APPROACHING TERRORISM ON SCREEN: CONTEMPORARY FILM AND TELEVISION IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

2023

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Contents

79,807 words

List of Figures

Abstract

This thesis examines a select corpus of recent French and Belgian films and series that portray both fictional and real-world terrorist events. These films are set in France and, in two cases, Belgium, and approach the subjective experience of terrorism in vastly different ways, often offering up these experiences to audiences as uncritical objects of scrutiny. However, despite the clear interest amongst French and Belgian filmmakers to address the phenomenon of terrorism on francophone European soil since the 2010s, no study to date has taken the subjective experience of terrorism in this period in France and Belgium as its primary point of concern. Existing research in Film Studies has focused almost exclusively on portrayals of terrorism as a post-9/11 phenomenon relating mainly to American and anglophone cinemas, and French and Francophone Studies has tended to concentrate on depictions of terrorism during the Algerian War of Independence. As such, there has been no extended scholarly investigation into the ethics of depicting those who are affected by, die as a result of, or perpetrate terrorism in a French and Belgian context. This study is underpinned by an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws upon the ethics of representation, trauma representation studies, and critical race studies in tandem with the philosophical works of Emmanuel Levinas. A number of Levinas's ethical theories help to elucidate the importance of acknowledging the irreducibly subjective experience of people affected by terrorism on screen. By applying this diverse theoretical approach, this thesis seeks to provide the first comparative account of how the experiences of survivor-witnesses, victims, and perpetrators of terrorism in recent French and Belgian cinemas have often been constructed in ways which cater to and privilege a traditionally white Western worldview.

Declaration

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest and most sincere thanks to my supervisors, Dr Darren Waldron and Dr Joseph McGonagle, for their expert guidance, for their constant encouragement and lasting patience, and for reminding me throughout the process of my own ability. I could not have wished for a more understanding, intelligent, or supportive supervisory team. Thanks to both of them too for their inspirational teaching during my undergraduate degree, which inspired my interest in French cinema.

I would also like to thank the academics I have encountered throughout my undergraduate and postgraduate degrees at the University of Manchester, who ignited my interest in academia and the subjects which led me to this point. To Dr Cathy Gelbin, Dr Ian Scott, Dr Jérôme Brillaud, Dr Barbara Lebrun, Dr Margaret Littler, and all teaching staff in the French Studies department, thank you for creating such an enriching environment.

I am grateful to the University of Manchester Graduate School for providing a supportive and dynamic research environment, and to the AHRC for generously funding this project.

I would like to express my gratitude to my peers at the Graduate School, to my friend and colleague Dr Lucy Neat-Ward, and to my sisters Libbi and Clare, for being the strongest pillars in my support network both academically and personally. Special thanks go to my husband Daniel, whose patience is unmatched, for his unwavering encouragement through the most difficult parts of my doctoral journey.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my late parents, William and Susan Davison.

Introduction

In 2015, France experienced two terrorist attacks whose impact would reverberate across the globe. The first, spanning from 7 to 9 January, saw shootings at the offices of French satirical weekly newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, a Jewish Hypercacher supermarket, and in the suburbs of Fontenay-aux-Roses and Montrouge. The attacks led to twenty deaths: fourteen civilians, three police officers, and three gunmen.[1] The target of the attacks, *Charlie Hebdo*, sparked an international debate on the parameters of freedom of speech, and the #JeSuisCharlie movement spread across social media platforms in support of the victims. Later that year, on 13 November, coordinated attacks across Paris claimed over 130 lives.[2] The multi-site attacks took place at the Stade de France, the Bataclan theatre, and various cafés across the city. Of the 151 terrorism-related fatalities in Europe in 2015, 148 occurred in France.[3]

Given France's claim to the status of the birthplace of cinema and its continued prolific production of films, it is perhaps unsurprising that the months and years after the events of 2015 saw a sharp increase in the production films that feature terrorism as a central focus, both as feature-length and series productions.[4] While, as the corpus will demonstrate, a small number of films portraying terrorism

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[1] Europol, 'TE-SAT 2016: European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2016' (European Law Enforcement Agency, 2016) <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2016> [accessed 8 June 2020].

[2] Europol, p. 22.

[3] Europol, p. 10.

[4] The birth of cinema as an industry is typically attributed to Auguste and Louis Lumière, who publicly screened their short films in Paris in 1895. While earlier paid public film screenings had been undertaken – notably by the Skladanowsky Brothers in Berlin a few months prior to those of the Lumières – scholars have noted that it was due to the financial and technical capacity of the Lumières that the industry subsequently gained traction. See John D. Dennis, 'Louis Lumiere: the father of French cinema', *Bulletin of Hokuriku University*, 30 (2006), 69–75 (p. 69); Michelle Royer, 'The Cosmopolitanization of French Cinema', *Literature & Aesthetics*, 18.2 (2008), 107–117 (p. 107); Stephen Barber, 'The Skladanowsky Brothers: The Devil Knows', *Senses of Cinema*, 56 (2010) https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2010/feature-articles/the-skladanowsky-brothers-the-devil-knows/ [accessed 12 July 2023].

in metropolitan France had been produced after the 2012 Toulouse attack, a great many more were conceptualised after the 2015 events. These works are set in France or its neighbour Belgium, invariably feature acts of terrorism (attempted or actualised), and portray the experiences of victims, survivor-witnesses, and perpetrators of these acts. Whether fiction or documentary, these films are among the first cultural representations of the changing dynamics of France's relationship with terrorism. However, despite the importance and topicality of these productions, no study to date has taken terrorism in contemporary French and Belgian cinema as its primary point of concern.

Within Film Studies, existing research on terrorism in film tends to focus on Hollywood and US films in the aftermath of 9/11, while French and Francophone Studies has focused on representations of terrorism during the Algerian War of Independence. As a result, there has been less research on the depiction of terrorism on francophone European soil in the aftermath of the events of 2015, and no extended scholarly investigation has examined the importance of the reaction of filmmakers living and working in the target countries to these events.

To begin to address this gap in scholarship, this thesis aims to provide the first comparative account of how French and Belgian cinemas are negotiating these topics across varying genres and formats, and to contrast and compare the ethics of such representations. To do so, I consult a corpus of 8 works. The documentaries *Je suis Charlie: L'Humour à mort* (Emmanuel and Daniel Leconte, 2015) and *13 novembre: Fluctuat nec mergitur* (Jules and Gédéon Naudet, 2018) and feature films *Paris est à nous* (Elisabeth Vogler, 2019) and *Amanda* (Mikhäel Hers, 2018) foreground the experience of those who have lived through or died during terrorist attacks. By contrast, the figure of the terrorist is the primary focus of *La*

Désintégration (Philippe Faucon, 2012), *Made in France* (Nicolas Boukhrief, 2016), *Le Jeune Ahmed* (Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne, 2019), and *L'Adieu à la nuit* (André Téchiné, 2019). In doing so, this thesis offers the opportunity to answer a number of vital, yet widely unaddressed questions: how have filmmakers in the target countries of these attacks constructed the experience of terrorism through the prism of cinema? Which genre categories are these films falling under, and what effect do contemporary viewing modes have on this? Which, if any, experiences of terrorism have been prioritised in these works? Have victims' experiences of terrorism been positioned as the uncritical object of consumption for the spectator, or do they, at times, transcend any attempted reduction? Have these works depicted the experiences of victims and perpetrators in distinct and separate manners? If so, what are the ethical implications of these different approaches, and what conceptual and critical frameworks can be mobilised to understand them? Have these works perpetuated, acknowledged, or challenged the Western tradition of dehumanising and depoliticising the figure of the terrorist? If so, through which devices has this been attempted? Have depictions of the terrorist operated with reference to the colonial legacy of France and Belgium, and what effect has this had on the resulting figure of the terrorist? And finally, how do these approaches to the varying experiences of terrorism inform our understanding of French and Belgian responses to the phenomenon?

This introduction will begin by highlighting the importance of ethical considerations in the analysis of films which portray terrorism. It will then outline this study's conceptual framework and summarise the reasons why an interdisciplinary approach that simultaneously draws upon ethics, film theory, and political theory can elucidate our understanding of how filmmakers are framing

terrorism in these films. Through its focus on the construction of the subjective

experience of terrorism and its relation to the viewer in these films, this thesis is the

first to apply an ethics of representation to depictions of terrorism in contemporary

French and Belgian films. As such, the thesis draws together theoretical and

analytical concepts from a variety of fields. For this reason, before examining the

topic of the ethics of representation as it relates to cinematic portrayals of terrorism,

it is necessary to devote some attention to the terminology adopted throughout this

study.

Beyond dichotomy: Victims, survivor-witnesses, and perpetrators

As this thesis deals specifically with the ethics of representation, I have aimed to

display care in my choice of terminology for people involved with and affected by

terrorism. The first two chapters deal directly with portrayals of what I refer to as

'victims' and 'survivor-witnesses' of terrorism. I use these terms separately from one

another, following debates around the parameters of the term 'victim' in the

aftermath of the Holocaust.[5] As a survivor of the Holocaust himself, chemist and

author Primo Levi was among the first to draw a distinction between those who were

murdered during the atrocities of the National Socialists' regime,[6] and those who

experienced the traumas of those years but ultimately survived: 'We who survived

the Camps are not true witnesses. We are those who, through prevarication, skill or

luck, never touched bottom. Those who have, and who have seen the face of the

Gorgon, did not return'.[7] Many scholars have adopted the differentiation between

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[5] The thesis engages with scholarship on the ethical representation of trauma following the Holocaust throughout the first two chapters. This introduction will discuss the multidirectional approach the thesis takes with regard to the utilisation of Holocaust representation studies below.

[6] Throught this thesis, the term 'Nazi' is only used in direct quotations.

[7] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, Vintage International Series (Vintage International, 1989), pp. 83–84.

those who have lived to testify to the experiences of trauma, and those who have not, following the distinction Levi highlights. For example, the Historian of Philosophy and Science José Brunner has highlighted that testimony from survivor witnesses is 'neither that of those on the outside nor that of those most severely affected: after all, although they have experienced war, persecution and annihilation, they have also survived them. They therefore testify to their fate as survivors,' rather than the fate of all victims.[8] Suzanne Little has observed that a potential problem with the term 'survivor-witness' is that in incorporating the word 'witness', it relies heavily on the aspect of testimony, yet 'testimony is […] restricted to what elements and fragments of the traumatizing event or situation the survivor-witness has been able to assimilate and share with another person'.[9] I discuss at length in Chapter 2 the notion that many individuals who have suffered due to acts of terrorism choose not to testify to the full extent of their experience; this does not take away from their status as survivor-witnesses, nor does it mean that they did not experience that suffering.

As this thesis will pay close attention to the portrayal of the lived experience of those who have experienced terrorism and survived (whether or not they choose to testify to that experience), and also to the portrayal of figures who have experienced terrorism and *not* survived, I have opted to adopt the terminology 'survivor-witness' to denote the former, and 'victim' for the latter. This is not to suggest that the former subset of people are not and cannot be considered 'victims' of terrorism – in fact, the first two chapters of this thesis are devoted to the specificity and subjectivity of their trauma. However, analysis of the portrayal of those who have survived terrorism and

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[8] José Brunner, 'Medikalisierte Zeugenschaft. Trauma, Institutionen, Nachträglichkeit', in *Die Geburt Des Zeitzeugen Nach 1945*, ed. by M. Sabrow and N. Frei, Geschichte Der Gegenwart / Beiträge Zur Geschichte Des 20. Jahrhunderts (Wallstein Verlag, 2012), pp. 93–111 (p. 96); translation mine.
[9] Suzanne Little, 'Repeating Repetition', *Performance Research*, 20.5 (2015), 44–50 (p. 45).

those who have not necessitates careful distinction between those who can testify to their experiences (and choose whether to do so in the works considered here), and those who cannot.

The third and fourth chapters of this thesis, by contrast, focus on the portrayal of individuals who commit, or attempt to commit, acts of terrorism. As these Chapters will discuss, portrayals of terrorism in French and Belgian cinema and television have tended to under-represent the increasing threat of far-right extremist terrorism and disproportionately portray the terrorist figure as being motivated by Islamist extremism. As such, the films discussed in these chapters focus exclusively on portrayals of Islamist extremist terrorists. Although I seek to underscore the imbalance of the types of motivation being represented in French and Belgian cinema and television, I limit my corpus to portrayals of Islamist extremism in order to explore the pertinent and under-acknowledged stereotyping and dehumanisation of these figures. Despite this, as discussed at length in this introduction and in Chapters 3 and 4, I do not wish to suggest that the threat of terrorism in France and Belgium comes only from Islamist extremism.

Furthermore, while I do not attempt to classify the terrorist figures in these films as 'victims', these chapters seek to acknowledge the wider networks of violence within which they function; Chapter 3 discusses the violence experienced by minority ethnic communities in France and Belgium, while Chapter 4 analyses the systemic violence which can be found in portrayals of non-white terrorists. In these chapters, I use the terms 'victimhood', 'victimisation', and 'victim' to describe the societal oppression and demonisation of those of minority ethnic background in France and Belgium. Here, my use of the term 'victim' departs significantly from the use of the term in Holocaust Studies. While this thesis certainly does not consider

terrorist figures 'victims' of the violence which they themselves perpetrate, and does not aim to absolve them of criminal status, it does seek to acknowledge the systemic and symbolic violence which radicalised youths of ethnic minority background are subject to in France and Belgium. In these instances in Chapters 3 and 4, I aim to use the terms 'victim', 'victimhood', and 'victimisation' with the necessary context. For example, I argue in Chapter 3 that *La Désintégration* positions its protagonist, Ali, as a 'victim' of France's failure to integrate immigrants and migrants of Maghrebi background: Ali is a victim of discrimination in France, but is not a victim of the terrorist act the film portrays.

These distinctions are necessary not only in terms of highlighting and moving beyond Manichean victim/perpetrator categorisation as it relates to terrorism; they also seek to acknowledge that each and every individual who is involved in an act of terrorism experiences the event and its context in a radically subjective manner. As Chapters 1 and 2 will discuss, the memory and experiences of those who witness and/or perish due to terrorist acts must be acknowledged as singular to each individual. Likewise, Chapters 3 and 4 argue in particular that the socio-political context of minorities in France and Belgium is overlooked in predominant portrayals of terrorists in Western media, which has tended to overlook the individuality of those who commit acts of terrorism in favour of a generalised, vilified portrayal. Throughout the thesis, I therefore use the phrase 'the subjective experience of terrorism' to refer to this concept of the uniqueness of experiences of those involved in terrorist acts, regardless of their role in those acts. As the following section will demonstrate, the definition of terrorism and who may be considered a terrorist requires careful specificity.

Defining terrorism: Who is the terrorist?

Any academic project which aims to discuss portrayals of terrorism – whether they are political, social, or cultural – must necessarily devote attention to the parameters of that term and the language surrounding it. Since the field's inception in the 1970s, the definition of terrorism has been widely debated in terrorism studies, as the parameters of the term are highly subjective, both conceptually and syntactically. Among the main problems with defining the term are the issues of whether terrorism should include acts of state; whether some motives (such as self-determination of colonised areas or 'freedom fighters') should be excluded from the term; whether methods of attacking should be considered; and the degrees of separation from a directly-involved attacker which makes a person a terrorist. Beyond these main difficulties, each aspect of any definition necessitates a topology of further definitions. For example, as will be discussed below, if terrorism is defined as violence committed only by non-state actors, then it must also set out parameters for what can be classed as a state, and the situations in which these states can be implicated.

Defining and redefining terrorism is, and always has been, an extremely difficult task, as illustrated in a contemporary context by former US President George Bush's 'War on Terror', because terrorism comes with both the necessity and impossibility of definition. When used in politics and law-making, terrorism must be strictly defined in order to avoid vague policies which ultimately allow for too broad a net to be cast for the persecution of terrorists. During the War on Terror, the CIA indiscriminately captured and tortured detainees whom they believed to be connected to, or know the whereabouts of, Osama bin Laden. A 2002 memorandum signed by George W. Bush states for the case of al-Qaeda and the Taliban:

> By its terms, [the Geneva Convention] applies to conflicts involving 'High Contracting Parties,' which can only be states. Moreover, it assumes the existence of 'regular' armed forces fighting on behalf of states. However, the war against terrorism ushers in a new paradigm, one in which groups with broad, international reach commit horrific acts against innocent civilians, sometimes with the direct support of states.[10]

One key observation to be made here is that this document – issued by the White House itself – fails to provide a definition of terrorism. Although it refers specifically to the parameters of the Geneva Convention, its use of the term 'war on terrorism' is self-referential and has no observable parameters. Its application to 'al Qaeda and Taliban detainees' is an equally poor set of parameters. The report goes on to specify that 'the Taliban detainees are unlawful combatants and, therefore, do not qualify as prisoners of war under Article 4 of Geneva'.[11] But what is to be understood by 'Taliban detainees'? Are 'Taliban detainees' those who can be empirically proven to have been members of the Taliban? Are they those who know, or have known, any Taliban member? Are they family members of those Taliban members? Are they family members of those who know or knew Taliban members? Such vague definitions of 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' in the case of the War on Terror allowed for the US armed forces, including the CIA, to cast a wide net for these 'al Qaeda and Taliban detainees', detaining and – in many cases – torturing anyone who was believed to have information on the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden.[12] Had these

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[10] 'Memorandum From President Bush To White House Senior Executive Branch Officials Regarding Humane Treatment Of Al Qaeda And Taliban Detainees', 2002, p. 1, American Civil Liberties Union <https://www.aclu.org/other/memo-president-bush-white-house-senior-executive-branch-officials-regarding-humane-treatment> [accessed 1 April 2020].
[11] Ibid.
[12] The so-called 'detainee program' run by the CIA during the War on Terror included many false detainments. At least 26 detainees were found to be held 'wrongfully' ('Senate Select Committee on Intelligence: Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program' (United States Senate, 2014), feinstein.senate.gov <https://www.feinstein.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/7/c/7c85429a-ec38-4bb5-968f-289799bf6d0e/D87288C34A6D9FF736F9459ABCF83210.sscistudy1.pdf> [accessed 4 February 2020]).

terms been better defined, the extent of the torture used in the 'detainee program' would not have been eliminated, but may have been reduced.

