have survived are rarely studied, aside from the notable exception *Sarati le terrible* (1938), another exoticist film that Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier included as a prime example of the incest themes that dominated 1930s French cinema. Besides following these predominant tropes of intergenerational

⁷⁵ See Borde (67).

romance, Beylie and d'Hugues point to Hugon's more general inclination to play up themes and subjects that appealed to popular taste. Not coincidentally, then, Hugon was the first French director to embrace sound cinema with his 1929 film *Les Trois masques* (Martin 15). Exoticism could also be counted as an appeal to the masses, although the director's status as a *pied-noir* certainly complicates his personal relationship to colonial North Africa. No matter how Hugon's view of the exotic was forged, the way it unfolds in *Guelmouna* reflects an extreme form of the assimilation anxiety that emerged in many exoticist films of the interwar period.

Of the films covered in this chapter, *Guelmouna* carries out the harshest punishment for the Westerner who willfully abandons his culture. The narrative interest centers on a group of Russian émigrés: the eponymous El Guelmouna, the alias adopted by a Russian expatriate named Warneskine, all three of his wives, and his manservant Igor. They live in a luxurious estate known to the locals as l'Isba. These reclusive inhabitants, combined with the suspicious disappearance of a French soldier who had been stationed at the outpost, pique the interest of a lieutenant named Varnière who is assigned to the fateful investigation of the soldier's death.

What stands out about Warneskine's coterie in this colonial context is their common Russian nationality, a trait that combines the colonial Algerian setting with the pervasive interest in Russian history, culture, and people that affected the French film industry throughout the decade. Popular films like *Les Nuits moscovites* (Granowsky 1934), *Sous les yeux d'Occident* (Allégret 1936), *La Tragédie impériale* (L'Herbier 1938), and many others brought various moments in Russian history to the screen. Among the better-known filmic adaptations of celebrated

Russian novels, expatriate Fédor Ozep directed a French adaptation of *Les Frères Karamazoff* in 1931, and Pierre Chenal adapted *Crime et châtiment* in 1935. So many Slavic characters were created at the time that certain actors became associated with what might be called the Russian subgenre; Harry Baur was dubbed “le plus slave des acteurs français” (Barrot and Chirat 29), and popular *jeune premier* Pierre Richard-Willm also frequently played Russians on screen.⁷⁶ Colin Crisp concludes that “of all the countries commonly represented in French thirties films, Russia is the one with which the French appear to feel the closest affinity,” an affinity that amounts to French employment of Russia and Russians as a kind of alter ego, one made particularly amenable to recognition and identification in the eyes of French spectators, yet still able to preserve a critical distance between themselves and the representations on screen (*Genre* 35-37).

Critics of the 1930s also took note of the cinematic interest in Russia, but instead of foreshadowing Crisp’s view of Russia as France’s filmic doppelgänger, some of these critics refused to condone the almost pathological recurrence of Russian themes and settings in French films. In an essay published in *Pour Vous*, accompanied by a collage of stills from successful examples of the Russian subgenre, Lucienne Escoube makes a resounding declaration worth quoting at some length:

Ces films russes, réalisés chez nous, ne seront jamais que du contre-plaqué, du faux ‘slave,’ du chiqué... ce qui est assez déplaisant pour le public et, bien souvent, pour les interprètes, fort peu convaincus de leurs personnages, *trop parfaitement étrangers à leur*

⁷⁶ See Chapter 5 for a discussion of *Yoshiwara*, in which Richard-Willm plays a Russian military officer.

façon de sentir. [...] Certes, il y a de la beauté, du tragique, de la poésie dans les choses slaves. Mais, en dehors des grandes créations humaines des romanciers qui sont la possession du monde tout entier, cette beauté slave, ce tragique slave, cette poésie slave, vigoureuse et fruste, romanesque et réaliste, âpre, brutale, si loin de nous, ne peut être belle que si elle nous arrive dans sa sincérité, dépouillée de tout artifice comme d'ailleurs de toute arrière pensée, de tout programme quel qu'il soit. Et c'est pourquoi il nous paraît attristant de lire une si longue liste de titres à consonance slave : nous savons d'avance que, quelque talent qu'aient nos artistes, quelque doués que soient nos réalisateurs, ils ne peuvent à coup devenir autres, 'sentir slaves.' [Emphasis added.]⁷⁷

While it may not seem surprising to make this kind of plea for French directors to bring French stories to the screen⁷⁸ and avoid bowdlerizing foreign source material, Escoubé's emphatic denunciation of these films as futile attempts to "become" the Other ring false in a context where Russian exoticism is only one of many varieties the 1930s had to offer. As this current project attests, myriad forms of exoticism appeared in fiction films of the 1930s, and few critics openly protested the casting of French actors as non-French and/or even non-white characters as a futile attempt to "devenir autres" in contexts more even more exotic than Russia.

⁷⁷ "La Russie des Tsars à l'écran." *Pour Vous* 454 (29 July 1937): 8-9.

⁷⁸ This nationalistic argument was particularly widespread among right-wing cinéphiles, including Jean Vignaud, who frequently advocated the overt use of cinema as nationalist propaganda in his opinion columns for *Ciné-Miroir* (see especially the one titled "Propagande" in issue 547, 27 Sept 1935).

Despite Escoube's protests, the tendency for filmmakers to represent Russia as an environment mostly closed to non-Russians underscores the logic of Crisp's analysis of the trend and differentiates it somewhat from other, contemporary cinematic forms of exoticism. Without the racial divide that visually separates African and Asian characters from Western ones, French spectators could more easily (and literally) see themselves in/as Russian characters than Asians or North Africans; only the setting in these cases lends a sense of otherness. Although Escoube is quick to condemn French actors and filmmakers for their inability to accurately convey a Russian sensibility, these films' allegorical potential would be lost if they could be dismissed as *only* or *merely* Russian. For Escoube, the allure of the exotic does not provide sufficient justification for French filmmakers to use Russia in such an all-encompassing fashion, but in fact, this recurrence of integral exoticism within the contemporary context of more visibly different places and people allows such films to achieve the feat of combining audience identification with an intriguingly "othered" culture.

However, when Russians are drawn out of their native land and thrust into roles as cultural outsiders, they can fall into stereotypical categories that are less visible in integral exoticist films. The Russian diaspora that spread through Europe and elsewhere after the revolution held little of the same fascination that drew French spectators to opulent, fully rendered representations of czarist Russia.⁷⁹ Warneskiné is one such member of the post-revolutionary Russian

⁷⁹ Nevertheless, Crisp gives examples of films that focus specifically on the Russian immigrant experience in France or include members of the Russian diaspora living in France (*Genre* 36).

diaspora, one who settled not in Paris, but in North Africa for reasons related to his unconventional family situation.

The film's protagonist, a young lieutenant named Varnière, first makes contact with a member of Warneskine's household en route to his new post in Ghardaïa. He stops for lunch in a remote restaurant, and there he spots a raven-haired young woman sitting alone. The lieutenant strikes up a conversation, and the young woman's accent gives away her Russian origin. She makes an immediate reference to the revolution: "En Russie on est toujours fataliste, surtout depuis le bouleversement." This fatalism, she continues, resembles the Muslims' in certain ways: "C'est peut-être le fatalisme qui me fait aimer les musulmans. Nous sommes tellement près d'eux." This explicit alliance between a Russian character and Muslim otherness signals to the spectator early in the narrative that Russians occupy a different position in *Guelmouna* than they do in other contemporary films, that there is a fundamental distinction being drawn that sets apart the Russians – more precisely, *these* Russians – as outsiders. The lieutenant, clearly intrigued by the young woman, named Gritcha, and her conversation, offers to accompany her to Ghardaïa. During the trip, she points out to him several local landmarks with evident familiarity, but when Varnière proceeds to ask more personal questions, she hedges her answers. When they arrive in Ghardaïa, she urges the lieutenant not to seek her out and takes pains to slip out of the car unseen.

While these scenes provide some expository dialogue, cross-cut with Varnière's encounter are three cryptic, wordless sequences that introduce Warneskine and establish his sinister demeanor. The film opens with a soundtrack of strangely upbeat music – unusually, the music lacks the usual

Oriental tones found in North African exoticist soundtracks – and the visual track shows several shots of Warneskine supervising a crew of Arabs digging in the sand dunes. The camera moves from distant shots to a medium close-up of Warneskine, then a close-up of a rigid, uniformed arm poking out of the sand. The sequence shifts to Varnière and the woman, then back again to Warneskine, now walking through a garden with a slack-jawed sidekick. He seems to be looking for something on the ground. The sidekick smiles enigmatically and nods to him as the scene fades. The third and final introduction to the strange, mustachioed man takes place in a well-appointed salon featuring Christian-Jaque's lush, Orientalist interior décor. With a blended wardrobe that pairs a Western style jacket and tie with baggy, Eastern style pants, Warneskine enters the room, takes a drink, then walks toward three dolls placed on a low bench. Each doll has a different hair color and complexion, but all three seem to represent white women in Western dress. He picks them up and looks them over as he puffs from his cigar, and finally he smiles tenderly, pulling the dolls in close for an embrace. The sequence fades, leaving the forthcoming investigation to reveal the full meaning of these wordless acts.

Once Varnière takes on the mission to investigate the officer's disappearance, he finds an anonymous letter warning of a house called L'Isba, where a Russian man named Warneskine lives. The letter writer urges Varnière to avoid the house and especially any contact with "Mme Warneskine." The lieutenant guesses at a connection between this warning and the furtive young woman who had come with him to Ghardaïa.

The next day, the lieutenant comes across a man named Guelmouna selling sand – "for washing your hands," an onlooker explains – but keeps on his

path to find his local contact, Mohammed. When he asks about Warneskine, Mohammed replies that Guelmouna and Warneskine are one and the same, but he, too, warns Varnière against contacting the man. Mohammed begins to complain that Warneskine has not yet paid for some rugs he has purchased, and the words barely leave his mouth before Gritcha, veiled in white, arrives to pay Warneskine's debt. The lieutenant recognizes and greets her, but she skips all pleasantries to beg him more emphatically than ever not to try and see her again.

After this odd exchange, the lieutenant overhears a conversation back at the outpost among soldiers discussing the legendary beauty of Mme Warneskine. Curiously, all of them seem to have very different notions of her appearance; one man says she's blonde, another a redhead, and the Lieutenant – describing the young woman he met – says she is a brunette. Later that night, one of the soldiers from the conversation falls victim to a dog attack, and his interest in Mme Warneskine emerges as a possible factor in the attack. Varnière adds this incident to his investigation and decides to survey the situation at L'Isba for himself.

Under cover of darkness, Varnière sneaks onto the grounds, but soon a servant arrives to present him with a letter from Warneskine inviting him for tea, saying that this would be far better than peering through the trees at him. When he arrives the next night, Warneskine informs Varnière that he has his own spies in town. Somewhere in the house, dogs bark. Continuing, Warneskine claims not to be the shady character everyone believes him to be, saying he has fled his homeland in order to lead a simpler life and forget the past: "Je suis un fuyard, voilà tout. J'ai fuit mon pays, la civilisation." His comments align Russia with "civilization" in the same way that France would claim the term, that is, in

opposition to life in North Africa. He continues: "La civilisation! Ah! Je vous jure bien qu'elle n'a rien à envier aux excès cruels des peuplades sauvages." The tone of admiration for the "savage peoples" is clear in his voice.

Somewhere in the house, a woman starts to sing. Taking advantage of the interlude, the lieutenant declares that he would like to meet "Mme Warneskiné." Surprised, Warneskiné summons the singing woman, but "Mme Warneskiné" turns out not to be Gritcha. A delicate blonde, accompanied by a very large dog, descends the stairs. Puzzled, under Warneskiné's watchful eye, Varnière cordially kisses her hand despite his confusion and her impassivity.

Left with more questions than answers after this tête-à-tête with Warneskiné, Varnière attempts the stealth approach once more, but once again a guard catches Varnière sneaking around the grounds. This time, Igor leads him inside to a seemingly empty room. From another location, Warneskiné cuts the lights. In the dark, the lieutenant finds that he is not alone, and he picks a fight with his fellow prisoner until Warneskiné brings up the lights once again. The lieutenant recognizes that he's fighting another French officer, one whose leave had been denied for the evening as a result of the recent incidents. Then, both officers are escorted into the dining room, where three women – Gritcha, the blonde who Varnière met during his last visit, and another fair-haired woman – are seated with Warneskiné at a long dining table. Western orchestral music plays, rather loudly, from somewhere in the house. He introduces all three of his companions as Madame Warneskiné, and after they all drink champagne together he dismisses them. Alone with the soldiers, Warneskiné explains the three "wives": one is his chosen bride (although he does not specify which one), and the other two were his brothers' wives until they were widowed in the

Russian revolution. With his own wife's blessing (!), the polygamous arrangement was decided, and the Warneskines had been living in Algeria ever since.

Pinpointing the threat that these French officers pose to his lifestyle, both as soldiers who enforce the law and as rivals for his wives' affections, Warneskine moves to take the two officers prisoner. Varnière successfully talks the Russian into setting his comrade free, but he himself agrees to stay behind. Warneskine lumbers off to enjoy some drinking and topless belly dancing with Igor and another unidentified man. This time, the music has a North African flavor, and the trio of dancers provides an overtly sexual parallel to the demure Mesdames Warneskine. The show turns into a microcosm of Warneskine's jealous fury after a dancer makes a move on Igor, sending Warneskine into a fit of rage. He beats Igor mercilessly until they reconcile with a raucous rendition of a traditional Russian song, their common nostalgia reuniting them as kindred spirits despite the flare-up of sexual jealousy.

During the ruckus, Gritcha finds Varnière, and together they make their escape. Mohammed helps arrange travel with a caravan of merchants about to leave Ghardaïa, but back at l'Isba, Warneskine soon finds them missing. Swearing vengeance, Warneskine enlists Igor and his sidekick Haïoub to help him retrieve his wife and dispose of yet another would-be rival. Driving across the sands, Warneskine quickly catches up to them. He stops the car out of earshot, and approaches the couple from behind with a gun. Just as he raises his arm to shoot, another shot rings out from off-camera, and Warneskine crumples to the ground. Igor has fired on his master, killing him before he could carry out his revenge.

In Warneskiné's native Russia, he would be considered a deviant for adopting a polygamous marriage, an arrangement typically associated with otherness – specifically, with Muslims. Warneskiné meets a violent death at the hands of a servant with the same Russian background, a man who, unlike his master, refuses to consider his North African surroundings as an excuse to normalize the idea of polygamy among men of his own, Western culture. Since arriving in Algeria, Warneskiné had set out to defend an indefensible way of life for a Westerner in a location as far from the glare of the public eye as it was from the post-revolutionary turmoil in Russia. The relocation alone does not constitute a cultural transgression, but Warneskiné perverts what might otherwise have been a straightforward attempt to make a new life in the French colonies by choosing to do so *specifically* in order to lead a polygamous lifestyle. His choice of Algeria and not France, as so many other Russian expatriates had done, underscores that it was the polygamous arrangement that ultimately drove his decision.

This small harem of Western women and the suspense built around the legend of Mme Warneskiné displace Varnière's murder investigation at the center of the film's intrigue. When it turns out that the murder victims, all French soldiers, share a connection to Warneskiné's wives, Varnière seems more interested in what this lead reveals about the women than what it contributes to his murder investigation. In terms of *Guelmounda's* narrative, the gravest offense, then, is not the murders, but the conditions that lead Warneskiné to demonstrate such jealous extremes, read as misplaced or delusional because of the “unnatural” number of women to which he lays claim. The blowup at Igor emphasizes that Warneskiné considers not just his three wives, but any woman

in the household to be locked in his sexual orbit. Although no generalized objection to polygamy appears in the film – indeed, no other characters are shown in any domestic environment – the incompatibility of Warneskiné’s native Western culture and this stereotypically non-Western practice violates the unspoken pact of Western solidarity that permeates interwar exoticist films.

The shared Western identity of the French and Russian characters, suggested and reinforced by conventions of Russian representations in interwar cinema, is plainly underscored by the similar names of the characters Varnière and Warneskiné. Although their respective languages inflect each of the names in recognizable ways (the ending *-ière* for the Frenchman and *-kiné* for the Russian), the strong echo suggested by the nearly identical first syllable seems to put into language the cultural common ground that connects the two men. The instant attraction that Varnière feels for the raven-haired wife, and the reasonable assumption at the end of the film that they will continue along the path to a “normal” monogamous relationship, point to an underlying connection to which neither cultural nor generic conventions would object; unlike, for example, the doomed Gilieth-Aïscha couple in *La Bandera* (discussed in Chapter 1), Russian émigrés were happily and successfully paired with French citizens in several interwar films (Crisp *Genre* 36). These connections between the French and the Russians, visible in the details of the narrative, ultimately build the case against Warneskiné, whose murder and polygamy add up to a double infraction against his native Western culture.

Warneskiné’s death, eminently readable as punishment for his defection from Western mores, amounts to the strongest penalty for cultural transgression in all of 1930s exoticist films. As the self-appointed executioner, Igor provides no

explicit rationale for his act, but even if the abuse he suffered working for Warnesquine offers a personal motive, both the moment of action and the story's trajectory encourage a less selfishly moralistic interpretation. Witnessing the breakdown of his master's polygamous marriage into a monogamous pair, Igor intervenes on the lovers' behalf instead of continuing to protect his master's aberrant lifestyle. Himself a victim of Warnesquine's violent jealousy, Igor recognizes the unsustainability of his master's situation, even in a land where, in the native culture, such an arrangement might be entirely unremarkable. That Warnesquine resorts to murder in order to preserve his polygamy against the threat of rival suitors – men who, under typical circumstances, would be appropriate mates – only amplifies the call for someone to intercede in the name of the Western order. Significantly, Igor's act also puts a fellow Russian, not Varnière or even another French soldier, on the hook for taking down Warnesquine, a distinction that demonstrates a horizontal enforcement of cultural mandates even within the shared macroculture of the West. Had Varnière pulled the trigger, the film's message concerning belonging and otherness would have been mixed up with a more simplistic rivalry for Gritcha's affections.

Interwar French cinema thus reserves its severest penalty for assimilation for a Russian outsider whose extreme sense of sexual propriety provokes a deadly intervention from one of his fellow countrymen. With an uncomplicated character at its center, one whose only goal seems to be to “preserve his happiness” with his wives and concubines, *Guelmouna* fails to interrogate the possibility that a man might want to return to the Western fold even after unfettered access to women and unrestricted use of violence to achieve

one's ends. The next film offers this return as a possibility, but the process takes a heavy toll both on the repentant Westerner and on those around him.

***Amok*: Cultural Readmission, at a Price**

Adapted from Austrian author Stefan Zweig's story by the same name, Fédor Ozep's feature *Amok* (1934) also features a Western man far out of his element. Unlike *El Guelmouna*, however, the quasi-assimilated protagonist in *Amok* attempts to forge a path towards social redemption that would rescue him from his life in the colonial margins and return him to social acceptability. But the price of this redemption is steep, and his initial attempts to demand respect from the Western community send another expatriate down the path to tragedy.

Despite standing alongside avowed classics *Le Grand jeu* (Feyder) and *L'Atalante* as French selections for the 1934 Venice film festival, *Amok* has failed to sustain a career as illustrious as its co-competitors'. Over the passing decades, *Le Grand jeu* has benefitted from its compelling performances and its inclusion in the established canon of *cinéma colonial*, and *L'Atalante* (discussed above) has been borne along by its status as Vigo's *chef-d'oeuvre*. Reconsidering the importance of *Amok* in French film history, Dudley Andrew considers "atmosphere" to be its primary link to the era's cinematic practice, even declaring Ozep's film "the most excessively atmospheric film of the era" (*Mists* 166). (It is unclear whether Andrew means this as a compliment, a criticism, or something in between.) For Andrew, this atmosphere trumps even exoticism as the defining characteristic of the film, situating it within a contemporary generic rubric of "atmosphere films" that also includes, among others, Marc Allégret's *Sous les yeux d'Occident*, an example of integral exoticism set in Russia (*Mists* 168).

Yet in *Amok*, the atmosphere itself is decidedly, deliberately exotic, and Lazare Meerson's lushly detailed décor⁸⁰ dominates the film's first act more than the actors, their performance, or the plot that they play out.

In their study of European set design in 1930s narrative cinema, Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris and Sarah Street hold up Meerson as the primary example of a transnational influence, with major work in the German, French, and British film industries. Citing Jill Forbes, they point out that Meerson's set designs

were often 'generic' in that they were not concerned with creating faithful reproductions of places, but through the selective process of creating a design – from initial research through to continual embellishment and refinement, right up until shooting began – they evolved into 'idealisations. [...] Our pleasure as viewers derives from the fact that the physical environment is exactly as we somehow always expected it to be, that it conforms to an image or an original we carry in our mind's eye.' (95)

The "original" notion of an exoticist set for a French public would have been built from several raw materials, including the Exposition coloniale of 1931, the World's Fair in 1937, and the elements that Elizabeth Ezra includes in her discussion of the colonial unconscious.⁸¹ In order to trace Meerson's approach to this alternative conception of verisimilitude, his set and the concomitant elements of Karol Rathaus's music and Ozep's evocative direction⁸² are worth

⁸⁰ Bergfelder, Harris and Street mention that Meerson probably never visited Malaysia firsthand in his research for *Amok*, but archives show that he "collected a wide variety of documentation on which to base his interpretation of the tropical jungle" (203).

⁸¹ See especially Ezra's Introduction (1-20).

⁸² This production trifecta – Meerson, Rathaus, and Ozep – makes *Amok* "an exceptional example of émigré achievement" in Bergfelder, Harris, and Street's study (204).

describing in detail, particularly within the context of the densely atmospheric first act.

The film opens with a sequence that shows a dank tropical forest covered with a light fog. The soundtrack features spooky music accented with strange staccato sounds. The scene shifts to a group of topless native women who each wield a mortar and pestle to pound a sticky white substance – a suggestive image in itself – while one lone woman rhythmically tosses some grain in a large bowl. A clocklike chiming begins to ring out, echoing the rhythm of their movement. At first, camera shots simply show the women from different angles; two keep the camera motionless, then with the third shot, the camera begins to pan left at a leisurely pace. From this moment until the end of the sequence, the camera is constantly in motion, panning first over the group of women, then following a passing man with a pack on his back who climbs a nearby ladder to a raised, tunnel-like bridge. Other men are crossing the bridge toward him; the scene emanates a sense of industriousness and purpose. Still panning, the camera captures carved wooden statues and more (studio-constructed) forest, then pauses at a raised house with a woman and children on the porch. Finally, the camera moves on to a second house, where a man descends the stairs as the image track fades out.

Having thus established this remote, primitive setting, the next sequence opens on a European man, dressed in white, lounging on the deck of a jungle house similar to the enclave shown in the opening scenes. Beside him, a native woman fans him with a blank, almost forlorn expression on her face. This brief, wordless introduction of the protagonist cuts from a medium close-up of the man to scenes that revisit the surrounding jungle. In an animated sequence, a

butterfly gets trapped in a flower that closes each petal around its prey in an exaggerated imitation of a Venus flytrap. Another sharp cut, accompanied by a burst of cacophonous music, shows a medium close-up of a grotesque statue outside under the pouring rain. Another cut to the rain falling over a home in the woods, then to a hand pouring a drink. This hand belongs to the same European man, and the same native woman is lying in the next room, topless, framed within the shot by a slight opening in the curtain that separates the two rooms. Looking up at the man, she gives an alluring half-smile.

But the man is busy – he is writing a letter, one that gives all the exposition necessary to explain his isolation in a remote corner of the jungle:

Je n'ai jamais été aussi bas. Depuis que je me suis cloîtré dans ce marécage, je n'ai été qu'une seule fois à la ville. C'était pour opérer le résident. Maintenant je ne vois plus personne, sauf les indigènes, et je bois toutes les nuits.

Si je vis encore dans deux ans, si je ne suis pas devenu fou [sic], je vous aurai remboursé complètement. Cet argent m'a sauvé du déshonneur et sans doute de la prison –

Tout ça pour une femme! Enfin, je suis au moins guéri de l'amour – c'est l'essentiel – merci !

After showing the contents of the letter, the remainder of the sequence contains shots alternating between brief views of the man's home – which, however isolated, still shows signs of colonial decadence such as indigenous artifacts arranged as decorative baubles – and the smiling, supine native woman clearly trying to charm the man into her bed. This interior montage visually echoes the previous exterior shots, which blend a kind of industrious domesticity among

the villagers with the bizarre and vaguely threatening exotic aesthetic evidenced by the masks and statues as well as the flora and fauna. The industriousness, of course, points to the preoccupied European while the decadent exoticism attaches itself both to the objects that occupy his home and to the topless, desiring native mistress (who indeed seems as much a part of the décor as the assemblage of curios). The shots cease to alternate, and the camera then follows the man, clearly distracted, as he paces nervously around the room. Finally, he notices the woman looking coyly at him from the bedroom – he abruptly turns, puts on his coat, and walks out into the downpour. He arrives at a neighboring house, and another European man, *Amok's* rogue colon (who is never named), comes out to greet him. Once the connection between the two men is established, the sequence cuts once again to the same grotesque wooden statue, and then to a puddle being peppered with falling raindrops before the screen fades to black.

The next sequence begins with the sun coming through clouds. A quiet gong rings out. A loud, sudden squall of music bursts in just after an abrupt cut to a different (but equally grotesque) wooden statue. (Evidently the jungle has the same capacity to startle and alienate in daylight as it does at night.) The still-life image of the statue then fades into a high-angle shot of a dancing woman wearing an elaborate costume seemingly inspired by Balinese traditions. The camera slowly withdraws to reveal other performers, including a male principal dancer, musicians, and the (exclusively indigenous) audience sitting in a circle that surrounds the performance space. There is a series of medium close-ups of human faces not unlike the statue shots, but without the discordant music.

Cut to the two Europeans playing dice and drinking in the old man's place. (A new alternation begins.) Back to the dancers, then to the Europeans. The close-ups become tighter and the music more and more tense until one of the spectators, a mad look building in his eye, suddenly bounds across the crowd and attacks the male principal dancer with a long knife. The crowd scatters in fear as they repeat the cry – *Amok! Amok!*

A chase sequence follows, with shots showing people running and general chaos in the village. As the natives make a break for their homes, the two Europeans emerge from the house to take stock of the uproar. The protagonist walks deliberately into the main path – apparently propelled by a suicide wish – as the rogue *colon* scrambles to get his gun. The crazed villager approaches the man, who stands perfectly still in the middle of the road, and he moves to strike just as the *colon* shoots him down. The villager falls and writhes in the mud at the man's feet, then goes still.

By his nameless and complete lack of dialogue, the rogue *colon* in *Amok* highlights the ubiquity of the type as a stock figure in exoticist films. The written source text appears to have no need for him; no such character exists in Zweig's novella, and no events correspond to the "amok" sequence described above. A propensity for excessive drinking and his isolation among the villagers make him instantly recognizable as the rogue *colon*, and the "amok" sequence accomplishes the laudable feat of demonstrating his key character traits through visual rather than verbal means. The rogue reacts almost instinctively to the chaos by aiming his gun and pulling the trigger, marking a stark contrast between his callousness and the younger man's desperation. The rogue's attitude towards the natives can be summed up as indifferent at best, brutal at worst, and the worst comes

out in defense of his fellow European. This and subsequent events point to major character differences between the two men, and the fact that the younger man does not blindly follow the rogue into the same pattern of aggression towards the natives seems to provide some moral justification for his quest to redeem himself in the eyes of the colonial elites. The young man is, in a sense, *rescuable* in a way that the brutish old man is not.

Once the threat of *amok* subsides, still another series of cross-cutting begins. It starts with a woman and a man in a car, cuts back to the wounded villager, then returns to the car, and in the second shot of the vehicle it becomes clear that the woman is driving. She wears a black lace veil, and she seems preoccupied. Back in the village, the man carries the victim indoors as the natives gradually reemerge from their hiding places. The man – revealed as one Doctor Holk in an act of naming that signals the beginning of the core narrative – takes the villager in for an operation, during which the woman from the car arrives at his office with the entire village looking on. As the gurney carrying the man, now dead, passes by, she asks the doctor what happened. “Amok,” Holk replies, marking the film’s first real dialogue, “c’est une démente, une rage des tropiques. Ça ne pardonne pas.” He explains that such a fit could happen to “chacun de nous,” a pronoun that implicitly includes himself and other European transplants among the pool of potential victims.

Once recovered from the stress of the unsuccessful operation, Holk expresses delight at the white woman’s visit – “une femme blanche, une vraie femme!” He leaves the room to change clothes, and his native mistress peers out at the white woman from behind a bamboo curtain, shying away as soon as the woman turns to look back at her. The visitor has not yet removed her veil, and

only her eyes are clearly visible. Holk returns to the office, and during the coldly distant conversation that ensues, the woman insinuates that she has come seeking an abortion. Holk bristles, apparently as much at her comportment as at her request, and she bluntly offers him 20,000 florins on the condition that he return immediately to Europe after the procedure. His anger mounting, Holk sternly declares that he will not be bought. The woman refuses to beg for his help, and after the doctor makes a comment about her lover she slaps him and leaves. Already regretting his curtness, Holk follows close behind. The woman's manservant stalls him long enough to allow his mistress to drive away. Holk returns to his office only to find that the woman has left behind her handbag, so he opens it to discover his visitor's identity: Mrs. Helen Haviland, wife of a wealthy English dignitary living in the colonial settlement.

With that, the first act draws to a close, and the film leaves the untamed jungle behind as the core melodrama builds between Holk and Mrs. Haviland. Despite Meerson's evident attention to detail in the jungle setting, the "atmosphere" that Andrew praises fails to transcend the level of *exotisme de bazaar*. The setup appears to eschew cultural and aesthetic continuity; African-style masks coexist with dancers who dress and move in a South Asian style, and a noticeably heterogeneous cast of non-European actors populates the remote jungle village. In any case, once Mrs. Haviland makes contact with the doctor, the villas and luxury living of colonial high society almost completely overtake the exotic set pieces that define the first act. Even in sequences where Holk returns to the village, Ozep eschews the languorous outdoor shots strewn throughout the first act, and the editing sheds the cross-cutting, instead giving way to a more continuous style that focuses on the unfolding melodrama.

The rest of the plot, briefly summarized: Mr. Haviland has been out of the country on business for nearly a year, and in the interim Mrs. Haviland has had an affair with a young sailor. Once Holk fully understands her predicament, he tries every avenue to reach Mrs. Haviland and offer his help, but Mrs. Haviland refuses his visit, then his letter, then she repeatedly and very publicly snubs him at a ball held at the governor's mansion. It becomes clear that Mrs. Haviland intends to resort to a back-room abortion procedure in the native quarter of the city, a measure that her loyal servant – the same man who accompanied her into the jungle – tries to dissuade her from taking. But, even after the doctor finally succeeds in talking to her one-on-one, she goes through with her plan and dies from complications.

Like their first encounter in the jungle, this private conversation that Holk finally manages to have with Mrs. Haviland also takes place in a stereotypically colonial locale, the dive bar. This sequence has no basis in Zweig's text, but like the invention of the rogue *colon* character, it provides the opportunity for the film to employ still more exoticist tropes. This particular club, called "Les Trois sauvages" and located in the Chinese district, appears from its outside architecture to have a style more Eastern than Western, but the interior recalls any Western or colonial expatriate bar. The clientele appears to be a mix of down-and-out expatriates, military types, and a select group of upwardly mobile natives. In another nod to exoticist conventions, the bartender is black; no matter how remote the exotic location, having a club conspicuously employ blacks as barmen, musicians, entertainers, or in other odd jobs is common.⁸³

⁸³ Sam the piano player in the American classic *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz 1943) is perhaps the most recognizable example of this phenomenon, but other French films – including *Le Drame de*

At *Les Trois sauvages*, however, the music belongs to Fréhel, who sings her number on stage as Holk takes a seat at the bar. Although Fréhel is not integrated into the story with a character role as in *Pépé le Moko* or *La Maison du Maltais*, her song in *Amok* relates to the loyalty, based at least in part on love, that lies at the core of the melodrama. Its refrain:

J'attends quelqu'un qu'est par delà les flots
 J'attends quelqu'un dont l'souvenir (est) très chaud
 Et demeure tenace dans ma peau
 J'attends quelqu'un qui savait me serrer
 Dans les liens de ses deux bras musclés
 D'autres que lui ne sauraient pas m'aimer
 J'attends quelqu'un qui est parti tout là-bas,
 J'attends quelqu'un qui ne m'oubliera pas,
 Celui que j'aime un jour se souviendra,
 J'attends quelqu'un qui reviendra !⁸⁴

Holk has spent the bulk of the narrative trying to “come back” to Mrs. Haviland, so the reference is aimed partially at him. Yet, somewhat ironically, these lyrics also refer to Mrs. Haviland’s returning husband, who will soon return after a lengthy absence – even though her affections were redirected elsewhere in the interim.

Drunk at the bar (and perhaps inspired by the song to take action), Holk decides to blackmail Mrs. Haviland into talking to him, using her forgotten handbag as leverage. He calls her, and to his surprise she arrives to meet him.

Shanghai (1938) and *Däinah la métisse* (1931) – also feature black cabaret employees and entertainers.

The scruffy patrons in the bar openly gape at the overdressed pair as they climb the stairs in search of some private corner, and the crowd clearly reads sexual intent in the encounter – an impression compounded when the doctor rents out one of the upstairs bedrooms. Finally alone with Mrs. Haviland, he offers an apology. She tries to leave, but he convinces her to hear him out. He claims that his “amok” – not a murderous rampage for him, but a singular obsession – compels him to help her in any way he can. What offended him during her visit, he says, was her disdainful conduct towards him despite his painful isolation and his delicate state of mind. Surprised at this offense and his description of his circumstances, she claims not to have acted out of spite or condescension, but in order to put herself on guard to keep her affair secret. She then apologizes to him, and begins to warm to the doctor’s kindness. Then, in an inopportune confession, Holk declares his love for her, a revelation that troubles her greatly. Defeated once again in her search for simple compassion, she leaves him at the bar to keep her appointment with the “pharmacist” who will go through with the procedure.

The abortion leads to serious complications, and Mrs. Haviland anticipates her death. Bedridden in a back room of the makeshift clinic, she sends her servant after Holk, who rushes to her side. She asks him to conceal the reason for her sudden death from her husband. Interestingly, while her face and body are obscured by shadows during this exchange, the doctor is perfectly lit, as though receiving a divine mandate. He gives her his word, and she dies just minutes before her husband arrives. As promised, Holk tries to convince Mr. Haviland that his wife had been suffering from heart problems, but,

⁸⁴ See Appendix I for complete song lyrics.

unconvinced, the husband declares his intention to send his wife's body to Europe for a complete autopsy. The final sequence shows the Haviland household – father, young daughter, and their ever-loyal servant – gathered on a boat to watch Mrs. Haviland's casket as it is hoisted onto a ship bound for the continent. But they watch in shock as Holk, who had secretly boarded the ship, leaps from the ship to the casket hanging above the water, cuts the rope and falls into the sea with the casket.

While Holk is the true protagonist of the narrative, Mrs. Haviland illustrates some key points with regard to Western gender roles in colonial and expatriate communities. *Amok* is unusual in that its focus on colonial Westerners targets the upper echelons of society; although Holk begins the film in a lowly jungle outpost, it soon becomes clear that his social connections extend to much higher levels, including the privileged milieu that the Haviland family clearly occupies. Mrs. Haviland's role in the film is unusual not only because of her upper-class colonial existence, but also because the plot, built around her unintended pregnancy, underscores gender issues that a vast majority of exoticist films never address. Because of this unusual focus on a woman's perspective, Winifred Woodhull points to *Amok* as an illustration of the "vernacular modernism" of 1930s melodrama, an oft-maligned genre that nonetheless differs little from the better-respected poetic realism save the gender of the protagonist.⁸⁵

Left to her own devices at the family's luxurious colonial estate, where a bevy of servants are on hand to carry out domestic tasks, Mrs. Haviland's affair

⁸⁵ On this point, Woodhull expands Vincendeau's argument in "Melodramatic Realism" to cover exoticist films, mainly *Le Drame de Shanghai* (Pabst 1938), which is discussed in Chapter 5.

appears to serve mostly as relief from her boredom during her husband's prolonged absence. This absence – not to say abandonment – however temporary and whatever good intentions he had in accepting it, is the first in the series of male shortcomings that precipitates Mrs. Haviland's ill-fated decision to seek a back-street abortion. The bungled first meeting with Holk is the second such breakdown of masculine empathy. Thirdly, when she meets with her lover after Holk's rejection, the young sailor so completely fails to grasp Mrs. Haviland's pregnancy that she awkwardly tries to pass off the news as a joke. The only man who seems to want to help her at all is her servant, but his dual status as a native and as a domestic laborer means that he is in no position to help her in any substantial way. Thus, left or dismissed by the three men who could support her, Mrs. Haviland resolves to go through with her own last-ditch solution.

After she declares her resolve to have an abortion, one by one, and in reverse order, each of the men tries again to do right by her. As described above, Holk quickly tries to reconcile with her and offer the help he first refused, but he does not manage to get her in another tête-à-tête until the third act. As a result of this impasse, the first about-face she hears out is the young sailor's. Taking her aside at the ball, he proclaims his intention to run away with her and become a father to their child. Touched but unmoved by the proposal – and fully aware that she and her lover are mismatched in age, experience, and lifestyle – Mrs. Haviland insists that they part ways, citing her obligation to her husband and their young daughter. Appearing relieved but still anxious about his role in her misfortune, the sailor accepts her decision.

Although Mrs. Haviland shrugs off Holk once again as she leaves the governor's ball, at Les Trois sauvages she gives him another chance to rectify the conflict between them. As he opens up to her, she seems to reconsider her earlier judgment of him, but his sudden declaration of love slams shut this window of opportunity. Her defeated response to his pleas – “Vous n’êtes qu’un homme” – reveals the strain of repeated letdowns from the men in her life and insinuates that his obsession for her results in an inability to recognize her real and urgent need for a truly selfless kind of support. Her refusal to be drawn in by yet another passionate overture forces her to rely on her last resort, an abortion that, if successful, would have helped restore her life to normal in time for her husband's arrival. The procedure's tragic outcome, however, precludes her return to normalcy even as it offers Holk a final chance to prove his devotion and put an end to his *amok*.

Mr. Haviland reacts to the news of his wife's death just as his she had predicted: by arranging for an autopsy back on the continent. Holk's promise to guard Mrs. Haviland's reputation even after her death leads to his sabotage of Mr. Haviland's plans, an act that cannot be completed without sacrificing his own life in the process. Holk's final act thus marks the only correspondence in the narrative between Mrs. Haviland's wishes and a man's response to those wishes.

Since Holk conflates Mrs. Haviland with Western civilization from the moment she appears in his office, his efforts on her behalf represent his attempt to reinstate himself as a full member of the Western community. Like Western civilization faced with its sons who return after years spent in the jungles and deserts, at first Mrs. Haviland sees Holk as someone other than the Westerner he

still is. His recognition of this exclusion provokes his *amok*, a mania that amounts to a variation on the death drive filtered through a non-Western culture. But even though Holk nearly succeeds in his attempt to be fully reinstated as a Westerner, his bizarre behavior proves instead just how far out of the bounds of social norms he has strayed. To keep the social machinery well greased, the colonial enclave requires that proper appearances must be maintained no matter what transpires beneath the surface, and Holk fails to accommodate this requirement, if it means tolerating what he sees as unladylike behavior from a member of polite society. These failures occur despite the fact that his very presence in the colony can be blamed on a considerable debt undertaken to save face for a love affair gone bad back on the continent, providing further evidence of his mental and cultural instability after a lengthy stay in the jungle. His hapless attempts to react to a similarly compromising situation, one seen from a woman's perspective, raise the stakes of his reconciliation with the West, and Holk does not agree to become complicit in Mrs. Haviland's quest to remain in good social standing until the price of readmission to Western society is death. Holk must sacrifice himself in the effort to thwart the husband's attempt to get at the truth behind the appearances that his wife literally went to her death to maintain. This ultimate act of respect for Western mores, one finally in keeping with his own original self-effacement, readmits Holk as a full member of Western civilization even as it takes his own life.

While the core of Zweig's novella corresponds to the narrative Ozep presents in this adaptation, the story's exoticist element appears to be deliberately exaggerated and modified to suit cinematic conventions – for example, by adding the rogue *colon* character and the nightclub scene where no

such details exist in the source text. In the novella, the doctor's experience of the colonial life, presented only in retrospect and not in the present time, offers little more than a backdrop for the central tale of his rejection, remorse, and redemption vis-à-vis the headstrong English socialite. None of the characters are named in the text, thereby strengthening the sense of allegory, and the doctor recounts his story in the first person within a frame narrative set aboard the ship carrying the woman's casket, and her husband, and the doctor himself, secretly determined to save the woman from scandal. Unencumbered by the film's constant and occasionally overbearing reminders of the exotic locale – the cinematic “atmosphere” that Andrew underscores as the film's trademark – what remains in Zweig's story is a tale of obsession punctuated by metaphorical references to the titular *amok*.

The centrality of female power is also more visible in Zweig's text than it is in the film, and it is considered in a different light. The doctor describes to a fellow passenger his first meeting with the woman as an encounter that left him feeling “saisi par le diabolique de cette volonté.” Yet mixed with his anger at this woman's willful comportment was something more: “Je... tremblai... je tremblai de colère et... aussi d'admiration. Elle avait tout calculé, la somme et le mode de paiement, qui devait m'obliger à partir ; elle m'avait évalué et acheté sans me connaître; elle avait disposé de moi dans l'intuition de sa volonté” (55-56). The repeated insistence on the woman's *volonté*, combined with his mental picture of the sexual pleasure that led to her current state, sparks an obsession with the idea of humiliating this willful woman:

À partir de cet instant, je vis à travers sa robe son corps nu... À partir de cet instant, je n'eus plus que la pensée de la posséder,

d'arracher à ces lèvres dures un gémissement, de sentir cette orgueilleuse, cette âme glacée, vaincue par la volupté, comme l'autre l'avait sentie, cet autre que je ne connaissais pas... [...] Et ce n'était pas de la lascivité, de la luxure, de la sexualité, non, vraiment non... sinon je l'avouerais... C'était uniquement le désir de maîtriser cet orgueil... de le maîtriser en homme que j'étais (58).

Yet despite the doctor's insistence that his intent to dominate this woman was not sexual in nature, what underscores the allure of the white woman's unexpected forthrightness in his estimation is a sexual diet of only native women who are "toujours accueillantes, toujours prêtes à vous servir... avec un doux sourire ressemblant à un gloussement... c'est précisément cette soumission, cette servilité, qui vous gâtent le plaisir" (58). The film amalgamates these women into the figure of Holk's native mistress, who certainly fits this description.

The film follows fairly closely the remainder of the doctor's tale, with the only major change being the timing of the doctor's successful attempt to dispose of the woman's corpse. The novella situates this dénouement in the European port instead of back in the colony, a setting that emphasizes in a literal fashion the doctor's symbolic return to Western civilization. But the text also dissociates his act from his personal identity by setting it at night, under cover of darkness and with no one aware that the reason the rope failed to hold was not an error in calculation but rather a very deliberate sabotage. Only the narrator, the man who listened to the doctor's story during the voyage to Europe, has enough evidence to piece together the story told to him on the boat, the sequence of events that happened at the port, and the unidentifiable corpse dredged out of the port well after the fact.

Both the film *Amok* and its source text tell the story of a man determined to rejoin Western civilization after his failure to demonstrate compassion within Western codes of conduct brings tragedy. However, the doctor's desire to reject the isolated life of a rogue *colon* indicates that such rehabilitation is not entirely outside the bounds of the exoticist genre. That his death comes as a result of suicide and not a violent intervention as in *Guelmouna* emphasizes the idea that this reinstatement in society may only come at a terrible cost. *L'Esclave blanc*, the final colonial redemption narrative in this trio of films, shows that this cost can also be borne by those who could never enter – let alone reenter – the gates to Western civilization.

***L'Esclave blanc*: A Segregationist Parable**

The final and most forgiving of the films that depict a white man's transgression into Otherness is Jean-Paul Paulin's *L'Esclave blanc*, which began production the same year that *Amok* was released. Virtually invisible both in its day and today (despite being the only film of this trio currently available on DVD), *L'Esclave blanc* emerged from an exceptionally messy production process in late 1936 only to be greeted with critical derision and public indifference. The convoluted path that led to the film's inglorious release attempted to unite in a single film several concurrent strains of the exoticist impulse, including an explicit foregrounding of assimilation anxiety and a late-breaking attempt to graft a biographical narrative onto a work that was likely conceived as fiction. Despite its low profile at the time of its release, *L'Esclave blanc* is an intriguing and instructive object of study thanks to its tumultuous production history, the

temporary involvement of a major director, and the breadth of exoticist influence that contributed to the final product.

The deceptively threatening title *L'Esclave blanc*⁸⁶ was the last of a series of titles assigned to the project, originally set to be helmed by director Carl Theodor Dreyer. While the final scenario bears Dreyer's stamp, the framework for the story came not from a popular novel like so many exoticist films, but from an original script by Italian journalists Gaston Biasini and Ernesto Quadrone, who called their project *Somalia*. Dreyer accepted the job on the condition that he would be allowed to rewrite the screenplay; he renamed the project *L'Homme ensablé* and completed the rewrite in a relatively short time (Drouzy and Tesson 191). Such luck did not continue for Dreyer, as production setbacks descended swiftly once location shooting began in the Italian territories of Somalia. The director's patience and health were pushed to the breaking point; overworked and frustrated with his producers' demands, Dreyer fell ill and returned to Europe without completing the film.

Their marquee director gone, producers then passed along the job to a relatively unknown director named Jean-Paul Paulin (Drouzy 272-5). Under Paulin, the project briefly went through a third title, *Moudoumdou*, before finally adopting *L'Esclave blanc*.⁸⁷ Marketed as a *documentaire romancé* – a fictional narrative presented with a visual emphasis on documentary footage more or less

⁸⁶ Despite their nearly identical titles, there is no identifiable link between this film and either version of *L'Esclave blanche*, the first of which is a 1927 Franco-German coproduction directed by Augusto Genina and the remake, discussed in Chapter 4, is a 1939 film starring Viviane Romance and directed by Pabst protégé Marc Sorkin.

⁸⁷ The feature "Leçons d'Oxford" on the DVD release of *L'Esclave blanc* claims that Quadrone and Biasini's original title was *Moudoumdou*, the name of the ceremonial dance performed by the native villagers. However, since Dreyer's title and that of its prototype are both well-documented in Drouzy, the title *Moudomudou* was more likely adopted after Paulin took over the project. A brief production note published in *Pour Vous* 315 (29 Nov 1934) refers to the film as

related to the storytelling (see Introduction)⁸⁸ – Paulin’s *L’Esclave blanc* was poorly received by contemporary audiences (Drouzy 272, 275). It was also barely covered in the popular film press; of the top three publications, *Cinémonde*, *Ciné-Miroir*, and *Pour Vous*, only *Pour Vous* mentions the film, in only one issue.⁸⁹ This ignominious end belies the drive behind the initial efforts to make the film, traces of which have survived thanks in large part to Dreyer completists.

Although Dreyer’s scenario appears to be a work of fiction, Paulin’s final cut adds an expository “preface” meant as an extradiegetic introduction to the narrative. In this sequence, Henri de Monfried, a French author whose memoirs and tales of African exploits began to appear in print around the start of the decade, advances the claim that the bulk of the film’s story is actually biographical. According to historian Michael B. Miller, “de Monfried’s life seems to have come out of a legend, perhaps fitting because that is what he would make of it,” and Miller acknowledges de Monfried as a prominent purveyor of exoticist prose during the interwar years. Abandoning a career as an above-the-board tradesman in Africa, de Monfried sought more adventurous employment that included illicit arms trading and smuggling hashish. While this part of his biography matches the historical record, after published accounts of his adventures began to appear in the early 1930s, French editions in particular show signs of revision that indicate an attempt to prolong and embellish the stories in

Moudoudou, but their review of the film nearly two years later in issue 412 (8 Oct 1936) uses the final title *L’Esclave blanc* without mentioning any of the previous incarnations.

⁸⁸ The scholars who present their analysis of *L’Esclave blanc* in the “Leçons d’Oxford” DVD extra do not appear to be familiar with the *documentaire romancé* as a genre, a lack of background that affects their reading of the film, particularly their assessment of audience expectations and prejudices. For instance, when they say that a 1930s audience was being didactically introduced – the implication being for the first time – to life in Africa, this may have been true for a portion of the audience, but in fact, exotic settings had been filmed and released to the public ever since the dawn of the medium at the turn of the century (see Introduction).

order to extend them into an ongoing series. And so a series it became; at least 20 volumes of de Monfried's writings appeared in print during the 1930s, many of which are still available in print today (Miller 337-9). Still, none of the current editions appear to be marketed as explicitly (or exclusively) autobiographical, and the line between history and fiction in de Monfried's life appears to be thoroughly blurred in the historical record.

Oddly placed after the requisite colonial map⁹⁰ and a scrolling text that describes Europeans' colonial struggles in the region, the preface to *L'Esclave blanc* pairs de Monfried's narration with selected visual highlights from the forthcoming narrative. The resulting montage could be read as an attempt to summarize, if not define, the allure of cinematic exoticism as a whole while offering a specific taste of what spectators of *L'Esclave blanc* have in store. De Monfried proclaims:

Je souhaiterais que vous puissiez comme moi vous abandonner au charme des images, sans tuer l'illusion de la crainte d'être dupe. Vous qui avez au cœur le secret désir d'évasion, cette hantise de la liberté perdue. Vous qui rêvez d'aventure dans une vie peut-être trop monotone, laissez-vous conduire à travers cette brosse africaine, où j'ai trainé ma chance pendant près de trente ans. [...] Il est temps maintenant de vous laisser partir, à travers cette brosse sauvage de *la Somalia*. Vous en allez sur les ailes merveilleuses du son et de la lumière.

⁸⁹ *Pour Vous* 412.

⁹⁰ Charles O'Brien, citing Michel de Certeau, discusses the significance of maps in cinematic representation of the colonies, using *Pépé le Moko* as his prime example (in Bernstein & Studlar 208-211). This point is also discussed in Chapter 1.

Calling upon the prominent themes of escape and exoticism that Crisp identifies as hallmark of the decade, de Monfried's speech nevertheless shows a strange naïveté in his allusion to cinema as "les ailes merveilleuses du son et de la lumière."

Identifying his authority with regard to the narrative, de Monfried goes on to state that Paulin's protagonist was based on a man he knew during his days in the colonies, adding that only the ending deviates from the true story. He takes great pains to emphasize the "sur le vif" quality of the images, mentioning the crew's difficulties in obtaining documentary-style shots of the African savannah, particularly the wildlife, but also the landscapes and indigenous ceremonies. These ostensibly unstaged images are woven, often unevenly, into the narrative fabric of the film, a strategy taken from the *documentaire romancé* approach and laid bare for the viewer by Monfried's extradiegetic insistence on how "real" the images actually are.

The fictional story centers on events that transpire when Simone, the daughter of a wealthy *colon* – whose more symbolic (and ethnically Italian) name in Dreyer's text is Bianca – arrives in Somalia and falls in love with her father's assistant Georges. In Paulin's film, Simone's declaration of love for Georges prompts her father to fire Georges and throw him out of the house. With nowhere else to go, Georges tentatively approaches the Somali village and begins an integration process that accelerates after Simone refuses his offer to leave her father's house and found a new plantation with him. Rejected by his white fiancée, Georges takes some advice from the local rogue *colon*, who tells him to find a native woman to take his mind off his troubles. Georges finds refuge with a Somali woman named Faye, whom he had saved from a cheetah attack.

Significantly, it is Faye who first spots Georges in a crowd as they a native dance, and Faye who approaches him seductively and leads him into the brush, where her son finds them both asleep the next morning. The boy warns them that Faye's impropriety has angered the villagers – she has left her husband to be with the white man – and soon they will come after them. So Georges, Faye and her son flee the village and find an isolated corner of the savannah where they set up a new life.

Here, Georges begins to assimilate, a process illustrated in sensual sequences that intimate both uninhibited sex and a more direct communion with nature. One particularly vivid hunting sequence, featuring the recurring figure of the cheetah, foreshadows the fate of this interracial coupling. Leading the hunt, Georges and the tribal hunting party track two cheetahs that become separated during their pursuit. One manages to escape Georges' sight before catching a goat from the herd and pulling it into the shade to eat. Meanwhile, the less fortunate cat is treed, and Georges's spear strikes the first blow. The cheetah falls from the tree and into the hunting dogs' hungry jaws. The fates of Faye and Georges go on to diverge in a similar way after marauding tribes attack and burn down Faye's home village. The chaos spreads to the plantation, where Faye's husband informs Simone that Georges has run off with his wife. Determined to confront them, Simone goes into the brush to find the fugitive couple. Once she does, Georges refuses to leave. He explains that the minute Faye loses his protection, tribal law demands that she will be killed, so Simone returns to the plantation without him.

However, the villagers soon locate the couple's hideout. Using a ruse to distract Georges, the tribe captures Faye and kills her. Just as both Georges and

the hunting party felled the cheetah in the hunting scene, they also share the guilt for Faye's murder. The villagers may have struck the final, deadly blows, but Georges cannot lay claim to total innocence. Like the lucky cheetah that evades the hunters, then feasts on a fresh kill, Georges is first captured, then rescued – and rewarded when Simone accepts him with open arms when he returns to the colonial fold. Although there is no dialogue after Georges's rescue, the visual sequence implies that Georges and Simone start a new plantation together as he had hoped, with Somali workers preparing the land, herding cattle, and harvesting fruit from the treetops under their cheerful supervision.

Whatever realist qualifications the film may try to support in its style or substance, the grain of truth in the "true story" that de Monfried promised lies well beneath the narrative surface. An interview with de Monfried's grandson, Guillaume de Monfried, proposes the idea that the plot of *L'Esclave blanc* retells Henri's own story.⁹¹ In letters to his family during his early days in Somalia, the elder de Monfried describes his life in the brush with a black woman, a life that resembles the idyllic isolation and communion with nature experienced by the young protagonist of the film. But how this life came to an end in the film differs sharply from de Monfried's documented story. In the film, tribesmen band together to kill the white man's lover as punishment for abandoning her husband; in reality, de Monfried claims, his native companion in Somalia was killed when a servant inadvertently triggered a loaded revolver. The younger de Monfried confirms his grandfather's liaison only to quibble with the reason for his lover's death that was invented for the film, but this hardly amounts to a minor tweaking of his grandfather's story. An accidental shooting signifies

something very different from a targeted kidnapping and murder at the hands of an angry native mob, and the outcome of their rage contributes a great deal to the imperial parable in the narrative. In the end, since a European man taking a live-in native mistress was a fairly commonplace arrangement in the colonies,⁹² there is little evidence that anyone's actual experience in Somalia served as direct inspiration for the film.

Even more curiously, the biographical link to de Monfried made explicit in *L'Esclave blanc* does not appear to have figured in *Somalia*; nor does Drouzy's account of Dreyer's work make any reference to de Monfried. Given the essential similarities between Dreyer's version of the script and Paulin's completed film, this omission justifies speculation as to whether or not this film was intended at its inception as a representation of all or part of a real person's experience. No description of the pre-Paulin stages of the film establishes or even mentions a connection to de Monfried's African experience; the only evidence that de Monfried's story actually served as the basis for the film comes from his own participation in the final release of the film itself and the additional research that his inclusion may have prompted.⁹³ The fusion of de Monfried's biography with the fictional scenario may have been an attempt to resolve the tension between the documentary quality of the wildlife footage and the fictional narrative of the *colons* in Italian Somalia. For spectators in the 1930s accustomed to seeing far-fetched stories taking place in faraway settings, Paulin's nonfiction

⁹¹ This video interview is an extra feature in the DVD release of *L'Esclave blanc*.

⁹² See Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*.

⁹³ This accounts for the clear split in the DVD extras between history *qua* history (i.e. de Monfried's life story as told by his grandson) and the history of the film's production. The two accounts do not overlap in any significant measure.

preface lends credibility to the fiction while attempting to link the film to the *documentaire romancé* style.⁹⁴

If de Monfried's story was ever in the filmmakers' minds, it appears to have undergone heavy, repeated revisions throughout the arduous process of bringing *L'Esclave blanc* to the screen. Taking a distinctly postcolonial perspective, Guillaume de Monfried describes his grandfather's "real-life" colonial experience as marked by a strong commitment to common ground between cultures. Henri, he claims, avoided the European enclaves established by the colonial administration, preferring immersion into the local way of life, learning the language and studying (although apparently not converting to) Islam. However, despite his intellectual commitment to understanding the colonized culture, the elder de Monfried still called for a clear racial divide in the social hierarchy. He warned against the abolition of slavery on the grounds that it maintains social stability, and in a conflation of race and class he compared slave labor in Somalia to workers on the assembly line at Renault. In spirit, then, the principle of cultural equality may have appealed to Henri de Monfried, but in practice, he considered social equality across racial lines a risky proposition.

Whether intentional or coincidental (though evidence points to coincidence), Dreyer's formulation of racial relations in his revision of the screenplay⁹⁵ resembles de Monfried's in his insistence on clear separation. Dreyer reframed the characters found in Quadrone and Biasini's script around two variables: race and behavior. On one end of both spectra, the harsh local

⁹⁴ The *documentaire romancé* genre is covered in the introduction and in Chapter 3 in the context of Léon Poirier's film *Caïn, aventure des mers exotiques*.

⁹⁵ Dreyer's original script has been made into a short film, directed by Denis Scoupe, that accompanies the Documents cinématographiques DVD release of *L'Esclave blanc*.

colon signifies white race and colonialist behavior; on the other, the villagers signify the indigenous race and traditional lifestyle. Other characters show potential for blended characteristics across the two schemas, as evidenced by the *colon*'s black servant, who takes on a hyperbolically colonial attitude as well as Georges's ability to immerse himself in the native life. This hybridity recalls Homi Bhabha's colonial mimic man – "almost the same but not quite" – but while Bhabha focuses on the indigenous subject vying for full recognition in the colonizers' culture, for Dreyer the failure of mimicry cuts both ways (127). The *colon*'s servant is a pathetic, even comic imitation of his white boss – a role that Dreyer's scenario plays up to a much greater extent than in Paulin's film – but it is the white man's attempt to live among the colonized that ends in tragedy.

The harshest punishment for any transgression goes to Faye, who draws ire not for trying to live among the white plantation owners or for adopting their way of life, but for sleeping with a white man. Miscegenation and gender combine to amplify Faye's punishment; the servant at the plantation faces only ridicule, while Faye dies over a sexual liaison that brought a white man into her people's way of life instead of the other way around. In contrast, Georges, granted the freedom to change his mind (and thereby evade punishment), returns to the forgiving arms of his white fiancée. The possibility of redemption for the white man gone astray can be read as encouragement to try out non-Western lifestyles, but the high stakes indicate that Dreyer likely used Florio's story as a warning to Europeans not to go astray in the first place. In both versions, the white woman offers physical and cultural salvation to the white man; first she leads the rescuers who pull him from the villagers' clutches, then she founds a new plantation with him. On the European side, at least, it takes

cooperation between men and women to successfully perpetuate the colonial process.

Dreyer's conception of the story underscores a fundamental inability to refashion the self outside of established racial and social boundaries. Unwritten rules regulate behavior and limit the realization of desire in all societies, and while different societies can coexist, any cross-pollination between the two systems can only wreak havoc. In Dreyer's world, Europeans must behave like Europeans, and they must assume (compassionate) control, while Somalis must behave like Somalis and submit to European rule. This essentialist message concludes that the successful coexistence of two societies depends on maintaining their complete social separation, which is to say that each side must remain within the limits demarcated by race and culture (Drouzy 272-3).

However, several modifications to Dreyer's script dull the force of this focal idea; Dreyer's scenario creates a rift between the old *colon* and his new assistant not because of the assistant's affair with the *colon*'s daughter – which became Paulin's point of conflict – but rather because of their divergent perspectives on colonial relations. When the villagers come to the *colon* asking for food, Florio – Georges's counterpart in Dreyer's script – supports a philosophy of “l'amour du prochain” and urges the *colon* to give them some of their reserves. Citing orders and a need to instill among the villagers a habit of forethought, he refuses. Later, when Florio pardons a man who has stolen from the corn silo to feed his family, the *colon* tells him that he can either obey orders or resign his post. Florio chooses to quit, a situation that grants him far more agency than the ousting in Paulin's film, and his fiancée Bianca (a much more racially evocative name than Simone) refuses to leave her father to go with him.

He goes into the savannah to live with Faye much like in Paulin's film, but when Bianca comes to find him, instead of turning around and leaving without him she agrees to move in with him and Faye (!). But after a few days, Bianca leaves, citing her disgust at Florio's increasingly crude behavior. He admits that he feels as though a wall has been built that separates him from the Europeans, but he stays with Faye rather than try to break down that wall. Bianca returns to the plantation and speaks with her father, ill with appendicitis, who now regrets his lack of compassion for the starving villagers. Although he and Bianca both agree that Florio was also wrong to leave the plantation to live among them, her father agrees to establish a plantation for the couple should Florio ever return.

The white fiancée in both Dreyer's and Paulin's version of the film thus represents the force for Western stability that Stoler claims white women in the colonies were called to be:

European women were to safeguard prestige and morality and insulate their men from the cultural and sexual contamination of contact with the colonized. [Authorities believed that] racial degeneracy would be curtailed by European women charged with regenerating the physical health, the metropolitan affinities, and the imperial purpose of their men. (*Carnal* 71)

L'Esclave blanc is unique among colonial films in that it reflects this proactive conception of white women's role in the imperial project, since no character in such a love triangle exemplifies this vocation better than Bianca/Simone. Rather than succumb to the pull of jealousy when her fiancé abandons the plantation and immediately takes up with Faye, she takes the initiative to find him in order to try to reason with him. Ultimately, she respects his sense of obligation to his

native lover and tacitly agrees to wait for him to come around while her father agrees to provide them the means to take their rightful place in the colonial hierarchy. When Florio/Georges finds himself at the mercy of the indigenous mob, without a second thought she goes to the village herself to save him – an unusually perilous act for a white female character in the colonies – and restores him to his place as her fiancé and heir to the colonial operation her father has maintained. This combined rescue and reconciliation mission defines the white fiancée character for both Dreyer and Paulin; on this point one can find little difference between the two versions despite the various, significant changes made to the narrative as described above.

The assimilation anxiety in *L'Esclave blanc* thus stands out for its explicitly diegetic quality in addition to its function as part of the generic pleasure for spectators of colonial narrative cinema.⁹⁶ The dialogue in Dreyer's scenario contains substantial analysis of colonial procedures and habits, finally leading the narrative to a segregationist conclusion (with a palpably didactic overtone) that rewards the prodigal white man with exactly the same benefits he might reasonably have expected had he never left the colonial community. Likewise, the white woman succeeds in her efforts to preserve the colonial mandate and secure her man's role in its smooth continuation. *L'Esclave blanc* thus offers the best possible scenario for the recovered rogue and his "legitimate" choice of mate

⁹⁶ In fact, one reason why the film was so poorly received may have been this attempt to graft generic narrative conventions of colonial cinema onto a *documentaire romancé* aesthetic, which tends to take an idyllic rather than a threatening tone when presenting exotic lands and peoples. Even *Caïn, aventure des mers exotiques* (1930) – a *documentaire romancé* feature made by right-wing colonialist filmmaker Léon Poirier – eschews figuring the protagonist's Robinson Crusoe-like story as a warning *against* assimilation despite his relationship with a native woman and the birth of mixed-race children. *Caïn* is discussed in Chapter 3.

even as it sentences his native mistress – his co-conspirator in the truncated assimilation process – to a violent death at the hands of her own people.

This stark inequality – whereas *Guelmouna* punishes the truly guilty and *Amok* refuses to allow either the reclaimed *colon* or his idealized white woman to die alone – renders the film both unsatisfying and brutally realistic. Unlike these other examples of assimilated Westerners, race and gender are both implicated in the path that *L'Esclave blanc* traces to cultural reclamation. As Stoler's work eloquently and repeatedly argues, sexual or romantic ties between a European man and an indigenous woman were remarkably likely to end with the indigenous woman (and the couple's *métis* children, if any) in the role of the victim, not necessarily of homicide, but of myriad other forms of social injustice.⁹⁷ The next chapter will set out to examine more closely the interracial and intercultural relationships that formed again and again in French exoticist narrative cinema of the 1930s, of which some manage to succeed in spite of bewildering odds.

⁹⁷ While it is difficult to select just one instance where Stoler makes this point, several salient arguments can be found in *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, pp. 56-71.

PART TWO: ROMANCING THE EXOTIC

CHAPTER THREE

Tragedy and Triumph for Interracial Love

Foremost among the truisms in the critical corpus on the *cinéma colonial* is the metaphorical equation of colonial territory and the native woman. In a typical instance of this tendency, Dudley Andrew remarks that “the Otherness of North Africa is after all merely a woman to romance and to make one’s own” (“Praying Mantis” 234). Ella Shohat’s influential 1991 essay “Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema” also focuses on the interplay of men and women in all manner of fictionalized imperial settings through “subliminally gendered tropes” as well as blunter instruments of gender- and race-based oppression (20). Anthropologist and historian Ann L. Stoler⁹⁸ shows that, to a certain extent, documented historical trends support the white-man, native-woman formula that supposedly permeates colonial and even more broadly exoticist narratives. But Stoler’s work also indicates that the continual evolution of colonial policies, both in practice and in the popular representations of empire and other exotic locales, can branch out to incorporate other types of interracial and intercultural relationships. Like Andrew and Shohat, most scholars who study interracial couplings and their fictional counterparts focus on the white male/nonwhite woman race and gender pattern. However, this narrow focus fails to account for the varied and shifting discourse – both historical and fictional – that deals with intercultural and interracial

⁹⁸ Stoler’s work also figures prominently in Chapter 2. While her primary focus is on Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, her research also includes sources and examples from French colonies.

liaisons in the early 20th century across a wide spectrum of locations and situations.⁹⁹ In order to expand this historically limited perspective, this section will consider the under-examined variety of interracial couplings that appear in French fiction cinema throughout the 1930s, including some examples of successfully matched couples in addition to the more visible examples of failed pairings.

Critics of the *cinéma colonial* have pointed out a tendency of interracial couples to dissolve almost as soon as they form. In this process, three paths to failure work alone or in tandem to ensure the couple's demise: death, vengeance, or self-effacement. The films *La Bandera*, *L'Occident* (Fescourt 1938), and the 1930s Josephine Baker vehicles *ZouZou* (Allégret 1934) and *Princesse Tam Tam* (1935) collectively illustrate how these general formulae operate for interracial love. In *La Bandera*, set in Spanish Morocco, the makeshift marriage between a legionnaire, a French national, and his Bedouin bride winds up leaving Aïscha a widowed newlywed when the Frenchman Gilieth is killed while on duty.¹⁰⁰ In this case, his death is not at all connected to his unconventional domestic situation even though it ends the central romantic relationship. Both of Baker's 1930s films, in keeping with her star image, show her self-effacement vis-à-vis the rejection of her would-be white lover, a trope described in detail below.

⁹⁹ An even more extreme example of this limited perspective is Dina Sherzer's article, "Interracial Relationships in Colonial and Postcolonial Films." The title announces a much more ambitious project than her corpus could ever provide, particularly with regard to prewar cinema. Under this sweeping title, she subsumes *all* of the interracial relationships in the interwar period into a study of Josephine Baker's films *Zou Zou* (1934) and *Princesse Tam Tam* (1935), with *Pépé le Moko* (1937) thrown in for good measure. Baker's films are discussed below, and the next chapter explains in more detail why Baker's films provide a poor case study from which to examine the possibilities of interracial and intercultural romance. *Pépé le Moko* is discussed in Chapter 1.

¹⁰⁰ *La Bandera* is discussed further in Chapter 1.

Henri Fescourt's sound remake of *L'Occident* (whose silent predecessor Fescourt also directed) fits the typical white man/native woman mold while deploying the cultural dynamic between them to construct the kind of misdirected vengeance that can irreparably split an otherwise compatible interracial couple. A young Moroccan woman named Hassina turns against the French naval officer who had become her protector and lover after a Moroccan acquaintance calls upon racial and national solidarity to convince her of the officer's guilt in a heinous act. The film opens in Paris, where Hassina (Rama Tahé) struggles to survive after her village is destroyed and its people massacred, leaving her both without family and without access to her student pension. Grief-stricken over her loss, her situation worsens when she is forced to leave the Sorbonne for lack of payment. Increasingly desperate for money, she takes a job as a dancer and good-time girl at a dumpy nightclub whose main marketing strategy is an ersatz Middle Eastern motif. After only a few days on the job, she meets a naval officer named Cadière (Charles Vanel), who turns out to be only man she meets in Paris who treats her and her Moroccan heritage with deferential respect. They hit it off, and he arranges instead to bring her back to Morocco with him.

Back in Casablanca, Hassina reflects on the poor treatment she endured while penniless in Paris, and with bitterness still lingering she tries to reconnect with the country she had left behind. Meanwhile, a shady chief named Taïeb (Robert le Vigan in ethnic drag, and an even bigger ham than usual) finds out about Hassina's return. He and his henchmen – not Cadière and his men – were actually responsible for the murderous raid on Hassina's village, but without any remaining eyewitnesses to contradict him, Taïeb meets with Hassina and

manages to convince her that it was indeed Cadière and his sailors who orchestrated the siege. Initially skeptical, she finally changes her mind, and according to Taïeb's plan, Hassina begins to plot her revenge.

When she fails to muster the courage to murder Cadière, Hassina concocts a plan for a more indirect retribution, one dependent on her sexual manipulation of an uncouth and impulsive young seaman named Arnaud. Hassina first encounters Arnaud during her studies in Paris, where he makes some romantic overtures despite Hassina's lack of interest. After she arrives in Morocco, she quickly discovers that Cadière not only knows Arnaud, he treats him like a son and has staked his own reputation on Arnaud's potential for success in the navy. Hassina decides to take advantage of his attraction to her in order to push him towards career sabotage, a move that would reflect poorly not only on himself, but also (and more importantly) on Cadière. Arnaud deserts his post to be with Hassina, angering his mentor and pushing him to investigate the root of the problem. Hassina is named as an accomplice in Arnaud's disappearance, so Cadière follows her as she traverses the city – a sequence in which she wears flowing, North African dress for the first time in the film – to meet Arnaud at Taïeb's hideout. During this final confrontation between Hassina and the three men, the truth about who caused the destruction of her village is revealed: it was Taïeb who led the raid, and the French navy arrived on the scene too late to stop him. Finding the courage she lacked when Cadière was her intended target, Hassina shoots Taïeb dead. Although neither lover dies as a result of the

dissolution of the central interracial couple, Hassina's relationship with Cadière is irreparably broken after her saga of misplaced vengeance.¹⁰¹

A decade before this version of *L'Occident*, Fescourt directed a silent feature also titled *L'Occident* and based on the same source text, a play by Henry Kistemaekers. Despite these similarities, Fescourt's two films differ from each other in some fundamental ways. For instance, in the silent film, the interracial Cadière/Hassina couple survives the fallout from the (false) accusation that Cadière has murdered Hassina's sister. Fescourt's original ending also stressed a Christian conception of forgiveness that allows Cadière to smooth over Hassina's pursuit of her unwarranted suspicions of him, a religious motif also present Fescourt's silent version of *La Maison du Maltais*, which was released the same year (and a film that will be further discussed in the next chapter). In the remake, the inflation of Cadière's rumored offense – not only Hassina's sister, but her entire family has been massacred along with the other residents of her native village – points to a drastic shift towards pessimism in the potential for interracial romance that is also underscored by the ultimate breakdown of the Cadière/Hassina pairing. Unlike many silent-to-sound exoticist remakes, Fescourt directed both versions, an indication that the culprit for the uptick in cynicism represents a much broader cultural shift and not merely directorial caprice.

¹⁰¹ Lost in this ending is the fact that *L'Occident* portrays Hassina's bitterness over her plight back in Paris remarkably thoroughly. As she says, "Quand j'ai eu de l'argent tout a été très bien. On a voulu faire de moi une occidentale, une civilisée. Mais après, quand j'ai dû leur demander de m'aider à vivre, de me donner du travail, alors, je n'ai plus trouvé que des hommes." Although Taïeb perpetuates a deeply negative stereotype of the two-faced Arab, Fescourt includes a French counterpoint in Max, the slimy doorman working at the Maison d'Orient (Jules Berry) who recruits Hassina using deceptive sweet talk. The increasing reliance on essentialism as the narrative progresses belies the moral balancing act that can be read into these aspects of the film. If Hassina's vengeance, though directed at Cadière, can be read as a grudge against the West in

This conclusion echoes the fluctuations that Stoler describes in European colonial policies and governance in the early 20th century; although cohabitation was initially accepted and even promoted as an ideal for *colons* looking to acclimate themselves to native culture quickly and effectively, by the interwar period this arrangement had been reframed as a serious transgression of European moral codes and a threat to their racial superiority in colonial communities (*Carnal* 62-64). However, Elizabeth Ezra's study of the "Concours du Meilleur Mariage Colonial" – discussed below – provides a counterpoint that shows that not everyone in the late 1930s was convinced of the inherent inferiority of mixed marriages and their progeny.

Despite these instances of death, self-effacement, and vengeance in colonial liaisons, some portrayals of interracial love in 1930s French fiction cinema find just enough room to defy the odds and achieve some measure of success, however marginal and however fleeting it turns out to be. Marriage, offspring, and mutual struggles all contribute to one or more of these narratives, but a significant indicator for a successful interracial coupling is a setting beyond the typical realms of the *cinéma colonial*. Stuck in a fairly rigid European male/indigenous female structure, interracial couples in colonial films lend themselves to the metaphorical reading discussed above; moreover, national and cultural identification in colonial films tends to polarize into Western and non-Western groups without a space for ambiguity in between. However, by overstepping the borders of the *cinéma colonial*, exoticist cinema opens itself to narrative possibilities unseen in a strictly colonial framework, an expansion of

general (a reading supported by the title of the film), she has sufficient narrative justification for her negative feelings.

potential that proves especially fruitful for interracial and intercultural coupling. The next chapters will cover these exoticist romances in more detail; here, the focus is on the colonial outliers, films not usually included in studies of the genre but in which circumstances occasionally conspire to create a successful interracial couple.

Lasting Love: *Caïn, aventure des mers exotiques* (1930) and *Baroud* (1932)

Two films made early in the decade – each with admittedly tenuous connections to the usual conception of French colonial cinema – gesture in their own way towards the possibilities that blossom in exoticist film towards the end of the 1930s. The first, *Caïn, aventure des mers exotiques*, was directed by exoticist auteur Léon Poirier and released amidst great studio fanfare in 1930 before winding up a complete flop once the gala opening weekend had passed.¹⁰² In fact, *Caïn* was released as one of the earliest sound films in French cinema, but instead of advertising this point as an unequivocal asset, Poirier insisted that he would not deal with speech, only sounds, and that the new technology would not detract from his cinematic ambitions.¹⁰³ Eventually, bowing to pressure, Poirier added some dialogue to the beginning and the end of the film, but it was

¹⁰² Years after its disappointing run in France, Americans would rediscover *Caïn* in a very different light. In *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True! A History of Exploitation Films*, Eric Schaefer recounts how, in the United States, an opportunistic American distributor snapped up Poirier's film a decade after its American début and gave it a very different life. With a new title – *Rama, the Cannibal Girl* – and a soundtrack featuring dubbed dialogue and new music, the repurposed film once again made the rounds in North America. In 1948, *Caïn* caught still another distributor's eye and was rereleased yet again, this time as *Savage Bride*. As these sensational titles indicate, the motives for this sustained interest in the film were far from highbrow; as Schaefer puts it, "the topless scenes of the energetic Rama-Tahé kept them lining up at the box office over the years" (273).

¹⁰³ Poirier declared his intent to record "tous les bruits, tous les sons, tous les chants qui pourront enrichir [ces] images et augmenter l'émotion qui s'en dégage; toutefois [ce] film ne comportera aucun dialogue; il insiste sur le fait que 'sonore' et 'parlant' laissent entre eux un abîme, et déclare

a decision he came to regret: “J’ai dû m’aligner sur le ‘progrès’ pour sauver mon pauvre *Caïn*, de justesse, mais un muet qui parle n’est jamais qu’un raté” (qtd. in Roelens 186).

The film was conceived as a *documentaire romancé*, a genre combining a fictional narrative with non-professional, often indigenous actors and extensive location shooting in a setting as interesting, if not more so, than the narrative itself.¹⁰⁴ For *Caïn*, it was the island of Nossi-Be near colonial Madagascar that provided the lush backdrop for the story, although the colonial status of the locale is left unaddressed within the narrative. The film’s failure to connect with its audience, despite the tremendous publicity push that led up to its release,¹⁰⁵ stems most probably from the fact that the *documentaire romancé* was solidly on the decline by the time Poirier undertook the project. It was, however, not quite dead; just a year later, F. W. Murnau’s last film *Tabu: A Story of the South Seas*, another *documentaire romancé*, was released in Europe to a more memorable run and a lasting reputation as a visually evocative film.¹⁰⁶

que, avant tout, *Caïn* restera du ‘cinéma.’” René Ginot. “Léon Poirier va tourner ‘Caïn’: En route pour Madagascar.” *Cinémonde* 37 (4 July 1929): 634.

¹⁰⁴ For contemporary audiences, *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flaherty 1922) was the most famous example of a *documentaire romancé*, and its importance as a touchstone film continues into the 21st century. Fatimah Tobing Rony unpacks the racial and ethnographic implications of this and other *documentaires romancés* in *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*.

¹⁰⁵ All three of the major contemporary cinéophile publications – *Pour Vous*, *Cinémonde*, and *Ciné-Miroir* – published multiple pieces on the film that collectively date from the earliest stages of production through to accounts of the gala opening. Poirier wrote two of these himself, one in *Pour Vous* 52 that describes their work on location in Madagascar, and the other in *Cinémonde* 110, distributed the day before *Caïn*’s gala opening; he was also interviewed for several others. These articles combined with a variety of film stills to create multi-page spreads that underscore the exoticism and escapism inherent in the narrative. See *Pour Vous* issues 21, 32, 52, 71, 78, 103 and 107; *Cinémonde* issues 37, 74, 107, 110 and 111; and *Ciné-Miroir* issues 261, 292 and 295.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Flaherty also contributed to *Tabu*, but Murnau completed it, and Flaherty renounced his artistic claim to the finished product (Rony 149). Murnau’s reputation has had much to do with *Tabu*’s staying power, and even Maurice Roelens compliments Murnau’s film in the context of an article aimed at penetrating the fog of obscurity surrounding Poirier’s *Caïn* (185). In such comparisons, the more successful film can be (and most often is) mentioned without the failure, but never the reverse.

Producers no doubt assumed that they could rely on Poirier's inherent association with sensational, travelogue style filmmaking to carry the film, since in addition to a number of other documentaries filmed in exotic places, he had directed the 1926 documentary *Croisière noire*, a film considered one of the seminal French cinematic experiences of its day.¹⁰⁷ Sponsored by Citroën, the film documented the journey of a specially outfitted vehicle on a transcontinental African voyage; the film was such a success that Citroën commissioned a sequel, *La Croisière jaune*, that recorded a similar trip across Asia – but this second film never reached the same level of renown.¹⁰⁸

Poirier was a prolific producer of images, and a single project occasionally ended up with enough footage to release more than one film. In fact, as a side project during location shooting for *Caïn*, Poirier filmed *Instantanés malgaches* (1929), a visual study of the native residents of Madagascar with a blatantly colonialist subtext.¹⁰⁹ Maurice Roelens explains that by the time filming began for *Caïn*, Poirier had already earned a reputation as “l’explorateur cinématographique par excellence des richesses, des beautés et de la diversité de

¹⁰⁷ Much of the contemporary publicity for *Caïn* mentions Poirier's previous success with *Croisière noire* as a means of enticing the same spectators to see his new film. Recent scholarship also shows a sustained interest in *Croisière noire*; for instance, Brett A. Berliner devotes an entire chapter of *Ambivalent Desire* to the film, its reception, and its influential imagery in the context of 1920s France.

¹⁰⁸ An authorial dispute related to *La Croisière jaune* contributed to Poirier's already ambivalent treatment within the French film industry. As Isabelle Marinone describes, Poirier was not tied to *La Croisière jaune* at its outset. Avant-garde artist André Sauvage captured the footage during the journey, but André Citroën commandeered Sauvage's footage and handed the project over to Poirier for completion, and Poirier's name was listed as the director of the 1934 release. See Marinone for an assessment of the official version of the film along with a comparison to evidence that remains from Sauvage's initial legwork. A detailed account of the journey from a historical standpoint can also be found in Miller (280-304).

¹⁰⁹ As in the fictional *Caïn*, in the companion documentary *Instantanés malgaches* Poirier employs several religious metaphors to describe the colonies and the white man's experience within them; for instance, an intertitle that accompanies a shot of a newly arrived *colon* climbing the stairs to his new home reads: “L’occidental pense monter l’échelle de Jacob qui conduisait au paradis.” As for Poirier's clear colonialist leanings, among the final intertitles is one that reads: “Malgaches

l'Empire colonial français, encore mal connu" among contemporary audiences (181). Poirier's ideological connection to imperialism also placated the right while providing appealing footage of exotic lifestyles throughout the empire that could be sold to filmgoers of many political persuasions. This legacy attracted and helped sustain the initial publicity push for *Caïn*, although the film failed to turn into the kind of cultural touchstone that *Croisière noire* became (and that his future production, the 1936 film *L'Appel du silence*, would also become, particularly for a right-leaning segment of critics and cinéphiles).

An allegorical myth rather than a realistic narrative – in keeping with the general spirit of the *documentaire romancé* – Poirier's *Caïn* tells the story of a ship mechanic who bears the titular, Biblical name. After stealing money, jewelry, and other possessions from wealthy passengers, Caïn (Poirier regular Thomy Bourdelle) flees on a tiny boat into the Indian Ocean, alone with his loot. Finally landing on a remote island, Caïn establishes himself as master of his domain in the manner of Robinson Crusoe, except in Friday's place Caïn lives with a native woman companion, wooed through a process that more closely resembles the domestication of a wild beast than any kind of Western courtship (described below). Years pass, and their family grows by two – but tragedy strikes when Caïn's younger child dies from a snake bite. Grief-stricken, Caïn goes alone to bury the child in a makeshift cemetery he had seen during his first days on the island, beside the long-dead missionaries also buried there. At the site, Caïn glimpses an unearthed Bible, opened to the page bearing the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal." Suddenly ravaged by guilt over his theft, he becomes

– races mélangées que la France est en train d'unir par un même idéal," followed by shots of colonial soldiers raising the *tricolore* and playing bugles.

determined to rejoin Western civilization and properly atone for his crime. Abandoning wife, child, and the island, he paddles out to a passing ship, and the captain takes him aboard. But as soon as Caïn is assured of his return, he overhears the news wire relaying the human tragedies taking place and the anxiety taking hold of life back in Europe. Plagued by second thoughts, Caïn gazes out to his island and spies his partner, Zouzour (Rama-Tahé), who had followed him out to sea. Leaping overboard to rejoin her, Caïn turns his back on Western civilization once and for all.

Unlike the central love story in Murnau's *Tabu*, the (deeply racist and misogynistic) coupling in *Caïn* comes in second to a more general mythology of the noble savage.¹¹⁰ The film's central message lies in the notion that Western civilization compares unfavorably to the lifestyle found in the idyllic settings of remote islands or in the deep, unmapped jungle. A similar skepticism towards "progress" emerges once again in Poirier's biggest success of the 1930s, *L'Appel du silence* (1936), a film inspired by the life of Charles de Foucauld, a military officer who rejects his life of military status and bourgeois privilege to become a Catholic priest and missionary in the North African desert. Both *Caïn* and *Appel*, by their narratives and their ulterior motives, skirt the edges of the *cinéma colonial* as Colin Crisp defines it (see Introduction). What makes *Caïn* remarkable as a colonial film – a title to which it can only barely lay claim – is its recognition of a non-Western lifestyle as one that (marginalized) Westerners might wish to emulate. Introduced as a "rebel" in the opening title cards, Caïn and his

¹¹⁰ Rony lists Murnau's film as part of the "racial film" genre, a segment of ethnographic cinema that she elucidates in her study. The centrality of the white castaway in *Caïn* indicates that Poirier was going for a different effect than the one Rony describes, but one can still apply her assertion that such "ethnographic ventriloquism *assumes* the inarticulateness of the Native, and it

relatively unproblematic adoption of an isolated, bare-bones existence depart markedly from the assimilation anxiety that so thoroughly permeated other colonial and exoticist film narratives (see chapters 1 and 2).