Despite the evident necessity for specific definitions of terrorism, achieving this remains extremely difficult. During the 1970s and 80s, the United Nations attempted to reach an encompassing and binding definition of terrorism, but failed as its members could not reach an agreement. Disagreements stemmed from differing opinions on the acceptable use of violence in conflicts of national liberation, which, at the time, pertained largely to colonialism and post-colonialism. To this day, the United Nations has no comprehensive, legally binding definition of terrorism.[13] As a result, each country and state (both within the UN and outside of it) navigates its relationship with that which may be deemed as terrorism in a specific way, and as such, definitions of terrorism across the world vary greatly depending on a state's political, cultural and historical landscape, combined with current events.

In scholarship and academic studies of terrorism, the term is usually defined as involving deliberate attacks on civilians by non-state actors with political objectives.[14] However, even this definition lacks complexity. The term 'non-state actors' raises problems when used to define terrorism: beyond the issues with suggesting that states cannot or do not commit acts of terror (without at least assigning this type of terror its own categorisation), defining 'non-state actor' is, in itself, difficult. This is exemplified in the 2002 memorandum, which contradictorily suggests that the Geneva Convention only applies to conflicts involving states, suggesting that terrorists are not protected by the Geneva Convention because the

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[13] Javier Rupérez, 'The United Nations in the Fight against Terrorism', *United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate*, 2006, 14–23 (p. 14).
[14] Martha Crenshaw, 'Introduction', in *The Consequences of Counterterrorism*, ed. by Martha Crenshaw (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2010), pp. 1–30 (p. 7).

acts they commit are not sanctioned by states, yet later admitting that the term will be applied to groups which 'sometimes' have the 'direct support of states'. The above academic definition poses further problems when we consider terrorist acts committed by so-called 'lone wolves' – seemingly politically unaffiliated acts of violence against civilians – which, in the context of so-called Islamist terrorism, are later claimed by established terrorist organisations such as the Taliban, al Qaeda, or the Islamic State. The 2017 Las Vegas Shooting, for example, was claimed by ISIS, who alleged that the perpetrator was acting in response to the call of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to target the states of the Crusader alliance. The FBI later determined that the perpetrator had no links to ISIS, and had acted on his own.[15]

In the case of France's specific attitude toward terrorism, the difficulty in reaching a comprehensive and legally applicable definition for the terms associated with the phenomenon persists. In his chapter in Martha Crenshaw's *The Consequences of Counterterrorism*, Jeremy Shapiro outlines the stages of responses to terrorism in France from the post-WW2 period, through anti-colonialism, and to the present day.[16] He highlights that after the Algerian War of Independence, French politicians actively avoided using the terms 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' because they had gained the reputation of being an intractable problem as a result of 'the combination of terror attacks, moral repugnance at the government's response – especially the resort to torture – and pressure from abroad' during the Algerian War of Independence.[17] Of course, when political leaders and the ruling class refuse to discuss the issue of terrorism, law-making and efforts towards counterterrorism are

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[15] Jared Malsin, 'ISIS Claimed the Las Vegas Shooter as a "Soldier." Experts Are Skeptical.', *TIME*, 2017 <https://time.com/4965449/isis-las-vegas-shooter-stephen-paddock/> [accessed 8 June 2019].
[16] Jeremy Shapiro, 'French Responses to Terrorism from the Algerian War to the Present', in *The Consequences of Counterterrorism*, ed. by Martha Crenshaw (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2010), pp. 255–84.
[17] Ibid., pp. 257–60.

endangered. However, in the immediate aftermath of the Algerian War, successive

French governments implemented what has been described as a 'sanctuary doctrine',

allowing sanctuary in France both for and from international terrorists, so long as

they did not perpetrate attacks against France.[18] The approach was based on the

belief that terrorism is an issue of foreign policy, separate from law enforcement, and

that if France presented itself as neutrally as possible to potential terrorists, it would

remain protected from them. Ultimately, the sanctuary doctrine failed on many

counts, putting increased strain on relationships between France and opponents of

the terrorists it harboured. The most crucial, however, was that 'the freedom that

terrorists had to operate within France, even for the purposes of conducting

operations outside of French borders, allowed them to accumulate logistical and

operational networks that could easily be turned on their host when the moment was

ripe'.[19] In the 1980s, France was faced with a wave of deadly terrorist attacks by the

CSPPA (Comité de solidarité avec les prisonniers politiques arabes et du Proche-

Orient) – whose motive was apparently the release of three unrelated terrorist leaders

in French custody. These terror attacks were widespread, with at least fourteen

causing eleven deaths and more than 220 casualties.[20] By this point, with increasing

discontent amongst the public at the approach of the government, the sanctuary

doctrine was finally abandoned. Yet, as a result of the doctrine, police and armed

forces failed to prevent many of the attacks because terrorist organisations were

already well implanted within French society.

     Following the terror attacks of the 1980s, the government faced pressure to

respond to widespread public outcry against the perceived lack of security for the

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[18] Ibid., p. 261.
[19] Ibid., p. 262.
[20] Ibid., p. 263.

population against terrorism. As a result, in September 1986, new legislation was introduced which moved the responsibility of counterterror away from the foreign affairs ministry, and towards the justice and interior ministries, finally making terrorism a responsibility of law enforcement.[21] Not only did this allow for counterterrorism efforts to be streamlined – where they had previously been divided between separate law enforcement agencies, and in many instances, rivalrous – but it also provided a new definition of terrorism to be applied legally. Act No. 86-1020 of 9 September 1986 sets out the following definition for terrorist activity: '[activités] en relation avec une entreprise individuelle ou collective ayant pour but de troubler gravement l'ordre public par l'intimidation ou la terreur'.[22]

Although the 1986 legislation did seem to combat terrorism in France, which remained mostly free from international terrorist attacks from 1987 to 1994, this definition faces the same problems as that of the 2002 White House memorandum.[23] 'En relation avec' is equally as vague as 'Taliban detainees' – where is the line drawn for persons acting 'en relation avec' terrorist organisations and individuals? Furthermore, 'une entreprise individuelle ou collective' shares the lack in specificity between state and individual actors seen in the US memorandum. Interestingly, both omit any reference to politics in their definitions of terrorism, whereas scholars working in the academic field of Terrorism Studies argue that political objectives are integral to defining acts as terrorism. As Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis will show, depoliticisation of the terrorist figure is a common element of political and media rhetoric, which dehumanises these individuals by overlooking their subjectivity.

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[21] Ibid., p. 268.
[22] 'Loi n° 86-1020 du 9 septembre 1986 relative à la lutte contre le terrorisme et aux atteintes à la sûreté de l'Etat: JORF n°0210 du 10 septembre 1986' (Journal Officiel de la République Française, 1986), p. 10956, Légifrance Online
<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFARTI000001491966> [accessed 8 June 2019].
[23] Shapiro, p. 266.

The most recent modification of Article 421-1 of the French penal code, which relates to 'des actes de terrorisme', was made in June 2016. This modification extended the definition to include a number of specific acts when committed in relation to the enterprises as defined above in Act 86-1020.[24] While this modification may define the parameters of acts which can be considered terrorist, it does little to address the issues with the 1986 definition, and therefore remains ambiguous concerning the parameters of who can be considered as acting 'in relation to' terrorist activities, and also concerning defined notions of 'individual' and 'collective' enterprises.

Unlike France, the threat of terrorism in Belgium before the millennium was mostly that of left-wing domestic terrorism (particularly from the so-called *cellules communistes combattantes*), although this was not as severe as similar extremism by the Rote Armee Fraktion in Germany or the Italian Brigatte Rosse.[25] In the late 1980s and 90s, there was no significant terrorist threat recorded.[26] As such, terrorism itself was not defined as a punishable offence in Belgian legislation, as no significant threat warranted its inclusion; instead, terrorists were prosecuted according to the other crimes their actions comprised of.[27] However, like many EU member states, Belgium updated its legislation in 2002 following the 9/11 attacks, making terrorism itself a punishable offence.

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[24] Namely: voluntary attacks on life, wilful attacks on the integrity of the person, kidnapping and sequestration and the hijacking of aircraft, vessels or any other means of transport; theft, extortion, destruction, damage and deterioration, as well as computer offenses; offenses relating to combat groups and dissolved movements; offenses relating to weapons, explosive products or nuclear material; the concealment of the proceeds of one of the offenses provided for above; money laundering offenses; and insider trading.

[25] Anne Weyembergh and Céline Cocq, 'Belgium', in *Comparative Counter-Terrorism Law*, ed. by Kent Roach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 234–68 (p. 234); for a comparative analysis of counter-terrorism law, see *Comparative Counter-Terrorism Law*, ed. by Kent Roach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[26] Weyembergh and Cocq, p. 235.

[27] Ibid., p. 236.

While Belgian counterterrorism legislation varies in many ways from its French counterpart, it echoes the American and French ambiguity in defining terrorism, and has been criticised by the Belgian Academy, defence lawyers, non-governmental organisations, and academics alike, who suggest that 'the definition of terrorist offences established by Art. 137 CC infringes the principle of legality because it uses terms that are too vague and imprecise'.[28] This results specifically in a 'wide margin of discretion left to judges', which is a similar consequence to those discussed above in relation to North America and France.[29]

Evidently, definitions of terrorism both in France and on a wider scale continue to lack clarity. However, it is not sufficient to criticise these definitions without acknowledging the difficulty that policy-makers and law-makers face in reaching encompassing and comprehensive definitions of terrorism. As mentioned above, the United Nations have tried and failed to reach an all-encompassing definition of terrorism due to disagreements among members as to what this term can be defined as. It seems that currently, it is impossible to reach a comprehensive definition of terrorism without consequently excluding some acts, agents, and situations which may fall under the umbrella of terrorist activity. For example, had Bush's definition of terrorism in the 2002 memorandum discussed above been more regimented and clear, the CIA may have struggled to apprehend those with links to bin Laden. This is not to suggest that their apprehension of suspects without due cause is justified under *exitus ācta probat,* but that defining terror narrowly and unwaveringly also presents drawbacks, and what may be considered errors of justice.

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[28] Weyembergh and Cocq, pp. 239–40; Ward Yperman, 'Terrorism Offences in Belgian Criminal Law: Is Less More?', *Queen Mary Law Journal*, 1 (2021), 150–82 (pp. 179–82).
[29] Weyembergh and Cocq, p. 268.

The possibility for such errors of justice is intensified when we consider France's disproportionate surveillance and monitoring of Muslim communities under the guise of counterterrorism.[30] As Human Rights Watch has suggested, in France '[t]he fight against Islamist or international terrorism has targeted a defined, if large and diverse community—Muslims—in a way that the fight against other types of terrorism never have'.[31] As a result of France's universalism, legislation does not make mention of religious affiliation in relation to the punishment of terrorist offences; the disproportionate punitive measures against Muslims are therefore often documented by anglophone studies, such as the Human Rights Watch and TellMAMA UK (MAMA here stands for measuring anti-Muslim attacks). Disparate treatment is observable in a French context, however, if we turn our attention to French media.

As mentioned above, definitions and conceptions of terrorism vary greatly depending on the political, social, and cultural landscape of any given state. Since the 9/11 attacks in 2001, Western public conceptions of terrorism have largely shifted towards the term as associated with Islamist extremist movements such as ISIL and al-Qaeda. Despite this, in recent years, scholars – particularly those within the field of terrorism studies – and activists have attempted to broaden both public and policy-makers' understandings of terrorism to include 'right-wing' attacks, which are becoming increasingly prevalent across North America and Western Europe, peaking in 2011 and again in 2015.[32]

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[30] Frank Foley, *Countering Terrorism in Britain and France: Institutions, Norms and the Shadow of the Past* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 321–22; Human Rights Watch, *Preempting Justice: Counterterrorism Laws and Procedures in France* (US: Human Rights Watch, 2008) <www.hrw.org/report/2008/07/01/preempting-justice/counterterrorism-laws-and-procedures-france> [accessed 9 March 2022].

[31] Human Rights Watch, *Preempting Justice*, p. 74.

[32] 'Right-wing' or 'far-right' terrorism is understood here to be terrorism motivated by often populist, xenophobic, and nationalist extremist ideologies as is characteristic of right-wing ideology in France,

Right-wing ideologies have a recent history in France, in no small part due to the rise in the prominence of far-right politics in the 1960s and that of the National Front in the 1980s. Violent attacks with a right-wing extremist motive have occurred in France throughout its recent history. In the 1960s, the right-wing *Organisation Armée Secrète* (OAS) was formed by pieds-noirs and hard-line military officers in response to Charles de Gaulle's announcement of a referendum of self-determination for Algeria. Between May 1961 and January 1962, the OAS carried out over 5000 attacks in both Algeria and France, and in a single week in May 1962, the organisation killed 230 Muslims.[33] The group expanded their target to metropolitan France, but ultimately failed to achieve the desired political impact. In more recent events, multiple far-right attacks occurred in 2015 in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* and Hypercacher January incident, and the multi-site attacks across Paris in November. According to TellMAMA UK, over fifty incidents of anti-Muslim violence or property damage occurred in the week following the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting on 7 January 2015, with four incidents involving firearms within the first twenty-four hours.[34] Despite the violent and frequent nature of these incidents – one of which resulted in the death of a man of Maghrebi heritage – they were largely under-reported in the French media; when they were reported, the incidents' relation to the *Charlie Hebdo* attack was questioned. For example, the stabbing and death of

as discussed below. These include but are not limited to neo-fascism, neo-Nazism, and white nationalism. However, I acknowledge that the outer limits of 'right-wing' extremism are undeniably much wider than this, on a global scale. For a detailed discussion of the challenges of defining right-wing terrorism, see Jessie Blackbourn, Nicola McGarrity, and Kent Roach, 'Understanding and Responding to Right Wing Terrorism', *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 14.3 (2019), 183–90 (p. 183–85).

[33] Shapiro, p. 258; Charles Townshend, *Terrorism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 50.

[34] 'Map of Anti-Muslim Incidents in France after the Charlie Hebdo Massacre', *TellMAMA*, 2015 <https://tellmamauk.org/map-of-anti-muslim-incidents-in-france-after-the-charlie-hebdo-massacre/> [accessed 8 June 2019]; 'Anti-Muslim Incidents in France after the Charlie Hebdo Massacre', *TellMAMA*, 2017 <https://tellmamauk.org/project/anti-muslim-incidents-in-france-after-the-charlie-hebdo-massacre/> [accessed 8 June 2019].

Mohamed El Makouli on 15 January was reported by only three major French print media outlets; *Le Monde*, *L'Express*, and *Le Figaro*. The titles of the reports in *Le Monde* and *L'Express* directly question whether the attack was an act of racism or Islamophobia.[35]

Terrorist activity from far-right groups has accompanied, and some might argue, been validated by, a rise in the prevalence of far-right ideology and discourses in the public realm. One key ideological text is Renaud Camus's theory of *Le Grand Remplacement* (2012), an extremist ideology built upon the supposed replacement of white French people (and Europeans in general) with Arab, Berber and Black Muslim immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa. Although Camus's writings blend leftist and far-right ideologies, far-right extremists across Europe, Northern America, and New Zealand have adopted his work as inspiration for violent attacks. His work was cited as inspiration for the Christchurch Mosque Shootings in March 2019 in the perpetrator's manifesto, for example.[36]

Similarly, 2011 saw the rise in popularity of French author Jean Raspail's racist and violent right-wing novels, such as his most popular book, *Le Camp des Saints* (1973). The novel is a dystopian work of fiction, with the destruction of Western civilisation through Third World mass immigration to France and the West as its focal point. Since its publication in 1973, the novel has received widespread

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[35] Soren Seelow, 'Mohamed El Makouli, Tué de 17 Coups de Couteau, a-t-Il Été Victime d'un Crime Raciste?', *Le Monde*, 2015 <https://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2015/01/22/mohamed-el-makouli-tue-de-17-coups-de-couteau-a-t-il-ete-victime-d-un-crime-raciste_4561514_1653578.html> [accessed 8 December 2020]; Philippe Huguen, 'Un Homme Tué de 17 Coups de Couteau En Provence: Geste Islamophobe?', *L'Express*, 2015 <https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/fait-divers/un-homme-tue-de-17-coups-de-couteau-en-provence-geste-islamophobe_1641676.html> [accessed 8 December 2020]; 'Un Marocain Tué de 17 Coups de Couteaux', *Le Figaro*, 2015 <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2015/01/16/97001-20150116FILWWW00425-un-marocain-tue-de-17-coups-de-couteaux.php> [accessed 8 December 2020].
[36] Tina Besley and Michael A. Peters, 'Terrorism, Trauma, Tolerance: Bearing Witness to White Supremacist Attack on Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 52.2 (2020), 109–19 (p. 112).

criticism as 'a racist tract'.[37] However, in 2011 – a key year in the timeline of far-right ideology in the West as will be discussed below – the novel returned to bestseller lists across the West. Subsequent to the novel's publication, Raspail collaborated with Gerard Dumont by publishing an article in *Le Figaro* in late 1985, in which much of the same polemical ideology was present. The Prime Minister of France at the time, Laurent Fabius, denounced the article as 'racist propaganda', 'reminiscent of the wildest Nazi theories'.[38] Meanwhile, Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the increasingly popular National Front at the time, had made immigration the primary issue of his campaign. Since its resurfacing, support for the novel has been publicly declared on four separate occasions by Steve Bannon, advisor to President Donald Trump, and once in a tweet by *Rassemblement National* leader Marine Le Pen stating 'Aujourd'hui, c'est une submersion migratoire. J'invite les Français à lire ou relire le Camp des Saints'.[39]

Violent attacks on civilians by those with contemporary radical right-wing political ideology as a motive have taken place since the 1970s in Europe. Despite their widespread nature, the increasing cause for concern they raise, and their fulfilment of the criteria for both academic and legal definitions of terrorism, right-wing violent attacks against civilians continue to be under-reported not only by the media, but they are also overlooked in academic scholarship.[40] Between 2007 and 2016, a mere 1.9% of articles from the top nine academic journals in the field of

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[37] Matthew Connelly and Paul Kennedy, 'Must It Be the Rest Against the West?', *The Atlantic Monthly*, 274.6 (1994), 61–84.