The lynchpin of his assimilation is the coupling between Caïn and Zouzour, a native woman he violently kidnaps from her tribe before wooing her more gently with gifts and somewhat more considerate treatment. The unlikely trajectory of their romance is laced with religious references; during the reconciliation sequence where Zouzour begins to warm to Caïn's advances, an intertitle lettered in a Gothic-inspired font reads: " – and Caïn took unto himself a wife."¹¹¹ The next shot shows Zouzour approaching Caïn, and she kneels, then bows at his feet. Caïn responds to this exaggeratedly submissive gesture by placing his foot on her bowed head. An intertitle then signals the passage of time, and the next shot shows the couple comfortably sharing domestic life with their two children and some friendly, domesticated animals. Zouzour's successful effort to bring Caïn back after he follows his fleeting urge to return to Western civilization (it never seems to occur to Caïn to try to bring his family along) caps off his initiation into her idealized lifestyle. Apparently, then, this kind of loyalty and stability in an interracial romantic pairing requires the extreme isolation of a remote island home, a restriction that both confirms the mythical quality of the narrative and encourages an allegorical rather than a literal reading of Caïn's romance with Zouzour.

is the West's own narratives of evolution, loss, and 'political physics' which are expressed" (155, author's emphasis).

¹¹¹ Since the surviving version of *Caïn, aventure des mers exotiques* in the CNC archives at Bois d'Arcy has English subtitles, the English wording is respected here.

The borderline anachronism of the *documentaire romancé*, the unproblematic coupling of Caïn and Zouzour, and Poirier's inability or unwillingness to adjust his visual style for a new decade¹¹² combined to spell box office doom for the film. Technically colonial in its setting and touted as such in its ample publicity campaigns, *Caïn* nonetheless failed to find a foothold with a public whose interpretive lens for the *cinéma colonial* was already well entrenched along familiar lines of military conquest and more turbulent (and usually doomed) intercultural love affairs, like those found in Fescourt's two silent films mentioned above.

The second early-1930s film with an exceptionally successful interracial couple is *Baroud*, an international coproduction¹¹³ directed by Irish born director Rex Ingram and his wife and collaborator Alice Terry (unnamed in the credit sequence, but listed as co-director in some of the French press covering the film). The narrative underscores the close relationship between the French spahi André and his Moroccan compatriot Hamed as a strong, cross-cultural friendship even as the central love affair that develops between the Frenchman and Hamed's sister Zinah threatens to compromise their bond.

Released to the French public in 1932, an English language version (also known as *Love in Morocco*) followed in early 1933.¹¹⁴ Since its multinational production and Irish-American director push the film beyond Crisp's criteria for

¹¹² It would be nearly impossible to disagree with Roelens' remark that in this film, Poirier seems to "ignorer totalement les conquêtes du langage cinématographique depuis le début des années vingt, qu'il s'agisse de la mobilité de la caméra, ou des possibilités offertes par le montage" (185). But Poirier catches up well enough by 1936 to direct one of the decade's top box-office hits, *L'Appel du silence*.

¹¹³ The credit sequence of the English language version of *Baroud* identifies the film as a production of the Gaumont British Picture Corporation.

¹¹⁴ Although the film had a French language version, as was the fashion during the rise of sound cinema, the version viewed for this project is the English language version. Although some of the

identifying a film as French, he does not include *Baroud* in his study of the decade. While none of the three major film weeklies published in France ignores the film entirely, only *Pour Vous* includes a full review of the film published at the time of its release (an assessment best described as lukewarm).¹¹⁵ Instead of a full review, *Cinémonde* provides a short synopsis in its recurring column “Les Écrans de Paris,”¹¹⁶ and *Ciné-Miroir* adapts the story into a two-page “scénario romancé” accompanied by a photo spread¹¹⁷ – a treatment often reserved for major foreign productions whose presence in the magazine might otherwise be underwhelming. Still, the colonial Moroccan setting provides an obvious connection to France, and some prominent individuals involved the creation of *Baroud* were also known entities to French audiences, including screenwriter Benno Vigny and the actor Pierre Batcheff, a Russian national but a big star in France, here playing what would be his final screen role before his death. Amidst this international pedigree, *Baroud* projects a recognizable version of French imperialism through French signifiers like Batcheff,¹¹⁸ with a target audience that includes French filmgoers familiar with the tropes that Ingram and Terry put into play.

Still, external influences stake some claim on the construction and execution of the narrative in *Baroud*; for instance, some racial stereotypes appear to be lifted

actors were changed, including Rex Ingram’s own role in the English version (played by Roland Caillaux in the French version) the plot is assumed to correspond to both versions of the film.

¹¹⁵ Frank, Nino. Rev. of *Baroud*, dir. Rex Ingram and Alice Terry. *Pour Vous* 210 (24 Nov 1932): 8. Print.

¹¹⁶ Authors unknown. Two different synopses appear, one in *Cinémonde* 212 (10 Nov 1932, page 919) and the second in 214 (24 Nov 1932, page 959). Earlier that year, *Cinémonde* also ran a feature based on an interview with Rex Ingram: Méry, Jean. “Retour à l’exotisme: *Baroud* ou *Les Hommes bleus* marque la rentrée de Rex Ingram.” *Cinémonde* 182 (14 Apr 1932): 300.

¹¹⁷ The “scénario romancé” appears in *Ciné-Miroir* 410 (10 Feb 1933): 84-5. A photo of Rosita Garcia in the role of Zinah also appeared in *Ciné-Miroir* 361 (4 March 1932): 154.

¹¹⁸ See Powrie and Rebillard, “Surrealist Star” for a discussion of Batcheff’s importance in French surrealist cinema productions and the construction of his specific star image.

from American cinematic conventions rather than resituated within a distinctively French context. The most obvious example is the character Mabrouka, a black Moroccan employed as Zinah's servant who also happens to be her former nanny. The appropriation of the black mammy figure could hardly be more evident in Mabrouka's accent and her sassy, back-talking attitude, both of which are played for comic relief even during key moments of narrative tension.¹¹⁹ Mabrouka even has a foil in another black Moroccan servant, a hapless man who repeatedly falls victim to her verbal abuse, which includes racially charged invective, and whose incompetence ends up being punished in a moment of slapstick comedy. This enforcement of the domestic pecking order – however exaggerated for the sake of comedy – reinforces the theme of social class, a focus on status so inescapable that it pervades even the concerns of these stock figures imported from a foreign cinematic tradition.

Class also affects the development of the film's two interracial romances. The first to blossom is a fling between Hamed (Pierre Batcheff in dark makeup¹²⁰) and Arlette, a nightclub singer. It is André who introduces them after he catches them openly staring at each other across the dance floor, and as André makes his exit, Arlette sits down with Hamed and declares that she likes living in Morocco because "you Arabs are such savages." He replies that perhaps the Arabs are more civilized than her kind, but her retort foreshadows events yet to come: "And yet, if you caught a man with your sister, you'd kill him." Once Hamed

¹¹⁹ For a detailed analysis of the mammy figure in history and culture, see Kimberly Wallace-Sanders' *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory*.

¹²⁰ Phil Powrie and Éric Rebillard point out that Batcheff's atypical acting style combined with his Russian background to identify him as a foreign other in the minds of French spectators. If Crisp's identification of Russia as a stand-in for France applies to integral exoticist films, when Russian nationals are cast alongside French stars in cross-cultural contexts, it would be

concedes her point, she smiles approvingly and remarks, “There. I knew you were a savage.” That André acts as a catalyst and not an impediment to this pairing contrasts with the way Hamed reacts to André’s love for his own sister. In terms of narrative weight, this second love match quickly eclipses the first, since Arlette never reappears after the bar scene ends.

At first, Zinah’s family ties are unknown to both André and Hamed, and Hamed warns his friend that unless the girl he met turns out to be a dancer, their continued relationship will likely cause problems. Still, in a gesture of good faith, he agrees to help his French comrade try to win the girl’s heart. But what he initially assumes to be a fling much like his own soon reveals itself as something entirely different. Hamed is paired with a marginal white woman and has his French friend’s encouragement; therefore, he has nothing to fear from the liaison. Likewise, he implies that as long as white men also stick to the margins, they can avoid the retaliatory violence against sisters’ lovers that Arlette has suggested. Above the lowest ranks of society, expectations for romance change drastically. Children of a chieftain, like Hamed and Zinah, are held to a more rigidly enforced standard of conduct than entertainers, and indeed, once Hamed discovers that André’s love interest is his own sister, he promises to “uphold the law” (presumably Islamic law) by killing André as punishment for his transgression against the family. In the end, though, Hamed’s conflicted feelings interfere with his determination, and after he hears André’s version of his meeting with Zinah – just a kiss and nothing more – he loses his will to follow through.

reasonable to consider them as exotic others. In this context, Batcheff’s casting in *Baroud* makes some sense.

The failure to eliminate André as romantic interloper holds serious consequences for the family. While Zinah pursues her relationship with André in secret, her father arranges her marriage to Amarok, a rival tribal leader, in order to promote peace between their tribes. But Amarok's ill intent soon rises to the surface, and their engagement is broken. Amarok declares war, and the Spahis prepare to fight in support of Zinah and Hamed's father. The Spahis emerge victorious, but Zinah falls gravely ill from poisoned well water. André must leave with the troops for a sojourn in Marrakesh, but Zinah's father insinuates approval for their relationship to continue once he returns, *insh'allah* – God willing. Hamed also comes around to a more open-minded attitude towards the match. The film concludes as, weak but alert, Zinah sees off the troops from her window, and André glances back as the company rides on.

While neither interracial couple in *Baroud* hears wedding bells by the end of the film (and once established, the Hamed / Arlette pair is largely ignored), the Moroccan characters' increasingly progressive open-mindedness towards the André / Zinah match should take some credit as a successful interracial romance. First, Hamed overrules the laws of his culture's religious practice in order to keep his friendship with André (and André himself) alive; Mabrouka also comes full circle, from outright rejection of André on religious grounds to joking that if he'd stayed any longer she'd have fallen for him, too. One can assume that the filmmakers wished to cultivate the impression that, had the film taken one step further into the future, Zinah's father would also have become even more forthrightly accepting of his daughter's love match. As a counterpoint to this happy ending, the film *Yamilé sous les cèdres* (1939), discussed below, illustrates

by its tragic conclusion the fact that not every family manages to come around to even the *possibility* of a mixed marriage, let alone its actual occurrence.

Triumph and Tragedy: *Le Simoun* (1933) and *Yamilé sous les cèdres* (1939)

Besides the specifically colonial examples of *Caïn* and *Baroud*, each of which rejects in its own way the inevitability of failure for an interracial relationship, several other factors inherent to a broad cross-section of 1930s French cinema also undermine this notion of inevitable separation. Foremost among these contradictions is the perception of death as an outcome particular to interracial relationships, an idea reinforced by the relative stature of Gabin's exoticist films within the larger cadre of 1930s French cinema. But death is a common outcome even for people who are neither involved in interracial romance nor connected in any way with the exotic – a point that Gabin's non-exoticist 1930s films like *Le Jour se lève* (Carné 1939) and *Quai des brumes* (Carné 1938) make to eloquent effect. The circumstances that surround death in exoticist cinema also vary widely, from the generalized political turmoil of *Le Drame de Shanghai* (Pabst 1938) to the military operatives of *Trois de Saint-Cyr* (Paulin 1938) to the religious martyrdom of *L'Appel du silence* (Poirier 1936) to the whodunit anxiety of *Les Cinq Gentlemen maudits* (Duvivier 1931). None of the above films feature a miscegenous couple; all of them send at least one protagonist to a violent death.

Romantic problems are also not unique to mixed-race couples, and European men in exotic locales also have problems linked to relationships with *white* women that are deep-seated enough to turn them to suicide when the match fails. This is the case in *Sola* (Diamant-Berger 1931), in which a love

triangle emerges between three white expatriates in Singapore.¹²¹ Suicide provoked by an impossible love for a white woman also brings *Amok* (Ozep 1934) and *Le Messenger* (Rouleau 1937) to their respective conclusions. While circumstances can suggest (or even declare candidly in the dialogue) a punitive intent in the death of someone involved in an interracial romance – as in *Yamilé sous les cèdres* (discussed below), *L'Esclave blanc* (Paulin 1936), and *Yoshiwara* (Ophüls 1937) – it is a drastic overstatement to conclude that this *ne plus ultra* of symbolic punishment specifically or more frequently targets characters involved in miscegenous affairs.¹²²

Secondly, not every interracial relationship is composed of a white Western man and a nonwhite, non-Western woman. To cite what is likely the best-known film in this category, *Princesse Tam Tam* (Gréville 1935) includes a secondary relationship in addition to Josephine Baker's white love interest, a French writer. This subplot depicts an escalating affair between the writer's wife and an Indian prince, a flirtation that would have threatened their marriage had it been pursued (or at least this is what spectators are led to believe). Word of the nascent affair prompts the author to cut short his vacation in North Africa to deal with the problem, an essential change of location that, in turn, propels the fish-out-of-water plot that features Baker's character Aouina, her Western reeducation and her subsequent rise to fame. While the attraction that she feels for her French companion dominates the romantic landscape of the film, the parallel setup for the Frenchman's wife, like the romantic inversion found in

¹²¹ Kelley Conway offers a detailed assessment of *Sola* in her book *Chanteuse in the City* (163-7).

¹²² Many of the films mentioned in this paragraph are discussed in other chapters. Chapter 1: *Les Cinq Gentlemen maudits* and *Le Messenger*; Chapter 2: *Amok* and *L'Esclave blanc*; Chapter 4: *Le Drame de Shanghai* and *Yoshiwara*.

Baroud, moves the story along while introducing a counterpoint to the main attraction, one that *Princesse Tam Tam* aligns with the more conventional white man/native mistress scenario.

An obscure example of both a white woman/native man pair and a successful interracial couple in a colonial setting is *Le Simoun* (Gémier 1933),¹²³ a film based on a play by Henri-René Lenormand. The plot features a long-lost French daughter, Clotilde, who after her mother's death moves in with her father, a businessman named Laurency who has spent twenty years living in a remote settlement in southern Algeria. Once she arrives, Laurency begins to confuse Clotilde with her mother, the love of his life who had left him twenty years before. Unaware of her father's mental turmoil, Clotilde falls in love with the son of a local *caïd*, who gives his blessing to his son's chosen lover and even suggests to Laurency that their children be married. Laurency adamantly refuses despite the hypocrisy of his own longstanding affair with Aïscha, a woman of mixed Spanish and Arab heritage who lives with him. One night, during a violent Saharan windstorm known as *le simoun*, Laurency's delirium reaches its

¹²³ *Le Simoun* bears the dubious distinction of being, in this author's estimation, one of the few truly irredeemable *navets* of this project's corpus despite its remarkable incorporation of an interracial, colonial couple and better-than-average reviews from contemporary sources. However, reasons for their generosity exceed the film itself; the *Pour Vous* review (issue 267, 28 Dec 1933) takes a sentimental tone since the director and star, Firmin Gémier, had passed away in the interim between the film's production and its release. Still, one scene (also singled out for praise in the *Pour Vous* review) stands out as a subtle indictment of French imperialism. To celebrate Bastille Day, a group of French men put on a record of *La Marseillaise*. The sound attracts some local children, who approach the phonograph, sit down and listen quietly. The four men take each other's hands as the camera pans across their faces, their expressions reflecting some deep, patriotic sentiment. When the anthem concludes, the children applaud and yell "Vive la France!" – and then they swarm towards the men, begging for money. Disillusioned by the children's ploy, they chase the children away. But one girl stays behind, and she asks Laurency what France is like. Grateful to have found a sincere patriot, he replies that France is very big and very beautiful. She asks, if France is so big and beautiful, why didn't he just stay there? Without responding, Laurency shoos her away.

peak. His sudden, incestuous advances frighten Clotilde out of his home and into the arms of her Arab paramour, presumably for good.¹²⁴

Significantly, the film rejects the potential for Aïsha to take up with the caïd's son, a match that would preserve racial groupings, but at the expense of the young white woman who would then be left alone with her dangerously unstable father. Aïsha, presented throughout as wholly unsympathetic, tries to communicate her attraction to the young man many times. Simultaneously desperate to win over the caïd's son and ragingly jealous of Laurency's doting on his daughter, she stages a last-ditch attempt to sabotage Clotilde's chances by poisoning her with a scorpion, then taking her place at a designated rendezvous point. Not only does the young man reject her before rescuing the wounded Clotilde, but an Arab servant, fed up with Aïsha's brutality, kills her with a knife to the back.

Another later, though equally obscure example of a white woman/nonwhite man couple is the 1939 film *Yamilé sous les cèdres*, directed by Charles d'Espinay, a narrative that also provides a rare example of a death resulting directly from the transgression committed by the pursuit of miscegenous love.¹²⁵ Adapted from a novel by Henry Bordeaux, the film includes an introductory sequence, narrated by the author, outlining both the narrative content of the story and broadly sketched political propaganda in support of the French protectorate status of Syria and Lebanon. Set in Lebanon, the credits point out that exterior footage for the film was shot on location, "sur

¹²⁴ The copy of *Le Simoun* in the collection at the CNC archives at Bois d'Arcy shows visible deterioration in its final frames, so it is difficult to discern whether the lovers manage to escape once and for all. Still, the unsympathetic father figure makes this ending extremely likely in spite of the miscegenation involved in his daughter's alliance.

¹²⁵ *Yamilé sous les cèdres* is available for viewing in the Bois d'Arcy archives.

les lieux mêmes de l'action en Syrie et au Liban." Bordeaux claims in his introduction that Lebanese Christians, known as Maronites, welcomed as liberators the Crusaders who entered their land. He explains that the name Yamilé means "bounty" in Arabic, but her features – she is fair-skinned and blonde – indicate that she may have descended from a French Crusader. As for the relations between Christians and other communities in Lebanon, Bordeaux explains that interfaith marriage was forbidden in order for the Christians to preserve "leur race et leur religion," a declaration that underscores the inextricability of one from the other. On this point, Bordeaux extols the virtues of the French protectorate and the benefits that the Lebanese – especially the Maronites – stand to gain from continued affiliation with *la plus grande France*.

After this politically charged prelude, the story begins with Yamilé as she prepares to be formally engaged to Khalil, a childhood friend. She has a tender affection for her fiancé, and both families are happy with the match, but Yamilé still appears hesitant to marry. The families host a grand outdoor celebration of the engagement replete with exotic spectacles: dancing, elaborately detailed costumes, hookahs and similar set pieces along with graphic images of skinning lambs and roasting the meat. During the festivities, a foreign tribe rides past, and the riders are marked as Muslim by their wardrobe and darker skin. Their chief, Osman Bey, catches Yamilé's eye, and the interest is clearly mutual. Once they notice Yamilé gawking at their chief, Khalil's associates threaten the arrivals, and Yamilé's father Rachid intercedes to calm the tensions. Later, Khalil angrily confronts Yamilé: "Il n'est pas de ta race! Tu ne peux pas être sa femme!" But soon after their encounter, Osman sends two messages, one to Yamilé's father and another to Yamilé herself. He wishes to speak to Rachid about

purchasing some horses – as for his message to Yamilé, its contents can be inferred by her monosyllabic response: “Oui.”

Osman arrives with horses to sell, and Rachid agrees to buy one. Osman says they can settle the price the next day, but early that morning, Yamilé takes off with Osman and leaves the horse behind as the bride price. The community panics with the thought that Yamilé has been kidnapped, and Khalil and his friends set out to find her. Meanwhile, alone together, Osman declares his love for Yamilé and assures her that she will be his only wife; still, he says that she will have to abandon her family and her traditions – but not, he seems to imply, her religious beliefs – in order to live with him. She declares her willingness to do so. Then, Osman covers her face with a veil and says they cannot sleep together until after their wedding.

Khalil and his friend Boutros leave the village to gather information about Osman, a widely respected man, even among the Maronites in his country. Back home, chaos reigns in Yamilé’s family; her mother dies of chagrin from the loss, but her sister supports her decision to follow her heart. While Yamilé’s sister pleads with Rachid to call off his pursuit, the local priest urges him to continue, claiming that their actions are part of the “*forteresse chrétienne*” intended to keep the Muslim hordes away from the Christian enclaves in Lebanon. Meanwhile, Khalil and Boutros zero in on their target and recruit one of Osman’s servants, who says that Yamilé will be left alone in the cemetery the following day, leaving them the chance to capture her and make their escape. Successful in their ambush, Khalil and Boutros start back with Yamilé, but Osman soon discovers her absence and follows closely behind.

Back at the village, Yamilé goes on trial before her father, the priest, Khalil, and other men from the community. She refuses to speak, even to explain her motivation for leaving. The tribunal promises a lesser penalty if she expresses regret or hesitation or even overwhelming persuasion from Osman, but she refuses to take the bargain. Khalil speaks to her alone, even offering to run away with her and start over, but she refuses his help. Privately, Yamilé assures him that she has not given up her religion and that she has continued to pray, and she believes her real offense was falling in love with Osman. After every intervention proves unsuccessful, the tribunal takes Yamilé away to be executed. Khalil goes after her, and Osman is also in hot pursuit, but neither arrives in time to prevent the shot that kills Yamilé beneath a cedar tree, finally making sense of the eponymous image.

In spite of the banality of its core love triangle, the intercultural romance presented in *Yamilé sous les cèdres* stands out on several counts. While overt politicization of an exoticist film is rare,¹²⁶ what sets *Yamilé* apart is the framing strategy that situates the political message in an extradiegetic introduction given by the author responsible for the original source content. As a filmic device, the extradiegetic prelude to the narrative was not entirely original; Jean-Paul Paulin's *L'Esclave blanc*, released in 1936,¹²⁷ also had such an introduction, but one that focuses on the film's narrative content without insisting on its value as a pro-imperial parable. Beyond this introduction, Bordeaux's support for French imperialism had already been revealed to potential spectators in a brief essay

¹²⁶ While rare, candidly politicized exoticist films are not unheard of. As discussed above, Poirier's 1930s exoticist films *L'Appel du silence* (1936) and *Brazza, ou l'Épopée du Congo* (1939) focus on political themes. Military dramas like *Trois de Saint-Cyr* (Paulin 1939) also carry a fairly clear political and patriotic message, set (not incidentally) in protectorate territories of the empire.

¹²⁷ See Chapter 2 for a more complete discussion of *L'Esclave blanc*.

published in *Cinémonde* shortly before the film's release.¹²⁸ In the piece, Bordeaux describes a conversation with Francis de Croisset, another contemporary author whose work had been adapted for the screen,¹²⁹ and the topic on the table is their potential collaboration on a filmed life of colonialist icon Maréchal Lyautey.

In spite of the overtly pro-protectorate stance in his introduction and the generally pro-imperial stance evidenced in his *Cinémonde* essay, certain aspects of Bordeaux's tale call into question the extent to which the film can be read as a pro-imperial work of fiction. The narrative focuses almost exclusively on the perspective of the Maronite Christian community in the Lebanese protectorate, and the threat and eventual enactment of violence in the film targets Yamilé for her "betrayal" of her own community. While her sister supports her unorthodox decision to elope with a Muslim she barely knows, other members of her community and even her own family shoulder the responsibility for punishing her transgression; perversely, her death sentence is carried out with her own father's complicity. The brutality of the Maronites' treatment of Yamilé contrasts markedly with the characterization of Osman, portrayed as an honorable man despite his status as an outsider. Far from a faceless *salopard*, Osman appears in *Yamilé* as an idealized Other, respectful of and respected by others and open to dealing with people outside his own community. In a reversal of the usual violence of exoticist films, in which Europeans project their anxiety outwards towards those unlike themselves, Osman never becomes a target of the punitive violence that the Maronites point instead towards one of their own.

¹²⁸ The film was released in 1939. His article, "Sur le cinéma," appeared in December 1937, in issue 476 of *Cinémonde*.

¹²⁹ Among Francis de Croisset's film adaptations was *La Dame de Malacca* (1937), discussed in Chapter 4.

Colin Crisp notes that arranged marriages, like the one set to wed Yamilé to Khalil, generally fared poorly in French cinematic narratives of the 1930s, and nearly every instance of such a plot device included a “true love,” like Osman, who emerges to set things right for the hero or heroine (*Genre* 135-7). André in *Baroud*, discussed above, is also constructed in the narrative as the man destined to save Zinah from a disastrous marriage to an untrustworthy tribal leader. In this regard, Crisp highlights *Yamilé* as an exceptional case, since it is the only film in which one of the affianced dies after rejecting the predestined engagement. Crisp points to the religious conflict – conflated to a “drame de race” in Pierre Leprohon’s review of the film for *Cinémonde*¹³⁰ – as the cause of such a startling end to a story where genre would normally ensure that love could eke out a win out in the end (*Genre* 136). Indeed, Bordeaux mentions in his *Cinémonde* piece that an American production company had already made overtures to purchase his novel for a big-screen adaptation, but their intention to give the film a happy ending ultimately turned the author off to the project: “Je refusai une offre qui dénaturait mon œuvre.”

For their part, critics had little to say about the film at the time of its release. In *Pour Vous*, Serge Veber notes director d’Espinay’s tendency to “faire ressortir la beauté des paysages libanais et syriens, plus que la beauté d’une histoire académiquement ennuyeuse.”¹³¹ Echoing the impression that the milieu overshadows the slender intrigue, Leprohon pans the film, but ends his review with the brusque caveat: “L’histoire finit très mal. Pour un film de ce genre, c’est

¹³⁰ Leprohon, Pierre. Rev. of *Yamilé sous les cèdres*, dir. Charles d’Espinay. *Cinémonde* 555 (7 Jun 1939): 3. Print.

¹³¹ Veber, Serge. Rev. of *Yamilé sous les cèdres*, dir. Charles D’Espinay. *Pour Vous* 551 (7 Jun 1939): 10. Print.

vraiment surprenant.” This generically aberrant ending (and Bordeaux’s insistence on keeping it that way) reveals the story’s depth of tragedy, one that lies in the steep price the Maronites agree to pay in their quest to preserve the insularity of their community. Yamilé’s murder is no direct casualty of imperialism, since the narrative is not immediately concerned with political or military intervention from the French or anyone else; rather, her death sentence and the obstinate will to carry it out spring from internal self-regulation within the Maronite community. They identify the real threat not in violent intrusion from without – the usual formula in which European forces of order fight the insurgent *salopards* – but rather taking root from within. Instead of perceiving Yamilé as a happily married Christian whose husband happens to be Muslim, her family foresees in her union the destruction of their society.

Women’s Agency and Exoticist Romance

In films where interracial love lasts, like *Baroud* and *Le Simoun*, credit is due in large part to the women, who choose and defend their lovers in spite of the social pitfalls that come with their choice. However, the predominance of Legionnaire films in studies focusing on the *cinéma colonial*¹³² has precluded critical scrutiny aimed at these kinds of roles for women, characters that come into play primarily in other kinds of exoticist narratives. In these films, women’s agency is often on display. Examples taken from both colonial cinema and a more expansive exoticist framework show several female characters that break

¹³² For instance, Slavin’s study privileges male-centered action over more female-centered romance, and Bergfelder, Harris and Street also assert that “colonial military drama” dominates representations of the exotic in 1930s cinema – even though they include in their study films like *Amok*, which deals with decidedly female issues (201). For *Amok*, see below and, for a more complete discussion, Chapter 2.

away from socially acceptable behavioral patterns that are often reinforced within the canonical *cinéma colonial*. Their rebellion often includes participation in miscegenous romance, but these women also resist in other ways. For instance, in *Amok* (Ozep 1934), the narrative focuses on an English woman who seeks an abortion from an expatriate doctor and the drama that ensues when he refuses to grant her request. The dénouement of *Amok* indicates that women who transgress their rigid social boundaries are not always rewarded, and that their punishments are likely to be severe. Likewise, *Yamilé sous les cèdres* also shows how a woman's choice to leave her Christian community to marry a Muslim – and her refusal to back down from that choice – bring dire consequences for her and her family.

Whether these couples find true love or tragedy, these women refuse to follow prescribed behavior and instead forge their own path in settings that, for French spectators, already point to a kind of freedom to lead one's life outside the confines of social structures that regulate life in France. It would therefore be reasonable to read this category of films as a subgenre we might call the exoticist romance, one whose connection to cinematic melodrama cannot be overlooked. Christine Gledhill explains how "melodrama, as an organizing modality of the genre system, works at western culture's most sensitive cultural and aesthetic boundaries, embodying class, gender, and ethnicity in a process of imaginary identification, differentiation, contact, and opposition" ("Rethinking" 238). Within the context of interwar France, the interplay of imperial culture and its concomitant interracial contact provides ample grounds to touch on all of these aspects of melodrama, and the exoticist romance normally covers them all.

While Gledhill addresses the problems inherent to assigning the overarching construct of melodrama to a male- or a female-dominant audience, the strength of the female characters in these films suggests that the exoticist romance, viewed as an identifiable subgenre of the melodramatic modality, aims to capture a female audience as opposed to the male-dominated target assumed for more canonical examples of *cinéma colonial*. However, as films like *L'Occident* and *Baroud* illustrate, films can blend elements of different genres in order to appeal to multiple segments of the filmgoing public, a trend that Martin O'Shaughnessy identifies as incompatible with the typical assumption that the *cinéma colonial* constitutes an intrinsically coherent genre (255).¹³³ As this chapter has shown, interracial romance offers narrative possibilities that male-dominated colonial films marginalize within the narrative or simply decline to address at all. Naming a dedicated subgenre for exoticist romance may help amend this critical deficiency and broaden the discourse that surrounds the cinematic exotic of the 1930s. Building on the corpus presented here, the next chapter examines a particularly noteworthy subset of exoticist romance: films that feature mixed-race characters within the central couple.

¹³³ While O'Shaughnessy does not include *L'Occident* or *Baroud* in his study, his conclusions about genre mixing still apply to these two films.

CHAPTER FOUR

Métissage and Cultural Repatriation

The failure to acknowledge even the possibility – let alone the permissibility – of successful miscegenation marks several films where culturally dissimilar individuals or groups meet and interact; exclusively white romantic drama forms the romantic center of, for example, Marcel L'Herbier's films *Les Hommes nouveaux* (1936) and *La Route impériale* (1935). And yet, in certain exoticist contexts the figure of the *métis(se)* undermines the pull of such rigid separation. Describing how interracial unions evolved over the centuries of colonization, Ann L. Stoler returns repeatedly to the ideological tug-of-war between sexual permissiveness and restrictions on the composition of a "proper" European colonial family. At first, European men living in the colonies were encouraged to engage in concubinage with a native partner, a practice thought to encourage their assimilation, teach them the language, and generally ease the difficulties of living in a remote part of the world among people whose way of life might seem unfathomably strange. However, Stoler points out that this widespread and largely accepted practice fell into disfavor around the turn of the twentieth century, when "concubinage became the source of individual breakdown, racial degeneration, and political unrest" (*Carnal* 68).

In colonial law as well as in social practice, distinctions were drawn between casual interracial sex and more formal commitments like marriage and parenting. Stoler emphasizes that "sexual relations between European men and Asian women per se were not condemned so much as the social tensions to which they gave rise. Live-in arrangements with native women and the presence of their mixed progeny came to be seen as a danger to the European community

at large” (*Carnal* 33). For this reason, mixed-race characters are extremely rare in colonial settings, since their very presence would force a pointed examination of colonial power, legal inheritance, and cultural belonging. Citing Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Stoler concludes that what worried European imperialists most about the mixed-race members of the colonial community was their threat to alter the “interior frontiers” of the nation: “Children born of these [interracial] unions were ‘the fruits of a regrettable weakness,’ physically marked and morally marred with ‘the defaults and mediocre qualities of their [native] mothers’” (*Carnal* 80, 68).

Because of the ideological gravity of the concepts of nation and citizenship during the imperial era (and especially in the politically charged years culminating in World War II), non-colonial exotic locations afford film narratives far greater liberty than colonial ones in terms of their depiction of interracial relationships, their development, and their continuation into future generations. Rather than avoiding the issues of belonging and cultural loyalty, as colonial cinema appears to do, these themes can surface more organically in French films set outside the empire. A prime example is Nicolas Farkas’ *Port-Arthur* (1936), in which the Russo-Japanese woman Youki marries a Russian and maintains her loyalty to her husband and his country despite her fully Japanese half-brother’s pressure to side with Japan in the conflict between the two nations.¹³⁴ Having connections to two different cultures allows mixed-race and culturally hybridized characters in exoticist cinema to transcend the role of “mimic man” as described by Homi Bhabha. Rather than stand accused of imitating Europeans in

¹³⁴ *Port-Arthur* figures in the analysis of *Générique des années 30*, but was not available for the present study. Chapter 4 offers an analysis based on contemporary accounts of the film.

power (whether or not this power is rooted in colonialism), these characters' claim to a European heritage validates their Western behavior and figures it as natural instead of feigned for personal gain.¹³⁵ Ultimately, these mixed-race characters show the pitfalls and perks that affect representations of *métissage* in the 1930s under circumstances removed from issues of colonial power and administration. Without the pressure to embody the imperial allegory, mixed-race characters and interracial couples in non-colonial exoticist cinema allow certain fantasies of the Other to flow more freely.

The *métissage* seen in these films also hints at prior success in intercultural relations (as it were) dating to at least one previous generation. Since these characters have reached adulthood more or less unscathed by their hybridity, some kind of acceptance, or at least *tolerance* of the miscegenation that produced these mixed-race characters is therefore implied. The occurrence of grown *métis* characters may be a nod to the older, more flexible formulations of colonial concubinage, although their absence from colonial locales disavows this reading. Yet even as Stoler's work underscores the danger perceived in the *métis*'s presence, it also points to opposition to the idea that a mixed-race population necessarily posed a threat to European hegemony in the colonies. Indeed, some people recognized the potential for these children to grow up in the service of the French empire in ways unavailable or unpalatable to people of pure French extraction. This was particularly true for the *métisses*, who were thought to make excellent wives or servants for French *colons*, provided that they were "rescued in time" to instill proper French values during their formative years ("Affront"

¹³⁵ An egregious example of a mimic man would be the black assistant in *L'Esclave blanc* (Paulin 1936), discussed in Chapter 2; a more famous example would be Slimane in *Pépé le Moko*

208). Of course, this process of cultural education (not to say indoctrination) could hardly be left to the indigenous mother. Allowing *métis* children to grow up among indigenous people amounted to “a social death—a severing from European society, a banishment of ‘innocents’ from the European cultural milieu in which they could potentially thrive” (Stoler “Affront” 206). To this end, *métis* children living in the colonies and “abandoned” by their French parent¹³⁶ were frequently placed in orphanages specially designed to develop the European side of their heritage (Stoler *Carnal* 69-70).

In keeping with these reformers’ arguments, exoticist film narratives do not assume *a priori* that an individual of mixed race is doomed to replicate the inferiority of his/her native parent. With this unalterable heritage in their past, the focus for the narrative is, instead, the future that presents itself to these characters over the course of the story. A frequent plot device sets up a kind of second-generation miscegenation that presents a love match between a *métis* – or, more typically, a *métisse* – and a Westerner, a recurring pattern within the subgenre of exoticist romance that suggests an imperative to “repatriate” the *métisse* to her Western roots. Films rely on heterosexual love to represent this cultural repatriation, giving a symbolic and generically conventional form to the same institutional efforts of the colonial orphanages’ state-controlled upbringing. While the Western component of the *métis* character’s identity may have been overlooked due to past or present circumstances, the internal conflict and the

(Duvivier 1937), discussed in Chapter 1.

¹³⁶ Stoler emphasizes that a *métis* child would be considered abandoned even if s/he were in the safe custody of the native mother; only the French father need be absent for such a child to be considered at risk and subsequently placed in the care of the state (“Affront” 207).

external actions engendered by this process of cultural repatriation offer a strong emotional core for an exoticist film.

These films also feature an even stronger proclivity for women's agency that the exoticist romance films analyzed in Chapter 3. Going against the race/ gender prescriptions of most interracial colonial couples, the three exoticist romance films discussed in this chapter offer a reversal by pairing a Western woman with a non-Western man. Released in the late 1930s, at a time when the *cinéma colonial* was closing in ever more tightly around overtly political themes and patriotic overtones,¹³⁷ this trio of films also highlights the more expansive narrative possibilities available to the exoticist cinema, which looked both within and beyond the empire for its romantic fantasies. In 1937, veteran exoticist filmmaker Marc Allégret's *La Dame de Malacca* paired a spunky, married Englishwoman with a biracial Malaccan prince. For his 1938 remake of *La Maison du Maltais*, Pierre Chenal eschewed the conventional colonial settings of Morocco and Algeria, setting the film in Tunisia – not a colony, but a protectorate without a military figure like Maréchal Lyautey to propel it into the imperial spotlight. The third film, *L'Esclave blanche* (Sorkin 1939), takes place in an entirely different and resolutely non-colonial setting (at least from the standpoint of European rule): the crumbling Ottoman Empire, where a Franco-Turkish couple becomes entangled in the politicking of a deeply corrupted court.

European Frog, Exotic Prince: *La Dame de Malacca* (1937)

Viewable today thanks in part to restoration work performed in the mid-1980s, a process that included additional voice work from Edwige Feuillère to

¹³⁷ For example: *Les Hommes nouveaux* (L'Herbier 1936); *Brazza ou l'Épopée du Congo* (Poirier 1939); *Le Chemin de l'honneur* (Paulin 1939); *L'Homme du Niger* (de Baroncelli 1940).

replace lost dialogue,¹³⁸ *La Dame de Malacca* stands out for several reasons as an atypical work of exoticist cinema. The film's status as an adaptation of a popular novel by Francis de Croisset likely boosted its visibility, and it became a modest popular success in its initial run, attracting 321,000 spectators across France (Crisp *Genre* 324). Following the novel, the setting for *La Dame de Malacca* is not entirely non-colonial, but here it is the British and not the French who pursue a system of exploitation and governance in Malaysia that is at least quasi-imperial in nature. The English military and the sultan appear to operate in a political give-and-take whose balance of power would be anathema to French imperial films. Still, politics serve as merely a sidebar to the central story: the budding romance between Audrey, an English woman newly but unhappily married to a childhood friend, and Selim, the young sultan of the (made-up) region of Udaigor.¹³⁹

The film opens on Audrey, living and teaching under stultifying conditions, when she receives an unexpected marriage proposal from her childhood friend Herbert, an officer about to embark on a prolonged tour in Malaysia. Not a love match for either party, Herbert nevertheless envisions their marriage as something potentially advantageous for his career in his new post, since a great many military wives act as major influence peddlers in the English expatriate community. Hesitant at first, Audrey finally accepts his proposal as a means of escaping her oppressive existence in Britain.

¹³⁸ The source for this information is an article from 1986, publication unnamed, found in the archives of the Bibliothèque Raymond Chirat at the Institut Lumière, Lyon.

¹³⁹ While cinéphilic commentators do not underscore the invented geography of the story, de Croisset makes his invention explicit: "J'ai débaptisé le cadre, sans trop retoucher le tableau" (11).

During the boat voyage east, Audrey makes the acquaintance of a young man in a well-tailored suit who engages her in conversation. Only later does Audrey discover that this man is the sultan of the region where she will be living. Exclaiming with surprise that she believed him to be European, a fellow passenger points out to Audrey that the sultan's mother was "une princesse géorgienne aussi blanche que vous" – a comparison that not only highlights the prince's mixed race but also puts Audrey indirectly but suggestively in a similar role for such a pairing. Once established in an exoticist narrative, especially when the revelation comes early in the film, a mixed-race identity implies that second-generation miscegenation will likely occur as part of the current narrative. Moreover, in this case, the sultan's mixed parentage also indicates that a miscegenous family history poses no problem for rule in his (father's) Asian culture. This renders moot Stoler's point that under European colonial rule, interracial marriage was considered dangerous because the couple's children "might be recognized as heirs to a European inheritance" (*Carnal* 39). The sultan's identity as a *métis* proves that no such obstacle exists in his non-Western context; unlike the complications that arise from mixed-race couplings in French colonial settings,¹⁴⁰ for the non-West, at least in fictional representations, mixed-race status can be declared a non-issue for succession of power and wealth.

Besides the question of *métissage*, women, their power, and their social patterns also play a key role in the narrative. Casting Edwige Feuillère in the

¹⁴⁰ In addition to Stoler, cited frequently in this chapter, see Pedersen, who points out that a 1912 law made it possible (in principle) for colonized women to bring French fathers of their mixed-race children to court in order to establish their legal paternity and, by extension, the child's status as a potential heir. The colonial governor had to allow the suit to proceed, but many of these officials supported the law, at least in part because it resembled "local traditions." Conklin (in the same volume) points out the inability of the *métis* to be considered as fully French by any

role of Audrey suggests a deliberate attempt to underscore the intelligence and independence of the character; even at this relatively early point in her film career, Feuillère showed a predilection for playing freethinking women, including Lucrece Borgia (for Abel Gance in 1935) and the spy Marthe Richard (for Raymond Bernard in 1937). In *Malacca*, Audrey writes for an Anglophone newspaper, a time-consuming enterprise that keeps her busy, earns her some spending cash, and removes her from the immediate pressures of her increasingly volatile husband. The social life of the English enclave also falls largely under the direction of women, although their pettiness and unvarnished cruelty towards Audrey does not paint such authority in a positive light. By their actions and their social manipulations, these women tacitly enforce a strict separation between races and between sexes. Once Audrey crosses these lines – first with her journalism and then with her socializing – she becomes a prime target for their wrath.

Aside from ruffling feathers among the society ladies, Audrey's journalistic endeavors also bring her closer to Selim. After she is arrested for taking unauthorized photos outside the city, Selim's intervention ensures her freedom and leads to a revealing heart-to-heart. He describes the brutal, unthinking racism of his classmates at the English boarding school where he grew up, and Audrey responds with sympathy. She expresses incomprehension at the idea that race could be the most important obstacle between two people, adding that indifference is often a much more important barrier to happiness – an oblique reference to her deteriorating relationship with Herbert. Their relations spiraling

widely respected legal or social criteria, noting that they were seen as problematic for continued colonial rule.

downward, with Audrey clearly unwilling to curb her controversial behavior, Herbert refuses to divorce her, fearing social disgrace far more strongly than a lifetime of unhappy matrimony.

The sequence of events that culminates in their separation starts with Audrey's ignominious ejection from a ladies' charity meeting. Called out before the assembly of society women, Audrey succumbs to the stress and suffers a nervous breakdown. With Selim's help, she slowly recovers; inspired by Audrey's courage, Selim takes action to improve his own standing with the British forces. The political capital he gains in the process allows him to pressure Herbert into consenting to a divorce, and immediately thereafter, Selim asks for Audrey's hand in marriage.

With Audrey's social standing thus restored and even surpassed thanks to her marriage to the sultan, the film ends in a legitimately wed, interracial love match, a rare happy ending for an exoticist melodrama. The final dialogue, set aboard the royal yacht, sums up with a dose of irony the optimistic message the film shows with regard to interracial and intercultural unions. Assuming her journalistic persona, a smiling Audrey approaches Selim with teasing gravitas:

Audrey: Monseigneur?

Selim: [Laughs.] Madame?

Audrey: Monseigneur, je voudrais que vous m'accordiez une interview.

[Selim laughs.] Oh! si, si, j'insiste! Pour le Daily News. Mais une interview authentique cette fois, hein?

Selim: Je vous écoute, Madame.

Audrey: Voilà. Que pensez-vous, Monsieur, du mariage entre les malais et les européennes? [Selim laughs.] Ah, non, ne riez pas! Il s'agit d'un problème des plus graves!

Selim: Eh bien, si c'est un mariage d'amour, le problème ne se pose pas. J'en ai fait l'expérience.

Audrey: Même avec une anglaise?

Selim: Surtout avec une anglaise. Vous savez bien que la haine est tout près de l'amour.

Audrey: En somme, vous m'autorisez à dire que vous êtes heureux?

Selim: Je vous l'autorise.

This exchange makes pointed fun of the bourgeois society that would stigmatize their happy relationship even as it enforces the unhappy marriage that Audrey had with Herbert. Audrey clearly articulates the gendering of each spouse in her scenario, emphasizing “les européennes” in general before specifically mentioning “une anglaise” – referring, of course, to their own love match.

However, the conditions that form the backdrop of the couple's rejection of this restrictive attitude reveal how problematic such criticism really is. Grounded neither in English nor in Malaysian terrain, the couple sails through presumably neutral waters as the above exchange takes place. The dry land nearby may be contested territory in power struggles between indigenous and imperial forces, but the vast waters belong to everyone at once and no one in particular. The combination of this liminal space along with their free expression of a utopian perspective on mixed-race marriage points to an ambiguously utopian reading of the film's conclusion, the term *utopia* implying an

unrealizable ideal rather than a realistic assessment of the way societies could (or should) operate.¹⁴¹

This insecure optimism differs starkly from Allégret's preceding exoticist film *Zouzou* (1934), one of Josephine Baker's star vehicles. As in all of Baker's films, the interracial couple proposed by the narrative is thwarted in the end, confirming in its place at least one monoracial relationship. Zouzou (Baker) falls for her foster brother Jean (a pre-*Bandera* Jean Gabin¹⁴²), who in turn catches the eye of Zouzou's coworker Claire, whose race is underscored by her name. The relationship between Jean and Claire endures while Zouzou becomes a music hall superstar, a trajectory that (not coincidentally) echoes Baker's own rags-to-riches experience in France.

Critics have claimed that *Zouzou* contributes to a systematic cultural rejection of *métissage* and a chronic problematization of the Other prevalent in the interwar years (e.g. Sherzer 232; Scheper 85). As the second-generation *métissage* narratives indicate, not all forms of racial mixing were too taboo for the screen. The existence of another, *successful* interracial romance in a film by the same director and released only three years after *Zouzou* also undermines the assumption that this anxiety would impose itself on a Baker vehicle without synergistic support from her star mythology. As many critics have pointed out, notably Elizabeth Ezra, multiple forces work in tandem to create the narrative structure of Baker's films, not least of which is the considerable force of her biography and her star persona. These personal narratives were already well established in celebrity discourse by the time she made her 1930s films, so if we

¹⁴¹ The Latin roots of the word translate roughly to *nowhere*, a sign of the impossibility to realize the utopian imaginary.

accept Scott Balcerzak's notion that "the intention behind [*Zouzou*] remains to showcase Baker above story, locale, and, to a lesser extent, even the musical sequences where the star fails to appear," then fidelity to Baker's entrenched star myth would also take priority over ambient social anxiety about interracial coupling. As it happens, though, Baker's persona *incorporates* this kind of anxiety by setting her up for romantic failure with white men, a trope that goes against Dina Sherzer's "double standard" that identifies nonwhite women as ripe for temporary sexual exploitation but unsuited for interracial matrimony (230). That Baker's characters find neither fleeting nor lasting romance – but become big stars instead! – says more about La Baker's unique image and less than critics claim that these films say about a universal injunction against interracial love.

Just as Baker's star image proves to be the interpretive key to *Zouzou*, casting offers an additional caveat to the happy marriage that concludes *La Dame de Malacca*. While neither Edwige Feuillère nor Pierre Richard-Willm was a star with the same extracinematic social presence as Baker, both had considerable appeal for spectators in the 1930s individually and as an onscreen couple. At the time of this film's release, they had already been paired together in the French language version of a German production, *Barcarolle* (1935), and they went on after *Malacca* to share billing in Jacques de Baroncelli's wartime production of *La Duchesse de Langeais* (1942). Before the release of *Malacca*, *Cinémonde* reported that fans were sending letters eagerly anticipating the reunion of Feuillère and Richard-Willm in this adaptation.¹⁴³ As individuals, by decade's end, Feuillère

¹⁴² See Chapter 1.

¹⁴³ See two articles by Odile Cambier, one in issue 451 (10 June 1937) and another in issue 467 (30 Sept 1937).

would be named one of the top female stars,¹⁴⁴ while Richard-Willm was both a popular heartthrob and a staple of French exoticist cinema throughout the 1930s.¹⁴⁵

As the critics of *Pour Vous* and *Cinémonde* point out, several factors both intrinsic and extrinsic to *Malacca* contribute to the toothless feel of the interracial romance. The fact that the pair had already been cast as an item downplays the element of race as a serviceable obstacle to their inevitable (and somewhat ironic) coupling. Their casting, based at least in part on its spectator appeal, eschews the full implication of their marriage as an ideological provocation. Richard-Willm's partial ethnic drag in *Malacca* also renders more clearly fictitious and therefore more palatable the prospect of an interracial affair. Selim's cultural and racial hybridity comes through both in his character's mixed Eastern and Western ancestry and in his English education; even if Richard-Willm's features have been artificially darkened for the role, Selim's tailored Western clothing points to an effectively Westernized mentality worn on the outside and, at least to some extent, reflected on the inside. This contrasts with Annabella's role as Aïsha la Slaoui in *La Bandera*, a famous and much-ballyhooed instance of ethnic drag in 1930s cinema¹⁴⁶; to play Aïsha, who is neither a *métisse* nor culturally hybridized in her self-presentation, Annabella must darken her skin and wear heavily ornamented, "traditional" Moroccan clothing. The "transformation" of both these popular actors into ethnically marked characters played an inevitable role

¹⁴⁴ A 1939 *Pour Vous* survey situated Feuillère at number nine in the top ten female earners at the time. Viviane Romance, discussed at length below, was number one.

¹⁴⁵ Richard-Willm was repeatedly cast in films from the Russian cycle (see the Introduction and Chapter 1), including *Les Nuits moscovites* (Granowsky 1935), *Au service du tsar* (Billon 1936), and *La Tragédie impériale* (L'Herbier 1938). He also had some key forays into the *cinéma colonial*, of which Feyder's *Le Grand jeu* (1934) has enjoyed the most lasting appeal. His other *cinéma colonial* films are *Courrier-Sud* (Billon 1937), apparently lost, and *La Route impériale* (L'Herbier 1935).

in the publicity for the film in the weeks leading up to their respective release dates; such elaborate ethnic drag was deployed as a strategy to garner spectator curiosity and build early interest in the film.¹⁴⁷

Despite the rich narrative potential of a plot that culminates with a successful interracial marriage, the filmmakers' ambitions for *Malacca* were apparently rather low. Without on-location shooting to boost its marketability with "authentic" exoticism, Feuillère describes how the team went ahead with what they had¹⁴⁸:

Nous nous retrouvions tout bonnement aux studios d'Épinay (Seine-Saint-Denis) au bord des canaux construits quelques mois auparavant pour *La Kermesse héroïque* de Jacques Feyder. On modifia à peine le décor : des jonques et une figuration asiatique suffiraient à créer l'illusion. (108)

Although Feuillère describes an improvisational feel to the set design, some critics singled out the sets for special praise. Georges Champeaux proclaims:

La mise en scène est de qualité. Non seulement la mise en scène dramatique – mais encore et surtout la mise en scène plastique. Les décors sont si peu conventionnels que certains d'entre eux déconcertent de prime abord. [...] Nous sommes loin de *Port-Arthur* et de *Yoshiwara*. Pour la première fois, un film sur

¹⁴⁶ See Chapter 1.

¹⁴⁷ This is also the case for many of the East Asian films discussed in Chapter 4, including both Annabella and Charles Boyer's roles as a Japanese couple in *La Bataille* (1933).

¹⁴⁸ Using the same setup, Allégret also simultaneously filmed a German version.

l'Extrême-Orient tourné en France nous donne l'illusion du dépaysement.¹⁴⁹

In *Cinémonde*, Jean Rimbaud also praises the attention paid to the studio set, but not without addressing the lackluster intrigue that fails to spark interest in spite of the tensions introduced by the interracial romance:

On sait que le sujet expose un conflit de races qui se traduit plus souvent par des conversations que par une action réelle. C'était là une entreprise difficile, et le réalisateur qui n'a point voulu l'éviter, a su écarter la banalité et la monotonie par de brillants subterfuges de mise en scène qui sont autant de broderies. Parlons donc de l'atmosphère qui est extrêmement bien rendue. C'est certainement impossible de faire plus exotique en studio. Vantons donc les dialogues, qui sans être étincelants sont pleins de tact.¹⁵⁰

Contemporary critics like Rimbaud seem to *want* to like the film, particularly because the novel had given many of them high hopes for the adaptation. In this camp was *Pour Vous* critic Serge Veber, who disagrees with Rimbaud's assessment and classifies the film as strictly mediocre:

J'avais lu le roman avec beaucoup de plaisir. Je me suis moins intéressé au film. C'est pourtant de l'ouvrage bien fait, bien présenté, mais à aucun moment on ne se passionne pour cette aventure. [...] Chacun semble avoir sa petite part de responsabilité dans ce film qui n'a ni grands défauts ni grandes qualités.

¹⁴⁹ This citation comes from a festival publication included in the dossier for *Malacca* found in the Bibliothèque Raymond Chirat of the Institut Lumière, Lyon. No details about the festival are given, but it cites Champeaux's article in the 8 Oct 1937 issue of *Gringoire*. *Port-Arthur* (1936) and *Yoshiwara* (1937) are discussed in Chapter 4.

¹⁵⁰ *Cinémonde* 469 (14 Oct 1937): 895.

His praise is reserved for the cast, most notably Feuillère – “c’est une de nos meilleures artistes; elle aura de meilleurs rôles, car elle les mérite.”¹⁵¹

As these hedging reviews indicate, *La Dame de Malacca* presents a case study in how an appealing intrigue, careful casting, and a sufficiently exotic-looking stage set can combine to create a dramatization of a European woman’s marriage to a Malaysian sultan without sending shock waves through the culture. The ambiguity of the ending, an aberrantly happy one in a genre that all but guarantees some final tragedy, tempers somewhat this outlier status among exoticist films, as does the star discourse that predestines the Feuillère/Richard-Willm couple from the start. Yet the fact that a French film could suggest that a European woman might be able to exchange her frog of a husband for an exotic prince means that many of the fundamental assumptions about racial anxieties that have been made based on fiction cinema of the 1930s are either overblown or under-researched.

(Re)claiming French Identity in *La Maison du Maltais* (1938)

In contrast to *La Dame de Malacca*, Pierre Chenal’s *La Maison du Maltais* shows a decidedly less utopian existence for *les métis* and those who love them. Prolific author and film critic Jean Vignaud first wrote the novel *La Maison du Maltais* in the early 1920s,¹⁵² and the story first came to the screen in 1927 with a silent film directed by Henri Fescourt, who also directed *L’Occident* (discussed above). Fescourt was a prominent figure in interwar *cinéma colonial*, and his

¹⁵¹ Less fortunate, however, is Feuillère’s *jeune premier*, the subject of Veber’s delicious dismissal: “Je n’avais pas, au début, reconnu P. R-Willm [sic], devenu brun. Mais dès qu’il ouvrit la bouche, le doute ne me fut plus permis. J’espère qu’il ne décevra pas ses innombrables admiratrices, qui continuent à me haïr parce que je continue à ne pas l’aimer.”

version presumably hews closely to its source material.¹⁵³ However, in his 1938 adaptation, director Pierre Chenal radically reformulates the story to bring a careful ambiguity to the core narrative. Set first in the French protectorate of Tunisia, then relocating to Paris mid-film, by virtue of its location and its cross-cultural romance *La Maison du Maltais* should be, and has been, included in filmographies devoted to the *cinéma colonial*.¹⁵⁴ This label also combines with the highly mutable but imminently recognizable category of “poetic realism,” making *Maison* by far the most frequently examined film of the present corpus.¹⁵⁵ However, some aspects of the film have been analyzed inconsistently throughout the film’s critical history, and for this reason the film is worth reconsidering not (only) as a colonial melodrama, but as an illustrative example of some of the more subversive themes at work in the larger category of exoticist cinema.

Chenal’s lack of insistence on the characters’ origins has provoked diverse and even contradictory readings of the film. When it comes to characters’ backgrounds, where Fescourt’s version offers clarity, Chenal opts for allusion, especially in the case of Mattéo. In Fescourt’s film, following Vignaud, Mattéo is the narrative center of the story. The son of a Christian father born in Malta and a Muslim mother of Bedouin extraction, Mattéo experiences firsthand the strain

¹⁵² Vignaud wrote a handful of exoticist novels in the interwar period and edited the right-leaning film weekly *Cinémonde* during the 1930s.

¹⁵³ Fescourt’s fidelity to the source text is difficult to discern, since Vignaud’s novel is no longer in print. However, using a novelized version of *La Maison du Maltais*, Steven Ungar has laid out in detail important differences between the two films. I have taken Ungar’s summary of this text as the basis for my analysis of the novel; the silent film was viewed at the CNC archives in Bois d’Arcy for this project and has been summarized below.

¹⁵⁴ This classification is based on Crisp’s criteria for the *cinéma colonial*, discussed in the Introduction. As for other critics who have addressed the film in this context, Benali and Slavin each cite both versions of the film; oddly, Boulanger cites only Fescourt’s silent version.

¹⁵⁵ See Dudley Andrew’s (error-prone) summary of Chenal’s *Maison* in *Mists of Regret* (259-60). Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier give a more accurate close reading in *La Drôle de guerre des sexes du cinéma français, 1930-1956* (63-67). Denise Brahimi also discusses the film, and Steven Ungar’s

that comes from these tangled family roots. Spurned by society and forced into seclusion because of his chosen bride, Mattéo's father shuts himself off from his family and the larger Tunisian community, leaving Mattéo to be raised by his mother according to Muslim traditions. Mattéo retains this religious identification throughout his courtship with Safia, whom Fescourt identifies as a Bedouin like his mother.

In the silent film, Safia is also portrayed as a greedy woman attracted to wealth rather than love, and her covetousness pushes Mattéo to steal pearls from his father's collection. As Mattéo steals the last remaining pearls, his father catches him in the act, and shocked at his son's betrayal, he collapses on the floor. Scared, Mattéo leaves him there and rushes out to find Safia. But she turns up missing; earlier that day, a jeweler named Chervin had made her a proposition, and she agreed to move with him to Paris. Vowing revenge, Mattéo follows Safia to Paris not to rekindle their relationship, but to avenge her infidelity.

In a curious parenthesis to the central love story, before finding Safia in Paris, Mattéo becomes the object of another girl's crush when his landlord's daughter falls deeply in love with him. Despite her parents' openness to the possibility of marriage, he refuses her love, and once he makes a name for himself as a pearl merchant he moves out of their home. Distraught at his absence, the girl dies (!) without seeing Mattéo again, and the parenthetical and unrequited love story ends on this tragic note. Given the chance settle down with a French citizen, Mattéo refuses it in order to pursue his revenge. The

"Split Screens: *La Maison du Maltais* as Text and Document" analyzes Chenal's film along with a novelized adaptation of the silent film that ostensibly illustrates Jean Vignaud's novel.

callousness with which he dismisses the sentiments of the girl reveals the stark differences between Fescourt's Mattéo and Chenal's.

Meanwhile, his pursuit of Safia continues unabated. He spots a newspaper article that mentions a Tunisian dance company starring one "Mlle S..., originaire de Sfax," and he prepares to make his move. Mattéo decorates his apartment in downtown Paris to look just like the one he had in Sfax. He comes even closer to his goal when Chervin, hearing of Mattéo's business success, offers him a job. Neither man is then aware of the other's connection to Safia, but it is only a matter of time before Safia's arrival at the office triggers her old lover's rage. Forced to explain to Chervin that she and Mattéo had been lovers in Sfax, Chervin agrees to keep her around, but begins to drink heavily in public and to flirt openly with other women.

Frustrated with Chervin's abrupt change in behavior, Safia visits Mattéo to reminisce about Tunisia. He sits and listens until she speaks of her rekindled love for him, and he responds to her confession by treating her like a brute. Explaining her sudden departure, she claims that the legend about the *Maison du Maltais* – the idea that she'd be locked away in his father's house forever – scared her away. She suggests that they stay in Paris and start over, but Mattéo has other ideas: "C'est à Sfax que je veux t'aimer." So back to Sfax they go, with Safia more Mattéo's prisoner than his lover. He leads Safia, pleading and crying, to his father's house, throws her inside and shuts the gate behind her. Inside, an old man appears – Mattéo's father, still alive. Happy to be reunited with the father he had left for dead, Mattéo blames Safia for pushing him to steal and recites a dictum from the Qur'an – "que la vengeance égale l'offense." But the father, a Christian, points out the Gospel's command to forgive. No sooner has

his father spoken does Mattéo agree to forgive Safia, and happiness returns with enough time for a group hug (!) before the final frame.

This highly implausible – and religiously implicated – happy ending underscores yet again the major differences between this first adaptation and Chenal's extensive reimagining of the film a decade later. It also differs markedly from the misogynistic ending in the novel; neither a joyous reunion with Mattéo's father nor forgiveness from either side of the lovers' conflict appears in Ungar's description of the text. With few exceptions, in Fescourt's film the events transpire from Mattéo's perspective despite his characterization as a rather unsympathetic character. In contrast, Chenal deemphasizes Mattéo's importance by streamlining his multicultural heritage, eliding his father's religion and leaving out all references to his mother. In Chenal's film, both Mattéo and Safia show concern for others' best interests in addition to their own, and each side of their love story develops without vengeful invective from Mattéo or wanton selfishness from Safia.

In the 1938 version of the film, Safia (Viviane Romance) works as a prostitute in the European nightclub style rather than assuming the mantle of an Oriental dancer. She meets Mattéo (Dalio, in a rare leading role) on the streets of Sfax and makes a big first impression on the hopeless romantic. At first, he dotes on her from a distance, following her around and buying her gifts. Put off at first by such devotion, eventually Safia succumbs to his charming sincerity and goes to stay with him at his father's house outside the city. There, she falls in love with him, and they take tentative steps towards building a decent life together – he takes a job at the docks, and she stays away from the nightclubs. Soon, Safia reveals the news that she is expecting a child, and Mattéo, though extremely

happy, worries about how he will provide for the growing family's future. To earn extra money, he agrees to participate in a contraband shipment, telling Safia that he will go out to sea for a fishing voyage. When Mattéo fails to return at the appointed time, his father – lacking the forgiving spirit of the father in Fescourt's film – throws Safia out of the house.

Alone and wandering through a desert storm at night, Safia is rescued by a group of French anthropologists. She stays with them for several days, attracting the attention of their director, Chervin. The day they are set to return to France, he offers to bring her back to Paris to live with him. She refuses his offer, sees off the group, and visits her friend and fellow European prostitute Greta, who is in the hospital, dying of consumption. With her last breath, Greta urges Safia to go to Paris with Chervin and pass Mattéo's child off as his own. Reluctant at first, once Safia sees that Greta has died, she takes her advice and runs to rejoin Chervin. Mattéo returns the same day, but too late to catch Safia before her departure.

The film's setting shifts to Paris, three years later, where Safia has been transformed into a bourgeoisie wife and mother despite derisive gossip about her origins. Mattéo comes to Paris to find her, joining a bunch of gangsters who take him in as their gofer. One day, while Mattéo tells stories to a group of children in the park, unbeknownst to him, his own daughter Jacqueline overhears part of a story. When she repeats it to her mother later that night, Safia recognizes it as the same fable that Mattéo had once told her. Panicked, she hires a private detective to find Mattéo and uncover his motives.

This "detective," a crook named Rossignol (Louis Jouvet), helps her set up a meeting with Mattéo in a dingy hotel room, where Safia dresses in her old

clothes to assume the role of an unreformed prostitute. Mattéo, who arrives thrilled to see her again, ends up leaving brokenhearted and disappointed after she implies that after his disappearance she had an abortion and returned to prostitution. Throughout their exchange, unbeknownst to Safia, Rossignol and his assistant eavesdrop from the next room. They use Safia's secrets to blackmail her for a hefty sum of money, and she pawns some jewelry to pay them off, telling Chervin it was stolen. But Chervin soon catches on to the ruse and demands an explanation. When Safia refuses to give him one, he throws her out of the house and, with nowhere else to go, she returns to the same dingy hotel.

Meanwhile, Mattéo returns to the circle of gangsters and channels his despair into rage. With his newfound swagger, he takes over the entire operation – he wears fine clothes, drives fancy cars, and hangs out with loose Parisian women. He also takes up drinking, which his Muslim faith had forbidden. One night, after more than a few rounds, he assembles his friends and storms up to Safia's room for an impromptu visit. Humiliated, Safia lashes out at Mattéo, accusing him of ruining her life and her daughter's. At the mention of her daughter, Mattéo realizes that this child is his after all. Chasing his friends away, he goes to Chervin's house to set things right. Mattéo breaks in and confronts Chervin, clearing Safia's name and paving the way for her reinstatement in the household. Then, Mattéo returns to his old quarters, telling his friends he's "returning to Sfax." He puts on the ratty clothes that he wore when he arrived in Paris, says a prayer, then takes a gun to his head in a symbolic return to his father's house.

Without enumerating any further the differences between the two narratives, Chenal's style reveals much about his perspective on the original

story. Using scattered inferences rather than a belabored exposition, Chenal exposes enough of Safia's background to underscore the social differences that separate her from Mattéo. In the only dialogue explicitly related to her heritage, Safia reveals to Chervin that she is not originally from Sfax (as he had assumed), but from Marseille – and she has the French passport to prove it. Although Safia never mentions how or why she left France, the presence of other expatriates in Sfax reinforces the credibility of her claim to European citizenship. The most important of these fellow expatriates is Greta, who reminisces to Safia about her idyllic childhood in Westphalia, adding a clear nationality to an ethnic name to create an unmistakably German identity. In contrast, Safia's name has an Arabic etymology and no connection to French tradition, a sign that her claim to French identity reveals only a part of her family history. Naming Marseille as her city of origin suggests a mixed heritage; like the multicultural island of Malta, where Mattéo's father was from, the port city of Marseille abounds with potential for cross-cultural interaction, given the volume of non-native residents, visitors, and tradesmen who arrive, depart, and sometimes set down roots. Unlike Paris, then as now loaded with symbolic value as *the* quintessentially French city,¹⁵⁶ being born in Marseille may confer French nationality, but cultural or racial hybridity cannot be ruled out.

In spite of this carefully constructed ambiguity in Safia's racial and cultural heritage, scholars and critics who focus on Chenal's film tend to reduce her identity to one side or the other. By virtue of her citizenship, Ungar takes her to

¹⁵⁶ Of course, Paris' symbolic stature as "purely French" bears little resemblance to reality; throughout the 1930s, Paris was the destination for immigrants and refugees from all over the world. See Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris* and selected articles in Laure Blévis, et. al. 1931: *Les Étrangers au temps de l'Exposition coloniale*.

be a white, French woman,¹⁵⁷ whereas Abdelkader Benali and Denise Brahimi both take her name as evidence enough to assume that her ancestry lies in North Africa.¹⁵⁸ Critics writing about the film in the 1930s point to her current city of residence, calling her either a prostitute or a dancer “de Sfax,” an assumption without incontestable evidence in Chenal’s film.¹⁵⁹ Yet, no matter which side a critic takes in this either/or assumption, the result still fails to contribute to a satisfactory analysis of the film.

Accepting Safia as a *métisse* offers a reading that sets *Maison* in a class by itself among the films of the *cinéma colonial*, since the love triangle that develops in *Maison* offers a double twist on the typical formula. The first plays off an oft-repeated triangle in which a white man must choose between two women, one belonging to a non-Western race, and the other a devoted European.¹⁶⁰ Women occasionally face this choice,¹⁶¹ but Safia’s dual identity complicates her decision in a unique way. The other twist is based on an even more common model, one identified by Burch and Sellier as a cornerstone of all of 1930s French cinema, that splits young women’s affection between a father-lover figure and a suitor of their own generation; naturally, their detailed analysis of *Maison* situates Safia’s

¹⁵⁷ Ungar finds it inexplicable that Safia falls for Mattéo at all: “One wonders also at the nature of Safia’s attraction to Matteo, whose devotion to Islam does not negate the fact that as the son of a Maltese father, he is neither Arab (Tunisian) nor French” (41).

¹⁵⁸ Benali 276; Brahimi 19.

¹⁵⁹ *Ciné-Miroir*, under original author Jean Vignaud’s direction, called Safia “une danseuse de Sfax” in “La belle Safia de ‘La Maison du Maltais,’ (issue 688, p. 363). *Cinéma* also called her “une prostituée de Sfax” in their (very positive) review of the film (issue 519, p. 828).

¹⁶⁰ *Pépé le Moko* situates Gabin’s gangster between Gaby the Parisienne and Inès the gypsy (see Chapter 1); in the 1938 version of *L’Occident*, discussed above, Arnaud is caught between the admiral’s daughter and Hassina; *L’Esclave blanc* puts a native mistress and a white fiancée at odds over a young European man’s future (see Chapter 2); Josephine Baker always loses out to a white rival in her films, as discussed above; *L’Esclave blanche*, discussed below, has a rivalry that plays out in an especially unusual way.

¹⁶¹ The woman-centered triangle occurs in *La Bataille* and *Yoshiwara*, both of which are discussed in Chapter 4, and *Yamilé sous les cèdres* and *La Dame de Malacca*, discussed in this chapter.

choice within this model and filters it through the lens of class analysis.¹⁶² Burch and Sellier's reading, while not incorrect, nevertheless overlooks the fact that *Maison's* triangle situates a woman's choice between men separated not only by age, but also by race. This fact alone merits attention, but Safia's biracial identity adds another layer of subversion that underscores for the spectator the contemporary social reality of miscegenation.

In France, the combined ideologies of eugenics and natalism produced a strain of colonialist thought that accepted and even encouraged miscegenation – within certain limits – as a means of strengthening and expanding the French population.¹⁶³ The Miss France d'Outre-Mer pageant that took place at the World's Fair in 1937, a key point in Elizabeth Ezra's book *The Colonial Unconscious*, offers a clear illustration of this idea. Young women born to French fathers and colonial mothers gathered to compete in a beauty pageant, which was also promoted as the "Best Colonial Marriage" contest. The fact that only young women of mixed race were put on display this way reinforces the gender hierarchy along with the racial one; as Ezra points out, "in a context that entails the viewing of the less powerful by the more powerful, the act of looking can only confirm the inequality of the relationship—that is, it can only be objectifying" (43-44).

Objectified on two counts, these young women were implicitly touted as potential partners for the Western men attending the fair. Their beauty marked their potential to contribute healthy offspring to Greater France, but eugenicists

¹⁶² Burch and Sellier locate Safia's struggles in her lower-to-upper class transition rather than in a mixed ethnic heritage. They also – rightly – observe that *Maison* manages to dodge the generic pigeonholing of the period. Still, in failing to apply the same nuanced attention to the film's characters and their national / racial backgrounds, they miss a significant point made in the film.

warned that this potential could only be realized in unions with French men. Racial mixing, then, was not to be compounded over generations through the *métisse's* selection of a non-European partner; in line with this directive, physician and eugenicist René Martial identifies a mixed-race woman's preference for a non-European partner as a sign of aberrant behavior, providing this illustration: "A Frenchman marries an Asian woman with whom he has a son and two daughters. The eldest daughter appears normal—but marries a Chinese man" (qtd. in Ezra 42). The daughter's "normal" appearance thus conceals an "abnormal" sexual attraction to a non-European. Martial's comment aptly summarizes the strict conditions that needed to be met in order for miscegenation to be "approved" by colonialist eugenics even as it further supports the idea that representations of second-generation miscegenation could lay claim to a certain cultural approbation.

At the time of the contest, *Pour Vous* openly wondered, "Miss France d'outre-mer fera-t-elle du cinéma ?"¹⁶⁴ The reporter describes the event where the eleven candidates were introduced to a very eager public; the room booked for the event turned out to be too small for the crowd who had arrived to watch. Also described are the contestants themselves (although the winner was not revealed before press time):

À l'heure où paraît notre revue, Miss France d'outre-mer est élue.

Mais j'ai l'impression que le jury [...] aura eu la tâche difficile...

Sur qui sera tombé le choix ? Sur Miss Pondichéry, aux beaux yeux

¹⁶³ See Camiscioli, who outlines some of the limits imposed on this practice, and Schneider, who emphasizes that this is a minority viewpoint (211-212).

¹⁶⁴ This question is the title of a short blurb in the "Ciné-Expo" column, author unknown. *Pour Vous* 454 (29 July 1937): 6.

de velours, sur Miss Tonkin, qui est très belle et représente admirablement sa race, sur Miss Annam, si jolie..., sur Miss Guyane, brune et ardente ? Et j'oublie Miss Martinique, Miss Sénégal, Miss Guadeloupe, Miss Laos, Miss Madagascar, et la plus jeune, dix-sept printemps : Miss Cochinchine...

Downplaying the women's European traits, the reporter praises instead their stereotyped, non-Western features, singling out their otherness as the very foundation of their beauty. And theirs was a kind of beauty that filmgoers would see periodically on screen. Although starring roles in 1930s exoticist films were usually played by French actresses in heavy makeup – e.g. Annabella in *La Bandera* and *La Bataille*¹⁶⁵ – ethnic women still found opportunities for work in supporting roles or as extras on set, with a rare leading role coming their way, as in *L'Occident* with Rama-Tahé as the Moroccan protagonist (discussed above). None of these actors were stars on the level of Annabella or, for that matter, Josephine Baker, but they were occasionally featured in cinéphile weeklies, which capitalized on their exotic backgrounds to give readers still another means of imagining exotic and faraway lands.¹⁶⁶ The young women's response to the reporter's question, then, could indeed have opened some doors into the film industry, and the reporter assures the readers of *Pour Vous* that none of the young women would turn down the chance to try her hand at screen acting.

¹⁶⁵ See Chapter 1 for more on *La Bandera*, Chapter 4 for *La Bataille*.

¹⁶⁶ Rama Tahé was featured in *Ciné-Miroir* 646 (20 Aug 1937): 550 to promote *Miarka, la fille à l'ourse* (Jean Choux 1938), and then in *Pour Vous* 484 (23 Feb 1938): 10 in conjunction with *L'Occident*. Tela Tchäï was – wrongly, it seems – identified as Moroccan in *Ciné-Miroir* 356 (21 Jan 1932): n.p. and she describes her gypsy background in *Pour Vous* 165 (14 Jan 1932): 14. Foun-Sen, more frequently working but less frequently featured in publicity press than Tahé and Tchäï, was included in a publicity shot for *Troïka sur la piste blanche* (Jean Dréville 1937) in *Ciné-Miroir* 634 (28 May 1937): 354.

Ultimately, a film like *Maison* shows that the French were more open than Americans to cinematic representations of miscegenation. Whereas Hollywood in the 1930s treated any kind of miscegenation as taboo,¹⁶⁷ in French films interracial unions meeting the aforementioned criteria could be tolerated and even condoned through the cultivation of spectator sympathy. The tug-of-war between two halves of a single identity shapes Safia's dilemma: choose Chervin and gain all the privilege that comes with a more complete French identity, or choose Mattéo and live in marginalized poverty in Tunisia. The contrast between rich whiteness and impoverished otherness could not be more explicit, and the dying Greta, foregoing sentimental appeals, lays out Safia's choices in these coldly practical terms. Still pining for Westphalia – and, by extension, her squandered Western status and identity – Greta urges Safia to leave Sfax with Chervin despite her love for Mattéo, an opportunistic decision that nonetheless coincides with the eugenicists' directive aimed at *métisses* faced with a similar choice. Moreover, within the narrative Chenal never condemns Safia for abandoning Mattéo, as Fescourt did (to a Bedoin Safia) in the silent adaptation, although both versions compound the racial divide between the two suitors by assigning each to a corresponding (yet not unrealistic) class status. In the end, though, Chenal's Safia finally recognizes her French identity as a foot in the door that could lead to a better future for her unborn daughter. The cost of this choice, paid by Mattéo in lost love and missed chances, underscores the heartbreak created by this pressure on Safia to make the “right” choice.

¹⁶⁷ Gina Marchetti points out that the restrictions on portrayals of miscegenation came not from the government, but from the Motion Picture Association of America (4). However, she goes on to illustrate how miscegenation nonetheless figured heavily in many interwar Hollywood pictures.

Nevertheless, Safia and Mattéo's child creates a layer of subversion in Chenal's story. Little Jacqueline seamlessly integrates into French society despite her (secret) status as the love child of a liaison between a French-Arab *métisse* and a non-Westerner. Her ability to "pass" as fully French indicates how circumstances – not biology or any "intrinsic" cultural inferiority – actually create the racial divide in French society. With a change of geography and a dose of romantic disillusionment, Mattéo manages to pull off a striking shift in personality, from wandering poet in Sfax to hardened gangster in Paris. His transformation that shows that one's roots can be successfully masked under felicitous conditions. Still, the tragic endings for Mattéo and Safia's friend Greta demonstrate that tragedy strikes hardest when one is far from "home." Only Safia, whose duality runs in her veins, effectively capitalizes on her opportunity to make the upwardly mobile transition from the racially tinged margins of the colonies to the hegemonic core of French society. *Maison* can thus be read as a success story for a *métisse* who follows the prescription for full cultural repatriation, although this success comes at a steep price for those unable to take advantage of the same path to acceptance.

"Une Occidentale tombée en plein harem turc": *L'Esclave blanche* (1939)

The setting of *L'Esclave blanche* situates the film squarely within the realm of non-colonial exoticist cinema; at the turn of the century, when the action takes place, the Ottoman Empire was neither colonized by Europeans nor considered a Western country.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, as the name rightly states, the Ottomans were

¹⁶⁸ The revolution led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk that founded the Turkish Republic in 1923 based the new government on Western principles, but the complications and hesitations provoked by

themselves colonizers, once occupying swaths of territory in North Africa that the French would claim as the Ottoman Empire staggered into its lengthy decline. Culturally, visiting Europeans braced themselves for a shock as they approached the Bosphorus despite the strong influence that the West exerted (and continues to exert) on certain aspects of Turkish culture. The marriage between a French woman and an Ottoman pasha therefore qualifies as a culturally mixed one, although racially, the perception of Turks as a distinctive race is significantly more difficult to ascertain. Physically, dark skin and features are assumed to distinguish Arabs from Europeans (although this is certainly not always the case) in addition to different habits of dress and adornment; however, Turks possess a more expansive range of physical attributes, and without the cultural signifiers embedded in their clothing, much of the population would be visually indistinguishable from Europeans. Still, in an age when religion, culture, and race were routinely conflated with hardly a second thought, it is no surprise that *Cinéma* summarized the film as a “conflit de races et de civilisations.”¹⁶⁹

Aware of the recent political and cultural transformation that Turkey had undergone after the First World War, the film’s publicity writers make it clear that the Ottoman Empire and not the new republic serves as the story’s backdrop. While little attention is paid to specific reforms enacted by Atatürk

modern-day Turkey’s candidature for full European Union membership reveal that general uneasiness with Turkish claims to Western identity has continued to the present day.

¹⁶⁹ This phrase appeared as part of a caption accompanying a photo of Viviane Romance in her fin-de-siècle wardrobe, describing her character in *L’Esclave blanche* as a “victime d’un conflit de races et de civilisations.” The “conflit de races” – this time without the religion – is repeated in the article about the film on the opposite page. The spread was part of a pre-release publicity push included in the expanded holiday issue: *Cinéma* 529 (7 Dec 1938): 112-3.

during the republic's formative years, nostalgia for what had been lost in this process creeps into the discourse:

On sait que Kemal Atatürk [*sic*], qui vient de mourir, avait émancipé la femme turque et supprimé les harems. Si la dignité, si l'humanité y gagnent, le pittoresque y perd... Plus de femmes voilées en Turquie, plus d'yeux brillant derrière le moucharabieh, plus d'intrigues mystérieuses, où l'attrait de l'inconnu décuplait le désir... Mais aussi, moins de déceptions, sans doute, car le haïk de soie ne défendait pas toujours des traits d'une pureté parfaite...¹⁷⁰

The times may indeed have changed, but misogyny endures.¹⁷¹

The film also takes care to emphasize that the story it tells has no basis on firsthand witness. A caveat appended to the opening credit sequence adds this disclaimer: "Ce film ne veut être en aucune manière une reconstitution historique. Aussi ne doit-on voir ici que des personnages imaginaires et de pure fantaisie" – a message intended, no doubt, to placate the republican Turks. In fact, several articles about the film printed before the film's release refer to the sultan character by the actual name of the Ottoman sultan in power at the turn of the century, Abdülhamid II, instead of the fictional Süleyman.¹⁷² Still, in a side-

¹⁷⁰ Wild, René. "Un illustre chômeur ! L'authentique Grand-Eunuque du Sultan Abdul Hamid a trouvé momentanément un emploi : conseiller technique pour *L'Esclave blanche*." *Cinémonde* 529 (7 Dec 1938): 113.

¹⁷¹ The penultimate paragraph of the same *Cinémonde* piece deftly combines misogyny and religious bigotry:

Je suis un peu inquiet pour ceux qui l'auront tourné: à force de vivre dans les harems à longueur de journée, les techniciens du film, opérateurs, metteur en scène et superviseur, peut-être même, qui sait? le photographe lui-même, ne vont-ils pas se convertir officiellement à l'islamisme pour avoir, selon Mahomet, un sérail particulier?

¹⁷² *Ciné-Miroir* refers to the actual sultan as Abdul Amid (issue 716); *Cinémonde* spells the same name alternately as Abdul Hamid and Abdul-Hamid, referring once to the actual sultan and once more to Dario's character in the film (issue 529). The alternate French spelling of the character's name is Soliman.

by-side comparison it is impossible to overlook even the physical resemblance between Sultan Abdülhamid II and the costumed Dalio, who was outfitted with a full beard for the role.

The pre-release buildup for *L'Esclave blanche* also includes details about visual flourishes that conjure the lost era of covered, secluded women and their life of leisure in a wealthy pasha's *sérail*. Such effects depend heavily on the décor and the period costumes, including Viviane Romance's fashionable Parisian wardrobe. The only pre-release coverage found in *Ciné-Miroir* spends roughly a third of its (rather short) length devoted to Romance's wardrobe.¹⁷³ Costuming is also the near-exclusive focus of a *Pour Vous* piece published in November 1938, which fills nearly all of the allotted column inches by detailing the myriad colors, fabrics, and accessories worn on the set by stars and extras alike.¹⁷⁴

In a revelation likely designed to validate both the film's authenticity of presentation and its setting in the not-too-distant past, a pre-release article published in *Cinémonde's* 1938 holiday issue leads with the headline: "Un illustre chômeur ! L'authentique Grand-Eunuque du Sultan Abdul Hamid a trouvé momentanément un emploi: conseiller technique pour *L'Esclave blanche*." Although the content of the article says little about the specific information and advice that the titular eunuch managed to impart to the cast, the author's ample embellishment ventures into the absurd:

Il [l'eunuque] enseigna à John Lodge l'importance du fez dans l'existence du Turc d'autrefois. Le fez, coiffure rituelle et sacrée, ne

¹⁷³ Clerval, Janine. "Viviane Romance, '*L'esclave blanche*.'" *Ciné-Miroir* 716 (23 Dec 1938): 816.

devait en aucune circonstance quitter la tête du Turc, sauf pendant le sommeil. Mais qu'il s'agit de travailler, de manger ou de faire la cour à ses femmes, le fez en tête était de rigueur. On mesure combien, en certaines circonstances, ce couvre-chef instable pouvait être embarrassant et l'on s'étonne que le Prophète Mahomet n'ait pas, au bout de quelques dizaines de générations, accordé à ses fidèles du sexe masculin le précieux privilège de naître tout coiffés... coiffés du fez, naturellement. Voilà qui eût, en outre, singulièrement affermi les théories darwiniennes sur l'évolution des espèces.

Leaving aside such misinformed treatises on evolutionary theory, the piece also describes the eunuch as

un personnage distingué, affable et plein de bonnes manières, vêtu à l'européenne, d'ailleurs, et surmonté d'un chapeau melon. Rien ainsi ne le distinguait du commun des mortels; chacun l'écouta avec respect, et les dames, Viviane Romance la première, lui prodiguèrent leur plus gracieux sourire. Lui, très galant, avait un mot aimable pour chacune. On le devinait admirateur sincère et désintéressé d'un sexe qu'il connaissait fort bien pour l'avoir beaucoup fréquenté jadis, on sentait en lui le connaisseur, l'artiste qui apprécie sans aucune arrière-pensée les chefs-d'œuvre de la nature...¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Doringe. "Constantinople à Joinville... où l'on tourne *L'Esclave blanche*." *Pour Vous* 524 (30 Nov 1938): 11.

¹⁷⁵ Wild, René. "Un illustre chômeur ! L'authentique Grand-Eunuque du Sultan Abdul Hamid a trouvé momentanément un emploi : conseiller technique pour *L'Esclave blanche*." *Cinéma* 529 (7 Dec 1938): 113.

Visually, the eunuch looked no different from a typical European. The only characteristic that sets him apart, of course, relates to his status as a neutered man, a man whose knowledge of women makes him an “admirer” and even a “connoisseur,” but whose physical deficiency bars him from the realm of carnal knowledge.

Likewise, this lack of visible markers of difference between (modern) Turks and contemporary Europeans creates an imperative for the filmmakers to emphasize the cultural gulf separating East from West. This rift appears wider in *L'Esclave blanche* than it does in many other exoticist films; indeed, it forms the crux of the plot. The central couple – Mireille, a former operetta singer from Paris, and Vedat, an Ottoman official originally sent to Paris on a kind of cultural reconnaissance mission – has already married when the story begins, thereby eliminating the pursuit of love as the narrative's driving force. Instead, what creates conflict in *L'Esclave blanche* is Mireille's struggle to stay married to Vedat in the face of mounting obstacles thrown in her path by his family, his culture, and even his boss, the sultan.