[38] Laurent Fabius, quoted in Connelly and Kennedy.

[39] Paul Blumenthal and JM Rieger, 'This Stunningly Racist French Novel Is How Steve Bannon Explains The World', *Huffington Post*, 2017 <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/steve-bannon-camp-of-the-saints-immigration_n_58b75206e4b0284854b3dc03> [accessed 9 June 2019]; Marine Le Pen, '"Aujourd'hui, c'est Une Submersion Migratoire. J'invite Les Français à Lire Ou Relire Le Camp Des Saints." #InvitéPol', *Twitter*, 2015 <https://twitter.com/mlp_officiel/status/638959623215706112?lang=en-GB> [accessed 8 June 2019].

[40] 'Global Terrorism Index 2018: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism' (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018) <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/resources/> [accessed 8 June 2019].

terrorism research included keywords relating to right-wing extremism, despite the significant events related to right-wing terrorism that took place during that period, with the Oslo attack by Anders Breivik and discovery of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground group in 2011.[41] By comparison, Jihadist terrorism featured in 74.5% of articles in the study. To put these figures into perspective, attacks perpetrated by al-Qaeda (and its branches), ISIL, Jihadi-inspired agents, Muslim extremists, and the French Armed Islamic Front caused 780 deaths in North America and Western Europe between 2002 and 2017. In the same time period, attacks by far-right extremists in North America and Western Europe caused 158 deaths.[42] Therefore, although, according to available figures, Jihadi extremism caused five times more deaths than right-wing extremism, it received thirty-nine times as much attention in leading scholarship. Even when accounting for the fact that more widespread phenomena receive increased attention by nature of their discussion in media and political policy, it is extremely revealing that the figures shown are so vastly different, and supports the observation that right-wing extremism is often overlooked in discussions of terrorism.

The under-representation of right-wing extremism, deliberate or otherwise, risks contributing to anti-Muslim racism, in that it focuses attention toward Islamist extremism and, by extension, downplays the severity of the threat from right-wing extremists. Jihadist and fundamentalist Islamist extremism and violence are by no means a minimal threat, but the imbalance in attention here must be noted. Some

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[41] Bart Schuurman, 'Topics in Terrorism Research: Reviewing Trends and Gaps, 2007-2016', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 12.3 (2019), 463–80 (p. 8). The study is English-language and focuses on journals with international contributors. Perhaps as a result of France's universalism, no similar study of French-language journals exists; it is my experience, however, that these trends are roughly mirrored in French and francophone scholarship.
[42] The 2018 Global Terrorism Index indicates 158 deaths caused by 'far-right extremism' attacks in this time period. However, no indication of the makeup of 'far-right extremism' is given for this figure.

have concluded that this is in part due to the different approaches that the West has

toward so-called lone-wolf terrorism when perpetrated by extremist Islamist-inspired

individuals, and by right-wing-inspired individuals. Writing in the *Washington Post*,

Max Boot suggests that '[m]any recent attackers in the West have been "lone wolfs"

[*sic*] who have been radicalized from afar by the Islamic State or al-Qaeda. Others

have been recruited by extremists in Muslim communities. We need to apply the

same methodology to right-wing terrorists and root out the ideology that inspires

them'.[43] The precise causes of this disparity cannot be categorically proved within

the scope of this study, and yet it is clear that disproportionate coverage of Islamist

extremism, both in scholarship and public dialogue, 'reinforces cultural narratives

about what and who should be feared'.[44]

As the corpus of this thesis will demonstrate, portrayals of Islamist extremist

terrorism far outnumber those of right-wing terrorism in contemporary French

cinema and television. While a number of films and series portray terrorism

motivated by Islamist extremism, only one film has been released since 2015 that

broaches the subject of right-wing extremism in contemporary France: Lucas

Belvaux's 2017 film *Chez Nous*.

The above overview demonstrates the challenges involved with reaching a

conclusive definition of terrorism, and highlights the political, public, and academic

oversights which tend to be made in such discussions. This complexity informs the

analysis of the films in the chapters of this thesis, which seeks to demonstrate that

acts of violence labelled as 'terrorism' are always and exclusively categorised as

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[43] Max Boot, 'Not All Terrorism Is Treated Equally', *Washington Post*, 2019
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/03/15/not-all-terrorism-is-treated-equally/>
[accessed 8 June 2019].
[44] Erin M. Kearns, Allison E. Betus, and Anthony F. Lemieux, 'Why Do Some Terrorist Attacks
Receive More Media Attention Than Others?', *Justice Quarterly*, 36.6 (2019), 985–1022 (p. 19).

such from the subjective socio-political and ideological perspective of the person or group using the term. As Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass point out in their landmark text *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism*, 'yesterday's terrorists are today's Nobel Peace Prize winners […] How do we manage to produce apocalyptic madmen who are later considered to be paragons of peace and virtue?'[45] The face of terrorism both as a concept and practice has of course changed dramatically throughout history: Paul B. Rich notes that '"terror" has always been with us in a range of different forms and guises; the whole of Western history can indeed be seen as marked by major acts of terror'.[46] He goes on to demonstrate that what is categorised by today's policymakers and researchers as terrorism is vastly different than what may have been at other points in history, or indeed geography.

In fact, Zulaika and Douglass specifically point to the relationship between terrorism as a practice and as a concept in order to highlight how distant the two have become. In their view, 'nothing feeds the growth of the phenomenon itself more than the inability of terrorism discourse to distinguish actual combat from ritual bluff, real violence from imaginary terror.'[47] In this thesis, I assume a similar stance to that of Zulaika and Douglass in the I do not attempt to redefine terrorism, but rather I engage with a corpus of films which portray events that have been characterised as terrorism (such as the *Charlie Hebdo* and November 2015 Paris attacks); which include characters accused of terrorism or radicalisation; which have been marketed using the terms 'terrorism' and 'terrorist'; or which other scholars and

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[45] Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables and Faces of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. x.
[46] Paul B. Rich, 'Understanding Terror, Terrorism, and Their Representations in Media and Culture', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 36.3 (2013), 255–77 (p. 256).
[47] Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*, p. xi.

film reviewers have identified as treating the subject of terrorism. In my analysis, particularly in Chapters 3 and 4, I discuss the violent actions the characters engage in in their wider context of what may from some subjective stances be considered state-sponsored terrorism, such as France and Belgium's colonial histories or France's involvement in Iraq, Syria, and the Sahel. Ultimately, a key aim of this thesis is to engage in an analysis of the discourse surrounding terrorism, and how this manifests in the films within the corpus in the framing of the terrorist figure.

Before focusing on specific films or groups of films, though, a general discussion of the recent history of French and Belgian cinematic depictions of terrorism will highlight how the terrorist attacks in these countries throughout the past decade have shaped these portrayals.

Terrorism in contemporary French and Belgian cinema

As many scholars have highlighted, one of the core components of modern terrorism is theatricality:

> [t]errorism must have a theatrical aspect, for otherwise it cannot communicate the threat of terror to the public at large […] The element of theatre, along with the organizational dimension of terrorism, accounts in part for its destabilizing impact on the public.[48]

French sociologist Jean Baudrillard agrees with this evaluation, suggesting that 'le terrorisme ne serait rien sans les médias', and goes as far as to suggest that cinema and terrorism are inextricably linked:

> la fascination de l'attentat est d'abord celle de l'image […] les deux éléments de fascination de masse du XXe siècle [se conjuguent]: la magie blanche du cinéma, et la magie noire du terrorisme. La lumière blanche de l'image, et la lumière noire du

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[48] George P. Fletcher, 'The Indefinable Concept of Terrorism', *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, 4.5 (2006), 894–911. See also Claudia Egerer, 'The Image of Terror/Terrorism of Images', in *Transnational America: Contours of Modern US Culture*, ed. by Russell Duncan and Clara Juncker (Museum Tusculanum Press, 2004), pp. 95–109.

terrorisme.[49]

It is perhaps as a result of the innate theatricality of terrorism – compounded particularly by the proliferation of images and media via the internet – that cinema globally has taken particular interest in portraying it.

While Hollywood has certainly produced the largest number of films about terrorism, French productions have also broached the topic at various points in history. In the twentieth century, the majority of these films were concerned with the Algerian War of Independence. Alain Cavalier's *Le Combat dans l'île* (1962), for example, is set in the context of the campaign of bombings and assassinations by the Organisation de l'armée secrète (OAS) during the Algerian War; Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* (1963) similarly depicts a French citizen who works for a right-wing terrorist group targeting members of the *Front de Libération National* (FLN) in Algeria. One of the most notable depictions of terrorism is Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), which has been the subject of much scholarship partly due to its unofficial censorship in metropolitan France as a result of the film's criticism of French imperialism.[50] Into the twenty-first century, representations of terrorism in French cinema have continued to focus on the context of Algeria, with films such as *L'Ennemi intime* (Florent Emilio Siri, 2007), *Hors-la-loi* (Rachid Bouchareb, 2010), and *Loin des hommes* (David Oelhoffen, 2014) depicting the events of the Algerian War, and *L'Assaut* (Julien Leclercq, 2010) and *Des hommes et des dieux* (Xavier Beauvois, 2010) focusing on the *décennie noire*, the period in 1990s and early 2000s in Algeria characterised by violence and civil war.

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[49] Jean Baudrillard, 'L'Esprit du Terrorisme', *Le Monde*, 2006 <https://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2007/03/06/l-esprit-du-terrorisme-par-jean-baudrillard_879920_3382.html> [accessed 3 January 2022].
[50] Benjamin Stora, 'Still Fighting', *Interventions*, 9.3 (2007), 365–70 (p. 365).

The importance of these films notwithstanding, it was not until the early 2010s that French and Belgian cinema began to depict terrorism and radicalisation on metropolitan French soil. Released in 2012, the Franco-Belgian film *La Désintégration* was among the first to broach this subject. As Ariane Allard points out in her review of the film for *Positif*, '[il] n'est pas si courant que le cinéma, en particulier le cinéma hexagonal, s'attaque à un sujet aussi épineux (le terrorisme) de façon aussi dépouillée'.[51] This was in part perhaps because France only recorded two terrorist attacks in its metropole since the turn of the millennium (in 2000 and 2007), resulting in two casualties. However, the film's release in February 2012 was followed the next month by the terrorist attacks in Toulouse and Montauban, which targeted French Army soldiers, and teachers and children at a Jewish school. The attack garnered significant attention in the media, and on 19 March 2012, several thousand people marched in Paris in memory of the victims, with similar marches in Lyon and Toulouse in the following days.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these events led to several attempts by French filmmakers to confront the subject of terrorism; several of which make up the corpus of this thesis. According to the film's French press kit, Nicolas Boukhrief – a French director of Algerian descent – began drafting the screenplay for *Made in France* shortly after the Toulouse attack.[52] Somewhat ironically, the topicality and sensitivity of the subject matter for *Made in France*, which follows a jihadist terrorist cell, also led multiple investors to refuse to fund the film.[53] When the production was finally funded, the release date was set for 4 November 2015; filming began in early 2014.

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[51] Ariane Allard, 'La Désintégration', *Positif*, 612 (2012), 30–31 (p. 30).

[52] '*Made in France*: Dossier de Presse Français' (Pretty Pictures, 2014) <https://www.unifrance.org/film/39375/made-in-france> [accessed 8 February 2021].

[53] Olivier Bouchara, '*Made in France*, Le Film Maudit', *Vanity Fair FR*, 2016 <https://www.vanityfair.fr/culture/ecrans/articles/-made-in-france-le-film-maudit-par-olivier-bouchara/31201> [accessed 9 August 2021].

However, as the news broke of the fateful attacks on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015, the film's release was suspended until 18 November. When, just five days before the scheduled release date, the coordinated attacks across Paris claimed over 130 lives, the film's theatrical release was cancelled, and it was shown only on video-on-demand services from January 2016.

Although not set in metropolitan France, François Margolin and Lemine Ould Salem's *Salafistes* (2016) met a similar, if more sudden, fate. The French documentary includes interviews with Salfist extremists in Africa and the Middle East, interspersed with IS propoaganda footage and images of jihadist-inspired violence such as the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks and the execution of James Foley. Unlike many mainstream European and American films released up until this point, the documentary deliberately engages with highly educated and intelligent extremists; as Margolin puts it, 'l'idée était qu'il fallait arrêter de dire que les salafistes ou les terroristes étaient uniquement des loups solitaires, des déséquilibrés, des fous, ou une secte'.[54] Despite the importance of this humanisation and politicisation of the terrorist figure – as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis – the film was given an 18 rating, which effectively censors it from public screenings.

In the summer of 2015, French director Bertrand Bonello began shooting *Nocturama* (2016), a film which would depict a group of teenage terrorists committing acts of violence and destruction throughout Paris; the terrorist figures' political or ideological motivation was entirely absent from the film. Unlike *Made in France*, the lack of political ideology within *Nocturama* meant that the only problem

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[54] Maria Flood, 'Critics and controversy: the reception of Salafistes (2016) in France, followed by an interview with co-director François Margolin', Studies in French Cinema, 19.3 (2019), 233–45 (p. 237).

the production encountered was that the original name, *Paris est une fête*, had to be changed. *Le Ciel attendra* (Marie-Castille Mention-Schaar, 2016) – which depicts a group of young French girls who are radicalised and plan to leave for Syria – did not receive pushback from production companies despite its focus on extremist Islamist ideology. Filming was due to begin just two days after the November attacks, on 15 November. Although the then recent events caused Mention-Schaar to reconsider her film, she suggests that – like *Nocturama* – they ultimately did not affect the production, which was released in October 2016.[55] Although it is not possible to conclusively prove the reasons for which *Le Ciel attendra* faced no disruption while *Made in France* was brought almost to a halt and *Salafistes* was essentially censored, there are two dramatic differences between the films which may account for this. On one hand, *Le Ciel attendra* does not depict the planning or commission of a terrorist attack, but focuses on radicalisation, while *Made in France* shows the detailed planning of coordinated attacks and *Salafistes* depicts real-world footage of terrorist attacks. On the other hand, the radicalised figures in *Le Ciel attendra* are mostly women, whereas those in *Made in France* and *Salafistes* are mostly male. Incidentally, *Nocturama* also features radicalised female figures as protagonists and, as mentioned above, received relatively little push-back from funders. While it is not possible to conclusively demonstrate that this affected the decisions of funding bodies, it is worth noting that in French media, women of Maghrebi origin or heritage have often been positioned as victims, and their agency in extremist or violent conflict has been diminished. Todd Shepard, for example, highlights that during the Algerian War of Independence, women were positioned as 'defenseless

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[55] '*Le Ciel attendra*: Dossier de Presse Français' (UGC Distribution, 2015) <https://medias.unifrance.org/medias/156/129/164252/presse/le-ciel-attendra-dossier-de-presse-francais.pdf> [accessed 8 September 2021].

victims of Muslim hedonism', despite their involvement in and contribution to the efforts on both sides.[56] In a contemporary context, recent studies suggest that the female terrorist figure is not seen by policy-makers and the public as a significant threat, and that narratives surrounding radicalised women 'reinforce societal assumptions about women by emphasizing that they are emotional but not political, easily manipulated, often deranged, or simply unintelligent'.[57] As the corpus of this thesis demonstrates, the large majority of terrorist figures in French and Belgian cinema are male.[58]

Although *Made in France* may have been considered too topical for a fictional portrayal of terrorism, the same seems not to have applied to documentary filmmaking. Around the same time, father and son duo Daniel and Emmanuel Leconte – who had previously produced and directed *C'est dur d'être aimé par des cons* (2008) about the court case against *Charlie Hebdo* – released a feature-length documentary, *Je suis Charlie: L'Humour à mort*, featuring interviews with the survivor-witnesses of the attack on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*. Unlike *Made in France*, the pair received financial support from Canal+ and Pyramide productions 'tout de suite', and the film premiered in December 2015.[59] Significantly, this was

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[56] Todd Shepard, 'Veiled "Muslim" Women, Violent Pied-Noir Men, and the Family of France: Gender, Sexuality, and Ethnic Difference', in *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 183–204 (p. 189).

[57] Rachel Schmidt, 'Duped: Examining Gender Stereotypes in Disengagement and Deradicalization Practices', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 45.11 (2020), 953–76; see also Camille Boutron and Myriam Le Basque, 'Combattantes, Terroristes Ou Victimes ? L'engagement Des Femmes Dans La Violence Armée', *Les Champs de Mars*, 33.2 (2019), 91–113.