Directed by G. W. Pabst's protégé and erstwhile assistant Marc Sorkin – under the “supervision” of Pabst himself¹⁷⁶ – the film features a star-studded cast, including Viviane Romance (at the pinnacle of her popularity) and Dalio, here in the supporting role of the Ottoman sultan. The American actor John Lodge plays Vedat, and recognizable character actors like Mila Parély and Louise Carletti as well as *excentriques* like Saturnin Fabre and Sylvie also figure in the cast. Like *La Maison du Maltais*, whose release predated *L'Esclave blanche* by roughly six

months, Sorkin's film is a much-revised remake of a silent film whose reinterpretations speak volumes about the filmmakers' intentions. Its predecessor, released in 1927, was a Franco-German coproduction directed by the Italian Augusto Genina. Apparently lost, Pierre Boulanger states in his summary that Genina's film was set in colonial North Africa and involved an English (not a French) woman who finds herself trapped in a polygamous marriage, adding that North Africans considered the film scandalous enough to ban it (63). The silent film's tone thus appears to stay well within the realm of colonial drama, with serious consequences befalling anyone who gets caught in the inexorable pull of an exotic desert existence.

In contrast, a quote attributed to Romance and published in *Ciné-Miroir* underscores the spirit of Sorkin's remake: "*L'Esclave blanche* traite sans effets dramatiques, plutôt avec ironie, la mésaventure d'une Occidentale tombée en plein harem turc." The same piece also quotes Pabst, who describes the film as "l'histoire du triangle légal, vue sur un plan humoristique." He also claims that the film was originally intended to be "une évocation de l'évolution féminine en Turquie," but fear of censorship – a problem he had recently encountered with *Le Drame de Shanghai* (1938) – pushed the filmmakers to adjust their course (or at least, it seems, their tone).¹⁷⁷ Whatever the filmmakers' intentions for *L'Esclave blanche*, audiences lined up at the box office in significant numbers; with 449,000 documentable entries, the film ranks among the top ten box office successes in 1930s exoticist cinema (Crisp *Genre* 279-337).¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Also worth noting in the production credits is that a young Jacqueline Audry, credited as Mlle J. Haudry, worked as an assistant director on *L'Esclave blanche*. The same year she also assisted Pabst for his film *Jeunes filles en détresse*.

¹⁷⁷ Clerval, Janine. "Viviane Romance, '*L'esclave blanche*.'" *Ciné-Miroir* 716 (23 Dec 1938): 816.

¹⁷⁸ See Table 2 in the Introduction for a list of the top exoticist box-office draws for the decade.

Echoing Pabst's point about the humor in the film, Burch and Sellier's brief analysis of *L'Esclave blanche* focuses on the irony and critique of gender relations in the film, identifying it as

un des rares films de l'époque à s'attaquer directement à l'ordre patriarcal privé. Le film procède à la manière des *Lettres Persanes*, les mœurs critiquées étant ostensiblement celles de l'Islam. Mais il est difficile d'imaginer que les femmes les plus conscientes qui ont vu ce film en 1939 se soient méprises sur la cible bien française de la satire.
(52-53)

Although the satire may indeed have been of purely French extraction (after all, had the satire been rooted in "authentic" Turkish culture, French spectators would have been unlikely to comprehend its intent), removing a film like *L'Esclave blanche* from its contemporary context of exoticist cinema disavows the potential for a more richly developed reading. Moreover, Burch and Sellier do not clarify which aspects of the film operate on this subversive level; while there are certainly some scattered moments of female triumph over male hegemony, the film falls far short of a latter-day, Franco-Turkish *Lysistrata*.

Indeed, beyond the gender issue, at the heart of *L'Esclave blanche* lies the problem of power, since authority figures of all kinds run into serious trouble. During the opening sequence, set on the train carrying the newlyweds to Istanbul,¹⁷⁹ policemen make their rounds to check papers for the border crossing. In the crowded coach car, passengers make clear attempts at trickery or employ petty annoyance tactics when handing over their documents. One man feigns

¹⁷⁹ The city is referred to as Constantinople throughout, but I have opted here and throughout this discussion to preserve the Turkish name for the city.

sleep (only to be kicked awake); another takes out his violin and begins to play a mournful tune. In yet another trick, a man dunks his passport in a bowl of liquid, then slips it underneath the baby he holds in his lap. When he hands it to the officer, he apologizes for the mess but allows the policeman to conclude for himself what really soiled the document – and he drops it without a close inspection. It is unclear whether such stratagems are designed to cover something up or simply to make the policemen's job more difficult, but general animosity towards the police becomes clear when Vedat points out some issues – namely, their openness to bribery and their propensity for brutality – that he would like to see reformed. But the chief of police wants to ferret out the revolutionaries he correctly believes to be aboard, and one such revolutionary, a man named Murat, finds his way into the couple's cabin while Mireille is alone. Vedat returns to find him there, and Mireille insists that they help him evade capture. Reluctantly, he consents, and before Murat slips away he assures Mireille that she has a friend in Istanbul should she ever need one.

After this initial victory, however, Mireille starts to feel more and more defeated in her new surroundings. Her mother-in-law makes no secret of her disapproval of Vedat's foreign bride, a choice that she fears will diminish his standing at court. Her remedy for this problem is an arranged marriage between Vedat's teenage sister Sheyla and Cemal Bey (Saturnin Fabre), a powerful pasha in the sultan's entourage. Vedat disapproves, but Mireille reacts to the news with vehement disgust. She tries talking to Sheyla in private, but the bride-to-be claims to have no ill feelings about the match. Mireille asks insistently whether she would rather be the only wife of a young pasha or the fourth wife of an old man, but rather than answer the question, Sheyla dismisses Mireille as naïve.

The engagement settled, Cemal obtains an audience with the sultan for Vedat. Just before their meeting, Cemal makes a rapturous ode to the sultan – the world’s most powerful monarch, “l’orgueil de la race musulmane” – but his visual introduction accentuates extreme paranoia rather than power. The camera follows Vedat in deep focus as he crosses the palatial foyers, but when he enters the office, he finds a confusing, labyrinthine space with folding screens arranged around a desk. The sultan’s voice commands Vedat to approach him from behind one of the screens. Unsure where to go, Vedat tries to follow the voice as he begins his formal greeting, bowing and gesticulating towards one of the screens. Meanwhile, the sultan, a hunched and wary-looking man who carries a fluffy white lap dog, ducks behind several screens as he sizes up his visitor. Approaching him from behind, the sultan cuts short Vedat’s formalities and asks him to get to the point. The sultan says he is aware of the corruption in his midst and the routine thievery that decimates the royal treasury, even naming Cemal as one of the most serious offenders.

Still, his first question to Vedat makes clear his real preoccupation:

Sultan: Que pense-t-on de la Turquie dans les contrées d’où tu viens?

Vedat: Que c’est un pays en retard de deux ou trois siècles où règne la corruption la plus éhonté.

Sultan: [Unmoved.] Dis tes désirs.

Vedat: Je voudrais vous aider à faire de votre merveilleux empire un pays propre, et il me semble que nous pourrions commencer par introduire ici l’instruction publique, l’hygiène, et l’électricité dont bénéficient les peuples que je viens d’étudier. [...] Toutes ces

réformes ne serviront à rien, Votre Grandeur, si vous ne réagissez pas contre les fonctionnaires qui vous volent sans arrêt et qui sont aussi nuisibles que les chiens qui rodent à Constantinople.

Taking the comment literally, the sultan caresses his lap dog and tells Vedat that “les chiens sont sacrés ici” – but declares an interest in Vedat’s plans for social and governmental restructuring. He puts Vedat in charge of auditing the officials at court, and the numbers they confess to stealing are staggering even to the sultan. For obvious reasons, then, Vedat fails to leave a positive first impression with the pashas; nevertheless, they accept Vedat’s invitation to a reception celebrating his return to the court.

The night of the reception, Mireille enthusiastically prepares her toilette for what she assumes will be a night of hostess duties and a chance to confront Cemal directly about his engagement to Sheyla. Vedat comes to see her and describes his successful meeting with the sultan, but Mireille is too preoccupied with Sheyla’s situation to indulge him. Vedat assures her that the matter of Sheyla’s marriage has yet to be settled for good, adding that the affair might yet be brought to a fortuitous conclusion. Mireille expresses some skepticism about his methods, then pulls out an evening gown, a luxurious number replete with feathers and a revealing cut. Vedat compliments her on the dress, but gently adds that the reception is open only to men.

Mireille feigns acceptance of this banishment, but once Vedat leaves, she prepares to forge ahead with her plan. Sheyla tries to dissuade her, but Mireille shows even more enthusiasm and determination than before. Mireille enters the dining room just as the men are about to be seated. With the other pashas visibly scandalized, Vedat tries tactfully to persuade Mireille to back down and return to

the women's quarters. Undeterred, in a witty exchange she tells Cemal not to marry Sheyla – and, after speaking her peace, she leaves. After the dinner, an agitated Vedat confronts her but soon forgives her indiscretion. Word about the incident travels quickly, even leaking into Cemal's household, where his wives are brazen enough even to tease him about it in person. Cemal vows to his wives that Mireille will pay for her insolence, but his angry response only makes them laugh all the more.

Mireille's defiance and its aftermath provide some evidence in support of Burch and Sellier's reading of the film as anti-patriarchal. Still, even when women show complete disregard for the men who supposedly control them – in this case, Cemal's wives poking fun at their husband – only the foreigner takes on this battle in public. Aside from the notable exception of the revolutionary enclave (which Mireille soon discovers), Turkish women seem willing to profit from the existing system whenever and however they can instead of actively trying to change it; Cemal's wives laugh at their husband's public humiliation (at the hands of a foreign woman), but Sheyla never opposes her arranged marriage, seeing it instead as a means to gain status and security. The feminist dynamic thus depends entirely on Mireille, an outsider to the society and unschooled in its intricacies. Moreover, the Turkish women view Mireille as an intriguing outsider at best, or at worst as an ignorant rabble-rouser. Her dinner intrusion shows that she also relies to some extent on Vedat's complicity in her efforts to change the surrounding culture. Vedat's tacit refusal to use any means necessary to remove her from the dining room – a reaction that his companions plainly expect from him – underscores his sympathy for Mireille's point of view and justifies his swift forgiveness. After all, they share a common concern:

forestalling or preventing Sheyla's marriage to Cemal. As a woman and a foreigner, and therefore permanently removed from the inner workings of Ottoman society, Mireille can only push for change from the outside; on the other hand, as a Turkish man, Vedat concentrates his efforts on effecting change from within the system.

Yet it is Vedat's commitment to this system that puts the couple's future on the line. Cemal's plots his revenge first by revealing to the sultan that Vedat is married to a French woman and insinuating that all of his ideas for reform are really hers. He suggests that the sultan send one of his wives, Tarkine, to infiltrate the household by forcing Vedat to take her as his second wife, and the sultan agrees to the setup. Cemal himself delivers Tarkine and the marriage papers to Vedat, who demands to see the sultan at once, but Cemal denies him an immediate meeting. Mireille arrives, and Vedat explains that Tarkine is now his second wife by decree. Mireille laughs in disbelief at first, but reality hits when Vedat's mother and Sheyla both plead with her to accept Tarkine for the sake of the family and to preserve Vedat's position at court. Fuming, but powerless to refuse, Mireille agrees to overlook her "*préjugés européens*" in order to keep the peace. Vedat, for his part, swears that nothing will change between them and that this new marriage will never be consummated.

Mireille and Tarkine put on a good face for the servants, but privately, Mireille makes no secret of her resentment. However, as time passes, Vedat reproaches Mireille for treating Tarkine with such disdain. Overriding Mireille's protests, he invites Tarkine to share their table during mealtime, a gesture that so enrages Mireille that she storms out of the room. Left alone together, Tarkine confesses to Vedat that she was sent to spy on him. She claims that her reports

confirm his loyalty to the sultan and affirm that the marriage has indeed been legitimized – with a clear sexual implication. This false affirmation works as her seduction line, and by the time Mireille returns she finds them lounging intimately together with Vedat declaring that she and Tarkine are now equally his wives in every way. Mireille bids him adieu, veils herself, and slips out of the house alone.

With nowhere else to go, Mireille goes to find Murat and enlist the help of his revolutionary group. But palace spies have followed her from Vedat's house, so Cemal soon discovers her escape and prepares to raid the revolutionaries' hideout. The police arrive and arrest Mireille, now formally accused of plotting against the sultan, but Murat and his associates manage to make a clean getaway.

Back at the palace, the sultan's paranoia reaches its apex when he hears loud hammering outside his office. He nervously ventures out to investigate, bringing his revolver for protection. He sees two workmen fiddling with some electric wires, and finally a light bulb blinks on. Frightened, the sultan aims his gun and fires... at the light bulb, which shatters and plunges them all into darkness. At this moment, Cemal finds the sultan and assures him that the electrification was planned according to Vedat's recommendation, to which the sultan replies that all of Vedat's reforms were only a cover for a conspiracy against him. Cemal then tells him that Mireille has been arrested, and the sultan summons her to his office.

Called before the sultan, as Mireille enters she derisively mimics the same formal gestures that Vedat made during his earlier meeting. The sultan accuses her of inciting treason, which she denies, and as she approaches him a plaintive yelp alerts her to the lap dog underfoot. The sultan rushes to comfort his pet,

calling it a “beau chien,” but Mireille declares that the dog is a mutt, proclaiming, “Je connais bien cette race.” With this, the sultan unceremoniously dumps the dog onto the floor, then sizes up Mireille with newfound respect. Only Vedat, he says, has ever spoken to him with the same frankness, to which Mireille replies that her husband held the sultan in high enough esteem to sacrifice their marriage for the “gift” wife. Mireille declares her intention to leave and says that she cannot bear to see Vedat cheat on her, and the sultan laughs before he retorts:

Alors, tu penses que nos mœurs sont différentes de celles des autres peuples. C’est vrai que dans ton pays on n’épouse qu’une femme à la fois, mais plusieurs successivement. Tu crois que c’est mieux? Tu crois que l’on nous est supérieure? Tu te moques de moi, tu te moques de mon peuple, tu nommes ridicules nos mœurs, nos coutumes, tu cherches à pourrir Vedat, à en faire un européen, ou bien plus un traître!

Mireille admits that she encouraged Vedat to leave behind his traditions, but she realizes that she has lost in this struggle. The sultan agrees to let her leave the country as long as she never sees or contacts Vedat again. He orders Cemal to accompany her to the train station, and he gives her the dog as a parting gift.

In the above dialogue, the sultan’s overt comparison between Turks and Frenchmen – easily read as East versus West – marks a certain ambiguity in the filmmaker’s critique. With a focus on similarities rather than differences between the two cultures, this dialogue raises a legitimate question with regard to assumptions of cultural superiority in the West. Although Mireille makes no claim to any moral high ground in stating her preference for a monogamous marriage, the sultan points out that serial monogamy *à l’occidentale* and the open

polygamy practiced in his empire are each designed to scratch the same male itch. Implicit in this declaration is the idea that each proposition would disallow women from the lifelong, monogamous love that Mireille imagines; it also rests on the assumption that love is by necessity a woman's foremost preoccupation in life, an idea that, to put it mildly, hardly resembles a feminist point of view.

Taking his invective further, the sultan conflates Mireille's desire for a Western marriage to Vedat with a more complete cultural transformation. Informed by Vedat's established support for education, electricity, and other services already considered essential in the West, the sultan begins to see both Western marriage and improved infrastructure as a serious threat to the status quo.

Awaiting an audience with the sultan, Vedat catches a glimpse of Mireille in the hallway. When she refuses to respond to his calls, he runs after her. More dejected than angry, the sultan declares, "*Il trahit son sultan pour sa femme. Il trahit la Turquie pour une étrangère,*" and orders that both of them be captured. Vedat catches up with Mireille at the train station, and he tells her that he has left Tarkine and that he was wrong "*de ne pas lutter davantage contre nos traditions.*" He offers to leave with her, but Mireille refuses. However, after accompanying Mireille to the train, Vedat runs into Murat, who tells him that the sultan has sent the police after them both. The men retrieve Mireille from the train, and Murat obtains passage on a fishing boat that will carry them to safety. Without another word between them, Mireille and Vedat embrace on the boat, and the film fades out over an image of the tiny vessel sailing across the water.

Burch and Sellier find this happy ending blatantly unconvincing, and the couple's tidy (and nearly wordless) reconciliation certainly appears at first glance like little more than a narrative afterthought. However, historical details as well

as the narrative setup justify keeping Vedat and Mireille together in exile. First, both Vedat and Mireille wind up as victims of an ineffectual and mistrustful monarch whose personal demons prevent him from using the benefits of modernity to his advantage – that is, by extending them to his people. Since exoticist films frequently use infrastructural improvement as evidence of Western influence in both colonial and non-colonial settings,¹⁸⁰ this may explain the sultan's reticence to go along with imported ideals of progress – even if those ideals have a strong advocate in his own court. The sultan sees Vedat's cultural hybridity as reason enough to suspect him of ill will and even treason in spite of his Ottoman pedigree and his good intentions. As for Mireille, doomed from the outset as a foreigner and a (particularly feisty) woman, her status as a double outsider labels her a *prima facie* threat to Ottoman Turkish culture. That these two threats happen to be married to one another leads the sultan to interpret the turmoil linked to their ideas as a conspiracy against him.

At the time of the film's release, however, Vedat and the revolutionaries' very real counterparts had long since won the battle to reimagine their country, transforming the shambles of the Ottoman Empire into a modern republic where Western influence and Muslim faith were not automatically assumed to be contradictory. That Vedat survives the ordeal – whereas his North African predecessor in the silent version apparently did not – and chooses to follow his Western wife into exile underscores the filmmakers' acknowledgment that post-Ottoman Turkey eventually *did* open up to outside forces of modernization. In

¹⁸⁰ The relationship between infrastructure and Western influence is discussed in Part Three and can also be seen in *La Bandera*, discussed in Chapter 1.

L'Esclave blanche, Vedat may have lost this fictional battle with the forces of cultural conservatism, but his brand of reformations literally won the war.

Redefining Exoticist Romance

Examining a broad swath of exoticist cinema from the 1930s throws into relief several faulty conclusions drawn from narrower studies of colonial cinema during this period. Interracial and intercultural couples whose breakups previous critics have often considered to be a foregone conclusion, in fact, are *not* systematically plagued by separation and failure. When these couples do split, their methods and motivations for doing so vary considerably, and in most cases, race alone fails to account for the rupture. The exceptional couples whose love – or some evidence thereof, like Jacqueline in *La Maison du Maltais* – survives through the film's conclusion reach this milestone thanks in large part to a combination of racial or cultural *métissage* and the female character's willingness to stand up to social conventions in order to lay claim to her own chance at happiness. In *La Dame de Malacca* Audrey defies public scandal, divorces her English husband and remarries the sultan; in *La Maison du Maltais*, Safia's decision to sacrifice Mattéo's love for the sake of their child pushes Mattéo to suicide but succeeds in giving their daughter the life they had dreamed of; finally, in *L'Esclave blanche* Mireille's active resistance against a petty and oppressive culture casts her and her culturally hybridized husband into exile together, their love finally victorious in the conflict of races and civilizations that the film's publicity engine promised.

Not coincidentally, all three of these films can be classified as melodramas,¹⁸¹ featuring strong and intriguing female protagonists whose concerns – love, family, self-discovery, and domesticity – are assumed to be appealing to female spectators. In contrast, male-driven adventure and military films tend to marginalize women whether or not they have any European heritage; these are the films where drama almost invariably gives way to death or some other such fatal separation of erstwhile lovers. Still, even in these cases, pressure on the couple tends to come from outside rather than inside, as several of the next chapter's films will illustrate.

¹⁸¹ For studies of melodrama in the 1930s, see Vincendeau, "Melodramatic Realism"; for specifically exoticist examples, see also Woodhull, "Vernacular Modernism" (also referenced in Chapter 5). For a general discussion of melodrama as a genre and the importance of stardom in its construction, see Gledhill, "Signs of Melodrama."

PART THREE: FRANCE IMAGINES THE FAR EAST

CHAPTER FIVE

Shanghai Fantasies and the Geishas of Joinville

In addition to Africa, home to the most popular settings for French exoticist fantasies of the 1930s, Asia offers an alternative vision of otherness whose ties to Europe can be accentuated or elided depending on the demands of the narrative. Recurring character types like rogue *colons*,¹⁸² criminals and fallen women or *milieux* like seedy nightclubs and opulent living quarters take on a distinctive Far Eastern flavor, with some adjustments to the narrative in order to better adhere to sociopolitical or geographical logic. For instance, European military men in Asia are not legionnaires trying (and failing) to subdue *les salopards*, but instead are portrayed as career sailors sent on glamorous missions or living it up while on shore leave. Crowd scenes are no longer linked to the North African *souk*, but take on the form of stereotypically teeming Asian populations, an image that solidifies into recognizable shorthand for Westerners' fictionalized experience of the Far East.

Other tropes that critics implicitly considered indistinguishable from exoticism, like the Foreign Legion, are revealed by their absence in Asia to be as inextricable from a North African setting as the Sahara itself. While African colonial films might allude to larger movements in global politics, particularly colonial issues,¹⁸³ in East Asian settings, socially volatile events such as citizen

¹⁸² For a discussion of the components of the rogue *colon* figure, see Chapter 2. Although Asian settings in French films do not overlap with French colonial territory, the term and its definition can still apply, particularly to Shanghai (discussed below).

¹⁸³ To name two examples, *Les Hommes nouveaux* (L'Herbier 1936) makes explicit reference to Lyautey and his efforts to bring Morocco under French rule, while *Brazza, ou l'Épopée du Congo*

uprisings and international conflicts intertwine with the narrative in ways that have only an indirect implication for the French spectator. Unlike the noteworthy collection of North African films shot on location in Morocco or Algeria,¹⁸⁴ Far Eastern land- and cityscapes were nearly always recreated in French studios, since no pioneer assumed the role of a Far Eastern Jacques Feyder, whose infamous decision a decade earlier to film *L'Atlantide* almost entirely in North Africa made shooting in the colonial desert a routine rite of passage for other directors throughout the interwar period.

This repeated use of actual North African landscapes to represent a North African setting points to one reason why Asia has been heretofore overlooked in French film scholarship: the conspicuous absence of French Indochina in the Franco-Asian filmography. It is unclear why the same site that inspired the reproduction of Angkor Wat, the crown jewel of the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris, never stirred filmmakers to make it a destination for their cinematic pilgrimages. This omission is all the more surprising given the fact that the Asian colonies accrued strong and sustained interest from non-filmic purveyors of the popular exotic imaginary in interwar France, as Panivong Norindr illustrates with ample evidence.¹⁸⁵ Although G. W. Pabst filmed some of his crowd scenes on location in Cochinchina during filming for *Le Drame de Shanghai*,

(Poirier 1939) fictionalizes the very real race between European colonial powers to stake their claim on sub-Saharan African territories. In each of these dramatized struggles, it is clear to the spectators which side France is on.

¹⁸⁴ According to Bataille and Veillot these films include *La Bandera* (Duvivier 1936, discussed in Chapter 1), *Tartarin de Tarascon* (Bernard 1934, discussed below), *El Guelmouna, marchand de sable* (Hugon 1931, discussed in Chapter 2), and *Le Grand jeu* (Feyder 1934, discussed in Part One), along with many more.

¹⁸⁵ See Norindr's *Phantasmic Indochina* for a full discussion of the implications of the Indochinese segment of the exposition as well as the role of the tourism industry and other popular media in constructing a specific colonial imaginary related to Indochina.

¹⁸⁶ as the title indicates, the film is set in Shanghai and not the French colony. Instead of representing itself on screen, then, Indochina could and did serve as a stand-in for other, less accessible locales in the region. Although an investigation of the contributing factors to this curious absence is beyond the scope of this project, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the category of *cinéma colonial* would have been much more difficult to equate so completely with North African settings had French colonial territory in Asia been granted equal representation in interwar exoticist cinema.¹⁸⁷

North Africa's relative proximity to France and the fairly common occurrence of on-location shooting there never created especially accurate depictions of North African life; likewise, portrayals of Asia were marked by a chronic reliance on clichés and fantasy. But some individuals with personal connections to East Asia attempted to expose the cracks in the proffered exoticist façade. One such critic was Titaïna, the *nom de plume* of French filmmaker and journalist Elisabeth Sauvy,¹⁸⁸ who used her extensive firsthand experience in the Far East and her platform as a contributor to *Pour Vous* to report on her observations of the film industry in China¹⁸⁹ and to lambast French fiction films set in the Far East.¹⁹⁰ Other feature writers, including *Pour Vous*'s (generally

¹⁸⁶ Francia-Rohl. "Paris-Cholon-Paris: Les Impressions de G.-W. [sic] Pabst." *Pour Vous* 491 (13 Apr 1938): 9.

¹⁸⁷ A handful of interwar French films are set in sub-Saharan Africa, including *Brazza, ou l'Épopée du Congo* (Poirier 1939) and *Le Messager* (Rouleau 1937, discussed in Chapter 1), and these films also tend to be given a cursory nod or left unmentioned in studies purporting to address *cinéma colonial*.

¹⁸⁸ Even though Titaïna may have taken umbrage at the fictional representation of exotic locales, historian Michael B. Miller points out that she herself "built a career out of drummed-up experiences and voyeuristic forays in search of sensations [...that] she peddled in newspapers, magazines, and books" (337).

¹⁸⁹ "La propagande mondiale du cinéma américain : Une journaliste française en Chine observe, s'étonne...et nous raconte." *Pour Vous* 159 (3 Dec 1931): 8-9. Hereafter, "Propagande mondiale."

¹⁹⁰ "Chine et Japon au cinéma." *Pour Vous* 460 (9 Sept 1937): 8-9, 14. Hereafter, "Chine et Japon."

cranky¹⁹¹) Lucienne Escoube, offer less consistent commentary regarding the cinema's vision(s) of East Asia. For instance, Escoube laments the "fausseté et puérilité niaise" of the typical Far East fiction film before lamely retreating into vague stereotypes, concluding that despite subpar efforts thus far, Asia still offers filmmakers the chance to capture "l'Aventure Eternelle."¹⁹² Robert Florey, also with *Pour Vous*, seems to have specialized in Far Eastern cinema, with at least two contributions focused on Japan during the decade.¹⁹³ But thanks to her experience as a traveler and as a filmmaker, Titaïna avoids both the hollow complaints in Escoube's editorial and the peppy reportage in Florey's focus on production. Instead, she infuses her writing with trenchant critiques of the French film industry, particularly its dual failure to penetrate the foreign market to its advantage¹⁹⁴ and to recreate foreign settings that are both accurate and appealing to a Western audience.¹⁹⁵

In a nod to the historical development of the medium, Titaïna traces the exoticist film's propensity for invention to narrative cinema's theatrical roots:

S'adressant au public, flattant ses goûts, le théâtre a de tout temps respecté la convention du spectacle. Marchant sur ses traces, le cinéma, aujourd'hui, donne aux spectateurs l'image de pays qui

¹⁹¹ It was Escoube who denounced the prevalence of Russian settings and source material in French fiction cinema as discussed in Chapter 1.

¹⁹² "Aventures en Extrême Orient." *Pour Vous* 282 (12 April 1934): 11.

¹⁹³ For example, Florey reports on production habits in Japanese studios and predicts a coming vogue for Japanese films in Europe in *Pour Vous* 295 (12 July 1934): 4-5. Florey also discusses which French celebrities are popular in Japan (Gabin apparently transcends national and cultural boundaries) before focusing once more on local film production in "Les Grands Reportages de *Pour Vous*: Japon 37," *Pour Vous* 462 (23 Sept 1937): 3-5.

¹⁹⁴ "Propagande mondiale."

¹⁹⁵ "Chine et Japon."

n'existent pas, mais qui ressemblent à l'idée qu'ils se font de ces pays.¹⁹⁶

By her assessment, then, exoticist cinema is not and even *cannot* be popularly judged by its accuracy compared to objectively verifiable experience. Instead, right or wrong, the public weighs the film's fidelity to the clichés and stereotypes that paint a false portrait of the region on screen, notions that take on the weight of cinematic conventions. Although Titaïna recognizes that this flaw is inherent to the exoticist genre, instead of calling for an overhaul that would "correct" these misperceptions, she respects the ubiquity and the inevitability of such conventions. She even acknowledges that the pervasiveness of exoticist cinema's imagined conventions might be the very root of its staying power: "De même que la comédie italienne a vécu pendant des siècles sur des personnages de convention, que le théâtre lui-même est difficilement sorti du triangle adultérin, le cinéma a créé un poncif de l'exotisme et du voyage." By necessity, then, even more than by conscious choice, this approach disregards realistic representation of the Far East as a viable goal for exoticist film. Instead, spectators create a rubric to assess how well each film deploys the tropes and figures common to Western productions set in the Far East.

Titaïna's major target is Hollywood exoticism, including *The Cheat*, whose French remake was in production at the time of her writing (though apparently unbeknownst to the author).¹⁹⁷ For each film, she divides her critical attention between the product – i.e. the film itself – and its larger premise, that is, the notion of the West filming this particular aspect of the East. Almost invariably

¹⁹⁶ "Chine et Japon."

(an adaptation of Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* emerges largely unscathed), she skewers each film on both counts, thereby destabilizing the Western cinematic perspective on the East more effectively than she might have done with a blanket call for more "realistic" representations of the exotic in fiction films. Her astute critiques do not target French productions with the same vitriol she reserves for Hollywood, although for a publication like *Pour Vous*, aiming such stinging criticism would have been considered antithetical to the manufactured exuberance of the surrounding puff pieces that were designed to promote some of the same home-grown films she lambasts in her essay.

Such trenchant contemporary observations aside, with the benefit of retrospective contextualization, it becomes clear that French cinema of the 1930s offers myriad perspectives on East Asia. These films connect a variety of genres to specific geographies, with settings ranging from Mongolia to Malacca and including repeated glimpses of Shanghai and Japan. Cast in these films were several character actors of Asian descent, of whom Inkijinoff and Foun-Sen were the best known. Their roles ranged from minor to major, and they made frequent rounds from set to set along with the other so-called "excentriques" of the era.¹⁹⁷ In 1936, a bona fide star joined their ranks when Sessue Hayakawa, whose career had already spanned three continents over two decades, returned to France for a series of starring roles in films that capitalized on the wave of cinematic interest in East Asia.

¹⁹⁷ An editorial footnote mentions the upcoming Marcel L'Herbier remake of *The Cheat*, a film discussed below, but Titaïna's text makes no mention of its existence.

¹⁹⁸ See Raymond Chirat and Olivier Barrot, *Les Excentriques du cinéma français (1929-1958)* for a discussion of this brand of French character actor. However, neither Inkijinoff nor Foun-Sen, each of whom appears in a number of exoticist films made during this period, do not make their list.

This chapter will start with two takes on Shanghai, both from 1938: Robert Siodmak's *Mollenard* and Pabst's *Le Drame de Shanghai*. Continuing eastward to Japan, a small but successful cycle of French films aimed to recreate the land of the rising sun, including Max Ophüls' *Yoshiwara* (1937) in which Sessue Hayakawa plays the only Japanese character out of all his 1930s French roles. Also in this cycle, Nicolas Farkas remade *La Bataille* (1933), whose predecessor was one of Hayakawa's silent French films (Édouard-Émile Violet 1923); this time, instead of casting Hayakawa and his wife, the Japanese actress Tsuru Aoki, French headliners Charles Boyer and Annabella appear as the leads, both in full ethnic drag. Farkas went on to direct *Port-Arthur* (1936), a multinational production whose Russo-Japanese protagonist exemplifies several key tropes of exoticist cinema discussed in Part Two.

In addition to the international flavor of the stars and the settings, some of the films discussed in this chapter exemplify the transnational quality of the European film industries identified in Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris, and Sarah Street's study of set design in the 1930s. Siodmak, Pabst, and Ophüls all came to the French cinema from Germany, and Siodmak and Ophüls would also continue their careers in Hollywood. Their émigré perspective on both the French and the foreign contributed greatly to the dynamics in play in these exoticist films, and this chapter can be considered a contribution to Bergfelder, Harris, and Street's general belief that "European cinema during the 1930s is best understood as a transnational cinema instead of a loose geographical cluster of essentially autonomous national cinemas" (29).

The Seductions of Shanghai: *Mollenard* (1938) and *Le Drame de Shanghai* (1938)

Considered by many to be “the Paris of the Orient,”¹⁹⁹ Shanghai’s modernity and cultural activity between the wars attracted the full spectrum of expatriate life, from the glitz at the top to the grime at the bottom. Winifred Woodhull describes the city as “a semicolonial metropolis, at once an enclave for wealthy and powerful businessmen, a magnet for travelers and refugees, and a scene of poverty and squalor” (130). Underscoring the city’s heterogeneous population, Woodhull states that in addition to the native Chinese (and, after 1937, the Japanese occupying forces), Shanghai played host to a number of different ethnic and national communities, including White Russians, Jews from Russia and central Europe seeking refuge from the Nazis, and a significant French expatriate population that included tourists as well as more permanent settlers (130).

Many writers, of whom the most famous is André Malraux, made China the focus of their work. Yet, unlike the ambition evident in Malraux’s politically charged *La Condition humaine*, a vast majority of these authors aimed only to conjure sordid stories to fill the pages of pulp fiction, like Oscar-Paul Gilbert’s *Shanghai, Chambard et Cie*, the source novel for Pabst’s film *Le Drame de Shanghai* (Woodhull 129). Other cinematic adaptations also sprang forth from this outpouring of popular fiction set in Asia – *La Dame de Malacca* (1937), discussed in Chapter 4, is another example – but their visual imagery depends largely on garden-variety exoticism dashed with a handful of key flourishes acting as shorthand to distinguish the region from other exotic locations. The narratives

also rely on broad, location-neutral exoticist notions, including the idea that once a European has been to this exotic place s/he can never truly return home. Normally associated with North Africa – as in *L'Atlantide* (Feyder 1921; Pabst 1932), *Pépé le Moko* (Duvivier 1937) and *L'Appel du Silence* (Poirier 1936) – *Mollenard* and *Le Drame de Shanghai* suggest that the same refuge/prison dichotomy applies to East Asian exoticist mythology as well. Yet, some characters in these films also find a different outcome, one that defies this cliché of exoticist cinema to prove that leaving Shanghai for good is not only possible, but sometimes inevitable.

For instance, in *Mollenard* (Siodmak 1938), the titular captain's return from Shanghai is foreshadowed when the action begins not in the ports of East Asia, but in his home city of Dunkirk. Like most Europeans drawn to exotic locales, Mollenard (Harry Baur) comes to China to escape something; however, he relocates neither to escape punishment nor to reinvent himself, but rather to avoid his overbearing bourgeois wife and the existence she imposes on her husband and their family. The film's opening sequence shows Madame Mollenard (Gabrielle Dorziat) unleashing a long-simmering tirade at her absent husband after having learned of the Navy's plans to investigate his conduct at sea, a procedure that puts her family's social standing in jeopardy at home. Shifting the scene to Shanghai, the charges of weapons smuggling prove true even as Captain Mollenard dismisses the official inquiry, applying himself instead to socializing with the shady characters that populate the European nightclubs. At its core, *Mollenard* underscores the stark contrast between the stultifying obsession with status endemic to the French bourgeoisie and the

¹⁹⁹ Lee, Leo Ou-Fan, cited in Woodhull (129).

insouciant pursuit of self-defined (if socially disreputable) goals outside the confines of Europe.

In order to highlight this comparison, Siodmak separates the film into two distinct halves, each of which is ensconced in a generic structure that emphasizes concomitant themes, tone, action, and cinematic execution. Mollenard's domestic drama acts as a cinematic frame story for his exotic adventure in Shanghai. Unlike the repulsion he feels among his family in Dunkerque, in Shanghai Mollenard enjoys a tight relationship with his crew and notoriety among the gang of locals. The latter group consists of despairing expatriates like Pigeon (Dalio, once again²⁰⁰), whose hopelessness casts him as little more than a tragic pawn in the power struggle that plays out at the heart of the adventure story. Pigeon also exemplifies the feeling of being trapped in Shanghai; he claims to have tried to leave many times to no avail, and he has long since resigned himself to a tragic end in this foreign city. Likewise, the song performed by the European nightclub singer (another standard-issue exoticist figure²⁰¹) focuses on her inability to leave Shanghai – in this case, because of a lover. Finally, Mollenard's Chinese mistress (Foun-Sen) completes the exoticist character roster, an assembly based on established cinematic conventions. The plot also fills in some easily recognizable tropes of exoticist fiction, including shady deals, betrayed confidences and shootouts between rival forces jockeying

²⁰⁰ He played the lead in *La Maison du Maltais* (Chenal 1938) and a key supporting role in *L'Esclave blanche* (1939) and supporting roles in other exoticist films. See the Introduction and Chapter 4.

²⁰¹ Fréhel performs a number at an expatriates' dive bar in *Amok* (Ozep 1934); however, her famous song in *Pépé le Moko* (Duvivier 1937, discussed in Chapter 1) was not staged as a public performance within the film. Songs in *Yamilé sous les cèdres*, discussed in Chapter 3, and *Yoshiwara*, discussed below, are similarly private. However, realist singer Damia performs within the narrative in *Sola* (Diamant-Berger 1931), a film that was clearly a vehicle for precisely this kind of performance. This trope also appears in other national film traditions, including the

for power in the East Asian underworld. However predictable this setup may seem, the uniqueness of *Mollenard* lies in the fact that this highly codified exoticism in no way anticipates the conclusion to Mollenard's story, one prefigured by the exposition in Dunkirk. Still, judging by the welcome Mollenard receives at his regular bar, the gang in Shanghai would gladly welcome the entire crew of the *Minotaure* into the expatriate fold for good.

Mollenard turns out to have a rival in the gun running business, and his deal with this rival (Pierre Renoir) quickly turns ugly. Fulfilling his own prophecy, the subsequent shootout kills Pigeon, and Mollenard and his crew are forced back to the *Minotaure* to attempt a hasty escape. But saboteurs sneak aboard and set fire to the cargo hold; under Mollenard's command, the entire crew abandons ship as the *Minotaure* sinks to the ocean floor. Amazingly, everyone survives, capping off a *deus ex machina* that simultaneously erases suspicion about Mollenard's misconduct (since any evidence has been destroyed) and forces his return to France, where the Navy now recognizes him as a hero. His overseas intrigue thus abruptly cut short, he disembarks in Dunkirk to a hero's welcome, and the domestic melodrama begins to unfold.

Crestfallen at the loss of his ship and his obligatory return to France, Mollenard ignores the town's pomp and circumstance in his honor and turns a cold shoulder to his family, whose dynamic Madame Mollenard seems to have soured for good. Rejecting his wife's pleas to behave in accordance with his station, Mollenard refuses to stay in the family home, where his relationship with his children has been poisoned by Madame's scare campaign designed to steer

iconic (and infamously tuxedoed) nightclub performance by Marlene Dietrich in Josef von Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930).

her two children clear of their father's influence, a tactic that works so well on their daughter that she throws herself into frigid waters rather than reciprocate her father's affections.²⁰² After this harrowing incident, Mollenard rents out a bachelor's pad above the sailors' bar while he waits for word about a new mission.

Mollenard's real misfortune begins when he falls ill, and his rapidly deteriorating condition forces him to return to his wife and family. Mollenard becomes despondent and even attempts suicide, although he finds a glimmer of hope when his daughter reconciles with him and begins to stand up to her mother, for herself and on his behalf. By the time his crew gets their new assignment, Mollenard's frail health prevents him from being reinstated as captain. But Mollenard's crew refuses to depart without him, and with the help of his daughter they stage an intervention, forcing their way into his home to carry him out and bring him aboard their new vessel. Mollenard then dies at sea, surrounded by his men and away from the stifling domesticity of his wife and the city of Dunkirk.

With ample material available for further development both in Shanghai and in Dunkirk, *Mollenard* might have become a full-blown exoticist adventure or an entirely domestic melodrama. Either the oppressive bourgeois home or the intrigue in Shanghai might have been successfully evoked in the dialogue without resorting to the abrupt shift in setting brought about by the destruction of the *Minotaure*. However, this superficially incongruous juxtaposition of a naval captain's home life with his escapades in Shanghai allows for *Mollenard* to

²⁰² That Mollenard eventually succeeds in winning over his daughter to his side helps to situate this portion of the film well within the patterns in father-centered family melodramas of the

be read as a pro-fantasy counterpoint to the exotic disillusionment that informs Raymond Bernard's *Tartarin de Tarascon* (1934).

Whereas Tartarin travels to North Africa only to find his romantic belief in its exotic potential incompatible with actual experience, Mollenard's strained home life offers a plausible justification for his inclination to remain in an indulgent, adventurous, even dreamlike existence in the Far East. A masculine, exoticist variation on Emma Bovary, whose expectations of life are (mis)shapen by overly credulous reading, Tartarin (Raimu) is famous throughout Tarascon for his retellings and reenactments of exotic adventures in Africa based on stories he gleans from books. When Tartarin gets the chance to go to Africa, he finds that his grandiose expectations are comically mismatched with the very real banality of life in colonial Algeria. Tartarin suffers in myriad ways from his *dépaysement* and his naïve credulity, including being duped out of his travel money by a self-proclaimed prince and winding up in court after killing a lion that happened to be the blind, tame mascot of the local mosque. Disillusioned, Tartarin returns to Tarascon penniless and ashamed, but the Tarasconnais receive him as they would a true hero. They *want* to believe his stories of adventure, whether or not they're true.

This homecoming in *Tartarin* serves as a moment of reckoning just as the homecoming changes the course of *Mollenard*. Unlike Tartarin, who is visibly relieved to be back in Tarascon, Mollenard returns to Dunkirk as though his home were a place of exile. In France, Mollenard feels deprived of his dynamic life of intrigue, one based on the heroic – though imaginary – self-perception that also affects Tartarin's lively reenactments of an African lion hunt. At the

1930s discussed in Burch and Sellier.

moment of their return, both men are subjected to widespread public mythologizing that invents or inflates the heroism of their actions abroad. This process works in Tartarin's favor, since the Tarasconnais have collectively prepared tales of Tartarin's African glory so vivid and compelling that they dismiss his less colorful account of as a sign of modesty. For Mollenard, the destruction of the *Minotaure*²⁰³ brings to an end his time in a mythic, exotic *ailleurs* only to follow it up with another, non-exotic myth: Mollenard as a patriotic naval hero. The celebratory welcome prepared for him in Dunkirk conveniently obscures unsavory facts about his actual conduct while on duty in Shanghai, a time he links not to a process of disenchantment, like Tartarin's trip, but to a lifestyle of illicit pleasures and unbridled bravado. The grandiose sentiments that greet Mollenard's return to France seem to exacerbate his inability to return to his life of adventure and increase his sense of alienation.