[58] The representation of gender within discussions of terrorism is, undeniably, an extremely important and overlooked topic which merits attention in future studies. However, as *Le Ciel attendra* is the only French film released so far which focuses on radicalisation as a 'gendered transformation' (Delphine Letort and Abderrahmene Bourenane, 'De-Westernizing the Gaze on Islam and the Veil in French and Franco-Algerian Films', in *Artistic (Self)-Representations of Islam and Muslims: Perspectives Across France and the Maghreb*, ed. by Ramona Mielusel (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), pp. 61–77 [p. 62]), I have chosen not to include it within the corpus.

[59] Emmanuel Leconte and Daniel Leconte, '*Je suis Charlie: L'Humour à mort*: Dossier de Presse Français' (Pyramide Films, 2015) <https://medias.unifrance.org/medias/138/78/151178/presse/l-humour-a-mort-dossier-de-presse-francais.pdf> [accessed 6 January 2022].

the first feature-length and internationally distributed French film since 2010 which

portrayed the experiences of the survivor-witnesses of terrorism: *La Désintégration*,

Made in France, *Nocturama*, and *Le Ciel attendra* feature no survivor-witnesses of

attacks and focus instead on the figure of the terrorist. In 2016, Netflix optioned the

rights to distribute the documentary, expanding its audience dramatically.

Another first-of-its-kind terrorism film followed in 2017, as Belgian-born

director Lucas Belvaux released *Chez Nous*, which focuses on right-wing extremist

terrorism.[60] Notably, however, despite the actions of the protagonist falling well

within the parameters of terrorism in academic and legal definitions as discussed

above, the film's press kit does not mention terrorism or market itself as a film about

terrorism, and press reviews do not mention terrorism.[61] Rosemarie Scullion is the

first and only scholar to date to recognise that the actions of the protagonist

constitute 'far-right terror', although she does not specifically categorise them as

terrorism.[62]

Following *Chez Nous*, there was a quick succession of francophone films

which focused on the survivor-witnesses and victims of terrorism on French soil.

First came the Netflix-produced three-part docuseries *13 novembre*, which is formed

of the oral testimony of survivor-witnesses of the November 2015 attacks, combined

with archival footage. In November of the same year, Mikhaël Hers's *Amanda* told

the fictional story of a man whose sister dies in a terrorist attack in Paris, and must

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[60] Lucas Belvaux was born and raised in Belgium. Since 1979, he has been living and working in Paris ('Persons: Lucas Belvaux', *IFFR*, 2021 <https://iffr.com/en/persons/lucas-belvaux> [accessed 9 October 2021]).

[61] '*Chez Nous*: Dossier de Press Français' (Le Pacte, 2017) <https://medias.unifrance.org/medias/42/154/170538/presse/this-is-our-land-presskit-french.pdf> [accessed 8 September 2021]; Joan M. West, 'Belvaux, Lucas, Chez Nous', *The French Review*, 91.1 (2017), 239–40.

[62] Rosemarie Scullion, '"This Is Our Land!": Owning the Nation in Luc Belvaux's *Chez Nous* (2017)', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 25.3 (2021), 277–86 (p. 283).

subsequently take charge of his young niece. Finally, the crowdfunded independent

film *Paris est à nous* – a 'docu-fiction' which follows a young girl in Paris who

believes her boyfriend has died in a terrorist attack – was picked up by Netflix in

October 2018 and released on the streaming service in February 2019. The film

received criticism as it was shot on-location during the events following the attacks

on *Charlie Hebdo* and the November 2015 attacks, and featured footage of

unsuspecting members of the public who had gathered to mourn or protest.[63]

The quick succession of French and Belgian films concerning terrorism in

Europe continued in 2019. In April, *L'Adieu à la nuit* was released; a feature-length

drama following three radicalised French youths, which received mixed reviews in

the press for its unconventional treatment of the subject matter.[64] As will be

discussed in Chapter 4, this film takes a highly impartial – if quite enigmatic –

approach to representing its terrorist figures, and is one of the only films in the

corpus to portray these figures in bright palettes and lighting, rather than the dimly-

lit scenes seen in the majority of depictions of terrorism. One month later, Belgian

brothers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne released *Le Jeune Ahmed*, which recounts a

young radicalised teenage boy's plot to murder his teacher. Like *L'Adieu à la nuit*,

Le Jeune Ahmed was well received by critics all round. It is worth noting that these

two most recent productions are both directed by well-known filmmakers. It is

perhaps unsurprising that directors of considerable renown decided to approach this

subject matter after more time had passed since the attacks of 2015 and 2016;

[63] Hermance Murgue, '*Paris Est à Nous*: Le Pari Décevant de Netflix', *L'Express*, 2019 <https://www.lexpress.fr/culture/tele/paris-est-a-nous-le-pari-decevant-de-netflix_2063479.html> [accessed 2 July 2020]; Jordan Mintzer, '*Paris Is Us* (*Paris Est a Nous*): Film Review', *Hollywood Reporter*, 2019 <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/paris-is-us-paris-est-a-nous-review-1190352> [accessed 19 November 2020].
[64] Pierre Eisenreich, '*L'Adieu à la nuit*', *Positif*, 699 (2019), 57; Olivier De Bruyn, 'Téchiné, Deneuve et le djihadisme', *Les Echos*, 2019 <https://www.lesechos.fr/weekend/cinema-series/ladieu-a-la-nuit-techine-deneuve-et-le-djihadisme-1212051> [accessed 8 September 2021].

however, their decision to broach this subject at all is testament to its pertinence and topicality in contemporary French and Belgian society.

With the Coronavirus pandemic came a lacuna in the production and release of francophone films on this subject. I have not been able to identify any such films released in 2020 or 2021. However, two new films which return again to survivor-witnesses and victims of terrorism on French soil premiered at the 2022 Cannes film festival. The first, *Revoir Paris (Paris Memoires)* (Alice Winocour) is a fictional feature film based upon the director's experience of communicating with her brother while he was hiding in the Bataclan theatre during the 2015 attack, and had its theatrical release in September 2022.[65] The second, *Novembre* (Cédric Jimenez), is a documentary film which follows the actions of the Parisian police in the immediate aftermath of the November attacks, released in French cinemas in October 2022.[66]

Despite their differences in terms of focalisation on survivor-witnesses and victims or terrorist figures, their setting, and their production histories, the films outlined above all draw attention to filmmakers' acute interest in addressing the subject of terrorism in the context of France and Belgium. Crucially, these films foreground varied subjective experiences of terrorism, demonstrating the pertinence and necessity of exploring the framing of the subjectivity of the other in such films. It is in fact *because* of the extreme difference in the subjective experience presented in some of the films discussed above that they are included in the primary corpus for this thesis, which is comprised of seven films that feature depictions of terrorism set in metropolitan France, and one set in Belgium. *Paris est à nous*, *13 novembre*, *Je*

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[65] '*Revoir Paris* (*Paris Memoires*): Dossier de Presse Français' (Pathé, 2022) <https://medias.unifrance.org/medias/68/209/250180/presse/revoir-paris-dossier-de-presse-anglais.pdf> [accessed 22 May 2022].
[66] '*NOVEMBRE*', *Festival de Cannes*, 2022 <https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/festival/films/novembre> [accessed 23 May 2022].

suis Charlie: L'Humour à mort, and *Amanda* all foreground the experiences of the survivor-witnesses of terrorism. While *13 novembre* and *L'Humour à mort* are presented in documentary format, *Amanda* is fictional, and *Paris est à nous* blurs the boundary between fiction and documentary; each film takes a different approach to constructing the subjectivity of the other for the audience. By contrast, *La Désintégration*, *Le Jeune Ahmed*, *Made in France*, and *L'Adieu à la nuit* focus their attention on the experience of the figure of the terrorist, and represent varied approaches to the construction of the terrorist, with some focusing on their subjectivity and humanity while others ultimately submit to a radical 'othering' of the terrorist figure. Despite significant differences in approach, all of the films selected for this study's final corpus underline the pivotal role that the construction of the subjective experience of terrorism plays in articulating France and Belgium's contemporary relationships with terrorism on their metropolitan soil. Furthermore, although I argue at the beginning of this Introduction that the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* and November attacks were followed by a sharp increase in cinematic portrayals of terrorism in France and Belgium, I include *La Désintégration* (released in 2012) and *Made in France* (conceptualised as early as 2012) as scholars have acknowledged that the Toulouse attacks marked a significant change in France's perception of terrorism in the metropole as a legitimate threat.[67] As these works vary so dramatically in their theme and method, I have chosen to group and analyse the films according to their focus, rather than chronologically. The structure and reasoning for my choices are as follows.

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[67] Christian Mouhanna, 'Reforms and Unexpected Events: The Influence of Terrorist Attacks on Policing Strategies', *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 15.1 (2021), 288–98 (p. 288).

Chapter 1 focuses on the extent to which two Netflix productions – *Paris est à nous* and *13 novembre* – attempt to bring the past historical event of terrorism into the present subjectivity of the viewer through a blurring of the boundary between fiction and reality. Drawing upon the theories of Emmanuel Levinas and Gilles Deleuze, in this chapter I contend that *13 novembre* is symptomatic of how the increase in popularity of on-demand documentaries has affected the ethics of such portrayals, encouraging proximity between the radically alterior subjective experience of the survivor-witnesses and the subjectivity of the viewer, while *Paris est à nous* deploys narrative and aesthetic techniques that challenge the boundary between fiction and reality and draw attention directly to the problematic nature of accessing survivor-witness testimony through cinema. Through such analysis, I suggest that contemporary viewing trends may result in a prioritisation of the viewers' entertainment, sacrificing the ethical depiction of the survivor-witness.

Chapter 2 builds upon this discussion by interrogating the ways in which *13 novembre*, *L'Humour à mort*, and *Amanda* encourage or challenge the viewer's access to the subjective experiences of survivor-witnesses. The chapter moves on to consider how these debates differ in terms of depiction of those who are killed as a result of terrorism in *Amanda*, before concluding that while *13 novembre* and *L'Humour à mort* engage in practices which highlight the inaccessibility of these subjective experiences, they also invariably invite audiences to feel as though they *are* able to experience the subjectivity of the survivor-witnesses. By contrast, the chapter demonstrates the ethical care with which *Amanda* navigates the subjectivity of both survivor-witnesses and victims of terrorism.

Crucially, Chapters 1 and 2 break from previous studies of cinematic depictions of terrorism by analysing documentary and fiction side-by-side. While the

increasingly blurred boundary between fiction and reality has been acknowledged by scholars in the field of Film Studies, this thesis is the first to apply this to an analysis of depictions of terrorism, and to consider how filmmakers may be manipulating this fluid boundary in order to engage viewers.[68] I demonstrate that contemporary fictional works have tended to exhibit more ethical care in their depictions of survivor-witness and victims, while the expository qualities of documentaries have tended to privilege the audiences' entertainment over the acknowledgement of the survivor-witnesses' experience as unique and unknowable.

Given the complexity of the research questions explored in this thesis, and the many ethical questions they raise, particular care was needed when identifying the corpus. As such, I have aimed to give all of the works analysed here equal attention. Despite this, I have chosen to include the Netflix docu-series *13 novembre* in both Chapters 1 and 2 as it produces productive discussion in vastly different ways: in Chapter 1, I focus on the series' attempt to relocate the past into the present and blur the distinction between fact and fiction, whereas Chapter 2 focuses more acutely on the extent to which the series acknowledges the subjectivity of the survivor-witnesses it depicts. Furthermore, although I aim to provide each film with equal attention, the discussion of portrayals of people who have died during terrorist attacks in Chapter 2 focuses solely on *Amanda*, as this was the only fictional depiction of such issues at the time of writing the thesis. Future studies could productively apply a similar framework to the very recent *Revoir Paris (Paris Memoires)* (Alice Winocour, 2022), which also portrays survivor-witnesses and victims of a terrorist attack.

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[68] Sarah Cooper, Introduction to *Selfless Cinema?: Ethics and French Documentary*, Research Monographs in French Studies, 20 (London: Legenda, 2006), pp. 1–13; Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006).

Departing from analyses of the ethics of depicting the survivor-witnesses and victims of terrorism, Chapters 3 and 4 move on to consider the often-overlooked subjective experiences of terrorist figures. Despite the lack of acknowledgement in media and scholarship of the proliferation of far-right extremist violence as highlighted earlier in this introduction, I chose not to include *Chez Nous*, which is the only film released since 2010 to tackle the subject. As the final two chapters of this thesis focus so acutely in turn on the systemic violence which affects individuals of Arab and Maghrebi immigrant heritage and the racially biased visual hierarchies at play within depictions of terrorist figures, I chose to analyse films which themselves portray ethnically diverse terrorist cells comprised of people from a variety of backgrounds. This allows me to demonstrate that, regardless of religious or political affiliation, the subjective experience of the white terrorist is often prioritised in these films, while the terrorist of Arab or Maghrebi immigrant heritage continues to be demonised and dehumanised. As such, including a film such as *Chez Nous* which only features white far-right terrorist figures would not have proved productive for the comparative approach taken in Chapter 4.[69] Devoting these chapters to the specifics and complexities of systemic violence and racial hierarchies allows me to demonstrate that filmmakers and scholars alike have recently begun to acknowledge the wider network of violence in which terrorist figures operate, and how this challenges the traditional dehumanisation and depoliticisation of the terrorist in Western rhetoric.

Chapter 3 explores the ways in which *La Désintégration* and *Le Jeune Ahmed* recognise the political and human subjectivity of terrorist figures, with

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[69] I do, however, explore the depiction of the figure of the terrorist in *Chez Nous* in my forthcoming chapter in *The Figure of the Terrorist in Literature and Visual Culture*, ed. by Maria Flood and Michael C. Frank (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2023).

particular attention to the taboo that such an acknowledgement represents in traditional media portrayals of terrorists. I contend that both films make steps in encouraging their audiences to renounce their own assumed subjective views of terrorist figures, and consider the wider networks of systemic and symbolic violence that terrorists operate in, ultimately constructing the figure of the terrorist as a political, morally complex human being, a depiction which is otherwise rarely seen in Western media.

Focusing more acutely on the specific forms of systemic violence which individuals of Maghrebi background experience in France, Chapter 4 discusses the ways in which formal aspects of *Made in France* and *L'Adieu à la nuit* – such as lighting and camera angles – can reproduce visual hierarchies which privilege the subjective worldview of the white terrorist over that of the non-white terrorist. Through a close analysis of the aesthetics of these films, I demonstrate that while the lighting and mise-en-scène of *Made in France* prioritises the experience of white terrorist figures and diminishes that of terrorists of Arab or Maghrebi background, greater technical care is demonstrated in *L'Adieu à la nuit*, which depicts its terrorist figures more equitably, refusing to privilege any specific subjective experience. This chapter in particular highlights the extreme complexity of producing an equitable depiction of terrorist figures from varied backgrounds, and the subtle ways in which individuals of non-white ethnic background experience discrimination in France and the Western world.

This thesis conducts an interdisciplinary and wide-ranging survey of the ethical implications surrounding depictions of terrorism in contemporary French and Belgian cinema, which, despite its pertinence, has hitherto not been provided. As such, I have consulted existing literature from a range of disciplines in order to

inform my analyses. In the following section, I will briefly outline the existing

studies to demonstrate how this thesis has been informed by previous literature, and

where it may be able to contribute to existing knowledge.

Surveying the literature: Cinematic depictions of terrorism

Despite the distinct phenomenon of contemporary French and Belgian films which

take terrorism on metropolitan French and Belgian soil as their subject, current

research into cinematic portrayals of terrorism often concentrates on Hollywood

productions (which invariably are set in the USA or the Middle East) with a focus on

their relation to the ideology of the USA's 'War on Terror'. Todd Comer and Llord

Vayo's *Terror and the Cinematic Sublime*, for example, is composed of thirteen

essays which interrogate and unmask the subtle ways in which Hollywood cinema

articulates anxiety in the post-9/11 era.[70] By contrast, Terence McSweeney's *The*

War on Terror and American Film comprises seven essays which challenge the

American mythology of the US as a simultaneous victim of terrorism and global

watchdog.[71] Certainly, this scholarship has made important steps in recognising the

stereotyping of the terrorist figure in Western media, which provides a strong

foundation for this thesis to discuss the ethics of representing the terrorist. However,

the publications mentioned do not transgress the borders of the US. To bridge this

gap, Tony Shaw's *Cinematic Terror: A Global History of Terrorism on Film*

considers representations of terrorism from cinema industries across the world, and

throughout the history of cinema.[72] However, despite – and due to – its benefits as an

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[70] *Terror and the Cinematic Sublime: Essays on Violence and the Unpresentable in Post-9/11 Films*, ed. by Todd A. Comer and Lloyd Isaac Vayo (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2013).
[71] *The 'War on Terror' and American Film: 9/11 Frames per Second*, ed. by Terence McSweeney, Traditions in American Cinema (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).
[72] Tony Shaw, *Cinematic Terror: A Global History of Terrorism on Film* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014).

overview of terrorism in global cinema, the monograph cannot address the specificity of each country with great detail.