Forced to choose between the disillusioned Tartarin and the dispossessed Mollenard, box office figures suggest that spectators sympathized with the latter. In late 1934, *Tartarin de Tarascon* failed to break the 300,000-spectator threshold Crisp requires in his study of the era, although he notes that comedies performed poorly on the whole that season (*Genre* 315). The *Pour Vous* review of *Tartarin* gravely proclaims that "il y a un comique éternel et un d'époque; je crains que celui de Tartarin ne relève plutôt du second."²⁰⁴ Roughly three years later, in early 1938, *Mollenard* attracted 315,000 spectators across France (*Genre Crisp* 324) – hardly a blockbuster, but classifiable as a modest success. Both films also had

²⁰³ The fact that the *Minotaure* is named after an imaginary creature of literally mythic proportions also stresses the unreality of Mollenard's Shanghai experience while simultaneously elevating it to the status of mythology.

²⁰⁴ Escoube, Lucienne. Rev. of *Tartarin de Tarascon*, dir. Raymond Bernard. *Pour Vous* 313 (13 Nov 1934): 5. Microfilm.

competition from within the genre; the Josephine Baker vehicle *Zouzou* (Allégret, discussed in Chapter 3) and the colonial melodrama *Sidonie Panache* (Wulschleger) were both released around the same time as *Tartarin*. By only a few weeks, *Mollenard* preceded *L'Occident* (Fescourt, discussed in Chapter 3) and the Foreign Legion film *Légions d'honneur* (Gleize), both of which also broke the 300,000 mark for spectators in France, the latter exceeding it by over one third (Crisp *Genre* 317, 324).²⁰⁵

Much like the characters on screen, French spectators relied on their imagination to take them somewhere – anywhere – outside their daily lives, and the theme of escape pervades all kinds of 1930s films, not only exoticist narratives.²⁰⁶ Like these filmgoers who long to be transported, Mollenard relishes his expatriate life as a ticket to freedom rather than seeing it as a forced exile, as many other characters do.²⁰⁷ Where *Tartarin de Tarascon* exposes exoticism as a sham, implicitly taking spectators to task for swallowing the ruse, *Mollenard* takes the opposite stance, enthusiastically embracing the illusion. Madame Mollenard's obvious dearth of sympathetic traits only elevates her husband's role as a magnet for spectator sympathy. In telling the story of a navy captain denied the faraway land he loves, Siodmak's film both inspires and legitimizes spectators' daydreams of a more exciting life outside France.

Less dreamlike, but no less fictionalized, Pabst's Shanghai in *Le Drame de Shanghai* offers a more grounded perspective on the Far East. Focusing on the travails of its expatriate community, especially the Russian émigrés, in the time

²⁰⁵ That *Légions d'honneur*, a forgotten film by an obscure director, outperformed even Siodmak's *Mollenard* in its first release should testify to the power of the Legion film in the 1930s imaginary.

²⁰⁶ Crisp discusses in considerable detail this escapist aspect of French films made in the 1930s (*Genre* 95-106).

²⁰⁷ See the Gabin films covered in Chapter 1 for the best examples of this exiled sensation.

of the Chinese people's political awakening, this film eschews the imaginary allure of exoticism found in *Mollenard*. However, a certain imaginary view of Shanghai was certainly in play, one based in part on recent history in the region, including the White Russian population and the (occasionally desperate) measures they would take to eke out a living for themselves in exile from post-revolutionary Russia. Historian Michael Miller summarizes this image both in empirical fact and as it pervaded popular fiction in 1930s France:

[For White Russians in exile,] Shanghai was the last, wretched stop on the line. Shipwrecked and destitute, they drifted into every dirty business the city had to offer. In Shanghai that meant a plenitude of possibilities – gunrunning, drug trafficking, petty crime, touting, espionage – but most of all it meant prostitution. [...] Around *les femmes russes de Shanghai* grew up a certain literature – pornographic, cheaply sentimental, and laden with the specter of white decline in the Orient. (246)

The shady side of Shanghai had some degree of truth to it, as Miller's historical account attests, but the swath of underworldly options available to actual Russians exiled in Shanghai tends, in fiction, to be reduced to the maudlin tale of a fallen woman.

In this, Pabst's film follows its source author's lead. Instead of a more typical adventurer like Mollenard, a single mother serves as the center of the intrigue, infusing the narrative with a side of the exotic experience left untouched or underdeveloped in male- or even romance-dominated exotic

adventures.²⁰⁸ The Russian nightclub singer at the center of the story, like many Westerners²⁰⁹ in *Le Drame de Shanghai*, works for an underground organization called the Serpent Noir. Unlike most such groups in exoticist fiction, whose operations proceed largely unchecked within the narrative, the Serpent Noir functions as an underworld foil to a very public nationalist and explicitly anti-colonialist movement. The Serpent Noir targets Tcheng, the leader of the uprising, expressly because his call to unify the Chinese against the external Japanese threat would undermine the group's power in Shanghai. While Tcheng manages to escape their clutches, the nightclub singer – known by the Anglo-friendly stage name Kay Murphy – pays a steep price for trying to extricate herself from their operation.

The journalist Franchon (Raymond Rouleau), one of the few Europeans unaffiliated with the Serpent Noir, tries to call attention to the developing conflict, but his (European) editor refuses to believe that anything serious is afoot in Shanghai: “Moi, je connais la Chine, et je vous dis: la Chine est un pays où il ne se passera jamais rien. Il n’y a pas de politique chinoise, pas de conflit chinois, il n’y a pas de Chine ! [...] C’est un pays de rêve. C’est un pays qui dort, en rêvant qu’il existe.” This tirade, proven wrong by the events that follow, serves two purposes: first, it discredits the cantankerous editor, who serves as a modified version of the familiar exoticist role of the rogue *colon* dispensing misguided advice to a less seasoned initiate.²¹⁰ This bit of dialogue also underscores the sense that atypical forces are at work in the narrative of *Le Drame de Shanghai*.

²⁰⁸ See Vincendeau, “Melodramatic Realism” and Woodhull.

²⁰⁹ See the Introduction and Chapter 2 for a discussion of Russians’ capacity to play both Westerners and their Others depending on the context of the film; see also Crisp, *Genre*.

²¹⁰ See Chapter 2 for a complete description of the rogue *colon* figure in exoticist cinema.

Characters and spectators both witness the obliteration of the façade of exotic immutability – a convention cultivated by exoticist culture-mongers, as Edward Said's *Orientalism* has argued²¹¹ – and the expatriates wake from their exotic “dream” to find themselves on the wrong side of history. In this film, Pabst interrogates the truisms of exoticism made explicit in the editor's rant: that nothing of broad consequence ever happens outside the West; that somehow these countries exist in a space beyond reality; and that non-Western peoples are incapable of stirring up conflict or establishing political structures by and for themselves.

A prerelease publicity piece for *Drame*, published in *Pour Vous*, emphasizes the political dimension of the film and its link to actual, contemporary movements among the Chinese:

Le patriotisme qui unit si fortement les Chinois s'est affirmé pendant les prises de vues. Pabst filmait une procession. Le spectacle était prodigieux, pittoresque à souhait, mais il manquait à cette grande mise en scène une profondeur pathétique. Ces milliers d'êtres, indifférents ou curieux, qu'on sentait pleins de bonne volonté, n'étaient que des figurants : 'Si vous regardez l'appareil,' leur dit-on, 'ceux qui vous verront sauront que vous travaillez pour le cinéma, non pour votre pays. C'est à lui que vous devez songer...'

²¹¹ Any reference to Said's seminal work should come with a caveat that a counter-study by Ibn Warraq, *Defending the West*, has deftly pinpointed many shortcomings in Said's text. However, unlike the litany of sources Warraq employs in his argument, exoticist films have not generally presented themselves as contrapuntal to Said's observations about how the West envisions the East.

‘Alors,’ raconte un témoin de cette scène, ‘nous assistâmes à ce miracle d’une âme prenant possession de la foule, imprimant à cette masse élémentaire l’accent de la sensibilité humaine.’²¹²

The nationalist sentiment that Pabst wishes to capture is the very feeling that the author and the anonymous witness that he cites both suggest as the salient point of interest in the story. This illustrates Pabst’s significant postulation that this narrative could evoke spectator sympathy by showing the Chinese answering a homegrown call to collective action, even action that rejects Western endorsement or participation.²¹³

While the political dimension of these crowd scenes may come through strongly in Pabst’s film, they also function as an exoticist convention. Political action provides narrative justification for the crowds that had already been deemed essential to the 1930s cinematic shorthand that evoked East Asian settings, and *Pour Vous* devotes a great deal of attention to the crowd scenes in *Le Drame de Shanghai*. Francia-Rohl underscores these scenes’ cinematic value as well as their role as a showcase for “real” Chinese people. The fact that they were filmed in Colon, a city in colonial Cochinchina, gave Pabst reason to boast:

Cette ville de la Cochinchine, située à une cinquantaine de kilomètres de Saïgon, est peuplée presque entièrement de Chinois authentiques. [...] Nous avons filmé des meetings, des processions,

²¹² Francia-Rohl. “Paris-Cholon-Paris: Les Impressions de G.-W. [sic] Pabst.” *Pour Vous* 491 (13 Apr 1938): 9. Hereafter, “Paris-Cholon-Paris.”

²¹³ That Pabst situates an overtly political subplot within a melodramatic superstructure signals the kind of genre mixing that Martin O’Shaughnessy (“Incohérence”) considers inherent to colonial cinema, and the setting of *Drame* extends this tendency beyond the empire and into the broader exotic.

l'attaque d'une maison et toutes les scènes d'ensembles avec la *vraie* foule asiatique, dans une ambiance *vraie*.²¹⁴

The repetition and editorial emphasis of the term *vrai* adds to the general insistence on authenticity, underscoring Pabst's push to distinguish his film from studio recreations like *Mollenard*, Marc Allégret's *La Dame de Malacca* (1937), and other films that deliver the fantasy of the exotic without the same grounding in geopolitical fact.

Besides this ability to boost credibility for the narrative, crowd scenes also incorporate an artistic dimension for the cinema as craft. The author effusively praises Pabst's work with the crowds: "Le metteur en scène pétrit la foule comme le sculpteur donne à l'argile une forme née de l'esprit. Un geste de lui déchaîne ces vagues, ces remous, ces tourbillons qui reflètent toutes les nuances."²¹⁵ In the spread that accompanies the text, two photos capture the crowd scenes from different perspectives; one shows Pabst and his assistants in the process of filming a crowd of demonstrators as they cross a bridge, and the other is labeled as a "scène de foule" shot in Cholon. In another article – whose ostensible focus is the *vedette* Raymond Rouleau – the author slips in the comment that Pabst "organise un subtil 'mouvement de foule'" in his direction of the film.²¹⁶

If the "horde asiatique" dominates both the publicity and the aesthetic of *Le Drame de Shanghai*, the narrative focus still rests squarely on the fate of the Europeans, particularly the singer Kay Murphy, a Russian refugee, and her teenage daughter Vera. Coerced into working for the Serpent Noir by her friend

²¹⁴ "Paris-Cholon-Paris," quote attributed to Pabst. Original emphasis.

²¹⁵ "Paris-Cholon-Paris." Kudos to the author for the oxymoron in which "tourbillons" are delicate enough to reflect "nuances" in the scene!

²¹⁶ Françoise Holbane, "Les Mille activités de Raymond Rouleau." *Ciné-Miroir* 685 (20 May 1938): 318. Hereafter, "Mille activités."

and fellow refugee Ivan (Louis Jouvet), Kay wants out of the organization and out of Shanghai before the mounting political tension reaches the breaking point. Newly reunited with her daughter, who has just arrived from boarding school in Hong Kong, Kay plans their escape even as the Serpent Noir lays out her final mission. Franchon befriends Kay at the nightclub and quickly surmises the connection between Kay's mercurial moods and the activities of the Serpent Noir. When Ivan draws Kay into the plot to kill Tcheng at the club, Franchon anticipates her moves and acts in time to save the political leader.

Her final mission thwarted, Kay proceeds in secret with her plan to leave Shanghai with Vera. But she entangles herself once again with the black market after a travel agent refuses to book passage for holders of Russian passports. Desperate, Kay arranges to buy forged European documents, and Ivan catches wind of this transaction. He confronts Kay and threatens to prevent her departure with Vera, but Kay shoots and kills him, provoking the Serpent Noir's retaliation. Captured and imprisoned along with her daughter, Kay awaits her audience with the leader of the Serpent Noir. Franchon arrives at the headquarters and tries to intervene, warning that the sudden, inexplicable disappearance of white women in Shanghai will not go unnoticed by the authorities. Since Franchon refuses to leave without Kay and Vera, the leader throws him into prison as well. But before official action can be taken against Kay, Tcheng's mobilized crowd surrounds the building and appeals to members of the Serpent Noir to defect so that the Chinese might unify in the face of the rapidly approaching Japanese. This argument sways many agents to abandon their posts, a shift in power that means the game is up for the Serpent Noir. Left unguarded, the prisoners pour out of the jail and into the streets, joining the

throng of Europeans as they head towards the docks. But Kay cannot outrun her fate; as she follows Franchon and Vera through the streets, one of the last loyal agents plants a knife in her back.

Thus, only Franchon and Vera – the reporter and the innocent – manage to escape the upheaval in Shanghai. Westerners with a stake in the old system, like Kay and Ivan, fall victim to its implosion. This involvement in the corrupt machinery of Shanghai politics precludes their capacity to leave, whereas those who lack a vested interest in the local transition of power are rounded up and expelled from the city. The European faces either death or forced departure, without a chance to help defend and build a new Shanghai. The film thus concludes with a mass exodus of European expatriates as Japanese bombs begin to fall on the city. The nationalist consolidation of the Chinese against a military invader and the waning of European power in the face of this mounting tension could not be more explicit.

The Geishas of Joinville: Ophüls, Farkas, and the Japanese Cycle

While Shanghai appears as a refuge for a heterogeneous mix of Western émigrés and expatriates, in Japan intercultural contact was more carefully restricted. Connections to a Western military body provide the predominant motivation for Westerners to spend time in Japan. This trend enforces a strict division along gender as well as cultural boundaries; all three films discussed here feature an interracial romance between a Western military officer and a Japanese woman. In two out of three cases, the man is Russian, an unsurprising choice given the relatively recent Russo-Japanese War and underscoring once again how, given the right intercultural context, Russians can act as a kind of

placeholder for the French.²¹⁷ Just as Europe sided with Russia against Japan in the battle for the strategic Port Arthur in 1904, the carefully delineated conflict between East and West played out in these screen romances puts Russia on the Western side.

Among the directors who tried their hand at exoticist cinema during the interwar period, German-born director Max Ophüls contributed to the genre with *Yoshiwara* (1936), made during his time working in France. Unlike the exoticist or colonial films that went on to become centerpieces of their directors' *oeuvres* (Duvivier's *Pépé le Moko* springs to mind), Ophüls' tale of interracial love in Japan typically earns a fairly low rank from critics devoted to his work.

Alexander Jacoby points out that French commentary on *Yoshiwara* tends to be more charitable than Anglo-American sources, but he concedes that the director himself dismissed the work in at least one interview.²¹⁸ However, the substance of these critical attacks, especially those dating to the postwar period after Japanese cinema became more visible in the West, tends to take aim at the accuracy of *Yoshiwara's* representation of Japanese culture.²¹⁹ Whether or not these complaints are valid, it seems unfair to judge the authenticity of a French film directed by a German and *set* in Japan by comparing it to a Japanese film directed by a Japanese and *made* in Japan.²²⁰ A more even-handed comparison would pit *Yoshiwara* against French director Nicolas Farkas' two contemporary

²¹⁷ See Crisp *Genre*. This point is also discussed in Chapter 2 and the Introduction.

²¹⁸ "The interview Jacoby cites was conducted by Jacques Rivette and François Truffaut and republished in *Ophüls* (London, BFI, 1978).

²¹⁹ Miyao reports that the Japanese government and media attacked the film and Hayakawa's participation in it (271). As for Western critics, Titaŷna rejects this critical rubric (see above, this chapter), but finds other ways to attack Western films that treat East Asian settings and subjects.

²²⁰ Jacoby identifies this ungenerous tendency in Anglo-American criticism, especially Susan White's comparison of *Yoshiwara* to a "dime-store Mizoguchi" despite the fact that at that point in time, Ophüls likely had little to no knowledge of Mizoguchi's prewar work (40).

French films set in Japan, *La Bataille* (1934)²²¹ and *Port-Arthur* (1936).²²² What I propose is not necessarily a rehabilitation of Ophüls' film for a 21st century audience – for the film is not without its flaws – but a recontextualization of the film within the framework of French *cinéma d'exotisme* in the 1930s.

Ophüls' temporary interest in exoticism differs from Farkas' singular attention to the potential for using Japan as an exoticist setting. Coming to the directors' chair from an extended career as a cinematographer, Farkas directed only three films,²²³ of which two are set in Japan. Having spent some time there, Farkas was at least somewhat sensitive to questions of authenticity. Still, the key aspects of that authenticity remain beholden to a highly subjective Western perspective. In Farkas' own words:

J'ai travaillé au Japon durant près de deux mois : Tokio [*sic*],
Nagasaki, la campagne japonaise... quel charme ! [...] Il existe
encore des demeures avec des panneaux de papier, des femmes
déférentes, qui présentent des plateaux chargés de nourriture avec
des génuflexions : le Japon de Loti et de Farrère n'est pas mort...²²⁴

Farkas does not assess his experience from a Japanese perspective, never imagining how his experience in Japan might compare to that of an average Japanese citizen. Instead, Farkas affirms from his experience that the French *image* of Japan still holds true, at least in parts of the country, a conclusion that he

²²¹ Farkas' *La Bataille* is a remake of a 1923 silent film of the same name, directed by Édouard-Émile Violet and starring Hayakawa in his French silent cinema début.

²²² The French language version of *Port-Arthur* has apparently been lost. (There was, however, a German version whose fate is unknown.) My discussion of the film is therefore based on contemporary published accounts and reviews of the film rather than on the film itself.

²²³ In keeping with early-30s filmmaking trends, Farkas' films all appear to have had multiple versions for different language markets (these multiple versions are not counted as separate productions).

makes with evident approval. As Titaïna argues (see above), this perspective infers that the gold standard of authenticity for films like *La Bataille* was forged by well-entrenched exoticist frameworks originally formulated by French authors like Claude Farrère – who, not incidentally, wrote the novel on which Farkas' *La Bataille* was based – and, of course, Pierre Loti. Rather than using objective reality to gauge the credibility of his story, a standard which Farkas might have been in a position to adopt given his firsthand exposure to Japan and the Japanese, instead Farkas openly defers to the exoticist canon as a means of appraising the authenticity of his experience. These filters played a significant role in shaping the kind of exoticist film he went on to produce for a French audience.

Indeed, Titaïna, another French national with personal knowledge of Japanese culture, took issue with Farkas' film. With more than a touch of irony, she lays into his idea of authenticity²²⁵:

Lorsque Nicolas Farkas présenta *La Bataille*, il obtint un succès mondial : l'histoire avait de l'héroïsme, du sentiment, du mystère, du sacrifice ; le cadre était plein d'exotisme, Annabella avait revêtu des kimonos fleuris, Charles Boyer avait tiré ses yeux : tout était parfait. Dans la réalité, il avait fallu le génie photographique de Farkas pour faire accepter l'anecdote, exactement comme dans le roman le style de Farrère avait servi son sujet. *La Bataille* fut donc

²²⁴ A.-P. Baroncy, "Nicolas Farkas, metteur en scène de 'La Bataille', nous parle du hara-kiri." *Pour Vous* 267 (28 Dec 1933): 6. Citation attributed to Farkas.

²²⁵ "Chine et Japon." Titaïna does not mention the first, silent version of *La Bataille*, a curious omission given that her focus was not only recent films; she opens with a discussion of the branding scene in DeMille's *The Cheat*. Had Titaïna known about L'Herbier's upcoming remake, she might have used his instead of DeMille's in order to limit her argument to the 1930s.

un très beau film qui n'avait rien de japonais. Mais eut-il été japonais, il n'aurait eu aucun succès.

Titaïna uses *La Bataille* to expose the crux of the exoticist dilemma in cinema: while a visibly French take on a Japanese subject or setting can draw plenty of spectators, a Japanese film created by a Japanese filmmaker would likely meet box office doom in the West. The ironic “perfection” Titaïna sees in the film lies not in its realism vis-à-vis actual Japanese life, but in the calculated force of its illusion for French spectators, an illusion dependent on its proficient rehashing of the ingredients necessary to conjure a specifically French exoticist framework. Nevertheless, under French standards for aesthetic and narrative content, Titaïna grants that *La Bataille* has its appeal, an appeal she also extends, with reservations, to Farkas’ follow-up, *Port-Arthur*.²²⁶ What sets her critique apart from so many of her peers’ is her sustained effort to separate each film’s exoticist premise from its cinematic quality as a fiction film. For Titaïna, partial or complete failure in one category does not force her to dismiss achievements in the other.

Both of Farkas’ films set in Japan use the construct of the interracial relationship to ground the underlying friction between East and West that plays out in the film. The details, however, create distinctions that warrant some unpacking. *La Bataille* sets up a love triangle in which a Japanese woman finds herself torn between her Japanese husband and her English lover; in *Port-Arthur*, it is not love but national loyalty on the line for Youki, the female protagonist whose mixed Russo-Japanese heritage forces her to choose between her Russian

husband and her (fully) Japanese half-brother during the battle for Port Arthur. In each story, secrecy and uncertainty threaten the relationships; in *La Bataille* the naval officer Yorisaka plays the role of enabler to his wife's affair so that he might gain access to the British military secrets that he believes her lover is hiding. The ambiguity of Youki's alliances in *Port-Arthur* leads to an accusation of treason against Russia. Her husband believes the allegations until further developments prove her innocence, but the revelation comes too late to save Youki from her death sentence.

The miscegenation in *La Bataille* is not filtered through a second-generation cultural repatriation narrative²²⁷ as it is in *Port-Arthur*, but tensions spring forth nevertheless from the restrictions in cultural participation that the marquis Yorisaka (Charles Boyer) imposes on his wife. He exhorts Mitsuko (Annabella) to wear only Parisian couture, sing only Western songs, and adopt Western mannerisms like shaking hands when in the company of Westerners. She obeys, but feels ill at ease under her husband's relentless pressure to maintain the Western façade. On the surface, Yorisaka aims to show how the Japanese have evolved away from their "barbarian" past (his words) and towards a Western ideal. However, despite Yorisaka's attempts to showcase a Westernized Japan, the Europeans that he and his wife encounter appear reluctant to accept a Japan that has left its own (stereotypical) traditions behind.

When a French painter convinces Mitsuko to pose in a luxurious kimono and traditional Japanese *toilette*, her husband, angered, reveals the motive

²²⁶ "Sans doute le film fut-il sauvé par la partie photographique de l'ouvrage, mais *Port Arthur*, qui n'avait rien ni de russe, ni de mandchou, ni de japonais, reste seulement un film français, victime d'un ratage, ratage dû pour la plus grande partie au scénario." From "Chine et Japon."

²²⁷ Second-generation miscegenation, cultural repatriation, and other issues linked to mixed-race characters in exoticist romance are discussed in Chapter 4.

behind his Western charade: “Alors, vous non plus n’avez rien compris.

Pourquoi avez-vous profané ce costume devant cet étranger? Qu’attendiez-vous en retour? [...] Sous les singeries d’Occidentaux, gardons-nous intacte.”

Assimilation, then, is not Yorisaka’s goal; rather, he believes that maintaining a guise of Westernization would allow the Japanese to keep their own culture to themselves, free from European influence and exploitation. The strength of his language underscores the urgency of his self-proclaimed mission to keep the two worlds as separate as possible: “profané” suggests how sacred he considers the Japanese tradition, while his dismissal of Western habits as “singeries” shows no positive spin.

Yet, for all of Yorisaka’s efforts to draw a line between Japanese and Western culture, his British colleague Fergen fails to perceive such a tidy divide in his blossoming attraction to Mitsuko, which sparks on its own before Yorisaka fans the flames for his own purposes. Fergen tells Mitsuko that she belongs to a superior class of women compared to those found in the West, and she timidly reciprocates his curiosity as the relationship escalates. What draws Fergen to Mitsuko is her hybridity: “Il y a en vous un mélange de votre pays et du mien, un délicieux mélange.” Rejecting Yorisaka’s notion that one must be either fully Eastern or fully Western, with the other culture worn and removed like a piece of clothing, Fergen sees the appeal in the admixture of both at once. This insistence on Mitsuko’s hybridity despite being fully Japanese by blood underscores the possibility for a cultural miscegenation independent of racial or national background. Mitsuko’s ability to participate in two cultures contributes to the superiority and the hybridity that Fergen attributes to her.

In Ophüls' *Yoshiwara*, fear of miscegenation and a strong unrequited love drive a Japanese servant to sabotage the romance between his former mistress, now a geisha, and a Russian military officer. Set in 1860, when Japan was beginning to open its ports to the world, the title of the film refers to a Japanese term for the red light district, a place full of "courtisanes" and other diversions to attract foreign soldiers. One of these young women, Kohana (Michiko Tanaka), is a new arrival to the "tea house" whose father has just died, leaving her little choice except to become a geisha in order to provide for her much younger brother. Her family's loyal servant Isamo (Sessue Hayakawa, although his name is curiously absent from the opening credits) has always loved her, but his social status has kept him from pursuing her openly. He tries to buy Kohana for himself, but the proprietor laughs at his offer and claims that he would not allow even a wealthy foreigner to buy her.

That night, a boatload of Russian sailors descends on the tea house while a terrified Kohana prepares for her début as a geisha. Her first customer is a drunk and violent Russian sailor (Roland Toutain), whose conduct provokes a swift intervention from his superior officer Serge Polinoff (Pierre Richard-Willm, also absent from the opening credits). Charmed by Kohana's nervous attempts to entertain him and a failed effort to conceal her own personal story, Serge arranges with the proprietor of the tea house to reserve her for the duration of his stay, a proposal that the proprietor now readily accepts. Isamo arrives shortly thereafter, this time making the same offer with stolen cash, but the proprietor tells him that he will get "honest, rich-man money" for Kohana. Thus alerted to his rival, Isamo prepares a rickshaw, and when Serge leaves he offers to transport him back to the port. Taking a circuitous road, anxiety builds

through fog, tense music, and imposing shot angles – but Isamo is arrested by patrolling officers before he can do harm to Serge. Standing before the judge, Isamo is granted his freedom in exchange for spying on Serge, so Isamo plies his way into the officer's employ the next day.

Time passes. Kohana and Serge arrange clandestine meetings outside the tea house, and the film presents some evidence of her cultural indoctrination and implied preparations to follow Serge to Russia. While Serge tries to convince the military to extend his stay in Japan, his efforts amount to a relocation rather than a cultural assimilation. However, in a poignant and fanciful sequence,²²⁸ Serge gives Kohana a Western dress and fills her head with images of what life would be like for her in Russia. She plays along with the fantasy without a thought to leaving behind her family or her homeland. On their way back to the teahouse, Serge takes Kohana to visit a Russian missionary chapel in the forest and describes a traditional Russian wedding, symbolically uniting them in marriage before their impending separation.

As he leaves the teahouse, Serge is attacked by Japanese forces. Severely injured, he staggers back to Kohana's quarters, where he slips her a letter and asks her to deliver it for him. Seeing her leave, Isamo summons the police, who arrest her before she can make the delivery. Put on trial for espionage, Kohana refuses to respond to the interrogation and is sentenced to death. The court offers a deal to spare Serge the same fate: she can take the letter to him at the port, but she must not tell him that her life is in danger. When Kohana sees Serge, all she can say is "*je t'aime*," and Serge rejoins the Russian vessel. But Isamo rows out

²²⁸ Jacoby cites Barry Salt's declaration that this sequence is "the only thing of any interest in the film."

to Serge and explains her situation. Learning of her death sentence, Serge tries to swim ashore, but, hampered by his injured arm, he arrives too late. He returns to the forest chapel, where he collapses and dies, deliriously repeating the wedding vows he had said to Kohana.²²⁹ The narrative thus situates each of their deaths in such a way that they sacrifice themselves for one another – Kohana bargains with the judge for Serge's life, and Serge attempts to rescue Kohana despite his own frail health.

Although Jacoby has identified in *Yoshiwara* many tropes common to Ophüls' more canonical works – including the conflict between love and duty and an implicit protest against prostitution – the exoticist veneer of what might have been a European love story polarized critical opinion. Of all the films Titaïna singles out, she reserves her most blistering critique for *Yoshiwara*, aiming her opening salvo squarely at the film's premise:

Ce film est basé sur le fait que le public sera attiré par l'idée croustilleuse éveillée par la vue du quartier réservé de Tokio [sic]. C'est exactement comme si les Américains faisaient un film appelé *Bouges de Marseille*. On y verrait des apaches en casquette à carreaux et cravate rouge marcher à pas feutrés en portant des poignards à leur ceinture. L'histoire pourrait être celle d'une jeune fille du monde enlevée à ses parents, avenue des Champs-Élysées, et prostituée dans une maison en carton-pâte, sous la menace des revolvers, des couteaux et des cartouches de dynamite. *Yoshiwara*

²²⁹ The film's final shot shows the altar in the Russian chapel, thereby ending with a view on the culture foreign to the Japanese setting. This choice also creates a symbolic return for the expatriate similar to the one seen in *La Maison du Maltais* (1938), discussed in Chapter 4.

est tout aussi idiot, et je pense que les Japonais ont, en le voyant,
une faible opinion de notre culture et de notre intelligence.

The force of this analogy – that the French making a film about Japan is as ridiculous as the Americans making a film about Marseille²³⁰ – offers a cogent argument against the exoticist impulse; since *we* cannot expect *them* to understand us, why should *we* presume to have a good handle on what makes *them* tick?²³¹ She also suggests that the Japanese opinion of the French has probably suffered as a result of this film – and the Japanese did, in fact, register their complaints about the film if not, more generally, about the French.²³² Far from empty or exaggerated rhetoric, Titaïna's conclusion seems to be tailored for maximum impact in the circle of (usually right-wing) cinéphiles and commentators who spent much of the decade preoccupied with the image of France that the film industry was sending, reel by reel, to audiences overseas.²³³

Although Titaïna goes on to criticize the actors in *Yoshiwara* – “avec un scénario faux, un décor faux, une conception fausse, que peuvent faire les acteurs? Ils jouent faux” – casting marks a significant distinction between

²³⁰ In framing this argument around Marseille (and not, say, Paris), Titaïna assumes, with good reason, that audiences outside France would fail to appreciate the particular brand of Frenchness that pervades a film set in a strong regional subculture like the Midi.

²³¹ Nearly a year after Titaïna's article was published, *Pour Vous* ran a feature about a recent film adaptation of André Gide's *La Symphonie pastorale* that was made in Japan, but not (yet) screened in France (Doringe. “Tokio filme une oeuvre d'André Gide : La ‘Symphonie pastorale’ prend un visage d'orient.” *Pour Vous* 511 [31 Aug 1938]: 3). The author assessed the Japanese adaptation for accuracy and commented on the plausibility of its modifications, and the author's incomprehension of several of these changes takes a condescending tone. Still, the article concludes on an optimistic (though banal) note: “On sent qu'une tendre et respectueuse fidélité animait les acteurs et les réalisateurs, et que tous s'étaient profondément pénétrés de l'esprit d'André Gide.”

²³² See Miyao (271) and Jacoby. This is not a hypothetical argument, since French films were regularly distributed in Japan. In fact, Crisp points out that Japanese audiences listed *La Bandera* (1936, discussed in Chapter 1) among the ten best films of 1937 (*Genre* 326).

²³³ Jean Vignaud, author of exoticist fiction and editor of *Ciné-Miroir*, was one such commentator. However, the primary sore spot among this group did not deal with how the French represented foreigners, but how French export-grade films represented the French – especially military

Ophüls' and Farkas' films. All three boasted a roster of stars, but both Farkas-directed productions feature big-ticket French actors – Charles Boyer and Annabella in *La Bataille* and Danielle Darrieux in *Port-Arthur* – playing Japanese characters (or in Darrieux's case, half-Japanese). For his film, Ophüls cast Japanese actors in both of the lead Japanese roles: Sessue Hayakawa as Isamo and Michiko Tanaka²³⁴ as the geisha Kohana. This move implies an effort to reach a level of verisimilitude unattained by preceding films in the cycle, but its impact on the film appears to have fizzled after the pre-release publicity. In the weeks leading up to the film's début, *Pour Vous* and *Ciné-Miroir* each feature biographical articles dedicated to Tanaka, pieces whose placement and length easily surpass the pre-release coverage of Hayakawa's participation in the film. Post-release, however, the press turns decisively in Hayakawa's favor (described below).

Reviews in *Pour Vous* and *Cinémonde* show that the overall critical verdict on the film is less vitriolic than Titaÿna's dismantlement, but any praise in these reviews singles out a particular aspect of the film without lauding the entire ensemble. To a considerable extent, the reviewers share Titaÿna's reaction to the storyline and the believability of the characters within it; still, the director's style earns some plaudits in *Pour Vous*, whose reviewer says that Ophüls "a su avec beaucoup de bonheur manœuvrer son appareil parmi les pommiers en fleurs, les petits ponts des soupirs, les lanternes japonaises et les icones du bel officier... Certaines scènes sont admirablement tournées" – cue the reservation – "[mais]

officers – as immoral, cowardly, or just plain ridiculous. For a particularly caustic example, see his takedown of *Mam'zelle Spahi* (Max de Vaucorbeil 1934) in *Ciné-Miroir* 521 (29 Mar 1935): 194.

²³⁴ Before *Yoshiwara*, Tanaka's career in the West had begun with roles in operettas. According to *Ciné-Miroir*, she had already acted in a film called *Dernier Amour* before starring in *Yoshiwara*.

avec des personnages à peine plus vrais, nous étions pris dans l'aventure!"²³⁵

Cinéma praises Ophüls' attempt to reflect a modicum of authenticity in his exoticist narrative:

Pour une fois qu'un réalisateur n'avait pas l'intention de faire un film oriental avec des japonais de pacotille, regards bridés à grand renfort de vernis à coller, il aurait dû avoir à sa disposition une matière humaine et forte. [...] Mais le mot d'ordre était sans doute 'faire commercial à tout prix.' Et l'on enfante une histoire mi-partie [*Madame*] *Butterfly*, mi-partie *Port-Arthur*. Ce qui fait la valeur du film, c'est le style qu'a su lui imprimer Max Ophüls [...]. Il est parvenu à grandir le sujet, à l'humaniser, et, surtout, à l'entourer d'une poésie incessante.²³⁶

These are kinder words than those of more recent critics, whose dismissal of the entire effort as "pasteboard Japonism"²³⁷ – if, indeed, they bother dealing with this film at all – clearly reflects a retrospective devaluation of the exoticist genre in the postwar period. How else to explain how *La Bataille*, which amassed nearly 600,000 spectators on its initial release, could fall into such obscurity after the exoticist trend had passed?²³⁸ How else to explain that a star of Hayakawa's magnitude could have sustained a lengthy career in French sound films without attracting the amount of critical attention that other transnational stars of the era have since been granted?

Like Hayakawa, she also had deep personal ties to the West, twice marrying German men and spending the bulk of her career in German stage and screen productions.

²³⁵ Roger Régent. Rev. of *Yoshiwara*, dir. Max Ophüls. *Pour Vous* 457 (19 Aug 1937): 4. Print.

²³⁶ Marc Farnèse. Rev. of *Yoshiwara*, dir. Max Ophüls. *Cinéma* 461 (19 Aug 1937): 749. Print.

²³⁷ Susan White's words, quoted in Jacoby (40).

Contemporary audiences were much more attuned to the ebb and flow of the exoticist cycle, and filmmakers and cinéphiles alike welcomed Hayakawa with open arms. In *Pour Vous*, a prerelease snippet of publicity for *Yoshiwara* heralded the return of Sessue Hayakawa to French cinema with nostalgic but sincere praise: “Son visage n’a rien perdu de ses facultés d’expression. Cet acteur justement célèbre n’a pas cessé de mériter de beaux rôles.”²³⁹ Once the film was released to the general public, *Pour Vous* readers enthusiastically agreed.²⁴⁰ Whatever faults have been attributed to *Yoshiwara*, the film that brought him back to France, the French were clearly excited by Hayakawa’s return, and he would go on to enjoy nearly a decade of productive work in the French film industry. The early years of this decade form the subject of the next chapter.

²³⁸ This figure easily puts *La Bataille* within the top 5 exoticist films of the decade in terms of box office statistics, just behind Feyder’s *Le Grand jeu* (1934). See *Crisp Genre* (279-337) and Table 2 of the Introduction.

²³⁹ *Pour Vous* 454 (29 July 1937): 6.

²⁴⁰ Gilberte from Paris writes: “Quant à Sessue Hayakawa il a la puissance dramatique, la variété d’expressions, l’intelligence et la sobriété des grands artistes. De plus, il possède une voix admirablement radiogénique.” Roxane from Paris notes: “Sessue Hayakawa est magnifique... figure impassible, mauvaise, et parfois si douloureuse. Quelle puissance d’expression !” *Pour Vous* 460 (9 Sept 1937): 10.

CHAPTER SIX

Sessue Hayakawa's French Resurrection, 1936-1939

Monte Carlo, winter of 1925. Among the regulars at the Sporting Club, a popular casino,²⁴¹ is Sessue Hayakawa, who first achieved legendary status among French cinéphiles with his seminal role in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Cheat* (1915, released in Paris the following year) and who, more recently, had continued his silent film career in France with *La Bataille* and *J'ai tué!* (Roger Lion 1924). One night at the game tables, Hayakawa's fortunes turn against him. Sharing his table were several heavyweights, including the Duke of Westminster, the head of the Citroën auto company, and a handful of other wealthy, seasoned gamblers.²⁴² The stakes climb higher and higher until Hayakawa, losing hand after hand, tallies his losses to find himself five million francs in the hole. He withdraws from the game. Short on cash to cover his debt, he writes a check before making a swift but polite exit. His renown as an actor and his status as a regular ensure that his misfortune quickly ripples through the local gossip circles. Rumors intensify after Hayakawa stops turning up at the casino, and they finally reach a fever pitch when a man's lifeless body turns up near Monte Carlo. Even with a badly mutilated face and no identification papers, investigators identify him as Japanese and rule his death a suicide. Piecing together Hayakawa's swift disappearance and the foreigner's corpse, the locals conclude that the acclaimed actor must have taken his own life after his

²⁴¹ Hayakawa names this casino, the events that transpired there, and the aftermath in his autobiography *Zen Showed Me the Way...to Peace, Happiness and Tranquility* (178-80). However, the account in his autobiography differs from the one he gave *Cinémonde* in a series of features published in 1937. Inconsistencies are indicated here in the footnotes.

²⁴² These men are named in Hayakawa's autobiography, but not in the *Cinémonde* series.

gambling loss. Without sufficient proof to confirm or deny this story, the scuttlebutt goes viral, spreading swiftly across France.

Meanwhile, Hayakawa had indeed disappeared from Monte Carlo, but only to rejoin his wife, actress Tsuru Aoki, in Paris.²⁴³ Soon after her husband's arrival in the capital, odd telegrams begin to come in, addressed only to Aoki and offering condolences for her loss. Unaware of the corpse in Monte Carlo or the rumors swirling around it, the couple underestimates both the extent of the misunderstanding and the tenacity of the rumor, and they shrug off the messages as distasteful pranks. The French press, undaunted by the lack of proof, catches wind of the story, and journalists start to badger Hayakawa's wife with questions despite her husband's presence at her side in Paris. Exasperated, the couple finally returns to New York.

Yet even after their departure, the false reports continue to reverberate, eventually following him across the Atlantic. American newspapers, including the New York Times,²⁴⁴ print the suicide rumor as probable fact while acknowledging the story's source as hearsay making the rounds of the French capital. One night, while on tour with an American theater production, the allegedly deceased Hayakawa opens the door to his dressing room to find the police. Brandishing reports of his death, they prepare to arrest him as an impostor. In the end, Hayakawa manages to prove his identity and secure his

²⁴³ This version of Hayakawa's story appears in *Cinéma*, but not in his autobiography.

²⁴⁴ "Hears Hayakawa Committed Suicide." *The New York Times* 5 March 1927. Page unknown. Hayakawa himself mentions this article in his autobiography, noting that it appeared in print a full 18 months after his return from Europe.

release, but the myth of his suicide nonetheless persists for several years on both continents.²⁴⁵

Still very much alive, Hayakawa would return to France a decade later and spend the late 1930s until the end of the Second World War starring in a number of French films. Daisuke Miyao notes that his return to France was immediately preceded by his work on a Japanese-German coproduction, a project undertaken after political accords had been formed between the two countries in late 1936. The goal was to bring images of Japanese culture to their German allies in Europe. As an established international star, Hayakawa took top billing for the film, titled *Atarashiki tsuchi* (*Die Tochter des Samurai*), and, much like the actor himself, the protagonist struggles to resolve the dueling influences of his native Japanese culture and the Western customs to which he has grown accustomed. Miyao explains that after the release of this film, the last in a string of mid-1930s films that Hayakawa had made in Japan, new and deeply nationalistic censorship standards were put into effect. These regulations left few opportunities to employ Hayakawa's particular star image, which had always been problematically associated with his deeply rooted transnationality. *Atarashiki tsuchi* thus turned out to be Hayakawa's last Japanese film until long after the end of World War II (Miyao 269-71).²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Sessue Hayakawa recalls the false rumors of his own death in "Mémoires de Sessue Hayakawa III." *Cinéma* 437 (4 March 1937): 199. The only contemporary French newspaper source I have located that refers to this urban legend is a news brief expressing relief that the rumors were untrue: "Le mort vivant." *Le Figaro* 300 (27 Oct. 1930): 2. However, during the 1930s, *Cinéma* mentioned the scandal in at least two feature articles about Hayakawa: "Le grand acteur japonais Sessue Hayakawa est-il en définitive mort ou vivant" in issue 267 (30 Nov 1933), and "Sessue Hayakawa revient" in issue 416 (8 Oct 1936). In *Pour Vous* 295 (12 July 1934), Asian correspondent Robert Florey sees Hayakawa in Japan and recalls "le temps où je le forçais à poser devant mon kodak, à New-York [sic], afin de prouver qu'il n'était pas mort!"

²⁴⁶ See also Miyao's filmography, pp. 334-336.

After the censorship reforms squeezed him out of the Japanese movie industry, Hayakawa's relocation to France might be read as an act of defiance in the face of the newly forged alliance between Germany and his home country. Describing this decision in his autobiography, Hayakawa declines to offer specific motivations for staying in France.²⁴⁷ Still, he describes his peculiar status of being doubly suspicious – to the Germans because of his refusal to comply with Japan's request to return to his homeland, and to the French because of Japan's alliance with Germany (200-201). In any case, Japanese spectators had grown accustomed to voicing their disdain for Hayakawa's work outside Japan, beginning with *The Cheat* and continuing into the 1930s with his French films, and French and American sources reported the negative Japanese reaction to the representation of Japanese life in *Yoshiwara*.²⁴⁸ Robert Florey stresses the habitual nature of this reaction: "Sessue Hayakawa a, *une fois de plus*, perdu sa popularité à cause du film qu'il a tourné dernièrement à Paris" (emphasis added).²⁴⁹ But for a French audience, despite the political puzzle that his relocation created, Hayakawa's personal background and experience in Hollywood playing a variety of cultural outsiders made him uniquely appealing to filmmakers looking to exploit the public's taste for the exotic. Canonized in the silent period by intellectual French cinéphiles as an innovative force in film acting,²⁵⁰ by the late 1930s, his popularity in Hollywood had all but disappeared, and Japanese

²⁴⁷ Miyao also lacks information about specific political or personal details related to Hayakawa's move.

²⁴⁸ Miyao cites a report in *Variety* magazine that registers the poor Japanese reception of the film (271). Florey, discussed below, is a French source that also notes Hayakawa's declining popularity in his home country.

²⁴⁹ Robert Florey, "Les Grands reportages de *Pour Vous*: Japon 37." *Pour Vous* 462 (23 Sept 1937): 3-5. The film to which Florey refers here is almost certainly *Yoshiwara*, since the release of Hayakawa's next French film, *Forfaiture*, followed the article's publication date by several weeks.

cinema had not found a suitable use for him. Thus, Hayakawa's return to France was not only fortuitously timed, but it also generated remarkable enthusiasm, especially among the class of cinéphiles that had anointed him twenty years earlier.²⁵¹

Yet Hayakawa's stardom in France is unique in that his nation of origin (Japan) is not the nation where his stardom took form (the United States); furthermore, neither of those nations is France, and his roots lie in a non-Western country. Although the French could take no credit for producing or discovering him, nonetheless they took pride in immediately recognizing his contribution to the cinema as an art form. The high esteem he inspired among film commentators partially explains Hayakawa's lasting stardom in France. However, his unique combination of cultural and national influences adds a dimension to his star image that sets him apart from transnational predecessors like Charlie Chaplin and Max Linder or even Western contemporaries like Erich von Stroheim. Josephine Baker, another contemporary performer who also found tremendous success in interwar France, also charted a path to a kind of transnational stardom based on her exoticist credentials as a black woman. Still, although Baker was immensely influential in France, her celebrity status never encompassed the same kind of sustained, international clout that Hayakawa maintained in his career.

²⁵⁰ Miyao discusses *The Cheat* and its impact on French intellectuals (23-26), including Colette's assessment of Hayakawa's revolutionary acting style, a review also discussed below.

²⁵¹ *Cinéma* dedicated a full-page spread of photos and text to an overview of Hayakawa's life and career in France: "Sessue Hayakawa revient" *Cinéma* 416 (8 Oct 1936): 703. The piece includes descriptions of *Yoshiwara* that bear surprisingly little resemblance to the finished product, indicating a willingness to broadcast Hayakawa's return and promote his first French sound film well before it had reached its final stages of production.

Hayakawa's sudden leap into stardom contrasts sharply with Baker's more methodical ascent. Baker, an American, came to the French cinema via the Parisian music hall stage, thanks to the wild success of shows like the (in)famous *Revue nègre*, which debuted in Paris in the autumn of 1925. Her star image thus takes shape with input from multiple entertainment media, all of which are culturally rooted in France – and even more specifically, in Paris. Baker's early career and rags-to-riches story lent a personal touch to her film roles, but her films complemented her extant music hall stardom without changing or adding nuance to her image. Instead of forging new contexts in which to showcase her exuberant performance style, her film roles echo her rise to fame. Baker was an important star whose presence and influence helped shape the contours of culture in 1930s France,²⁵² but her status as a *film* star cannot be measured separately from her roots in dance and musical variety.

On the other hand, Hayakawa's stardom happened almost by accident. Miyao describes how, after studying political economy at the University of Chicago, Hayakawa took various odd jobs to make ends meet as a temporary resident of the United States. This résumé included a stint with a theater company in Los Angeles that served the growing Japanese immigrant population. There, he was "discovered" and sent to the movie studios (50-51). His first films – and his roles in them – were almost as obscure as his first forays onto the stage, but his turn in DeMille's *The Cheat* made him an instant international star. With a short career and almost no training in acting (or any other kind of performance) before taking this indelible role, Hayakawa's stardom

²⁵² See Ezra (97-128) for a detailed description of Josephine Baker's impact on French interwar culture.

sprang solely from his films and, even in the 1930s, most especially from his performance in *The Cheat*. Unlike Baker, whose films were indelibly tied to her identity as a music hall star, Hayakawa achieved international attention with the success of a single film. Although he continued to seek theatrical work sporadically throughout his career, Hayakawa was known first and foremost as a film star.

To account for Hayakawa's position in the American star system, Miyao adapts W. E. B. DuBois' notion of "double consciousness" into a triple consciousness; as a star, Hayakawa had to consider his image as a foreigner in the eyes of the American spectator and as a representative of Japanese culture to American audiences, all the while relating to himself in terms of his stardom (157). While this concept may apply to Hayakawa's initial, specifically American stardom, still another layer must be added to incorporate his work in Europe. Hayakawa was an unknown when he first arrived on the big screen in the United States. The same cannot be said of his move to France, where his casting was directly motivated by his previous achievements in Hollywood and the sustained respect of French *cinéphiles* for his star turn in *The Cheat*.

Hayakawa's American identity depended on very different cultural factors than those he encountered in France. The discourse of cultural assimilation that formed a critical component of Hayakawa's image in the United States²⁵³ has no direct equivalent in his French work; unlike the growing communities of Japanese-Americans who played a significant role in Hayakawa's career, no notable segment of the French immigrant population in

²⁵³ See Miyao, especially Part Two.

the 30s came from Japan.²⁵⁴ This helps explain why Hayakawa plays a Japanese man only once during the 1930s, in *Yoshiwara* (Ophüls 1937, discussed in Chapter 5). Immigration from his home country may have borne little relevance to social reality in France, but colonialism indelibly and inevitably marks French interaction with foreigners throughout the decade.²⁵⁵ Like his later work in Hollywood (and all of Baker's film work in France), his otherness was flexible enough to evoke a variety of non-Western identities,²⁵⁶ and French cinema had a need to fill these roles. Still, colonial immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa handily outnumbered Asians in the metropole,²⁵⁷ meaning that representations of Asians were almost entirely limited to films set in Asian territory (although *Patrouille blanche*, discussed below, is a noteworthy exception). Thus Hayakawa's French roles tend to situate his otherness outside Europe, thereby skirting the issue of accepting and assimilating non-Western immigrants into Western culture.

After Ophüls' *Yoshiwara* reunited Hayakawa with his French audience, Marcel L'Herbier aimed to reacquaint the actor with his past success in *Forfaiture* (1937), a remake of DeMille's *The Cheat* that casts Hayakawa in a revised version of his career-launching role. The following year Richard Oswald cast Hayakawa

²⁵⁴ Clifford Rosenberg does not find Japanese immigration to France during the Great War sufficient enough to warrant particular mention in *Policing Paris: The Origins of Modern Immigration Control between the Wars*. Nor do Guichard et. al identify any measurable, non-colonial Asian immigration in the census of 1931 (58).

²⁵⁵ See Ezra, *The Colonial Unconscious*.

²⁵⁶ This transferable Otherness was not at all unusual for racially marked actors, as Foster describes in the context of Hollywood (138). More visible examples than Hayakawa in French cinema are Jewish character actors Dalio and Lucas Gridoux, each of whom played characters of a variety of racial backgrounds, but rarely played Jews. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of Dalio's performance in *La Maison du Maltais* (Chenal 1938).

²⁵⁷ See Guichard, et. al, particularly the diagram on page 58 indicating proportional numbers of immigrants from different colonial and non-colonial territories.

in *Tempête sur l'Asie* (1938).²⁵⁸ In 1939, Hayakawa made two films whose release was trapped in censors' limbo until well into the second World War: *Patrouille blanche* (Christian Chamborant), Hayakawa's only film of the 1930s set entirely in France; and *Macao, l'enfer du jeu*, directed by Jean Delannoy. Of these four productions, *Forfaiture* and the pair of films produced on the eve of World War II will be the main focus.

A Legend Revised, A Legacy Reborn: *Forfaiture* (1937)

Cecil B. DeMille's groundbreaking, sensational silent film *The Cheat* left a cinematic legacy in France that still resounded among cinéphiles two decades after its initial release. As a tribute to this formative film, seasoned (and politically right-leaning) director Marcel L'Herbier filmed his *Forfaiture*²⁵⁹ in 1937, taking advantage of Hayakawa's recent return to France. Although casting Hayakawa once again as the predatory Oriental intimates a sense of continuity between the two films, his role in *Forfaiture* transcends a simple reprisal of a seminal performance. In fact, little but the central sexual conflict remains in L'Herbier's reframing of the film, which employs cultural codes specifically suited to late-1930s French conceptions of the exotic. Unlike DeMille's American audience, whose main contact with racial and national Others came from new immigrants, French filmgoers between the wars were steeped in a deeply imperial brand of exotic *ailleurs*, a distinction that holds myriad implications for L'Herbier's narrative. As this project has shown, in both French culture broadly

²⁵⁸ Oswald's film has apparently been lost.

²⁵⁹ DeMille's film was also called *Forfaiture* in its French release. Citations from French sources reflect this shared title, but here the title *The Cheat* refers to DeMille's version and *Forfaiture* to L'Herbier's.

defined and the more targeted world of cinema, the exotic and the colonial naturally overlapped – especially for the overtly colonialist L’Herbier.²⁶⁰ Nevertheless, these are not entirely interchangeable terms. The rhetoric of the *cinéma colonial* certainly influences L’Herbier’s approach, but *Forfaiture* relies even more clearly on non-colonial exotic discourses that were circulating in popular cinema throughout the decade. *Forfaiture* endorses European hegemony and relies heavily on negative stereotypes of the exotic outsider, but the film’s portrayals of power and justice ultimately respect the separation of the exotic from the colonial.

In 1916, the year *The Cheat* was released in France, critics attributed the film’s success to two key elements: DeMille’s innovative direction, and Japanese-American actor Sessue Hayakawa’s performance, a *tour de force* hailed as nothing short of a revelation. *Cinémonde* declared that DeMille’s film was so unique and influential that it inspired others to become filmmakers.²⁶¹ In her review of the film, Colette calls Hayakawa’s performance the new paradigm of screen acting, one that the French industry would do well to emulate:

Que nos aspirants cinéistes [sic] aillent voir comment, lorsque son visage se tait, sa main poursuit la pensée commencée. Qu’ils apprennent ce qui tient de menace et de mépris dans un mouvement de son sourcil, et, à l’instant de la blessure, comment il feint que sa vie s’écoule avec son sang, sans secousse, sans grimace

²⁶⁰ L’Herbier’s major contributions to the *cinéma colonial* are *La Route impériale* (1935) and *Les Hommes nouveaux* (1936), of which the latter presents a clear-cut version of colonial ideology by incorporating into the narrative historical figures – namely, Maréchal Lyautey – and actual events. These films are discussed further below.

²⁶¹ Lucien Ray. “21 ans après Sessue Hayakawa ressuscite ‘Forfaiture.’” *Cinémonde* 476 (1 Dec 1937): 1055.

convulsive, rien que par la pétrification progressive de son masque de Bouddah et le ternissement extatique de son regard.²⁶²

The Cheat and its critical legacy were certainly not lost to time and memory when L'Herbier announced his intention to recreate the film, and nostalgic recollections of the original were used to help promote the remake, as in the title *Cinémonde's* article, "21 ans après Sessue Hayakawa ressuscite 'Forfaiture.'" The trade press devoted several features to *Forfaiture*, and Hayakawa's return to his most famous role offered writers a convenient excuse to link *The Cheat's* past success with the present domestic product.

As the living symbol of this link to past (and foreign) cinematic achievement, Hayakawa was occasionally the main attraction in these articles, and in any case, his presence among the cast was never ignored.²⁶³ But these profiles tended to filter Hayakawa's work through racial, cultural, and linguistic markers of difference, thus singling him out for his otherness. Granted, race was hardly absent from French criticism of DeMille's film during its initial run, and even Colette's otherwise judicious critique includes a racially implicated reference to Hayakawa's "mask of Buddha." Still, twenty years after Colette's review, many writers failed to emulate her attentive observation of Hayakawa's revolutionary acting style, opting instead for a crass, race-based assessment of his craft:

²⁶² Review reprinted in Virmaux and Virmaux (289-292), citation page 292.

²⁶³ In addition to the *Cinémonde* coverage, a blurb in the news brief section of *Ciné-Miroir* (30 July 1937, issue 643) bears the headline, "On va revoir Sessue Hayakawa dans une nouvelle version de 'Forfaiture.'" Other cast members as well as L'Herbier are also mentioned in the short text, but Hayakawa gets preferential treatment: "On reverra, naturellement, Sessue Hayakawa dans le rôle du cruel Japonais [*sic*]." The centrality of his participation in *Forfaiture* contrasts sharply with his work in *Yoshiwara*, where his name does not even appear in the credits!

Vingt et un ans ont passé depuis et *Forfaiture* est entré dans la légende. [...] Comment Sessue Hayakawa réussit donc ce miracle sans s'en douter? Mais tout simplement en jouant selon sa nature de Nippon, avare de gestes, avare de paroles, mais dont la cervelle est bien meublée.²⁶⁴

While this summation of Hayakawa's style as intelligent minimalism may be apt, it stems not from his prescient grasp of the needs of the medium, but from his "Japanese nature." After a lengthy, multifaceted career, Hayakawa nevertheless remains defined by a "natural," race-based essentialism rather than by any consciously cultivated techniques he had developed over years of acting experience. This race-centered assessment of his work also makes it difficult to take Hayakawa as a role model in the same way Colette did; if his talent is innate to his race, what could non-Japanese actors actually learn by watching his technique?

While Hayakawa's performance style may have been labeled as "Japanese," his lifetime filmography also demonstrates that an actor's particular brand of Otherness can be plausibly transferred to another in the context of a screen role. Other "ethnic" actors across several national traditions also demonstrated this ability to portray a variety of ethnicities,²⁶⁵ a flexibility that

²⁶⁴ Lucien Ray. "21 ans après Sessue Hayakawa ressuscite 'Forfaiture.'" *Cinémonde* 476 (1 Dec 1937): 1055.

²⁶⁵ Ezra notes how Josephine Baker "could evoke Africa, the Caribbean, the United States, and France, by turns or all at once as the occasion required" (99). Likewise for Hayakawa, star power trumps the need for an accurate ethnic or national match between actor and character. See Foster for a general discussion of the phenomenon (137-40). This tendency remains true today; for a contemporary French example, consider Omar Sharif in *Monsieur Ibrahim et les fleurs du Coran* (François Dupeyron 2003). The panoply of his own ethnic and national associations – Lebanese, Syrian, Egyptian – does not include any connection to Turkish ancestry despite his character's Anatolian origins.

influenced the French publicity devoted to *Forfaiture*.²⁶⁶ Hayakawa himself was, obviously, no less Japanese for L'Herbier than he was for DeMille, but in the remake his character was not conceived as a Japanese businessman, but a Mongolian prince.²⁶⁷ Critics often fail to draw such an explicit distinction between Hayakawa's own identity and his character's, as in this profile in *Ciné-Miroir*:

Sous les feux croisés des sunlights, émergeant du kimono noir aux ramages d'or, l'admirable visage de Sessue Hayakawa prend un éclat insoutenable. Il dit son texte français d'une voix grave, enveloppante, voilée, avec un curieux accent âpre, puéril, frémissant, complexe, parfaitement compréhensible. Ce personnage de Japonais silencieux, secrètement passionné et cruel, qui, repoussé par la femme qu'il convoite, la déshonore d'une marque au fer rouge imprimée dans la chair, lui inspire décidément des accents inégalables...²⁶⁸

In this passage, the mark of the non-Westerner is delineated in several ways. His costume, called a *kimono* but more likely a robe of Mongolian design to reflect the film's setting, is both menacing (black) and opulent (flashes of gold), a description that also neatly summarizes the prevailing cinematic stereotype of East Asians. His voice is "voilée" – *veiled* – a word highly charged with

²⁶⁶ In light of this transferability of exotic identity, it is not insignificant that DeMille cast a Japanese actor in a Japanese role. Here, I have kept references to Hayakawa's character in *The Cheat* consistent with the Japanese nationality DeMille originally intended. The fact that L'Herbier chooses still another national identity than the one used for *The Cheat*'s rerelease while using the very same actor also illustrates this flexibility.

²⁶⁷ Miyao notes that Hayakawa's most well-received and well-remembered roles in the United States after DeMille's *The Cheat* (1915) were characterized by their Asian identity, but in other films Hayakawa played a Native American, an Arab, and even a Spaniard (2).

Orientalist symbolism as a visual and cultural barrier between the Western and Eastern worlds. This “veiled” voice speaks with “an odd accent – bitter, childlike, trembling, complex, [and] perfectly understandable.” Yet once this strangely accented voice has spoken, its bearer is condemned to silence – “this silent Japanese character” – the better to hide his secret passion as well as his cruelty, soon to be unleashed on a titillated white society.

The shift in rhetoric when comparing Colette’s intellectual evaluation of contemporary cinema to the less illustrious writers who helped fill the pages of popular 1930s film magazines illustrates the extent to which film criticism changed between the wars. The era of critics like Colette,²⁶⁹ whose criticism was rooted in the cultured classes and aimed at other cultural producers, gave way to an era of criticism aimed squarely at the masses, the better to influence consumers. Stars – major and minor, French and foreign – were routinely pitched to the public along with the films they made in France and abroad. Analysis of film as art form, a major component of criticism in cinema’s early days, gradually encompassed an awareness of film as social fact. Film gained recognition not only as a commodity that appealed to the public, but also as a medium that could grapple with issues of the day. Since the movie-going masses throughout the 1930s were wrestling (consciously or unconsciously) with volatile questions of race and culture in French society, it comes as no surprise that contemporary film writers would reduce Hayakawa’s acting style to the uniqueness of his Japanese identity.

²⁶⁸ Holbane, Françoise. “Marcel Lherbier [*sic*] achève la réalisation du nouveau ‘Forfaiture.’” *CinéMiroir* 652 (1 Oct 1937): 636.

²⁶⁹ Marcel Carné was also an accomplished film critic in the 1930s before turning to filmmaking. Louis Delluc, Jean Epstein and Jacques de Baroncelli – and many others – also published film criticism before or in addition to making films themselves. See Abel.

Across the Atlantic, however, this Japanese identity remained the same for actor and character in *The Cheat*, a confluence of ethnicity that helped stir up controversy in the United States after the release of the film. In contrast to the sunny nostalgia with which the French looked back at the cinematic achievement of *The Cheat*, in America, Hayakawa's signature film – even, arguably, his subsequent film career²⁷⁰ – remained tainted by the racial tensions it ignited. During the teens, many Japanese and members of the Japanese-American community protested the film. By the time it was rereleased in 1918, these groups had amassed enough clout to compel the studio to change the nationality of Hayakawa's character, a move that placated the protesters but that nevertheless left intact the racial stereotype against which they had reacted so strongly.²⁷¹ Back in Europe, without a Japanese population to speak of, nor even a significant number of Indochinese immigrants,²⁷² French audiences saw DeMille's film at a remove from the sociohistoric implications that influenced its American trajectory.

The differences evident in *The Cheat's* reception on either side of the Atlantic underscore major shifts in the social touchstones between American and French cultures in the early 20th century. Unsurprisingly, then, more than 20 years later, L'Herbier undergirds his French remake with very different reference points despite his inclusion of what appear to be common tropes: the menacing Oriental, the white woman succumbing to temptation, the secrets that threaten to split a Western couple apart. These shifts demonstrate a drive to acknowledge

²⁷⁰ That is, until his performance as Colonel Saito in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (David Lean 1957) renewed audience and critical attention on his career in a postwar context. In all likelihood, this is the performance that 21st century audiences would most readily associate with Hayakawa.

²⁷¹ The Japanese Hishuru Tori thus becomes the Burmese Haka Arakau for the rereleased version. See Miyao 26-28.

and accommodate social realities that invoke both colonial practice and immigration as paths that lead inevitably, but problematically, to cross-cultural interaction.

The location of these junctures points strongly to the preoccupations of each film. Without a colonial component to shape international relations, *The Cheat* reflects the specter of immigration that haunted the American public at the moment Hayakawa found success in Hollywood. In DeMille's film, set entirely in the vicinity of New York, Hayakawa plays a wealthy Japanese businessman named Hishuru Tori who is living and socializing among Americans of a similar station. From Tori's initial friendship with Edith Hardy to his expulsion from the courtroom after her sensational testimony, a single cultural code of conduct is established, threatened, and finally reinstated, and this code belongs to its American setting just as surely as the Japanese businessman does not. In contrast, *Forfaiture*'s transcontinental crossings show the give-and-take on either side of a cultural divide shaped by predominant colonial attitudes. The film begins in Mongolia, shifts to France at a rough halfway mark, and then concludes in Paris. Although the initial Mongolian setting has no immediate connection to the French empire – nor does it readily correspond to actual Mongolian history – the French presence in the region appears to be modeled after familiar colonial patterns of influence, as Jun Okada notes (375).²⁷³

Judging by his previous films, L'Herbier likely had very specific colonial influences in mind. The director was no stranger to the *cinéma colonial* by the

²⁷² See Guichard, et. al in Blévis, et. al (52-59).

²⁷³ While Okada makes some valid arguments with regard to the stereotypes that inform *Forfaiture*, she fails to unpack the specific connections and distinctions that connect *Forfaiture* to the familiar tropes of the *cinéma colonial*.

time he made *Forfaiture*. His previous features *La Route impériale* (1935) and *Les Hommes nouveaux* (1936) both featured military and monetary conquests of North Africa undertaken in the name of Western imperialism. While *La Route impériale* makes reference to the British Empire, the quasi-propagandistic *Les Hommes nouveaux* covers the “pacification” of Morocco under the leadership of Maréchal Lyautey, who stands out in French imperial history as the colonial administrator keenest to avoid unilateral French authority in North Africa. Instead, Lyautey preferred to win the cooperation of local *caïds* as an indirect means to power.²⁷⁴ This method of colonialism comes through most strongly in *Les Hommes nouveaux* through Lyautey’s reference to his Moroccan allies, an idea reinforced by the friendship between a French officer and a wealthy *caïd* and by the culturally diverse attendees present at official functions. But, importantly, Lyautey’s regime, though culturally pluralistic, remains under his primary direction; his final authority over procedures or decisions remains unchallenged.

A similar emphasis on intercultural cooperation, similarly piloted by Westerners, also applies to the non-colonial exotic in *Forfaiture*. In what is arguably the most significant adaptation of DeMille’s story, L’Herbier takes the husband figure out of a financial career and places him in the field of engineering. This character, Pierre Moret (Victor Francen), works as the director of a bridge construction project situated in a remote part of Mongolia. Similar infrastructure projects appear throughout the *cinéma colonial*,²⁷⁵ but in those cases the French colonizers take the credit and the responsibility for their

²⁷⁴ For more on Lyautey, his ideology and his methods, see Singer and Landon.

²⁷⁵ *Le Grand jeu* (Feyder 1934), *La Bandera* (Duvivier 1936) and *L’Homme du Niger* (Baroncelli 1940) are all examples that show colonial infrastructure projects; in *L’Homme du Niger* the dam is even a focal point of the plot.

development. The only participation from the indigenous populations in these projects comes from either their passive participation in their construction or their active resistance to its progress. In L'Herbier's Mongolia, however, Pierre leads an emphatically collaborative Franco-Mongolian alliance, a *lyautiste* insistence on shared governance elevated to a degree of importance unseen in the colonial formula. Besides the very literal bridge the team constructs, the film also underscores the connection forged between French and Mongolian cultures as a result of their cooperation. Still, just as Lyautey stands firmly at the helm in *Les Hommes nouveaux*, the building team in *Forfaiture* clearly operates under Pierre's leadership.

This utopist project meets an abrupt and tragic end when the Mongolian prince Lee-Lang (Hayakawa) has the bridge destroyed, an act motivated not by the welfare of his people, but by personal revenge against the Morets. Instead of a faceless band of dissidents aiming to drive out the colonizers, like the rebels fighting the road-building legionnaires in *La Bandera*, here the prince levels a structure built in part by the willing hands of his own people. Non-Western authority thus emerges as the primary threat to intercultural teamwork, with the added implication that this authority is unlikely to act in the people's best interest. Yet Lee-Lang's self-centered vengeance springs not from an innate, despotic urge to destroy, although such a characterization would be in line with the stereotype of the malicious Asian villain. Instead, it is the prince's French assistant Valfar (Louis Jouvet) who plants the seeds for the sabotage, and Valfar's animosity towards the bridge-building team appears to stem from his own lust for power. Whatever its origin, the plot holds serious consequences for the

visiting Westerners. Pierre's French colleague is killed in the collapse, and Lee-Lang frames Pierre for the act.

Although the prince's machinations hinder the engineers' progress and even threaten their lives, his claim to authority within the Mongolian state remains unquestioned and uncompromised. Unlike the retaliation that usually follows an insurgent attack on colonial military forces, in *Forfaiture* there is no clear venue for Western reinforcements once Pierre's control of the project is undermined. Although a Frenchman helms the bridge project, this (limited) authority inspires neither respect nor compliance from the local ruler. Pierre's infrequent confrontations with the prince only bring frustration, and he finds himself an unknowing victim of Lee-Lang's setup. Lacking a colonial administration to oversee operations from the top, Pierre cannot regain the prince's support once it is withdrawn; nor can Pierre clear his name in the suspicious destruction of his project without testimony from the very man responsible for the sabotage. Pierre's unwarranted yet incontrovertible burden of guilt not only underscores the power imbalance that puts Lee-Lang on top, but it also foreshadows his role in the murder trial in Paris that concludes the film.

If Pierre represents the Western impulse to forge intercultural bonds and create Western-style infrastructure overseas, Pierre's wife Denise represents the exoticist trope of the Western tourist. On vacation and out of her element, Denise succumbs to local temptation while becoming an ill-fated temptation herself for a man who ends up paying the ultimate price for his attraction. What DeMille figures in *The Cheat* as Edith's social acquaintance gone awry, L'Herbier recasts as the malevolent Oriental's unrequited desire for the French woman visiting his territory. Unlike Edith's initial, perhaps overly comfortable

flirtations with Tori, the Japanese businessman, Denise appears unnerved by Lee-Lang from the start, responding to his solicitous attention with guarded cordiality. In the end, both Edith and Denise must rely on this tenuous social connection after each of them falls prey to the promise of quick riches. In *The Cheat*, Edith is lured in by stocks, a form of gambling, to be sure, but one with a socially sanctioned (and quintessentially American) veneer. Moreover, within the narrative, her husband's successful investments confirm their potential as an investment strategy. In contrast, in *Forfaiture*, the casino becomes Denise's diversion of choice, and an unsurprising one since gambling was a mainstay of French representations of East Asia throughout the 1930s. But Denise proves no more talented a gambler than Edith an investor, and unlike *The Cheat's* 50/50 record for stocks, no payout arrives to offset Denise's losses at the table.

The motivations of the two women also differ considerably. While Edith's consumerism leads to her reckless speculation, Denise's urge to abuse the charity funds has no basis in material possessions. Instead, the act of gambling itself precipitates her fall. Undeterred by an initial, potentially compromising loss, Denise returns to the casino for another losing streak. After losing her own cash, a shady Asian businessman offers her an undisclosed amount of credit on the spot. Left unaware of the stakes, Denise continues to lose, and she winds up 90,000 francs in the hole. To some extent, this financial entrapment alleviates Denise's responsibility for the sum, since, unlike Edith, Denise does not gamble directly with charity money. But Denise repays this substantial debt with charity funds, then accepts a "gift" from Lee-Lang to replace the pilfered cash. This transaction sets a course of action that is similar to *The Cheat*, but even further

complicated by her husband's independent involvement with Lee-Lang, an embellishment of the original narrative.

While the conclusion of *The Cheat* hinges on a single trial at which all three implicated parties (Edith, her husband, and Tori) are present, *Forfaiture's* establishment of a dual connection to the Oriental villain leads to a double dose of justice. An interim and unofficial verdict changes the narrative trajectory so that the final, official trial might take place not in Mongolia, but in France. In each of these retributive moments, only two of the three protagonists are involved, thus creating a very different power struggle from the triple complicity on display in *The Cheat*.

The first, informal judgment in *Forfaiture* comes when Lee-Lang condemns and expels the foreign presence that threatens his prerogative to possess the white woman. When Denise reimburses Lee-Lang's "gift" with a letter instead of keeping her promise to meet him, Lee-Lang uses the bridge collapse as an indirect punishment for Denise's actions. The incident forces Pierre and Denise to return to France in disgrace, making Lee-Lang's punishment an echo of Tori's eviction from the courtroom in *The Cheat*; however, DeMille's social justice is meted out not by a lone authority, but by a courtroom mob. At its core, though, Lee-Lang's prerogative is identical to the mob's: he intends to eliminate a threat to power, and thereby (re)gain control of the white woman. In her analysis of *The Cheat*, Gina Marchetti points out that the trial aims to put Edith in line as much as it aims to punish Tori for his transgression (10-32); the courtroom mob performs the dual function of purging the threat of the outsider and reinforcing the couple's social bond of marriage. In comparison, Lee-Lang's forced eviction

of the Morets also aims to eliminate the outsiders, but his intentions with regard to the couple's marital bond are much less clear.

In *The Cheat*, one might imagine the advantage Tori would stand to gain if, in the course of justice, Mr. Hardy were to successfully take the fall, thereby leaving his wife alone and even more vulnerable than before. Likewise, in *Forfaiture* Lee-Lang sets up the bridge sabotage as a device to force the couple back to France for the investigation, thereby putting Pierre in a position to endure a prolonged separation from Denise. Indeed, once the couple returns to Europe, Pierre sends his wife to their summer home in the south so that he can face the investigation alone in the capital. Denise, ostensibly motivated by her will to intervene on behalf of her beleaguered husband, ignores Pierre's advice and sneaks up to the capital to meet with the Prince in secret. While the trauma of deportation seems to bring the Morets closer together, giving Denise the impetus to confront the man who made her husband the undeserving target of official scrutiny, it also creates precisely the kind of vulnerable situation Lee-Lang may have foreseen.

Neither Lee-Lang's unilateral justice nor the Western court system – American in *The Cheat* or French in *Forfaiture* – ever builds a case around the person who is actually guilty of the offense being tried. In *The Cheat*, Edith's innocent husband deliberately takes the fall for his guilty wife, and Tori tacitly supports this substitution by refusing to testify. Likewise, Lee-Lang obliges Pierre to stand in for his wife, an act motivated by logic since forcing Pierre's deportation ensures that Denise will be deported, too. But unlike Edith's husband in the courtroom, Pierre has no prior knowledge of his wife's guilt when Lee-Lang passes judgment on him.

Pierre's ignorance also carries over to the second, more formal judgment in *Forfaiture*: the courtroom trial in which he finds himself implicated in Lee-Lang's murder. This problematic escalation of the less-than-deadly assault charge in the original film is compounded by Pierre's own connection to the prince, a link not found in DeMille's film. Unlike the wounded Tori, who is alive but silent at Mr. Hardy's trial, in *Forfaiture* the murdered Lee-Lang has two vocal representatives who take the stand in Paris: his assistant Valfar and his secretary, Ming, a young Asian²⁷⁶ woman who is also Valfar's lover. Although the conspicuous absence of the primary foreign adversary provokes valid questions about L'Herbier's intent, Lee-Lang's erasure from the trial scene fails to constitute an endorsement for France to purge itself of its Others. In fact, the heightened presence of Ming in the third act, both as a trial witness and as Valfar's love interest, negates this interpretation of L'Herbier's revision of the scene. Not only does the court take Ming's testimony seriously, but within the narrative, the miscegenous dalliance between she and Valfar matters little – if at all – compared to the ill will they show the Morets. Finally, from a dramatic standpoint, Lee-Lang's absence from the courtroom heightens the impact of the flashback sequence that shows the night of his murder, a device that gives L'Herbier a justification within the narrative for removing him from the trial.

As in *The Cheat*, circumstances make Pierre a prime suspect in the case, and his point of view on the night's events comes first in the narrative's chronology. Wanting to confront the prince over the sabotage of the bridge in

²⁷⁶ While the actress Sylvia Bataille, who plays Ming, claims in an interview that her character is "une métisse," this mixed-race status remains unconfirmed by the film's dialogue. Visible, however, is the fact that Ming's dress, makeup, and hair are consistently coded as Asian (see Holbane in *Ciné-Miroir* 652).

Mongolia, Pierre arrives at Lee-Lang's home in time to hear gunshots. Searching for the source, Pierre finds the prince alone and fatally wounded. Noticing a revolver on the floor, Pierre picks it up at the very moment Valfar enters the room, seeing his master near death and Pierre with the weapon in his hand. But Lee-Lang will not (or cannot) name the culprit before he dies, and the affair is sent to trial. Outside the courtroom, Valfar reveals privately to Pierre that he saw a woman fleeing the scene that night, and produces a torn piece of fabric from Denise's dress. This revelation that provokes Pierre to change his plea to guilty and take the fall for his wife, but his sudden about-face in the courtroom pushes Denise to the stand to recount her version of the events of that night. A flashback visualizes the events, a technique that interrupts the trial drama and breaks up the linear progression of DeMille's *The Cheat*.

Beyond L'Herbier's change in narrative chronology, the substance of Denise's confrontation with Lee-Lang departs from the original story in such a way that distances Denise once again from her culpability. In this sequence, the prince's costume further magnifies his otherness and even foreshadows his threat to Denise; although in Mongolia he wears formal Western dress everywhere, even in his home, in his Parisian quarters he dons a flowing, intricately patterned Oriental robe. Unaware of Lee-Lang's role in the bridge collapse, Denise approaches him to plead her husband's innocence. Her motivation to contact the prince, linked not to her own affairs but to a good-faith effort to clear Pierre's name, thus bolsters a sense of her innocence and renders even more terrible the impression of Lee-Lang's cruelty. Lee-Lang's culpability for assaulting Denise is unmitigated by an immediate personal affront, unlike Edith's attempt to "cheat" Tori out of his side of their deal. In *The Cheat*, Edith

visits Tori after the assault and begs him to drop the charges against her husband, even offering herself once again in recompense. This time, Tori flatly refuses her offer with an intertitle reading: "You cannot cheat me twice." Edith is thus labeled as a conniving manipulator, and Tori retains at least some of his pride in proceeding with the legal trial and refusing to fall for her scheme to prevent it.

On this point, *Forfaiture* differs from the original in two ways: first, the semantics of the original agreement shift from Edith's "deal" to Denise's "gift"; and second, Lee-Lang indeed allows himself to be duped more than once. The "gift" Denise receives in Mongolia corresponds to Edith's one and only "deal," but the connotations of these two words differ significantly. A "deal" can be "cheated" if one side fails to make good, but a "gift" can only be cheated if it really isn't a "gift" at all. Thus, DeMille's presentation of the stakes of each proposed exchange is more frank than in *Forfaiture*, and the clear, two-party "deal" in *The Cheat* splits culpability for the transaction between the covetous woman and the predatory Oriental. However, in *Forfaiture* Lee-Lang's monetary "gift" elides any clear sense of Denise's precise obligation to him, and when she fails to return for her scheduled visit, the prince's explosive reaction outweighs the level of offense. In Paris, during their second meeting, Denise makes a new "promise" to Lee-Lang when he agrees to drop the case against Pierre, but the terms of the "promise" are again left implicit. That Denise's "promise" is made under such duress also seems to function as a means to win sympathy, since at this point she is trying – apparently at any cost – to act in her husband's best interest. In the end, the prince plays the fool when he fails to emulate Tori's prudent refusal of a second arrangement; not only does Denise refuse to keep her

promise, she shoots him dead after he brands his seal into her shoulder. Both a symbolic rape and a literal marking of the white woman as an object in his possession, evidence of this act of branding ultimately confirms innocence in court for both Edith and Denise.

Denise's testimony at the trial, including the display of Lee-Lang's branding scar, incites the spectators to eject Valfar and Ming from the courtroom just as the crowd in *The Cheat* turns against Tori. But in making this revision, L'Herbier fails to recapture the connotations of a lynch mob that are evident in DeMille's film, and furthermore, Valfar's status as a Frenchman prevents the eviction from representing a systematic elimination of the foreign. Here, the outrage-by-proxy fails to register as an authentic rejection of foreign interloper(s), especially since the foreigner(s) in question were by no means fixtures in the community.²⁷⁷

In both films, the threatening foreigner becomes the target of vigilante justice in the form of expulsion (Tori in *The Cheat*, and the Morets' deportation in *Forfaiture*) or death (Lee-Lang in *Forfaiture*). Nevertheless, the clarity of the central idea in *The Cheat* – the social (non-)assimilation of nonwhite immigrants – stands in marked contrast to the convolutions of L'Herbier's exoticist narrative. Both Edith and Tori are guilty of socially improper misdeeds – Edith of an ill-conceived attempt at financial independence and Tori of attempted (that is, symbolically attained) rape – yet despite physical injuries and public humiliation, they both survive the ordeal.²⁷⁸ Edith even reconciles with her

²⁷⁷ Jun Okada discusses the difference between *The Cheat* and *Forfaiture* in their use of space in the courtroom and elsewhere, claiming this as the primary distinction between the two films (376).

²⁷⁸ Discussing the link between lynch mobs and the courtroom mêlée in *The Cheat*, Gina Marchetti points out that as part of mob punishment, the white woman "victim" (or the consensual lover)

husband in what is construed as a happy ending, but what happens to Tori remains unclear. Does he get his own trial? Is he deported? Does the crowd mete out its own idea of justice after the couple leaves the courtroom? Unlike the overt and openly celebrated rehabilitation of the bourgeois woman, the irreconcilability of Tori's Otherness with his surroundings remains as implicit as it is inevitable after such an affront to Western bourgeois morality. The loose thread of Tori's fate leaves a hint of disquiet in the conclusion of *The Cheat*, but in *Forfaiture*, even more troublingly, Lee-Lang's fate is sealed long before the trial convenes.

The fact that Hayakawa, the strongest and most evident point of continuity with DeMille's silent classic, plays a character killed before the climactic trial underscores the fact that L'Herbier perceived a very different ideological focus for his film. Marked by the absence of the murdered Mongolian prince, *Forfaiture's* trial raises questions about how actions and interactions with non-Western peoples abroad can lead to targeted violence at home. By applying the colonial uncanny to non-colonized Mongolia,²⁷⁹ in short, L'Herbier puts French colonialism on the stand. And in this trial, as in reality, the forces that work against Western control are shown to be deceitful, hence Lee-Lang's sabotage and Valfar's selective testimony at the trial, or forcibly silenced, hence Lee-Lang's murder. Meanwhile, the (white, female) murderer is

of the nonwhite male accused of rape was subject to public identification and humiliation, and was considered forever beholden to the men who had acted to avenge her honor (15-16).

²⁷⁹ Several devices are used to invoke the colonial uncanny. Casting Victor Francen, who frequently played military and colonial men during the 1930s, was one such device (see the Introduction). Okada points out, after Charles O'Brien (whose citation is also discussed in Chapter 1), that the shot of a map of Mongolia at the beginning of the film reframes a common trope in colonial cinema, labeling and claiming the territory to anchor the film's perspective with the colonizers (377). But Okada's conflation of Mongolia – a territory never colonized by any European power – with territory within the French empire renders her analysis highly

set free; the West is exonerated in spite of its guilt. Significantly, *Forfaiture* raises the stakes of the white woman's crime, but it re-skews the imbalance in her favor by providing ample evidence of the duplicity and irrationality of non-Western power. The Morets embody the two sides of colonialism, both the titillating leisure side and the practical administrative side, and while both sides misstep in their dealings with the non-Western other, their errors can be justified as an excess of trust. Denise trusted the stranger who offered her credit at the casino, and she trusted Lee-Lang to behave like a gentleman; meanwhile, her husband trusted that Lee-Lang would be steadfast in his support of the bridge project. While Okada reads the film's position on imperialism as ambiguous (375), the fact that Denise and Pierre reconcile over Lee-Lang's grave shows quite clearly the side L'Herbier takes in the colonial debate. The West may not be wholly innocent, but its use of violent means to eliminate the guiltier-than-thou turn into the pursuit of a cooperative Western hegemony.

Bringing the Other Back Home: *Patrouille blanche* (1939/1942)

Christian Chamborant's *Patrouille blanche*, made in 1939-1940 but not released until 1942, brought Hayakawa's recognizable prototype of the Asian villain out of the East and into the West – to Chamonix, to be exact. This is also the only 1930s French film to give Hayakawa a true top billing; his name leads the opening credits, and at least one poster for the film also focuses on an image of him at his most violent as he subjugates a white woman by force. Set in France from start to finish, Hayakawa plays a Chinese gang leader, the

problematic, as are her repeated attempts to apply the notion of "colonial nostalgia" to a film made well before the collapse of the French empire.

improbably named Halloway,²⁸⁰ who lures desperate men and women into his service. Marked as both powerful and cruel using the same Orientalist tropes as those found in *Forfaiture*, in the first sequence Halloway holds audience in a sumptuous room bedecked with décor that includes a giant statue of Buddha and billowing clouds of incense. Dressed in a splendid Chinese robe, he orders his assistant Wong (Gaston Modot in ethnic drag) to dispose of an associate who has provoked his ire. Others wait outside the room in the hopes that he will grant them whatever favor they seek.

The most remarkable aspect of this role is the fact that the narrative offers Hayakawa's race as the only rationale for his animosity towards a pro-development project, a new dam near Chamonix. The publicity conference for the project centers on discourse about bringing modernity to the region, and despite the Alpine backdrop, the tone of the talks is oddly reminiscent of colonial development rhetoric. The project president refers to the dam as an "éclatante victoire sur la nature sauvage," a substitution of what exoticist cinema would call "savage" colonized or native peoples with impersonal, yet "savage" natural surroundings. Further tracing the contours of these colonialist shadows, a vaguely military interpretation can be grafted onto the eponymous *Patrouille blanche*, a high-spirited mountain patrol whose volunteers monitor the engineers' construction and perform mountaintop rescue missions as needed. Significantly, the name "Patrouille blanche" also takes on a racially charged meaning when a Chinese man emerges as the primary threat to the safety of the

²⁸⁰ Phonetically, there are common sounds in "Halloway" and "Hayakawa": the aspirated *h* as the first letter and the *w* in the final syllable. Whether or not these similarities appear by design, the name Halloway is neither ethnically French nor tied to a non-Western heritage, raising questions about whether the role was originally written with Hayakawa in mind or if his performance hallmarks were incorporated into the narrative after he was cast.

entirely white mountain community. A kind of localized, home-grown version of the Legion, as it were, this patrol defends the march of progress against the rebels who would fight it. The implication of this struggle, like other infrastructure projects in exoticist and especially colonial cinema, is that such resistance works against the best interest of both the rebels themselves and the whole of Western imperial society.