In the context of France, as mentioned earlier, existing research has focused predominantly on the socio-political issues raised by representations of terrorism set during the Algerian War. The work of scholars such as Maria Flood, Florence Martin, and Carrie Tarr, although it does not specifically deal with the new wave of representations of terrorism on French soil, has been crucial in elucidating the connection between France's colonial history and the continued anxiety surrounding Islamist extremism in France as it is depicted on the cinema screen.[73]

While a general dearth of scholarship on depictions of terrorism on French and Belgian soil remains, a limited number of articles and book chapters have emerged which acknowledge and analyse the above-mentioned films in their contemporary context. While Tarr interrogates the representation of Islam in *La Désintégration*, Jimia Boutouba discusses the extent to which *Made in France* conforms to stereotypes of the terrorist in Western media.[74] The majority of such scholarship focuses on how Islam and Muslims have been represented in films about terrorism. In *Artistic (Self)-Representations of Islam and Muslims*, two chapters locate representations of terrorism within the context of Islam in France more generally: Delphine Letort and Abderrahmene Bourenane compare French productions *Le Ciel attendra* and *Made in France* with films which feature terrorism outside of French territory, while Patrick Saveau engages in a detailed analysis of the

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[73] Maria Flood, 'Terrorism and Visibility in Algeria's "Black Decade": *Des Hommes et Des Dieux* (2010)', *French Cultural Studies*, 27.1 (2016), 62–72; Maria Flood and Florence Martin, 'The Terrorist as *Ennemi Intime* in French and Francophone Cinema', *Studies in French Cinema*, 19.3 (2019), 171–78; Carrie Tarr, 'Looking at Muslims: The Visibility of Islam in Contemporary French Cinema', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 48.5 (2014), 516–33.
[74] Tarr; Jimia Boutouba, 'Through the Lens of Terror: Re-Imaging Terrorist Violence in Boukhrief's *Made in France*', *Studies in French Cinema*, 19.3 (2019), 215–32.

representation of the terrorist figure in *Made in France*.[75] The work of these scholars

provides a valuable starting point from which to examine the varied subjectivities

and constructions of the other in contemporary representations of terrorism on

French soil; however, once again, these publications do not consist of a wider

comparison of recent French productions including those which depict the

experience of survivor-witness and victims of terrorism, nor do they foreground the

ethics of such portrayals, which is a central theoretical and conceptual approach

adopted in my work. By shifting the focus to terrorism (though inevitably questions

of racialisation and colourism will be engaged with), the thesis increases its potential

for providing a rich discussion of the ethical dilemmas raised by the corpus films.

Furthermore, this thesis addresses the substantial gap in scholarship

surrounding Belgian productions. Perhaps due to the limited and comparatively

recent number of (Franco-) Belgian productions which address the topic of terrorism

on Belgian soil, academic discussion of Belgium's cinematic relationship with

terrorism is largely non-existent. In fact, discussions of films such as *Le Jeune*

Ahmed – which is produced, filmed, and set entirely in Belgium – do not allude to

the Belgian context of the film; some do not mention Belgium at all.[76] I argue that

terrorism on French and Belgian soil is inextricably linked, as is discussed in

Chapter 3, but have also paid attention to the specificities of Belgium's counter-

terrorism legislation, socio-political background, and relationship to terrorism in

order to address this academic lacuna.

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[75] Delphine Letort and Abderrahmene Bourenane, 'De-Westernizing the Gaze on Islam and the Veil in French and Franco-Algerian Films', in *Artistic (Self)-Representations of Islam and Muslims: Perspectives Across France and the Maghreb*, ed. by Ramona Mielusel (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), pp. 61–77; Patrick Saveau, 'Nicolas Boukhrief's *Made in France*: Nuancing the Mediatized Approach to Islamic Terrorism', in Mielusel, pp. 79–92.

[76] François Massonnat, '*Le Jeune Ahmed* by Jean-Pierre et Luc Dardenne', *The French Review*, 93.4 (2020), 194–95; Charlotte Garson, 'Films: *Le Jeune Ahmed*', *Études*, 6 (2019), 105–6.

Informed by philosophical debates on the subjective experience of the other, both within film studies and philosophy itself, this thesis aims to counter the scholarly gap in the current field of research by providing the first detailed analysis of how French and Belgian filmmakers are negotiating the depiction of terrorism. In order to do so, the chapters of the thesis are underpinned by an interdisciplinary theoretical framework which draws upon the discourses of the ethics of representation (particularly in relation to cinematic portrayals of trauma and, in some cases, terrorism). Each theoretical framework is explored in detail throughout the course of this thesis; however, below I will briefly summarise how these theories are appropriate and in which ways they will enlighten the present study.

The ethics of representing the irreducibly alterior subjective experience of terrorism

As the films in the corpus of this thesis specifically depict the experiences of victims, survivor-witnesses, and terrorist figures, they all feature subjective experiences which will differ significantly from those of the large majority of their audiences, the vast majority of whom are unlikely to have been victims or perpetrators of terrorism. As such, the issues surrounding the cinematic depiction of radically alterior subjective experiences take a central role in the present study. Such issues have been the subject of scholarly attention for decades: particularly following the Second World War, scholars in Trauma Studies, Literary Studies, and later in Film Studies debated how – and indeed *if* – the experiences of survivor-witnesses and victims of the Holocaust could be represented in literature and film, when these experiences are fundamentally subjective, unique to each individual, and in many ways inaccessible. As mentioned earlier in this introduction, Primo Levi highlighted that even the survivor-witnesses of the atrocities of the concentration camps could not attest to the

full extent of the horrors – in particular the gas chambers and crematoriums – as surviving meant that they had not experienced them.[77] Scholars such as Alvin Rosenfeld and James Young built upon this debate by emphasising the failure of language – whether spoken or written – to communicate the horrors experienced by survivor-witnesses, pointing out that our only method of accessing these experiences is through a system of signs and symbols – language – which cannot possibly express the true nature of the trauma.[78] Although, as many have argued, the unique specificities of the Holocaust prevent its comparison with other historical events, as my thesis will show, insights from debates in relation to Holocaust experience and its aftermath can be applied to the depiction of survivor-witnesses and victims of terrorism in order to illuminate the ethical challenges that such portrayals face. [79] I navigate this form of borrowing following what Michael Rothberg terms 'multidirectional memory'. Rothberg suggests that 'the emergence of Holocaust memory on a global scale has contributed to the articulation of other histories – some of them predating the Nazi genocide […] and others taking place later', and that memory need not function as competitive and privative, but that cross-referencing and borrowing between historically situated events and phenomena can be productive ways of understanding such histories.[80]

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[77] Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*.

[78] Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1980); James Edward Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*, First Midland (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990).

[79] Claude Lanzmann, 'The Obscenity of Understanding: An Evening with Claude Lanzmann', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 200–220; Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Steven Katz, 'The Uniqueness of the Holocaust: The Historical Dimension', in *Is the Holocaust Unique?: Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, ed. by Alan S. Rosenbaum, 3rd edn. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), pp. 55–74.

[80] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 6.

In recent years, several scholars have acknowledged that treating the subjective experience of survivor-witnesses as entirely inaccessible is problematic not only because such traumas must be discussed so that their severity and significance are not forgotten, but also because this tends towards an extreme othering of people affected by such traumas as their experience is kept away from public acknowledgement. To address this, many scholars have turned to the ethical theory of French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, whose work champions the acknowledgement of the other's irreducible difference from the self, while still encouraging the 'approach' to the other.[81] As is discussed at length in Chapter 2, this differs significantly from the work of his predecessors – such as Heidegger in particular – who preferred the 'letting be' (*Gelassenheit*, or *Seinlassen* in Heidegger's terminology) of the other. Ultimately, Levinas's theory of ethics is grounded in its balance between acknowledging the radical and irreducible alterity of the other, without holding the other at such a great distance that they are not considered a being in and of themselves. In such a view, the other recognised as distinct and separate from the self without being 'othered' so extremely that no interaction takes place. Alison Landsberg links this directly with the impossibility of understanding the experience of the survivor-witness of trauma. In her work, she discusses films in which 'viewers are brought into intimate contact with a set of experiences that fall well outside of their own lived experience', and draws attention to the fact that 'we are not […] *sympathetic* to [the other's] plight, as it remains in

[81] See for example Jiewon Baek, 'Turning Toward the Other: The Face of Humans, the Face of Things and the Face of Language in the Documentaries of Sylvain George', *Studies in French Cinema*, 16.1 (2016), 61–77; Sarah Cooper, 'Mortal Ethics: Reading Levinas with the Dardenne Brothers', *Film-Philosophy*, 11.2 (2007), 66–87; Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton, *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters* (London: Routledge, 2010); Alison Landsberg, 'Memory, Empathy, and the Politics of Identification', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 22.2 (2009), 221–29; Libby Saxton, 'Fragile Faces: Levinas and Lanzmann', *Film-Philosophy*, 11.2 (2007), 1–14.

significant ways alien to us. Our sense of connection to him is based on a simultaneous recognition of distance and difference, coupled with a sense of compassion and responsibility'.[82] She discusses in detail how this mirrors the ethical call of Levinas, in which we are 'both compelled to [the other] and yet pushed away'.[83] Elsewhere, Libby Saxton draws similar conclusions between Levinas's ethical theory and the depiction of trauma in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), but takes her analysis a step further by suggesting that in order to 'preserve the proximity and separation proper' of Levinas's ethical theory, a film must '[direct] attention beyond itself towards an otherness which cannot be recuperated in images […;] it fails to represent [and] acknowledges this failure'.[84] This reading of Levinas is shared by Judith Butler in her landmark book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) in which she discusses (among many other subjects) representations of Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein – both of whom were considered directly responsible for terrorism in the 2000s. She, like Saxton, suggests that within Levinasian parameters, 'representation must not only fail, but it must *show* its failure'.[85]

As Levinas does not specifically discuss these ideas in relation to cinema, the theoretical framework of Chapter 1 is also underpinned by the works of Gilles Deleuze, who worked more closely with film, and film theorist Eleftheria Thanouli, who discusses the significance of what she calls 'parapraxis' – failed performance and the performance of that failure – in depictions of the 9/11 attacks.[86] This theory

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[82] Landsberg, 'Memory, Empathy, and the Politics of Identification', pp. 222, 227, emphasis original.
[83] Ibid., p. 227, emphasis original.
[84] Saxton, 'Fragile Faces', p. 6, 11.
[85] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 144, emphasis original.
[86] Eleftheria Thanouli, 'Representing 9/11 in Hollywood Cinema', in *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Politics*, ed. by Yannis Tzioumakis and Claire Molloy (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 302–12.

is explained in detail in Chapter 1, and allows the thesis to consider the ways in which *Paris est à nous* and *13 novembre* address their own failure to represent the inaccessible subjectivities of survivor-witnesses of terrorism. By extension, Chapter 1 turns to *Cinéma II: L'image temps* by Deleuze to account not only for the lack of discussion of cinema specifically in the work of Levinas, but to draw upon the capacity for art to eclipse its own real-world object – a concept which Levinas considers unethical, but which Deleuze sees as powerful. This allows the chapter to consider the implications of the blurring of the boundary between fact and fiction on the construction of the subjectivity of the survivor-witnesses in the two films it considers.

While the work of Levinas allows this thesis to provide a productive analysis of the ethics of representation in regard to the subjectivity of survivor-witness experiences, application of Levinasian ethics in the final two chapters is problematised by what scholars such as Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou have noted in Levinas's work as a judgement of the other. They argue that within certain areas of Levinasian theory, as discussed at length in Chapter 3, the other 'is acceptable only if he is a good other', and 'when faced with a concrete other, one should […] see if he is a friend or an enemy'.[87] As the current study attempts to move away from any facile and reductive demonisation and dehumanisation of the terrorist figure and consider their position in a wider network of systemic and symbolic violence as discussed above, this type of judgemental classification perpetuates the dehumanisation of the terrorist figure, and stands in diametric opposition to the ethical stance this thesis takes.

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[87] Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. by Peter Hallward (London; New York: Verso, 2001), p. 104; Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 106.

To address this issue, the third and fourth chapters of the thesis turn to Žižek's notions of objective and subjective violence, seeking to destabilise the recurrent perception of terrorism chiefly as subjective violence, viewed exclusively through the prism of the (Western) society which experiences it, in favour of acknowledgement of the objective networks of violence in which these acts of terrorism occur. Through this framework, these chapters consider the extent to which viewers of *La Désintégration*, *Le Jeune Ahmed*, *Made in France*, and *L'Adieu à la nuit* are encouraged both to step away from such subjective notions of terrorism and acknowledge the objective forms of symbolic and systemic violence to which the terrorist figures featured, in France and Belgium, have been subjected.

While these theoretical frameworks generate productive analyses of the films they are applied to, it must be acknowledged that such frameworks run the risk of imposing strains of philosophical thought theorised in specifically Western conceptual spaces onto the context of individuals of Arab and Maghrebi immigrant background who have often suffered in such spaces. I am aware of the limitations of this theoretical approach and certainly do not wish to reinforce neo-colonial hierarchies of power by implementing a discourse that finds its origins in privileged (white) (male) French and anglophone academic culture to images of those who have been systematically oppressed in France, Belgium and anglophone regions. As such, the final two chapters of the thesis also incorporate the work of scholars – particularly in the field of Critical Race Theory – who do not represent the white male academic tradition and actively seek to decolonise it, and whose work enlightens this study's understanding of the racial discrimination experienced by Maghrebis and those of Maghrebi ethnic background in France and Belgium, further

underlining the importance of acknowledging the specificities of different subjectivities within the thesis.[88]

Furthermore, while I do not wish to reduce these films to the subject positions of their directors, I chose to include work by filmmakers of varied backgrounds – both white and Maghrebi, born within or outside of France – in order to facilitate a diversity of perspectives which is reflective of the subject matter of the thesis. Of the eight works in the corpus, five are directed by filmmakers of French and Belgian heritage. These are *13 novembre* by Jules and Gédéon Naudet, born in France to French parents; *Amanda* by Mikhaël Hers, also born in France to French parents; *Paris est à nous* by Elisabeth Vogler; *L'Adieu à la nuit* by André Téchiné, born in France with Spanish heritage; and *Le Jeune Ahmed* by Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, born in Belgium.[89] Three are directed by filmmakers of Maghrebi birth or heritage: *La Désintégration* by Philippe Faucon, born in Morocco to a French father and pied-noir Algerian mother and raised in Algeria; *Made in France* by Nicolas Boukhrief, born in France to an Algerian father and French mother; and *L'Humour à mort* by Daniel Leconte – born and raised in Oran, Algeria – and his son Emmanuelle, born in France.[90] No official statistics on directors' heritage are

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[88] I am particularly indebted to the work of Jean Beaman and Katya Salmi, whose research on race in France is integral to the final chapters of this thesis.

[89] David Friend, 'Bond of Brothers', *Vanity Fair*, 2014 <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2002/03/jules-gedeon-naudet-world-trade-center-film> [accessed 2 August 2022]; 'Mikhaël Hers', *Pyramide Films* <http://distrib.pyramidefilms.com/pyramide-distribution-catalogue/mikhael-hers.html> [accessed 2 August 2022]; Elisabeth Vogler works 'undercover' according to their webpage on Cargo Collective, and uses a pseudonym according to their *Kickstarter* bio, and therefore there is relatively little information available online or published elsewhere as to their birth or heritage, see 'Elisabeth Vogler', *Cargo Collective* <https://cargocollective.com/elisabethvogler/About-Elisabeth-Vogler> [accessed 2 August 2022] and Elisabeth Vogler, '*Paris Est Une Fête* by Elisabeth Vogler', *Kickstarter*, 2018 <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1335564388/paris-est-une-fete> [accessed 14 December 2020]; Bill Marshall, *André Téchiné*, Manchester Film Studies (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2013); Joseph Mai, *Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

[90] Philippe Rège, *Encyclopedia of French Film Directors*, 2 vols (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2009), I, p. 381; Frédéric Strauss, 'César 2016 - Philippe Faucon, Réalisateur de *Fatima*, Sacré Meilleur Film : "Les Films Français Sont En Décalage Avec La Société"', *Télérama*, 2015

available in France, likely as a result of the country's universalism. However, it is

noteworthy that there are fewer works by those of (non-white) minority ethnic

heritage than those in the white ethnic majority in France and Belgium. While I have

aimed to select a representative corpus, the chosen works nevertheless reflect this

disparity. In the following chapters of the thesis, I examine the extent to which the

films within the corpus deploy representational strategies which appeal to traditional

(Western and white) audiences, underlining the main aim of interrogating the

construction of the other's subjectivity in these films. With these objectives in mind,

in the first chapter I examine the influence of trends in Western cinema consumption

on the construction of the other's subjectivity in *Paris est à nous* and *13 novembre*.

<https://www.telerama.fr/cinema/philippe-faucon-realisateur-de-fatima-les-films-francais-sont-en-decalage-avec-la-societe,132272.php> [accessed 23 January 2020]; Samuel Blumenfeld, 'Sortie Repoussée Pour Le Film *Made in France*', *Le Monde*, 2015 <https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2015/11/16/sortie-repoussee-pour-le-film-made-in-france_4810592_3246.html> [accessed 2 August 2022]; Valérie Priolet, 'Daniel Leconte', *RadioFrance* <https://www.radiofrance.fr/personnes/daniel-leconte> [accessed 2 August 2022].