What sets Halloway against these forces for change is a backroom deal with the oil companies, who stand to lose a great deal of their business to the water power generated by a nearby dam. The oil barons hire Halloway to destroy it, but Halloway makes it clear that he accepts the mission not for monetary gain – since he refuses their generous payoff – but for personal reasons: “J’obéis à la volonté de mes ancêtres. Je haïs le progrès. Je haïs votre civilisation de barbares qui détruit la nôtre. Il faut que je réussisse.”

Paradoxically, Halloway’s race is both utterly gratuitous – since a white actor might have used any other invented rationale – and essential to his motive because his non-Western ancestry “naturally” pits him against Western civilization.

Halloway also inspires contradictory impressions among his acquaintances and associates. At the publicity reception, where he is the only non-European in attendance, the project director’s chatty wife absent-mindedly calls him “cet Asiatique,” but concludes nonetheless that he is someone “de qualité.” On the other hand, aside from Wong, his gang seems to harbor only hatred for their boss. Halloway recruits associates by agreeing to bail them out of various personal failings – debts, a criminal record, and the like – then using their past to blackmail them into doing his bidding. Victor (Paul Azaïs), who has

long been trapped under Halloway's control, refers to him ruefully as "ce jaune" and longs to escape with Sandra (Junie Astor), another member of the gang.

But Sandra does not share Victor's feelings, and she winds up falling for the dam engineer that she was assigned to surveille. The force of Halloway's control is fully deployed on Sandra over the course of the film. First, when she resists his orders, Halloway executes a move strikingly similar to the one used in *Forfaiture* (and *The Cheat* before that); he grabs her hair, pulls her down,²⁸¹ then pushes her forcefully onto the bed in a violent but oblique visual allusion to rape. The next shot cuts to him as he lies down beside her – both now behave more calmly although the tension between them still simmers – and she agrees to follow his orders. But the plot thickens with Sandra's continued affair with the engineer and the revelation that the gang's newest member (Robert le Vigan) is actually a double agent. Sandra tries to escape the impending debacle, but Wong shoots her down as she tries to make her way down from Halloway's mountain hideout to safety. The *Patrouille blanche* is called in to retrieve her, but her fate is sealed; at the moment of her death, an image of a clenching fist – established in the opening sequence as Halloway's command to kill – is superimposed on her face, and a gong sounds on the audio track. Revenge for her murder comes when Victor finds her near death, tracks down Halloway, and shoots him dead during an altercation.

Patrouille blanche thus appears to be a straightforward Hayakawa vehicle in the same sense that Josephine Baker's films served as star vehicles; his role is designed for him to give a performance that replays elements readily

²⁸¹ This moment is even captured on a poster for the film, although Hayakawa's likeness in the image is rather poorly rendered.

recognizable to an audience familiar with his preceding work (and especially *Forfaiture*). These elements include racially motivated hostility, abuse of power, and cruel subjugation of underlings and (white) women as exemplified by his signature move, first seen in *The Cheat* and replicated nearly exactly in *Forfaiture*. His identity as an exotic Other is established only superficially, using scattered racial references in the dialogue along with the occasional, ethnically marked set piece and costuming choice. With only minor changes, Hayakawa's role could have been played by any actor with a history of on-screen villainy, but his casting necessitated the inclusion of these racially based verbal and performative signifiers. Once again in *Patrouille blanche*, his death comes as vengeful retaliation for his shady dealings, but as *Macao, l'enfer du jeu* would go on to prove, it was not the only way Hayakawa's character could meet his end.

The Exotic Father: *Macao, l'enfer du jeu* (1939/1942)

Of all of his prewar films, Hayakawa's role in *Macao* offers the most complete composite of the roles that he was offered in France during this period. The troubled, prolonged release of *Macao* no doubt contributes to the lack of extant criticism of the film; after the German invasion, censors forced director Jean Delannoy to erase Erich von Stroheim due to a Nazi ban on his work, so he gave the role to Pierre Renoir and reshot the relevant scenes. This version was released in 1942, but the Stroheim version was restored and made available in France after the end of the Occupation. However, much had happened during the war years, not least of which was a noticeable break in dominant cinematic themes that moved popular cinema away from conventions that dominated the

1930s.²⁸² Out of sync with both wartime and postwar audiences, the delayed release of *Macao* stripped it of its chronological context within the extended cycle of interwar *cinéma d'exotisme*. Further complicating its global reception, its U.S. release was delayed even longer, first appearing on American screens in 1950 to coincide with a growing public interest in the region.²⁸³ As a result, 70 years after Hayakawa's prewar French films were made, *Macao* is among the least examined, yet by far the most easily accessible thanks to a recent DVD release.²⁸⁴

In *Macao* Hayakawa plays a casino boss named Ying Tchai, whose business and behavior as a wealthy casino boss bear a strong resemblance to his role in the remake of *Forfaiture*. As the powerful, threatening Asian man, Hayakawa covers familiar territory indeed; however, in addition to the menace Tchai poses to the central, European couple, *Macao* presents his failed attempts to thwart his daughter's love for a Frenchman. The central couple begins to form when Mireille (Mireille Balin) encounters Captain Krall (Erich von Stroheim/Pierre Renoir) in a general's office in Canton. She has just been picked up by a military patrol; he has just arranged a black market arms deal with the Chinese general. Krall's successful intervention saves Mireille from imprisonment, and she gratefully agrees to accompany him to Macao where, unbeknownst to her, he will seek a deal with Tchai in order to complete the exchange of weapons. Without asking or demanding anything (sexual) in return, Krall gives Mireille her own quarters on his boat, the *Amouna*, a fancy dress for

²⁸² This is the major argument in Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier's *La Drôle de guerre des sexes du cinéma français (1930-1956)*.

²⁸³ Miyao (329 n70) asserts that the renewed cinematic interest in Asia was sparked by the onset of the Korean War. It is unclear if the original cast or the refilmed version was released in the United States, but Miyao indicates two alternate English titles: *Mask of Korea* and *Gambling Hell*.

²⁸⁴ Studio Canal, released in April 2004. To be fair, none of Hayakawa's prewar films have enjoyed frequent scholarly attention, but *Yoshiwara* and *Forfaiture* each have a recent article

their gambling outings, and engaging, attentive company. This generosity lays the foundation for an affectionate camaraderie that grows between them.

As the *Amouna* makes its way towards Macao, the focus shifts to a commercial ocean liner already pulling into port. Aboard this vessel, a French journalist named Pierre (Roland Toutain) and Tchai's daughter Jasmine (Louise Carletti) arrange fleeting encounters, hoping to avert the watchful eye of Jasmine's hovering chaperone. These expository sequences that establish the circumstances of both key romances are construed to win audience sympathy for both the Mireille/Krall and the Jasmine/Pierre romantic pairs. For Jasmine and Pierre, further exposition reveals their romance as a tale of second-generation miscegenation, since Jasmine pointedly mentions her mother's French origins in a conversation with her Chinese father. This revelation activates the cultural repatriation narrative schema found in films of the 1930s that feature a romantic coupling between a European and a mixed-race character.²⁸⁵

The only force that tries to thwart these couples is Tchai, although in each case his intervention has a different motivation and takes a different form. He moves with great calculation to disrupt Krall's dealings while jockeying for sexual control over the European woman. When Krall and Mireille go out to Tchai's casino, his past dealings with Tchai lead to his easy identification, and Mireille's presence compels the boss to investigate further. Surmising their mutual attraction, an informer named Almaido tells Tchai that Krall lacks the means to pay for his weapons up front, forming a combination of weaknesses that Tchai plots to exploit. At the casino, Krall puts Mireille at a card table to

devoted to in-depth analysis, e.g. Jacoby (2002) and Okada (2008).

²⁸⁵ See Chapter 4 for a discussion of second-generation miscegenation and cultural repatriation.

play. Unaware that her winnings have been earmarked for an illicit weapons deal, Mireille has excellent luck while Krall endures a tense, unproductive tête-à-tête with Tchai. Krall returns to the casino floor, sends Mireille to the bar and takes her place, but once she is alone, a servant arrives to escort her to Tchai's quarters. Immediately suspicious of his motives, Mireille brushes off both his advances and his threat to withhold her winnings. In spite of her chilly insolence, Tchai invites her to dinner the following night, an invitation she proclaims no intention of honoring. Visibly unnerved by the encounter, she rejoins Krall at the table only to find him on the verge of serious debt. As he writes a bad check to cover the loss, Mireille wordlessly connects Tchai's proposition with Krall's bad luck.

The next day, Krall reveals his situation to Mireille, who offers to talk to Tchai in order to save him from debtor's prison and to reciprocate Krall's intervention on her behalf in Canton. She never mentions Tchai's prior invitation, and Krall accepts her offer with relief. After nightfall Mireille goes to meet Tchai, who destroys the bad check before trying to force Mireille to submit to his advances. She resists, flinging cigarette ash into Tchai's face and managing to flee the casino, and she ultimately reconciles with a repentant Krall. The same financial and sexual domination found in *The Cheat* and *Forfaiture* thus resurfaces in the triangle between Krall, Mireille, and Tchai – schema in which Hayakawa always plays the same role. Even the blocking of the confrontation scene between Tchai and Mireille contains echoes of DeMille's film. However, there remains one significant point where *Forfaiture* and *Macao* do not overlap: in *Macao* the woman's entrapment stems from her man's ill-fated dealings instead of her own.

Unlike his plot to derail Krall by manipulating Mireille, Tchai's interference in his daughter Jasmine's romance begins inadvertently, although his motive proves equally self-serving. After their arrival, Jasmine returns to her father's house while Pierre hits the casino with Almaido, a gregarious companion who keeps mum about his job as Tchai's informer. In very short order, Pierre, a reporter on assignment to investigate arms dealing in Macao, wins big at roulette. Ignorant of his daughter's love for the lucky young stranger, Tchai targets him both for his big win and for his potential to expose his underground dealings. Without confronting him directly, Tchai orders his thugs to abduct Pierre as he leaves the casino, take back his winnings, and dump him into the bay. Improbably, Pierre survives the hit, and Krall's boat, preparing to dock in Macao, passes by just in time to pull him out of the water. Once recovered, Pierre pays a visit to Jasmine in order to meet her father and bring their romance out of secrecy; when Jasmine tells her father about her new beau, he smiles and seems supportive of her choice in partner. At this point, however, neither Jasmine nor Pierre knows of Tchai's status as a boss of Macao's underworld. Oblivious to her father's ownership of the casino and his interest in the black market arms trade, Jasmine believes him to be a banker, while Pierre, not knowing that Jasmine's father is responsible for ordering the hit, recounts his ordeal to Jasmine and Tchai and threatens revenge on the man behind it.

During Pierre's visit, Tchai listens impassively to his story, but when Pierre marches into the casino that night and demands to see the boss, he is surprised to find his lover's father sitting in the boss's chair. Hoping to protect his own position – Pierre's task as a journalist is to investigate precisely the kind of underhanded dealings that are Tchai's specialty in Macao – he returns Pierre's

winnings and informs him that he will be traveling on the next boat out of Macao. Pierre is forcibly removed from the casino and nearly crosses paths with Jasmine, who arrives at the casino with her worrywart governess in tow. After coaxing her chaperone to a spot at the gambling table as a distraction, Jasmine tries to spot Pierre in the crowd. But instead of her lover, to Jasmine's astonishment she glimpses her father fumbling through the corridors, temporarily blinded by the ashes Mireille had thrown into his eyes. She follows him back to his office and confronts him, and Tchai, frozen in disbelief, regains his sight in time to see his disillusioned daughter run out of the casino. She goes to the docks, finds the *Amouna* and introduces herself as Tchai's daughter. The watchman, eager to accommodate such a valuable piece of collateral, leads her to Pierre's quarters to wait for him. Meanwhile, Pierre manages to wrest free from Tchai's henchmen and make his way back to the *Amouna* while Krall uses his unwitting hostage to force a distraught Tchai to make a deal.

Ultimately, both couples are reunited on board the *Amouna* as Tchai's machinations quickly unravel. In the process, he loses two things: his position of power in Macao's seedy underworld, and the love of his daughter. The sudden loss of his daughter's trust drives Tchai to desperation in the same way Isamo in *Yoshiwara* turns desperate after learning of Kohana's death sentence. For both of these characters, self-interested love – romantic love in *Yoshiwara* and paternal love in *Macao* – leads to unfortunate actions that destroy any chance at lasting happiness with the object of their affection. This sentimentality brought forth in Tchai's relationship with Jasmine also marks the clearest distinction between this character and the prince in *Forfaiture*, whose cruelty is left unmitigated by filial love. The final blow to Tchai comes when Almeida, unaware of Jasmine's

disappearance, announces that he has taken the liberty of sending a fleet of bombardiers out to sink the *Amouna*.²⁸⁶

Outwitted by his adversaries and abandoned by the only person he loves, Tchai burns down his casino and commits suicide as the sound of planes and bombs washes over the sound track. The downward spiral that reduces the stoic and forceful underground kingpin to a pathetic, remorseful father thus combines in a single narrative the full spectrum of Hayakawa's roles in the 1930s. In *Macao*, Hayakawa's portrayal of Tchai allows the powerful, sadistic bosses of *Forfaiture* and *Patrouille blanche* and the pining servant of *Yoshiwara* to cohabit a single role in which Hayakawa's star persona reconciles the dual impulses of sexual predation and loyal adoration that characterize his previous French roles.²⁸⁷ The recourse to suicide at the end of the film fulfils the need for the villain to die as a result of his treachery; the motive behind the suicide underscores the same level of sentimentality that led Isamo to betray his country.

The conclusion of *Macao* also underscores the failure of the menacing outsider to successfully decouple a Eurocentric love match just as the reaffirmed marriage in *Forfaiture* (like in *The Cheat* before it) leads to a hopeful ending. Lee-Lang fails to draw Denise away from her husband; Tchai cannot separate Mireille from Krall nor his own daughter from the French journalist out to expose his underground empire. Without the benefit of a European/European

²⁸⁶ John W. Martin makes a deft comparison of Pabst's *Le Drame de Shanghai* (see Chapter 5) and *Macao*: both feature fallen aristocrats (Kay Murphy and Ivan/Krall), both depict a shady and corrupted underworld run by wantonly immoral leaders (Lee Pang/Yin Tchai), both have young innocents who stumble unawares into the dark pasts of their parents (Vera/Jasmine), and both feature French reporters who blow the whistle on the evildoers and help save the innocents as their parents meet their doom (Martin 73-77). Martin also claims that Tchai "mistakenly" thinks that he has killed his own daughter, although the final sequence seems to suggest that the *Amouna* has actually been sunk. In *Macao*, then, it seems that the innocent has not been spared.

or a European/*métis* structure, the mixed-race character of *Yoshiwara*'s central couple prefigures an eventual separation, but Isamo's interference pushes them each towards death. Although the central couple(s) might also meet a tragic end, the non-Western interloper is left unloved, defeated (or dead), and implicated in his own wrongdoing.

²⁸⁷ This combination of normally incompatible traits is one of the characteristics of a star as defined by Richard Dyer (*Stars* 26).

CONCLUSION

Exoticism of the Occupation and Beyond

Throughout the 1930s, the cinematic manifestations of the exoticist impulse combine mutability with polyvalence, demonstrating a flexibility in their forms and narrative structures that offers an array of potential meanings. While fascinating in its own right, this variety makes it extraordinarily difficult to come to any neat conclusions about the function of these films within the cultural context of the decade. Exuberantly performed escapist fantasies like the Josephine Baker vehicles do not easily align with exile narratives like *Le Grand jeu* and *Pépé le Moko*, and neither match up in an obvious way to the pointedly political military dramas like the 1939 film *L'Homme du Niger*, discussed below. Yet these and all other instances of cinematic exoticism perform a balancing act between enacting hegemonic ideologies about the exotic and/or colonized Other and appealing to the public's taste for escapist fare. Thus, for French audiences in the 1930s, exoticist cinema responded to a spectrum of spectator desires, connecting a wish to escape with the will to enforce an inevitably political mythology of East-West relations, one in which the West always ends up on top.

The Patriotic Expatriate: *L'Homme du Niger* (1939)

As intra-European tensions began to escalate towards the end of the 1930s, some filmmakers used exoticist films to communicate overtly patriotic messages to an increasingly anxious public. In particular, colonial cinema adopted a nationalistic stance under these tense political conditions, and films where the French exert clear (although not necessarily direct) power placated the conservative right in the months before the onset of the German occupation. One

such transitional film is Jacques de Baroncelli's *L'Homme du Niger*, filmed in 1939 and released just months before the end of the *drôle de guerre*.

Writing in *Cinémonde*, Pierre Leprohon alludes to the film's capacity to bolster French morale in the face of political uncertainty: "Dans les jours difficiles que nous traversons, *L'Homme du Niger* dira mieux que toutes les paroles, ce qu'est en Afrique l'œuvre colonisatrice de la France."²⁸⁸ In a subsequent headline, the same publication declared it "un grand film de propagande française."²⁸⁹ Pro-French and pro-imperial rhetoric coming from a narrative set in the African colonies offered a distraction from more proximate threats to the nation while simultaneously managing to eschew purely escapist forms of exoticism. In these cases, the colonial signifiers pointed to something very real, even if these images were constructed in narrowly ideological terms. *L'Homme du Niger*'s potential for moral edification also contributed to the decision to select the film as one of France's contributions to the ill-fated Cannes festival of 1939. Jean Vignaud's *Ciné-Miroir* praises the choice and describes the film as

un drame de la lèpre qui se déroule dans notre Afrique Occidentale française, et c'est une occasion pour Baroncelli de montrer les grands efforts accomplis par des savants et des médecins de chez nous qui ne séparent jamais la cause de la colonisation de la cause de l'humanité. C'est un document magnifique tout à la louange des grands administrateurs de notre vaste Empire. Il donne aux

²⁸⁸ "'L'Homme du Niger' qui exalte une grande oeuvre de paix." *Cinémonde* 576 (15 Nov 1939): 2.

²⁸⁹ The article attached to this headline is mainly an interview with Harry Baur, one of the stars of *L'Homme du Niger*. Jacques Berland. "Un grand film de propagande française: *L'Homme du Niger*." *Cinémonde* 581 (20 Dec 1939): n.p.

Français la fierté de leur pays et de leur race. C'est un beau film et c'est une bonne action.²⁹⁰

Despite such superlative descriptions, Baroncelli's film has since languished in relative obscurity. Still, as Floréal Jimenez argues, many of the motifs engaged within the narrative are emblematic of the colonial branch of exoticist cinema. Like Poirier's overtly colonialist *L'Appel du silence* (1936), there is an element of biography in Baroncelli's narrative; Jimenez points out that the protagonist, an officer and an engineer named Bréval, appears to be based on Étienne Bélime, an irrigation specialist who had been involved with projects in several countries, including a system implemented in the Nigerian basin echoed in Bréval's dam project at the heart of the film (114). While Jimenez's reading of *L'Homme du Niger* focuses primarily on colonized space and the racism inherent in the film's treatment of the native black populations, the film's significance as a transitional narrative from the 1930s to the Occupation lies in its deployment of white, French colonizer types.

As played by the reliably authoritative Victor Francen (see the Introduction), Bréval signifies the imposition of infrastructure as a colonial strategy, and his devotion to his work emphasizes his narrative role as a hero of sub-Saharan imperialist ideology. His close friend Bourdais (Harry Baur, in another incarnation of his exoticist paternal figure) is a colonial doctor specializing in the treatment of leprosy. Bréval proposes an irrigation system designed to propel a new era of agricultural prosperity, and his vision earns him attention not just from the colonial administration, but also from a young woman named Danièle, a colonial minister's daughter who soon falls in love with him.

²⁹⁰ Claude Bernier. "Les films français au festival de Cannes." *Ciné-Miroir* 753 (8 Sept 1939): 579.

Just after Bréval and Danièle make plans to marry, however, Bourdais diagnoses his friend with leprosy. Despite Bourdais's promises to cure him of the disease, Bréval breaks off his engagement to Danièle in order to retreat into self-imposed colonial exile.

In this context, Bréval's leprosy merits further unpacking. The disease operates as a figurative invasion of the Western body by a clearly non-Western force, and as a result of his infection Bréval is unable to reinstate himself unproblematically in a Western lifestyle. It must be noted that the inability to return "home" is a frequent trope in the exoticist imaginary, and one generally expressed in the figure of the rogue *colon*.²⁹¹ While this figure shows certain symptoms implied to be a kind of colonial disease, like lethargy and alcoholism, the implications of these afflictions are generally understood to be primarily psychological. Bréval's character is certainly a *colon*, but nevertheless he is anything but a rogue; in contrast to the rogue *colons'* mental degeneracy, Bréval's leprosy is figured as a strictly physical disease that in no way detracts from his intellectual focus on his work.

Indeed, during his treatment Bréval continues to monitor his pet project in secret and at a safe remove, with Bourdais acting as his go-between as well as his physician. Dressed in traditional Tuareg clothing, which covers his face and thus conceals his identity from the European community, Bréval even makes periodic visits to the construction site himself. Here, then, Bréval's use of non-Western sartorial signifiers – instead of pointing to an anxiety-producing level of assimilation with his African surroundings – are used to deflect public scrutiny and allow him to continue in his role as an engineer of imperially sponsored

infrastructure. On a cultural level, Bréval thus maintains his Western identity and on-the-job competence despite his isolation and suffering that stems from an ailment associated with non-Western, poverty-stricken regions. His motives for adopting local customs contrast sharply with, for instance, Gilieth in *La Bandera*; furthermore, his ideological devotion to imperial service separate him not only from the legionnaires in *La Bandera*, but also from Doctor Holk in *Amok* or the eponymous captain in *Mollenard*, to cite only two possible examples.²⁹²

Three years pass. Bréval and Bourdais continue their work in the colonies, while the heartbroken Danièle – unaware of Bréval’s reason for abandoning their engagement – has married a younger officer named Parent. Dissatisfied with their life in the *métropole*, Parent and Danièle decide to return to the Sudan, a decision further discussed below. On a tour of the dam site shortly after arriving in Africa, Danièle spies a mysterious man in black Tuareg robes and immediately suspects him to be Bréval in disguise. Following her hunch, Danièle leaves the settlement alone to find him. Meanwhile, Bourdais triumphantly informs Bréval that he has been cured of his leprosy. Once Danièle finds Bréval, he tells her the story of his diagnosis and recovery, but Bréval refuses to break up Danièle’s marriage to Parent, telling her that he has suffered a relapse.

Then, Parent is called away to address an indigenous revolt at the construction site. Just as the Africans begin to arrive in numbers great enough to do serious damage to the dam, an uncovered Pierre climbs the scaffolding and addresses the crowd in their native language. The fact that the protagonist openly (and frequently) communicates in the local language marks a new

²⁹¹ See Chapter Two for a more complete discussion of the rogue *colon* figure.

²⁹² See Part I for analyses of *La Bandera* and *Amok*; see Chapter Five for a discussion of *Mollenard*.

development for colonialist narrative.²⁹³ No subtitles are given for the French spectator to understand the exact content of his speech, but the crowd's reaction shows their conversion – they cheer him on, fists in the air, as the rebel faction returns to their boats. But, after overcoming the passive force of his leprosy through Western science, Bréval succumbs to the more direct force of a disaffected local leader's parting shot; as his men row him back across the water, the leader who had incited the coup shoots Bréval dead. Having first sacrificed his happiness in order to preserve Danièle's marriage, Bréval loses his life while ensuring that his irrigation project would carry on with local support.

The emphatic characterization of Bréval as an ideologically motivated imperial engineer rather than a mercenary (like Gilieth in *La Bandera*) or an opportunist (like Bourron in *Les Hommes nouveaux*) gives *L'Homme du Niger* a very different tenor compared to preceding exoticist films, a deployment of the exotic that prefigures the Occupation-era approach, discussed below. Bréval is not the only character in the film to take exoticist representations in unusual directions. Danièle and Bourdais also point to new developments in the genre, since films that lean to the right of the imperial spectrum had previously emphasized exclusively male domains of military and commercial conquest rather than the more nurturing, "soft" aspects of the imperial project like domesticity or medicine.²⁹⁴ Although rare in earlier films, the presence of both domesticity and medicine in *L'Homme du Niger*'s colonial narrative is not unprecedented. The 1934 film *Itto* (Benoît-Lévy and Epstein) also shows a Western woman in a participatory role: a colonial doctor's wife who grows

²⁹³ Despite this use of non-Western language in the film, racism still runs rampant in many aspects of *L'Homme du Niger*. See Jimenez.

accustomed to her isolated surroundings and symbolically participates in the greater imperial project. Still, the left-leaning politics of *Itto* and the parallel figure of the eponymous, indigenous princess in the story make this Western woman less of an anomaly than Danièle in *L'Homme du Niger*. She helps usher in the idea that a married, military couple could agree settle in the colony together rather than staying in Europe or enduring a sustained separation, an idea that marks a new development in right-leaning imperial narratives. Furthermore, like the central figure of the doctor in *Itto*, in *L'Homme du Niger* the centrality of Bourdais's work places additional emphasis on humanitarian efforts unrelated to the typical military-industrial-infrastructure trifecta of imperial control.

Taken together, these three characters – Bréval, Bourdais, and Danièle – and the narrative that presents them all underscore a subtle yet identifiable shift in *cinéma colonial*'s narrative strategy. Tweaking the male-centered formula of an adventure film, *L'Homme du Niger* turns it into a more gender-inclusive, decidedly patriotic representation of imperial activity. While the new openness to women would continue in some exoticist films of the Occupation, the patriotic overtones gave way to a more pessimistic view.

Imperial Stasis: *Malaria* (1943)

During the Occupation, exoticism moved away from the resurgent nationalism seen in *L'Homme du Niger* and tended to serve as a backdrop to gloomy allegories that underscore the moral ambiguities inherent in the imperial project. One film that uses exoticism to this effect is the 1943 film *Malaria* (Jean Gourguet), which reunites Sessue Hayakawa and Mireille Balin in a situation

²⁹⁴ See Slavin for a detailed analysis of *Itto*.

drastically different from the one that had brought them together four years earlier for the filming of *Macao, l'enfer du jeu*.²⁹⁵ Rejecting the alluring connotations that were considered standard for exotic settings in prewar productions, in *Malaria* the colonial setting more closely resembles a prison. Many characters define themselves early and repeatedly as dissatisfied or even unwilling pawns in the imperial operation that keeps them exiled from Europe, referred to as “le fruit défendu” by the lone character who professes a taste for the adventures of exoticism.

The film centers on an intrigue in which a love triangle dovetails with an indigenous servant's mysterious disappearance. A military officer named Henri is carrying on an affair with Madeleine (Balin), a nonmilitary *colon*'s wife. Neither of them enjoys the colonial life, and they conspire to leave together for Europe. When Madeleine realizes that Saïdi (Hayakawa), her house servant, may have overheard their plans, Henri vows to confront him and ensure his silence. Henri, who suffers from malaria-induced hallucinations, gets into an altercation with Saïdi one night but blacks out as the confrontation escalates. The next morning, unsure of what happened, Henri awakes to find his hut in disarray, but Saïdi has disappeared without a trace. Neither the Europeans nor the native population have seen him, nor have they heard of his whereabouts.

As the mystery of Saïdi's absence deepens, Madeleine's husband Barral sets out to accompany Henri on a mission to find a man suspected in recent serial killings that have targeted military officers in the jungle. Once Barral and Henri find the suspect, when Barral urges him to shoot the trigger-shy Henri balks at

²⁹⁵ *Macao* was released during the Occupation despite having been filmed in the late 1930s. The story of the film's delayed release is covered in Chapter Six.

the idea of killing him on the spot. Annoyed by Henri's reluctance, Barral does the job for him; still, in public Barral gives Henri credit for the act, since as a military man, Henri is safe from a wrongful death prosecution in the shooting. Unmoved by Barral's attempts to justify the act, Henri considers it more a murder than a justifiable punishment for his alleged wrongdoing.

With both Barral and Henri now circumstantially linked to misconduct – Henri to Saïdi's disappearance and Barral to the unorthodox offing of the suspected killer – among the Europeans in the colony, suspicions mount around each man. Emerging in the discourse are deep-seated social fissures between military men like Henri and non-military *colons* like Barral; others without any direct affiliation, like Madeleine and the local priest, also take on peripheral roles. These distinctions show how the formula found in interwar exoticist cinema changes during the Occupation in significant ways. In *Malaria*, there is no clear rogue *colon*, nor does there emerge a character that represents a contrapuntal masculine colonial ideal. Barral may show a singular devotion to the exoticist lifestyle, but his moral lapses undercut this trait; meanwhile, Henri is certainly no hero, his affiliation with the forces of military order notwithstanding. Both men are thus amalgams of positive and negative aspects of the stereotypical *colon*. As for Madeleine, she is not a European tourist (like Balin's character Gaby in *Pépé le Moko*), nor a daughter figure (as in *Le Simoun* or *L'Esclave blanc*), nor even a single woman down on her luck (as in *Sola*). Instead, like Danièle in *L'Homme du Niger*, Madeleine is married to a man whose work links him to the colonies, but she lacks any enthusiasm for the role of colonial wife. In the narrative, her affair with Henri serves less as an intrigue in itself and

more as a catalyst for the focal point of interest: Saïdi's disappearance and the subsequent scrutiny of both Henri and Barral among the colonial community.

Despite a paucity of screen time, the character Saïdi also haunts the narrative, an effect achievable thanks to Hayakawa's star power. A kind of floating signifier, Saïdi represents two contradictory facets attributed to colonized peoples, both of which are presented only indirectly in the narrative. The first is his loyalty, expressed through his service to Barral; Madeleine alludes to his record of faithful service when she tells Henri of her fear that he will uncover their affair. Along with this docile image of a faithful servant, the narrative also casts an image of Saïdi as a vaguely threatening, otherworldly being who can lay claim to supernatural forces. His mysterious provenance and his habitual silence mark him as unique even before his disappearance, and part of the search after his disappearance involves a consultation with a holy man whom Saïdi was said to frequent. His sudden reappearance at the end of the film – just in time to protect Madeleine from one of Henri's delirious outbursts – reinforces rather than dispels the air of mysticism that surrounds the character. Aside from this final proof of life, little else about him or his actions is ever clarified or explained.

Setting aside the indigenous serial killer, whose strikes precede the narrative trajectory of the film, the primary conflicts in *Malaria* do not erupt between Europeans and non-Europeans, but between different members of the expatriate community. This internal discord is expressed primarily in the division between military men and civilian *colons* and amplified further by the presence of atypical colonial demographics. For instance, the priest in *Malaria*, straying from the path set out by Charles de Foucauld as retold in *L'Appel du*

Silence (Poirier 1936), appears dedicated to serving the resident European community rather than trying to make a career of converting the natives to Catholicism. The very presence of a priest among the expatriates underscores the extent to which the community should be read as a microcosm of French society. As for Madeleine, she begins and ends the film as a colonial wife, a situation she unequivocally treats as an ordeal. Never feeling the epiphany that hits the doctor's wife in *Itto* or the taste for the exoticist lifestyle that Danièle brings to her marriage in *L'Homme du Niger*, to comfort herself Madeleine counts down the time that remains for her and Barral to live in the colony. Besides setting Madeleine apart from her fictional predecessors, this impulse underscores the parallels between the colonial life and the French perception of the Occupation; however insufferable their situation, however absurd (in the existentialist sense of the term) such an existence might become, they could have faith that it would end someday. The allegory is further clarified when the priest advises Madeleine, "partir, c'est trahir" and when the final title card reads, "La colonie est faite pour les hommes à l'âme forte. Elle rejette les autres."

While Henri ends up as one of the "rejected" – he claims to have committed suicide, but the truth is left vague in the film – for the rest of the characters, these last words ring false. Although the characters draw some kind of strength in solidarity, the prominence of their flaws in the narrative prompts us to question the real strength of their "soul." The isolation of these characters, the insularity of the narrative, and the insistence on the moral ambiguity of many of their actions all situate *Malaria* well within the thematic bounds of Occupation

cinema.²⁹⁶ The potential for adventure in prewar exoticist representations has evaporated, replaced by a pessimistic, allegorical deployment of the exotic space as a closed space without any room for Gabin-esque tragic heroes.

The Exoticist Legacy: *Indochine* (1992) and Beyond

Cinematic exoticism remains a presence in French cinema. The 20th century has provided ample fodder for exoticist narratives, including two global wars and the subsequent phases of decolonization that ultimately dismantled *la plus grande France*. Approaching the new, current century, post-imperial exoticist fantasies adjusted in order to cope with the historical fact of decolonization, washing away the *cinéma colonial* in the cultural undertow. And yet, these postcolonial films have drawn on idealized and even revisionist history as they recycle many exoticist tropes that date to the colonial era. However, it is significant that postcolonial exoticism, without a contemporaneous imperial context, tends to deploy tropes grounded more firmly in the non-colonial exotic, even when representing former colonies.

One of the most famous of these postcolonial exoticist productions is Régis Wargnier's *Indochine* (1992). This prestige production casts Catherine Deneuve – a star almost as symbolically charged with Frenchness as Gabin – as a powerful female *colon* whose story unfurls over a timespan beginning in colonized Vietnam and ending with the accords that grant the country independence from French rule. Although the gender of the protagonist Éliane

²⁹⁶ See Williams (245-271) and Ehrlich for analyses of how the German Occupation influenced French cinema.

is a noteworthy departure from the pre-World War II exoticist formula,²⁹⁷ particularly in colonial contexts, in other areas the film relies on standard narrative configurations for exoticist cinema. For instance, a love triangle develops between Éliane, her adopted Vietnamese daughter Camille, and French officer Jean-Baptiste. After Jean-Baptiste deserts his post (and breaks with Éliane) to run away with Camille, she gives birth to a biracial son, but French forces soon ambush Jean-Baptiste and kill him, ostensibly as punishment for his desertion. Still, his attempt to cover his tracks by performing with an itinerant Vietnamese theater troupe points to the tradition of the rogue *colon*'s efforts to abandon Western habits, and the death sentence he receives is hardly unusual in the exoticist context.

The motif of child rearing in *Indochine* also hearkens back to exoticist formulae. After Jean-Baptiste's death, Camille takes up with an anti-colonial militant group in a move legible simultaneously as a return to her Vietnamese roots and as rebellion against her Western upbringing. But when Camille is imprisoned for her role in Vietnamese agitation against the French, without other family members to turn to, custody of Camille's son falls once again to Éliane. Here, *Indochine* refers the imperative to culturally repatriate mixed-race offspring by conferring them to French care. And while Camille ultimately shrugs off the pressure to assimilate into the Western world, for Camille's son, the tactic works; the epilogue shows him, now grown, declaring Éliane to be his true mother, even as he visits the site where his biological mother participates in the delegation that emancipates Vietnam from French colonial rule (a situation described in the

²⁹⁷ In *Le Cinéma postcolonial français* (2006), Caroline Eades describes the gender issue along with other differences that separate postcolonial exoticist films from their forebears.

dialogue, but never shown). Rejected by her Vietnamese daughter and by her French lover, Éliane manages to win over their son in a kind of deferred ideological victory for Western hegemony.

Thus, Camille may have helped win the struggle for political control of her country, but Éliane and, by extension, the French are situated as the ultimate winners in the battle for the hearts and minds of those caught between the two worlds. *Indochine* echoes its cinematic predecessors first by situating and interrogating Frenchness in an exotic environment – evidenced in the decision to cast the incontrovertibly French star Deneuve – and by reconfiguring familiar figures like the rogue *colon*, who pays dearly for his attempts to assimilate, and the mixed-race child, who affirms loyalty to his Western heritage at the expense of his estranged, non-Western mother.

The tectonic shifts in East-West relations since these fictional tropes were galvanized in the 1930s raise important questions as to the reason for their longevity. Globalized media and more frequent overseas travel have made misrepresentations of verifiable facts less forgivable offenses than they were in the 1930s, when audiences and filmmakers could cede to the demands of generic verisimilitude vis-à-vis the exotic *ailleurs* without necessarily feeling obligated to conform to documentable reality. Yet, the thread that connects the ideology of these earlier representations to the underlying messages found in *Indochine* remains legible despite the latter's evident (and expensive) attempt to recreate a version of history with discernible respect for basic accuracy. The ideological persistence of exoticist narrative tropes as French cinema approached the 21st century thus points to a decadence rooted in the superfluosity that has overtaken exoticist fiction since decolonization. A great deal of this excess stems

from the fact that cinema is no longer the lone medium charged with bringing exotic images to curious spectators. Audiences in the new millennium can find with relatively little effort myriad examples of narratives and images from places and peoples around the globe, and as visual technologies continue to spread, many of these representations are created by those cultures' own people instead of (or in addition to) culturally distanced observers.

What Pierre Leprohon called *exotisme d'importation* has therefore become both increasingly banal and exponentially more relevant in a globalized world. Non-Western and subaltern cultures have laid claim to the prerogative to narrate their own stories by and for themselves, and those who wish to distribute their stories find within their reach more and more means to do so. However, because of Western cinema's continued dominance in nearly every facet of the film industry, these non-Western works have not fully replaced exoticist narratives shaped by a strictly Western perspective. Still, the very presence of their voice and vision has fundamentally altered the impulse behind transcultural cinematic representations. Thanks in part to this broadening array of perspectives, as we proceed into the new century the exoticist impulse will no doubt confront new challenges and undergo profound transformations.

APPENDIX I

The complete lyrics for Fréhel's song, "J'attends quelqu'un," are as follows:

Un soir sur le port où je traînais seule
 Mon cafard fourbu dans un cœur trop lourd
 Il dit serrant son brûle-gueule,
 "Viens me donner l'illusion de l'amour."

Sans savoir pourquoi j'ai connu sa couche,
 Son baiser brutal aux relents d'embruns
 Et j'ai gardé sombre et farouche
 Le spleen ardent de son beau torse brun

REFRAIN:

J'attends quelqu'un qu'est par delà les flots
 J'attends quelqu'un dont l'souvenir (est) très chaud
 Et demeure tenace dans ma peau
 J'attends quelqu'un qui savait me serrer
 Dans les liens de ses deux bras musclés
 D'autres que lui ne sauraient pas m'aimer

J'attends quelqu'un qui est parti tout là-bas,
 J'attends quelqu'un qui ne m'oubliera pas,
 Celui que j'aime un jour se souviendra,
 J'attends quelqu'un qui reviendra !

Vous qui bourlinguez dans toutes les rades,

Vous de tous les bourgs et de tous les ports,
Vous l'avez eu pour camarade
Des matelots celui qui rit le plus fort

D'un couteau rageur il a sur ma porte,
Gravé simplement « A te r'voir un jour »,
Le Rotterdam au loin l'emporte,
Dites, savez-vous quand il sera de retour?

REFRAIN

Thanks to Bénédicte Lebéhot for helping transcribe these lyrics. An audio track for the song is available online: <http://www.deezer.com/track/510068> (last accessed 12 May 2009).

APPENDIX II

Interracial Couples in French Cinema of the 1930s			
<i>Title</i> (Director, Release Year)	Man's nationality	Woman's nationality	Ending
<i>Caïn, aventure des mers exotiques</i> (L. Poirier, 1930)	French (white, fugitive)	Madagascan	The French man abandons his effort to rejoin Western civilization and rejoins his native wife on their island.
<i>La Bataille</i> (N. Farkas, 1933)	English	Japanese	Adulterous affair used by the woman's Japanese husband to win a strategic battle, a sacrifice that drives the husband to suicide.
<i>Le Simoun</i> (F. Gémier 1933)	Arab	French (white)	The Arab chieftain favors the union between his son and the French woman, but her father rejects it. In the end, the Arab lover rescues the young woman from the incestuous advances of her delirious father.
<i>Zouzou</i> (M. Allégret, 1934)	French (white)	French (Creole)	Stardom, but no love for the Creole, who loses her love interest to a white friend.
<i>Princesse Tam Tam</i> (E. T. Gréville, 1935)	A. French B. Indian	A. North African B. French	Interracial affairs turn out to be imagined, and the end re-pairs French husband with French wife and gives the North African woman a North African husband.
<i>La Bandera</i> (J. Duvivier, 1936)	French (white legionnaire)	Moroccan	Marriage, then death on the field of battle for the legionnaire.
<i>Port-Arthur</i> (N. Farkas, 1936)	Russian (military)	Russian-Japanese	Married to a Russian officer, the mixed-race bride finds herself accused of espionage during the Russo-Japanese War. After reconciliation comes too late, husband and wife both die.
<i>L'Esclave blanc</i> (C. T. Dreyer / J-P. Paulin, 1936)	European (white, <i>colon</i>)	Somali	The Somali woman dies at the hands of her own tribe over the affair, and the European returns to his white fiancée to assume his place in the colonial hierarchy.
<i>L'Occident</i> (H. Fescourt, 1937)	French (white, military)	Moroccan	A chieftain turns the Moroccan woman against her French lover by accusing him of heinous crimes of which the chief himself was guilty. The lovers separate.
<i>La Dame de Malacca</i> (M. Allégret, 1937)	Mixed (Indo-Georgian)	English	English woman divorces her brutish first husband and remarries the sultan.
<i>Pépé le Moko</i> (J. Duvivier, 1937)	French (white, fugitive)	Gypsy (Algerian?)	Jealousy drives the gypsy to lead the police to her lover, who then commits suicide.
<i>Yoshiwara</i> (M. Ophüls, 1937)	Russian (military)	Japanese	Accused of treason, the Japanese woman refuses to testify against her lover and is sentenced to death. Arriving too late to save her, the Russian dies from his effort.
<i>La Maison du Maltais</i> (P. Chenal, 1938)	Tunisian (Maltese-Bedoin)	French (French-Arab)	A daughter is conceived in Tunisia, but born in France, where the mother passes her off as her French husband's child. Three years later, the erstwhile lover commits suicide after seeing his daughter's life in Paris.
<i>L'Esclave blanche</i> (M. Sorkin 1939)	Turkish (court official)	French	A Turkish pasha and his wife, both exiled by the sultan, leave the Ottoman Empire together for parts unknown.
<i>Yamilé sous les cèdres</i> (C. d'Espinay, 1939)	Lebanese (Muslim)	Lebanese (Christian)	A young Christian woman abandons her fiancé to marry a Muslim, but her family recaptures her and puts her to death.
<i>Macao, l'enfer du jeu</i> (J. Delannoy, 1939/1942)	French (white, journalist)	French-Chinese	Both die (?) in a bombardment ordered by the woman's Chinese father, who did not know his daughter was aboard the targeted boat.

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Curriculum Vitae

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