1. The Powers of the False and Fabulation in *13 novembre* and *Paris est à nous*

A core aim of this thesis is to investigate the ways in which terrorism is being constructed in contemporary French cinema and television. While all chapters of this thesis are devoted to the ethical issues surrounding these portrayals, with specific focus on the experiences of survivor-witnesses and the portrayals of the perpetrators, this chapter will act as a preface to this discussion. By concentrating here more closely on form and genre than ethics, and interrogating the fluidity of the boundary between documentary and fiction, this chapter will establish several key aspects relevant to subsequent chapters where documentary and feature films are considered alongside each other. In particular, this chapter aims to interrogate the ways in which the documentary *13 novembre: Fluctuat nec mergitur* and the docu-fiction *Paris est à nous* present the lived experience of terrorism to the viewer. In doing so, I explore key questions: which genre categories have these works fallen under? Have genre categories and their associated tropes influenced the ways in which terrorist events in these works are presented to audiences? If so, is the uniqueness of the experience of those affected by terrorism safeguarded in these works, or is viewer entertainment prioritised? In addressing these questions, this chapter will highlight the ethical concerns surrounding depictions of the experience of terrorism in a contemporary viewing climate, before I explore the ethics of portraying survivor-witness experiences in more detail in Chapter 2.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I will refer to Holocaust representation theory as an important point of reference for considering the depiction of individual and collective trauma on screen (as discussed in the Introduction). Drawing upon this field of research allows this thesis to consider the ethical implications of

representing, referencing, fictionalising, and documenting historically situated

traumatic events. However, there are of course considerable differences between

Holocaust representation and the works this thesis addresses. As discussed in the

Introduction, my reference to and borrowing from the field of Holocaust

representation theory is informed by Michael Rothberg's path-breaking work on

what he calls 'multi-directional memory', in which he argues that while all historical

events are unique in their own right, the 'interaction of different historical memories

illustrates [a] productive, intercultural dynamic'.[1] While Rothberg focuses his study

on the function of multi-directional memory in the context of decolonisation, his

work has helped informed my understanding of how the critical theory developed in

the aftermath of the Holocaust can be productive in discussions of modern traumas,

such as the terrorist incidents discussed in this thesis. Following Rothberg's model,

my reference to Holocaust representation theory does not aim to diminish the

traumas experienced by Jewish people and other minorities under National

Socialism, or to suggest that the events discussed here are in some way equal to

them. Instead, following Rothberg, this is memory as 'subject to ongoing

negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative'.[2] In

his discussion of what the concept of memory entails, Rothberg highlights a

definition which is central to this chapter: 'memory is the past made present'.[3] While

memory refers to a past event, he argues, it occurs in the present moment; as will be

discussed in this chapter, the relocation of the past event is significant in the works

considered here and, as Rothberg suggests, 'in "making the past present,"

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[1] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 3.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

recollections and representations of personal or political history inevitably mix multiple moments in time and multiple sites of remembrance'.[4] However, when we consider this in the context of cinematic articulations of memory, a crucial question is raised: for whose benefit is the articulation of memory and subsequent 'making present' of the past? As Rothberg rightly highlights, 'as soon as memory is articulated publicly, questions of representation, ethics, and politics arise'.[5] This chapter aims to interrogate the function of bringing the past event of terrorism into the present in two works: *13 novembre* and *Paris est à nous*.

One perhaps obvious, but not insignificant, difference between Holocaust representation theory and the works discussed in this thesis is the time period they respectively address. Unlike the field of Holocaust representation theory, which began to take form as a field of study in the mid-1980s, this thesis looks explicitly at films and series which were released in the 2010s. As such, it is necessary to account for the differences in filming and viewing practices which now influence cinema, before moving on to discuss the ethics of these depictions in the following chapters. Particularly since the mid-2010s, the cinema industry has been dramatically influenced by the proliferation of streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. As this chapter will show, this has coincided with an exponential rise in the popularity of the 'True Crime' genre, both in fiction and documentary form. As will be seen, audiences are growing increasingly desensitised to the format of their viewing, whether it is documentary or fiction, on a smartphone or a computer,

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[4] Ibid., p. 35.
[5] Ibid., p. 36.

in a theatre or at home, leaving the boundaries between fiction and documentary increasingly blurred.[6]

The True Crime genre is certainly not a new area of interest. As Pamela Burger points out, narrative retellings of true cases of crime found huge popularity as far back as the sixteenth century, as new print technologies emerged, and literacy rates increased.[7] In the nineteenth century, as European countries began to establish central police forces, True Crime narratives increased again in popularity; in France, a criminal-turned-investigator François Vidocq published his widely read *Memoirs* (1829), which in turn influenced literary giants such as Victor Hugo's Inspector Javert.[8] In the US, this trend continued through the twentieth century and onto the screen with increased media interest in crimes such as the serial murderers Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, the anonymous Zodiac killer, the infamous murder trial of OJ Simpson, and the widely acclaimed documentary *The Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris, 1988).

Yet, while interest in nonfiction crime has certainly spanned the decades, its modern iteration as a form of what Tanya Horeck calls 'clickable entertainment in a 24/7 media culture' is relatively recent.[9] Horeck here refers to the increasingly common phenomenon of 'binge-watching' – accessing media content in its various forms on-demand and in immediate succession, with audiences often watching entire television series or listening to podcast series in one sitting. Stella Bruzzi, too, connects this phenomenon closely to the True Crime genre, with audiences

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[6] Stella Bruzzi, 'Making a Genre: The Case of the Contemporary True Crime Documentary', *Law and Humanities*, 10.2 (2016), 249–80 (p. 258).
[7] Pamela Burger, 'The Bloody History of the True Crime Genre', *JSTOR Daily*, 2016 <https://daily.jstor.org/bloody-history-of-true-crime-genre/> [accessed 12 January 2022].
[8] Burger, 'The Bloody History of the True Crime Genre'.
[9] Jean Murley, *The Rise of True Crime: 20th-Century Murder and American Popular Culture* (Westport: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2008); Tanya Horeck, *Justice on Demand: True Crime in the Digital Streaming Era* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019).

recollecting their experiences of binge-watching the early True Crime series *The Staircase* (Jean-Xavier de Lestrade, 2004).[10] The True Crime genre spans literature, film, podcasts, and the majority of other on-demand services such as YouTube, and while the particular parameters of what constitutes True Crime vary between platforms, it generally focuses on unsolved or contested murder cases. Despite this, the first production this chapter will consider – *13 novembre* – is a docuseries about the November 2015 Paris attacks which is categorised by Netflix as True Crime. When the wider category on Netflix and its inclusions (and exclusions) are considered, the parameters of the genre itself lose clarity. For example, no productions concerning 9/11 are included in the genre, while other cases of terrorism are included, such as the November 2015 Paris attacks as discussed here, and a docu-series titled *Terrorism: Close Calls* (Marek Bures, 2018), and *Terror in Mumbai* (Dan Reed, 2009). What seems to bind together the productions included in the category, therefore, is not the nature of the crime itself, but the stylistic form of the production. As will be discussed in detail in this chapter, the True Crime genre – like many other genres – exhibits shared formal techniques which result in one unifying effect: relocating the past into the present for the consumption of contemporary viewers. To borrow a term from Jennifer Mnookin, viewers are 'jurified': they are presented with testimony, evidence, and archival footage, and they are invited to judge the events in question.[11]

This chapter will aim to interrogate the 'jurification' of the audience in relation to terrorism documentaries. To do so, it will consider the inclusion in

[10] Bruzzi, 'Making a Genre', p. 250.
[11] Jennifer L. Mnookin, 'Reproducing a Trial: Evidence and Its Assessment in *Paradise Lost*', in *Law on the Screen*, ed. by Austin Sarat, Lawrence Douglas, and Martha Merrill Umphrey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 153–200.

Netflix's True Crime category of *13 novembre*, a three-part docuseries which was produced by Netflix and released exclusively on the online streaming service, and which consists mostly of interviews with survivor-witnesses of the November 2015 terrorist attacks at the Bataclan, Stade de France, and various cafés across Paris.[12] This series will be considered in comparison to another Netflix production, *Paris est à nous*, which exhibits very little jurification of its audience, instead highlighting the impossibility of accessing or knowing events which are historically fixed. Originally launched as a *Kickstarter* campaign in order for the filmmakers to crowdfund enough revenue to finalise shooting and production, the film received €91,500 in donations.[13] However, during the fundraising campaign, Netflix contacted the film's team and *Paris est à nous* was acquired and ultimately released on the streaming service as a Netflix Original, with no theatrical release. The feature film follows a young (white) couple in Paris, and their troubled relationship. Part-way through the film, the young male protagonist disappears after catching a flight, and his girlfriend questions whether the flight has crashed due to terrorism. The film is interspersed with footage captured during its production at various events, such as the marches following the 2015 shooting at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, and as such has been dubbed a docu-fiction for its mixing of dramatisation and real-world events.[14] Unlike *13 novembre*, which explicitly discusses and centres around the events of November 2015, *Paris est à nous* relates to terrorism on a much more conceptual level. While it does feature scenes shot in the aftermath of the events of 2015, and alludes to

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[12] See Introduction, footnote 7 of this thesis for more on the term 'survivor-witnesses'.
[13] Elisabeth Vogler, '*Paris Est Une Fête* by Elisabeth Vogler', *Kickstarter*, 2018 <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1335564388/paris-est-une-fete> [accessed 14 December 2020].
[14] Hermance Murgue, '*Paris Est à Nous*: Le Pari Décevant de Netflix', *L'Express*, 2019 <https://www.lexpress.fr/culture/tele/paris-est-a-nous-le-pari-decevant-de-netflix_2063479.html> [accessed 2 July 2020].

terrorism as a cause for the plane crash, director Elisabeth Vogler has articulated in multiple interviews that it is the atmosphere of Paris in the aftermath of the attacks that they intended to capture.[15]

As *13 novembre* is marketed undoubtedly as a documentary while *Paris est à nous* incorporates both fictional and documentary elements, these films provide varied approaches to representing terrorist incidents. Nevertheless, they also share certain traits, such as the influence of streaming services on their production, and the blurring of the boundary between documentary and fiction. This facilitates their comparison and enables a fruitful discussion of how terrorist incidents are being represented in contemporary French cinema and television. In the following sections, I will consider how these distinct approaches confront and also manipulate the fluidity of the boundary between truth and falsehood, between documentary and fiction, and to what end.

In order to do so, I will refer to the work of Emmanuel Levinas – also used throughout the thesis – with particular attention to his article 'La Réalité et son Ombre' (1948), in which he discusses the eclipse of the event by its representation in art. We recall from the Introduction that Levinas did not work directly with cinema during his lifetime. Despite this, as discussed in the Introduction and in the next chapter, many film scholars have used Levinas's theory in Film Studies, as his work on representations of the other and his critiques of vision as a form of relation offer an insightful and nuanced lens through which to interrogate film. While I will use Levinas's theory here and throughout the thesis, this chapter also draws upon the

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[15] Elisabeth Vogler is a pseudonym assumed by the director of the film, and the director does not have a significant public profile. They use they/them pronouns. See 'Roaring 20's', *Eventive*, 2021 <https://watch.eventive.org/worldfilmweeks2021/play/610af0fc9e158f00c756575a; https://www.bozar.be/en/calendar/roaring-20s-elisabeth-vogler> [accessed 17 December 2022].

work of Gilles Deleuze to expand upon the relatively small amount of attention paid to the medium of cinema by Levinas. As will be illustrated shortly, the work of Deleuze compliments Levinas well here. While these theories differ vastly at times, they offer many converging insights as far as the boundaries of truth and falsehood are concerned.

Beyond the boundaries of documentary and fiction

It has long been established in Film Studies that the boundary between documentary and fiction is neither clear, nor stable. This can be seen in the varying and often contradictory interpretations of what constitutes a 'documentary' according to various theorists. In 1977, Christian Metz wrote that 'tout film est un film de fiction', as '[d]ès sa naissance à la fin du XIXe siècle, le cinéma a été comme happé par la tradition occidentale et aristotélicienne des arts de fiction et de représentation'.[16] Considering cinema to be a descendent of the Aristotelian tradition of mimesis and diegesis, he maintains that even documentary is grounded in fiction. By contrast, some twenty years later in *The Subject of Documentary,* Michael Renov suggests that the very genesis of cinema was tied up with the pursuit of 'authentic representation' and the 'scientific project', as these ideals were guiding principles for the early practitioners of cinema.[17] In French cinema in particular, filmmakers have been experimenting with authenticity since the 1930s, when directors such as Jean Renoir began to champion less intrusive editing and deep-focus lenses seemingly in an attempt to objectively capture the world.

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[16] Christian Metz, 'Le Signifiant Imaginaire: Psychanalyse et Cinéma', *Communications (Paris)*, 23.1 (1975), 3–55 (p. 31, 28).
[17] Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, Visible Evidence, 16 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 171–74.

Drawing a similar conclusion to Renov, the very first line in Bill Nichols's *Introduction to Documentary* is 'Every film is a documentary', contrasting directly with the viewpoint of Metz.[18] Nichols explains that this conclusion is drawn from the fact that even the most whimsical works of fiction reflect aspects of the society in which they were produced. However, he does point out that '[n]either a fictional invention nor a factual reproduction, documentary draws on and refers to historical reality while representing it from a distinct perspective', suggesting that just as fiction documents the society from which it originates, documentary also has a 'fictive' element in that it is necessarily created from a subjective perspective.[19] Some, such as Brian Winston, suggest that a film is fictional or otherwise depending on how the audience receives what they see.[20] While any attempt to distinguish categorically between fiction and documentary is clearly problematic, Renov reframes this debate as hierarchical, particularly when discussing documentary. He highlights how in many fields – not only the arts – 'objectivity' has been championed and 'subjectivity' has had shameful connotations attached to it, and asserts that

> within the community of documentary practitioners and critics, subjectivity has frequently been constructed as a kind of contamination, to be expected but minimized. Only recently has the subjective/objective hierarchy (with the latter as the favored term) begun to be displaced, even reversed.[21]

Aside from the European intellectual tradition of challenging the objective/subjective distinction, it is also worth noting that many scholars – such as Trinh T. Minh-ha – have highlighted that the concept of 'authenticity' (i.e. objectivity) in documentary film is inextricably bound to power relations of knowledge. Minh-ha, like Metz,

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[18] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 1.
[19] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 3rd edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), p. 5.
[20] Brian Winston, *The Documentary Film Book* (London: BFI Publishing, 2013), p. 65.
[21] Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, p. 174.

subscribes to the view that '[t]here is no such thing as *documentary*', as subjectivity

is always involved at the point of production.[22] However, she expands upon her

problematisation of the objective/subjective hierarchy with numerous references to

the issues at stake in relation to what is commonly classified as 'documentary'

filmmaking:

> At the core of such a rationale dwells, untouched, the Cartesian division between subject and object […]. The moment of appropriation and of consumption is either simply ignored or carefully rendered invisible according to the rules of good and bad documentary […]. The socially oriented filmmaker is thus the almighty voice-giver (here, in a vocalizing context that is all-male), whose position of authority in the production of meaning continues to go unchallenged […]. Good documentaries are those whose subject matter is 'correct' and whose point of view the viewer agrees with. What is involved may be a question of honesty (vis-a-vis the material), but it is often also a question of (ideological) adherence, hence of legitimization.[23]

Here, Minh-Ha points to the tendency for documentary film to be formatted in such a

way that the audience is pointed toward a specific conclusion about the 'reality' of

its subject. While Minh-Ha acknowledges elsewhere that this is unavoidable, she

criticises the totalising effect that this rhetoric of 'authenticity' risks inflicting upon

the phenomenal, perceptible world.[24]

This discussion is also present in adaptation theory, which deals mostly with

cinematic adaptations from literature but can also lend many excellent observations

to adaption from historical events, and here may serve to illustrate further the issue

of supposed authenticity. Robert Stam's discussion of novel-to-screen adaptations

stresses that the large majority of language used to criticise cinematic adaptations

'has often deployed an elegiac discourse of loss, while ignoring what has been

"gained"'.[25] Not only does Stam highlight and challenge the negative language

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[22] Trinh T Minh-Ha, 'Documentary Is/Not a Name', *October*, 52 (1990), 76–98 (p. 76, emphasis original).
[23] Ibid., pp. 83–84.
[24] Ibid., p. 78.
[25] Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo, *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), p. 3.

surrounding adaptations, but he reminds us that much of this language is – as Minh-Ha suggests – rooted in patriarchal ideas of ownership. Phrases such as 'faithful to', 'fidelity', 'legitimate', and 'bastardisation' are but a few examples of language with paternal connotations, in which cinema 'symbolically slays the source-text as "father"'.[26] Certainly, the idea of ownership of the 'source-text' (here, real-world events) becomes complicated when these are traumatic experiences, such as terrorist attacks. While the author of a literary text is usually relatively clear-cut, making ownership of such a source text simple, the ownership of a historical event is much more complex. Concepts of ownership and accessibility to the experience of terrorism through cinema will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. This chapter, by contrast, aims to provide a more general discussion of how the event itself is re-presented to audiences, and at times how it is used for commercial means in French cinema and television. Ultimately, the primary goal of this chapter is to consider French depictions of the terrorist incidents within the current industry of cinema, before the ensuing chapters delve into the ethical issues surrounding these portrayals. These observations will be key to the following chapter, as the opposing approaches of Levinas and Deleuze are discussed with reference to *13 novembre* and *Paris est à nous*; two films which, in very different ways, connect to the phenomenal world and as such have been labelled as documentary or docu-fiction, respectively. It is precisely the fluidity of the boundary between fiction and documentary which makes Deleuze's work on the 'power of the false' (1989) appropriate here, particularly in conjunction with Levinas's limited but detailed account of artwork in 'La Réalité et son Ombre'.

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[26] Ibid., p. 4.

As discussed above, Levinas did not work directly with cinema as a method of representation. This may, in part, be due to his rejection of vision as a site of relation to the other – a concept which he discusses throughout his work, but with particular specificity in his article 'La Réalité et son Ombre'. As is the case with many of Levinas's works, the interpretation of this article has varied significantly between scholars. A large majority of these interpretations, such as Robert Eaglestone's and Jill Robbins's, have tended towards a reading of 'La Réalité et son Ombre' as a critique of art, in which Levinas is – for the most part – hostile towards art (with art being understood in the text as literature, sculpture, cinema, and other forms of artistic expression).[27] However, in a close reading of Levinas's article, Richard A. Cohen challenges this claim, suggesting instead that Levinas 'understands and values art', but laments that it is 'irresponsible' and 'disengaged', and 'rejects art, or really art theory that pretends to totality'.[28] Indeed, in this text Levinas suggests that 'Le procédé le plus élémentaire de l'art consiste à substituer à l'objet son image'.[29] This has led scholars such as Robbins to conclude that 'Levinas ultimately sees this substitute procedure as illegitimate, as amounting to idolatry'.[30] Robbins's use of the world 'illegitimate' reminds us of the questions of ownership as discussed above in reference to adaptations, and highlights how this concept may apply to translation of real-world objects and events onto the cinema screen. However, Levinas's original text does not allude to this process as idolatrous or

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[27] Robert Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); Jill Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
[28] Richard A Cohen, 'Levinas on Art and Aestheticism: Getting "Reality and Its Shadow" Right', *Levinas Studies*, 11.1 (2016), 149–94 (p. 150, 190).
[29] Emmanuel Levinas, 'La Réalité et son Ombre', *Les Temps Modernes*, 38 (1948), 769–89 (p. 774).
[30] Robbins, pp. 84–85.

illegitimate. Cohen suggests instead that unlike the Platonian understanding of art as a failed copy of the original, for Levinas

> the 'image,' which is a doubling of reality, to be sure, is not a doubling for the sake of illumination, for knowing, but for obscurity, or really, not even for obscurity in contrast to clarity but rather to create an alternative or virtual 'reality,' not referring back to the real, not a copy or mimesis. […] The image Levinas has in mind when he speaks of art as imagine [*sic*] is not one that like a copy or representation would point beyond itself like a symbol, sign, or word. […] Rather, for Levinas the image is another or alternative 'reality,' shadowy in relation to knowledge, to be sure, but still a reality on and of its own.[31]

In its essence, this reading of 'La Réalité et son Ombre' suggests that Levinas understands art as directing its audience's attention away from any real-world subject it is based upon or connected to, and towards a virtual reality created by and contained within the artwork itself. Cohen explains that as such, the artwork creates its own temporality, 'a moment without past and without future, what is sometimes called the "specious present"', or, as Levinas calls it, *l'entretemps* (the meanwhile).[32] He suggests that because of artwork's suspension in its own temporality, 'l'artiste a donné à la statue une vie sans vie. Une vie dérisoire qui n'est pas maîtresse d'elle-même, une caricature de vie'.[33] For Levinas, the 'greatest task of humanity is to strive for justice, always future, always exigent', and as such the nature of the artwork being removed from the temporal flow of the lived world, and stuck in a repeating and 'unmoving meanwhile', makes art incompatible with ethics.[34] Cohen puts forward a robust argument that while Levinas does not reject art or the consumption of artworks – which he himself regularly enjoyed and utilised in his writings – he does believe art to be guilty of irresponsibility toward the other.[35] This is not a statement which he makes plainly in 'La Réalité et son Ombre', but rather

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[31] Cohen, pp. 173–76.
[32] Cohen, p. 177; Levinas, 'La Réalité et son Ombre', p. 781.
[33] Levinas, 'La Réalité et son Ombre', p. 782.
[34] Cohen, p. 178.
[35] Cohen, p. 157–58.

implicitly, between the lines of the article, which must be read with reference to his more encompassing works in order to be fully understood.

It is in relation to this idea of the *entretemps* that we see a significant connection between Levinas's approach to art, and Deleuze's work on philosophy and cinema. Like Levinas, Deleuze has suggested that art creates its own temporality, and that it has the capacity to eclipse its own real-world object. This sentiment is clearest in *Cinéma II: L'image-temps*. Discussing neo-realist films from the early Italian productions through to *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (Alain Resnais, 1961), Deleuze highlights that 'comme elle *remplace* son propre objet, pour une part elle en gomme ou en *détruit* la réalité qui passe dans l'imaginaire, mais d'autre part elle en fait surgir toute la réalité que l'imaginaire ou le mental *créent* par la parole et la vision'.[36] While we can see clear similarities between the thought of Levinas and Deleuze, it is also clear that – unlike Levinas – Deleuze does not consider the eclipsing of the object to be strictly negative. Whereas Levinas approaches the topic from an ethical standpoint, Deleuze is more concerned with form; an unsurprising difference considering their respective careers.

This difference in thinking is particularly useful for the following chapter, as the tension between cinematic form and ethics of representation presents itself distinctly in the two works considered. Levinas and Deleuze's thoughts on the fluidity of the boundary between the real and imaginary in art develop useful concepts in relation to this area of cinema, which will form the theoretical basis of this chapter. Whereas the following chapters focus more definitively on the ethics of representing the individuals involved in terrorist incidents and their experiences, this

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[36] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: L'image-Temps* (Bloomsbury Academic, 1985), p. 15, emphasis original.

chapter aims to explore how the 'event' of terrorism has been represented in French cinema and television. As such, the large majority of the following sections will naturally focus on cinematic form, rather than the ethics of the audience-subject relationship.

The will to truth in the True Crime documentary and *13 novembre: Fluctuat nec mergitur*

Although Deleuze and Levinas were both working in the twentieth century, the observations discussed above remain pertinent now and provide fruitful commentary on modern modes of media consumption. Discussing documentaries in particular, Stella Bruzzi reminds us in her 2016 work on the True Crime film genre that

> previously recognised boundaries are not simply getting blurred, they are perilously close to being eradicated altogether. Collectively and globally, we have become accustomed to 'factual entertainment' and no longer feel the need to adjust our perspective or attitude as viewers depending on whether we are sitting in front of a television, cinema, computer or phone screen enjoying a documentary or a drama.[37]

In the time between Bruzzi's publication in 2016, and the writing of this thesis, this has certainly become even more of a pertinent observation. The True Crime genre – while already significant in 2016 – is now immensely popular, particularly on Netflix. While Bruzzi discusses series such as *The Staircase* (2004), *Making a Murderer* (2015) and *The Jinx* (2014), the genre has produced an exponentially increasing number of films in recent years. Since 2015, Netflix alone has produced and released a huge number of True Crime documentaries, including *Abducted in Plain Sight* (2017), *The Disappearance of Madeleine McCann* (2019), *The Keepers* (2017), *Oklahoma City* (2017), *Audre and Daisy* (2016), *Casting JonBenet* (2017), *Massacre at the Stadium* (2019), *Strong Island* (2017), *The Rachel Divide* (2018),

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[37] Stella Bruzzi, 'Making a Genre: The Case of the Contemporary True Crime Documentary', *Law and Humanities*, 10.2 (2016), 249–80 (p. 258).

Amanda Knox (2016), *Evil Genius* (2018), *The Ted Bundy Tapes* (2019), *The Innocent Man* (2018), *Examination of Conscience* (2019), *Dark Tourist* (2018), *Jeffrey Epstein: Filthy Rich* (2020), *Don't F**k with Cats* (2019). The success and exponentially increasing popularity of these is demonstrated by *Tiger King* (2020), which attracted 34.3 million viewers over its first ten days of release, ranking as one of Netflix's most successful releases at the time, and its subsequent overtaking by *Dahmer: Monster — The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* (2022), which was reportedly viewed by at least 56 million households in its first 12 days.[38] This is to name only a few of the most popular productions listed under Netflix's 'True Crime Documentaries' category. This list only includes films and series which come under what Bill Nichols calls the 'expository mode' of documentary filmmaking: comprised mostly, or entirely, of archival footage and narration.[39] However, re-enactments and dramatisations of True Crimes have also gained popularity, as evidenced by series such as *The People vs. O.J. Simpson* (2016), *Manhunt: Unabomber* (2017), and *Dirty John* (2018) – all of which were released within months of (or, in the case of *Dirty John*, simultaneously with) a documentary on their respective criminal cases in expository mode.

In an era where True Crime is one of the most popular genres and the boundaries between drama and documentary are consistently blurred, it is striking that, as mentioned, *13 novembre* is listed under Netflix's 'True Crime Documentaries' category. Certainly, terrorism is a crime: while this thesis seeks to question and challenge the contemporary notion of the term 'terrorism' in the

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[38] BreAnna Bell and Selome Hailu, 'Jeffrey Dahmer Series *Monster* Is Netflix's Ninth Most-Watched English-Language Series of All Time', *Variety*, 2022 <https://variety.com/2022/tv/news/jeffrey-dahmer-monster-netflix-most-popular-1235393003/> [accessed 17 December 2022].

[39] Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 3rd edn., pp. 121–25.

popular imaginary, I do not aim to contest that the killings of 13 November 2015, or those at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, were indeed criminal acts. However, as Bruzzi highlights, the True Crime genre cannot simply be used to define any documentary which focuses on a historically situated crime that occurred in the 'real' world. Rather, Bruzzi suggests that the True Crime genre communicates its narrative in a particular style and atmosphere, where 'testimony in the present tense is a staple feature', and we can identify common 'uses of double exposure and exaggeratedly slow cross-fades between enigmatic and poignant images […] a graceful moving camera and an intrusive musical score […] montage of desolate landscape shots' which 'are atmospheric, not merely functional'.[40] The inclusion of *13 novembre* in Netflix's True Crime category is not the only quality that the docuseries shares with the True Crime genre. In fact, many of the traits which Bruzzi highlights as the common style for this genre can be found in *13 novembre*.

Although *13 novembre* does not feature an extensive title sequence in the same way as popular True Crime documentaries such as *Making a Murderer* or *The Staircase*, its short title sequence shares the genre's use of a 'strumming score [which] starts subtly but portentously […] before building in pitch, dynamics and momentum […] towards the score's strangulated […] final bars'.[41] Although in more popular documentaries, this is often directly accompanied by photographs and 'aerial and travelling shots' of the case being represented, *13 novembre*'s short thirty-second title sequence is immediately followed in all three parts by aerial shots of Paris or archival footage of the attack sites. This is not only important because *13 novembre* is immediately introduced to the audience in the same way as popular

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[40] Bruzzi, 'Making a Genre', p. 253, 279.
[41] Ibid., p. 279.

True Crime documentaries; it is also pertinent because the swelling score and building momentum introduce us to a key component of documentaries which fall under the True Crime category and share its traits: temporal relocation of the event in question, or as Bruzzi calls it, the 'play with time'.[42]

Bruzzi does not attribute the swelling, strangulated score of title sequences directly to the notion of 'playing with time' in documentary, but focuses on present tense testimony and the nature of these scores as two separate issues. She suggests that present tense testimony is a feature of True Crime which attempts to play with time, while works in the genre's similar musical scores are 'atmospheric', although she does not suggest what 'atmosphere' these features build.[43] Certainly, a swelling score reaching a dramatic crescendo is not necessarily indicative of the 'play with time'; this has been used in the film industry for decades as a means of communicating the building of dramatic tension. However, in the case of *13 novembre,* we must consider how this effect has been used in its True Crime antecedents, and particularly those produced and released as Netflix Originals. Bruzzi highlights *Making a Murderer* and *The Staircase* as two such series. Indeed, many of the Netflix docuseries released between Bruzzi's publication in 2016 and the release of *13 novembre* in June 2018 followed this pattern. *Amanda Knox* (2016), and *The Keepers* (2017) are also examples of Netflix documentaries with a title sequence featuring the swelling score with strangulated final bars. Although not examined in detail by Bruzzi, it is likely that the similarity she identifies and describes as 'strangulated' comes from their formal qualities: string instruments as their main components, their shared dominant key being a minor, shared timbral

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[42] Bruzzi, 'Making a Genre', p. 253.
[43] Ibid., p. 279.

techniques applied to the string components, and their use of dissonance and close harmonies. These elements are all commonly used individually in cinematic scores to convey a sense of melancholy, strangeness, or unacceptability.[44] In these True Crime productions, they combine to create scores which intensify this sense of sadness and unease. While this may seem relatively straightforward, as the evocation of crimes such as murder and terrorism may understandably create a sense of sadness and unease, many of these elements also lend themselves to questions of temporality. The score of *Making a Murder*, for example, is in D# minor, which German poet and composer Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart famously characterised as conveying

> feelings of the anxiety of the soul's deepest distress, of brooding despair, of blackest depression, of the gloomiest condition of the soul. Every fear, every hesitation of the shuddering heart, breathes out of D# minor. If ghosts could speak, their speech would approximate this key.[45]

Beyond the minor key's characteristic of anxiousness, Schubart's suggestion that it is the key in which ghosts would speak reminds us, already, of the 'play with time' Bruzzi suggests.

Making a Murderer also shares with *13 novembre* the specific element of a subtle synth applied to its string instrument elements. Although not characteristic of the other True Crime documentaries discussed here, this synthetic addition adds to the quality of temporal questioning in these scores by suggesting a literal stretching and rearrangement of time. In her work on temporality, Carolyn Dinshaw highlights the application of synth and tremolo to the guitar in The Smiths' song *How Soon is*

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[44] For more on the use of major and minor keys in cinema scores, see Jon Gillick and David Bamman, 'Telling Stories with Soundtracks: An Empirical Analysis of Music in Film', in *Proceedings of the First Workshop on Storytelling* (presented at the First Workshop on Storytelling, New Orleans: Association for Computational Linguistics, 2018), pp. 33–42; for tremolo in string instruments, see K. Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film*, Wisconsin Studies in Film (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); for dissonance, see Kang-iL Um, 'A Study on Dissonance Functions of Scenes and Background Music in Movies', *International Journal of Advanced Smart Convergence*, 9.4 (2020), 96–100.

[45] Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, *Ideen Zu Einer Ästhetik Der Tonkunst* (Vienna: Degen, 1806) <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/details/bsb10599461>, my translation.

Now? (1984) to express how 'the denoted moment shifts, it slips, it is deferred, potentially infinitely, along an endless timeline of moments'.[46] Certainly, I do not wish to suggest that these documentary series are making direct reference to The Smiths' music, or that audiences would need to be familiar with *How Soon is Now* in order for the documentaries' scores to effectively express this temporal quality. However, Dinshaw's recognition of these techniques demonstrates how the formal qualities of music can create a subtle atmosphere of questioned temporality, made particularly potent when accompanied by verbal or visual cues that suggest the same. In *How Soon is Now?*, this is achieved by the title and lyrics of the song, 'When you say it's gonna happen now/ Well, when exactly do you mean?', and the official music video which shows the lead singer Morrissey performing in clips which skip out of chronological sequence and repeat multiple times. In comparison, documentaries convey these temporal qualities throughout their title sequences (and throughout their episodes) through various methods.

In all of the series discussed above, the title sequences are comprised of double exposure and slow cross-fades between images which will later become important parts of the documentary, as Bruzzi suggests of *The Staircase* and *Making a Murderer*. The use of double exposure in particular indicates a layering of the past in the present image, reminding us again of the 'play with time' that features in such documentaries. In the later releases, these visual effects during title sequences become increasingly tied to notions of non-linear temporality, and the indecipherable boundary between 'reality' and fiction. *The Keepers,* for example, features Tom Nugent – a journalist who reported on the case as it happened – as he utters 'You

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[46] Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham, United States: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 2.

start asking, you know, what was— what is the past? What was it?' This is again present in the title sequence of *Amanda Knox*, which features not only double exposure, but still images which are digitally manipulated to appear blurred, distorted, inverted and in motion. These images represent a distinct challenge to normative, linear temporality by questioning the established 'facts' of their respective cases, by suggesting that the past the documentaries deal with is layered and multiple, and by indicating that it is 'moving' into the present. The strangled score which plays alongside these images therefore not only evokes a sense of dramatics and emotion, but also directly compliments them by evoking a stretching, warping, and rearrangement of time. As such, while *13 novembre* does not feature images in its title sequence, the strangled score is certainly redolent of the 'play with time' that features in popular True Crime documentaries which preceded it, and shares many of these visual and verbal elements in its episodes.

The large majority of oral testimony given in interviews with survivor-witnesses in *13 novembre* is expressed in the present tense. For example, 'Jean-Luc', who saw one of the café attacks in November 2015 from his apartment window, tells us 'Je ne vois pas la terrasse. Donc je ne peux pas voir les gens par terre, de chez moi. Et là je vois mon smartphone, je vois le gars en face de moi, et je fais quatre photos, jusqu'au moment òu ils remontent dans le Seat noir'. Present-tense address in other True Crime documentaries, according to Bruzzi, 'makes spectatorship an active as opposed to a passive activity, which in turn conveys both urgency and presentness to the viewer'.[47] The question of active and passive viewing in portrayals of terrorism necessarily raises ethical questions regarding audiences' ability to access the experience of survivor-witnesses, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 2.

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[47] Bruzzi, 'Making a Genre', p. 253.

Here, however, it is productive to interrogate Bruzzi's suggestion that present-tense testimony conveys 'urgency and presentness'. What exactly does the 'presentness' of this testimony achieve, why is it particularly frequent in True Crime documentaries, and why is it applied to *13 novembre,* which – unlike the majority of True Crime documentaries – does not involve an 'unsolved' or contested judicial trial?

Bruzzi argues that this technique 'summons up into the present a charged historical moment, regardless of when we are watching'.[48] The relocation of the 'historical moment' from past to present aims to bring the real-world event closer to the viewer, so that they might better interpret the 'truth' of what might have happened. Bruzzi also suggests that 'a recurrent feature of many documentaries is an inherent belief that returning to the site where an event, in particular a traumatic event, occurred will bring both subjects and audiences closer to understanding what "really happened"', as if layering elements of the historical moment – whether those are memories communicated as if occurring in the present, or the physical presence of the site itself – somehow indicates a more accurate portrayal of the event.[49]

Figure 1: The empty Bataclan theatre is shown in 13 novembre

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

Figure 2: Survivor-witness of the Stade-de-France attack Bilal is interviewed in front of a backdrop of the stadium in 13 novembre

Throughout *13 novembre*, looming shots of the attack sites are shown, empty and desolate. These shots are often used to indicate a change of scene (for example when a survivor-witness has been recounting their experience of the Stade de France bombing, and the following survivor-witness begins to talk about the Bataclan), but at times also feature in the middle of survivor-witness testimony. Yet this revisiting of the scene is even more subtly suggested by the backdrops against which the survivor-witnesses are filmed. Each interviewee is placed in a similar setting to one where they experienced the attacks: survivor-witnesses of the café and bar attacks are shown being interviewed in café and bar settings, the fire service are shown being interviewed at a fire station, the Mayor of Paris and former President are shown being interviewed in regal offices, the survivor-witnesses of the Stade de France bombings are shown in front of a backdrop of the stadium itself. These backdrops remain out of focus throughout and are darkly lit, making them extremely subtle. The atmosphere created, however, is clearly suggestive of a return visit to the

site of the attacks, and as such conveys an indexical relation to the individuals'

experiences of the attacks.

The effect of these attempts to bring historical moments into the present may

be, as Bruzzi suggests, 'the increased "jurification" of audiences and the instability

of truth' in such criminal proceedings.[50] Bringing the historical moment into the

present for the audience, as a lawyer would for a jury, allows and encourages

audiences to re-evaluate the apparently established 'facts' of a case. For example,

Making a Murderer is largely considered by scholars in the field of documentary and

True Crime to have caused unprecedented reaction from its audience. Following the

release of the first season, which questions the trial and conviction of Steven Avery

for murder, a petition to the White House for the pardoning of Steven Avery was

signed over 534,000 times.[51] In the first thirty-five days of the series' upload, it

attracted 19.3 million viewers. Beyond this landmark example, the majority of other

popular True Crime documentaries produced and released by Netflix have

encouraged and resulted in widespread discussion (mostly in online news outlets,

podcasts, and social media) of the cases, the trials, and the convictions discussed in

the respective documentaries. If the aim of the presentness of the True Crime

documentary is to allow the audience to be jurified in order for potential or supposed

miscarriages of justice to be illuminated, the following question is raised: what, if

anything, about the crimes of November 2015 is being put up for judgement in *13

novembre*? If elements of the historical moment are portrayed as present in the

docuseries in order to emphasise the veracity of the testimony of the survivor-

[50] Bruzzi, 'Making a Genre', p. 280.
[51] Michael Seyedian, 'Free Steven Avery', *Change.Org*, 2015 <https://www.change.org/p/president-of-the-united-states-free-steven-avery#petition-letter> [accessed 14 December 2020].

witnesses, does this implicitly suggest that there is room to question these voices, as is the case for other True Crime documentaries?

Returning here to the tension between the theories of Levinas and Deleuze may help to address, if not to answer, these questions. When we consider the presentness of the historical moment in *13 novembre* with a Levinasian framework, the representation of the historical moment of 13 November 2015 necessarily eclipses the moment itself. According to 'La Réalité et son Ombre', Levinas holds that an artwork 'peut et doit être traitée comme un mythe […] L'exégèse philosophique aura mesuré la distance qui sépare le mythe de l'être réel, prendra conscience de l'événement de créateur lui-même'.[52] Essentially, what Levinas suggests here is that because representing 'reality' risks eclipsing the real-world object, artwork (or at the very least, criticism) must acknowledge the 'myth' of the artwork. As mentioned above, Levinas suggested that the process of eclipsing the real-world object renders artworks incompatible with ethics and justice, even if artworks were to reflectively admit their own artifice. However, it can be argued that in the case of *Making a Murderer*, for example, some documentaries can result in steps toward justice.

It is here that Deleuzian theory creates an interesting and productive tension when compared with that of Levinas, particularly because Deleuze's work specifically focuses on film. While Levinas holds that the eclipse of the real-world object is largely negative, Deleuze considers that this instead allows the emphasis of 'la réalité que l'imaginaire ou le mental *créent* par la parole et la vision'.[53] Building upon the theory of Nietzsche, Deleuze suggests that 'there is no truth of the world as

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[52] Levinas, 'La Réalité et son Ombre', p. 788.
[53] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 15, emphasis original.

it is thought, no reality of the sensible world, all is evaluation […]. Being, truth, and reality are themselves only valid as evaluations, that is to say as lies'.[54] By this estimation, there is no 'pure' reality, as events and occurrences only exist in the present in the form of evaluation, speech and thought. For Deleuze, cinema's ability to create a new temporality, layering the past onto the present moment, is an example of what he calls 'les puissances du faux' (powers of the false).[55] The power to eclipse the object and replace it with the interpretation or image of the object is therefore a powerful, positive, and unavoidable process. The power of this process of fabulation is well exemplified by series such as *Making a Murderer*, *The Staircase*, and *The Keepers*, which utilise cinema's ability to falsify – here used in a non-derogatory, Deleuzian sense – and to introduce new truths to the world and potentially correct injustices. So, the question remains: why is this power being applied to the events of 13 November 2015, if the established narrative is not being called into question?

In *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* Deleuze reminds us of Nietzsche's theory that the concept of the 'false' has been vilified by philosophers and scientists as a result of what Nietzsche calls the will to truth, which consigns the false to abnormality, immorality, and error.[56] If we apply this to the True Crime documentary, then we can understand that fabulation and the eclipse of the established state of things may have a positive outcome. However, we must also recognise that despite the correction of injustice which may come from these documentaries, they do not redeem the false in a strictly Deleuzian sense. As Bruzzi points out, the large majority of these documentaries exhibit compulsiveness in their presentation of numerous examples of

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[54] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London: Athlone Press, 1983), p. 184.
[55] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 165.
[56] Gregory Flaxman, *Gilles Deleuze and the Fabulation of Philosophy: Powers of the False* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), I, p. xiv.

evidence and testimony, supporting their preferred interpretation, which she suggests is an indicator of bias on the part of the filmmakers.[57] This would imply that as opposed to the Deleuzian approach of embracing the impossible and indiscernible distinction between fiction and reality, these directors are instead presenting only those events that reinforce their own version of truth. The director of *The Staircase*, for example, commented after filming that 'it has been immensely frustrating that the truth of this story has remained so obscure for so long'; the editor of the same documentary entered into a romantic relationship with its subject, Michael Peterson, during its production.[58] Similarly, the very title of *Making a Murderer* suggests an alternative version of events to those presented in the courtroom: that the documentary's subject, Steven Avery, was 'made a murderer' by the Manitowoc country Sheriff's department who arrested him. Although these documentaries benefit from the power of the false, they paradoxically seem to share the will to truth.

This brings us closer to understanding why *13 novembre* may be included in Netflix's True Crime category, and share many of the genre's common traits. Like the contested verdicts and unsolved crimes which often feature in the genre, the experience of terrorism – as will be discussed in the following chapter – is one to which the majority of audiences will never have direct access beyond news and media reports, and – increasingly in the current era – videos shared on social media. As such, through the temporal relocation of the past event into the present, *13 novembre*, like its True Crime antecedents, offers audiences a route towards a 'truth'

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[57] Bruzzi, 'Making a Genre', p. 254.

[58] Bruzzi, 'Making a Genre', p. 254; Emmanuelle Skyvington and François Ekchajzer, 'Un chouette alibi pour Michael…', *Télérama*, 2020 <https://www.telerama.fr/television/un-chouette-alibi,36910.php> [accessed 3 January 2022].

that would otherwise remain unknown and unknowable. In Chapter 2, I discuss in greater detail the ethical implications of encouraging audiences to believe that cinema can provide access to the unknowable experience of terrorism. Here, however, we begin to see the effects that contemporary viewing modes and the formal traits of new genres can – and have – had on the depiction of terrorism.

The power of the false in *Paris est à nous*

As has been established, *13 novembre* has been categorised as a True Crime documentary by Netflix, and shares many of the genre's traits and goals as discussed above, including the will to truth exhibited in its attempt to bring past events into the present. However, is this the case for other depictions of the 2015 attacks, particularly those produced by and released on Netflix? The remainder of this chapter will now consider another such production, *Paris est à nous*. Unlike *13 novembre*, this film is not categorised as True Crime, and is not strictly in documentary mode. Filmed over a period of three years between 2014 and 2017, the drama was captured sporadically and improvised on the streets of Paris, and includes scenes shot at the sites of various events from the time period, including the protests following the *Charlie Hebdo* 2015 shooting, the flowers laid at cafés after the November attacks, an unexplained explosion during the marches after the November attacks, and (perhaps somewhat bizarrely) Emmanuel Macron's public speech in homage to French singer and actor Johnny Hallyday, who died on 5 December 2017.

This particular approach to representing the event of terrorism unsurprisingly garnered negative attention in press reviews of the film. One such review, featured in *Hollywood Reporter*, criticises *Paris est à nous* for its methods:

> eye-catching scenes were shot with real crowds and riot police during a few pivotal events that have marked the city's recent history, including protests in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo and Nov. 13 terrorist attacks. But there's also a rather distasteful,

ambulance-chasing way in which Vogler and her [*sic*] crew seemed to rush out and shoot footage every time something bad happened in Paris. When, in one scene, you see Schmidt walking toward a cordoned-off street where firemen are evacuating a burning building, you wonder if the filmmakers thought about what they were doing before grabbing a camera and capturing someone else's catastrophe as a backdrop to their trifle of a story.[59]

Here, reporter Jordan Mintzer questions the ethics of the way in which director Elisabeth Vogler renders the traumatic events in Paris as a means of relaying what they claim were the aims of the film: to capture the tension felt in Paris during the years the film was shot, and to draw attention to the fluidity of the boundary between fiction and fact.[60] Indeed, beyond the mixing of real-life event and drama in the narrative, the depiction of real-life events themselves are at times manipulated to benefit the film.

In one example, the protagonist Anna (Noémie Schmidt), walks through the Place de la Concorde as Macron gives his speech in homage to Johnny Hallyday's life, an event that took place on 9 December 2017. Within the film, however, the speech is edited and cut so that no mention of Hallyday is heard:

> Ce samedi de décembre est triste. Et vous êtes là, encore là, toujours là ! C'est aussi un jour de souffrance intime. Je sais que beaucoup d'entre vous, depuis quelques jours, découvrent une solitude étrange. C'était la vie, la vie dans ce qu'elle a de souverain, d'éblouissant, de généreux. Et c'était une part de nous-mêmes. C'était une part de la France. Et c'est aussi pour cela, que nous sommes ensemble aujourd'hui. C'est aussi pour cela que je m'exprime devant vous. Parce que nous sommes une nation qui dit sa reconnaissance. Parce que nous sommes un peuple uni. Il a traversé le temps, les époques, les générations et tout ce qui divise la société, et à chaque instant, il y avait cette humanité indéfinissable qui vous perce à jour et qui fait qu'on se sent moins seul. Et l'émotion qui nous réunit ici, aujourd'hui, lui ressemble. Elle ne triche pas, elle ne pose pas, elle emporte tout sur son passage, elle est de ces énergies qui font un peuple. Une force qui va.[61]

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[59] Jordan Mintzer, '*Paris Is Us* (*Paris Est a Nous*): Film Review', *Hollywood Reporter*, 2019 <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/paris-is-us-paris-est-a-nous-review-1190352> [accessed 19 November 2020].

[60] Elisabeth Vogler, '*Paris Est Une Fête* by Elisabeth Vogler', *Kickstarter*, 2018 <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1335564388/paris-est-une-fete> [accessed 14 December 2020].

[61] The speech as it appears in *Paris est à nous*. Macron's full speech can be seen here: https://www.francetvinfo.fr/culture/musique/johnny-hallyday/video-johnny-c-etait-la-vie-revivez-le-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-en-hommage-a-johnny-hallyday_2506907.html [Accessed 12/01/2022].

References to Hallyday are removed entirely, and the pronoun 'il' – which refers to Hallyday in the original speech – is placed after mention of 'un peuple uni' to maintain the grammar of the speech while changing its meaning. The speech is interspersed with footage of the marches following the November 2015 attacks, making a subtle but undeniable link to the terrorist incidents of that year. Macron's homage to Hallyday is transposed onto the lives of the victims of terrorism. In this example, and at many other points during the film, we see a similar manipulation of fact in order to create a specific narrative, as discussed earlier in reference to True Crime documentaries' will to truth. However, in *Paris est à nous*, it does not seem that objective or educational truth is the goal of the film. Rather, this manipulation seems to deliberately and openly blur the boundary between fiction and reality.

Kickstarter's own article on the project points directly to the fluidity of the boundary between truth and falsehood: 'la question de ce qui est vrai n'est jamais loin de l'esprit du spectateur. La tension entre fiction et réalité consomme le film. Le cliché de l'histoire d'amour qui finit mal prend soudain un goût d'inhabituel'.[62] Press reviews have also noticed the blurring of the boundary between reality and fiction in the film, with *L'Express* calling the film a 'docu-fiction'.[63]

Once again, we are reminded of the ethical issues that can arise when traumatic events are represented and reality and fiction become blurred. In his article 'La Réalité et son Ombre', as mentioned above, Levinas builds upon his critique of art as an eclipse of the reality it represents by suggesting that the artist creates a 'vie

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[62] Angela Benoit for *Kickstarter*, 'D'un budget inexistant à une sortie mondiale sur Netflix : *Paris est à nous* raconte (et envoûte) toute une ville', *Medium*, 2018< https://medium.com/@kickstarter/dun-budget-inexistant-%C3%A0-une-sortie-mondiale-sur-netflix-paris-est-une-f%C3%AAte-raconte-et-envo%C3%BBte-b14a73c3686e> [Accessed 02/07/2020].

[63] Hermance Murgue, '*Paris est à nous*: le pari décevant de Netflix', *L'Express*, 2019 < https://www.lexpress.fr/culture/tele/paris-est-a-nous-le-pari-decevant-de-netflix_2063479.html> [Accessed 02/07/2020].

sans vie', which is not in control of itself.[64] As discussed above, scholars such as

Eaglestone and Robbins have found this criticism of the creative process quite

polemical, and whether it can be applied to all art has been contested.[65] However, it

is useful here when we are considering representations of trauma where the creative

process directly intervenes in these events, and straddles reality and fiction. It can be

argued that in using these events as a backdrop to the otherwise melodramatic (if

slightly confusing) narrative of the film, Vogler captures moments of national and

personal trauma, and presents them without context or acknowledgement of the lived

experiences of survivor-witnesses to these events, meaning that the events are

diminished to the point of being a metaphorical tool for the inner turmoil of the main

character after the breakdown of her relationship.[66]

Questioning how aesthetics and ethics are used in representations of trauma

specifically is by no means a new scholarly endeavour. As discussed in the

Introduction, particularly after the Second World War as filmmakers began to

represent the fate and suffering of European Jews, homosexuals, Sinti and Roma,

and other minorities in the Holocaust, the intersection between beauty and ethics

attracted increasing attention. In 1961 and 1992 respectively, the Italian film *Kapò*

(Gilles Pontecorvo, 1960) was criticised by both Jacques Rivette in *Cahiers du*

Cinéma and Serge Daney in *Trafic* for beautifying the death of concentration camp

victims.[67] In 1981, Sebastião Salgado's photography book *Migrations* was challenged

for beautifying the suffering of migrants and refugees. The 2007 film *Fateless* (Lajos

Koltai) has, like *Kapò*, been criticised for beautifying suffering in concentration

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[64] Levinas, 'La Réalité et son Ombre', p. 782.

[65] Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism*; Robbins, *Altered Reading*.

[66] Vogler does not only include footage from marches and public events but goes as far as to include a shot of an ongoing fire in a Parisian building, with Noémie Schmidt in the foreground.

[67] Jacques Rivette, 'De l'abjection', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, XX.120 (1961), 54–55; Serge Daney, 'Le Travelling de Kapò', *Trafic*, 4 (1992), 5–19.

camps. A wide variety of scholars, including well-known film theorists such as Jean

Baudrillard and Susan Sontag advanced influential criticisms of the aestheticisation

of suffering, particularly in relation to historically situated traumas.[68] As a result,

attention has also been paid to methods of representing trauma which do not beautify

or aestheticise the event or the experience of that trauma; Levinas himself suggests

in his essay that artwork should be treated as a myth, and take into consideration the

act of creation itself.[69] He suggests that art must necessarily draw attention to its own

creation and its distance from the *réel*, effectively allowing its consumer to see that

this is 'vie sans vie', and therefore to see the failure of the artwork to depict truth. As

such, in his view, committed artwork necessarily fails in portraying its reality.

Although Levinas's critique is launched mainly against classical artwork

(seen in his examples of the statue) and literature, various scholars have applied this

to film studies. As discussed in the Introduction, Libby Saxton carves out a pathway

detailing the requirements of Levinasian ethics regarding such representations. She

comes to the conclusion that in order to counterbalance the paradoxical impossibility

and necessity of representing trauma as famously noted by Samuel Beckett, a film

'directs attention beyond itself towards an otherness which cannot be recuperated in

images'.[70] Judith Butler agrees with this notion, noting herself that for Levinas, for

representation to convey the 'human' - by which we can understand that she is

referring to the Levinasian face - 'representation must not only fail, but it must show

its failure'.[71] Interestingly, while Saxton works with Holocaust film, Butler relates

this theory to the depictions of Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden, both of

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[68] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays* (London: Verso, 2003); Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004).
[69] Levinas, 'La Réalité et son Ombre', p. 788.
[70] Libby Saxton, 'Fragile Faces: Levinas and Lanzmann', *Film-Philosophy*, 11.2 (2007), 1–14 (p. 11).
[71] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 144. For a fuller discussion of the 'Levinasian face', see page 191 of this thesis.

whom were often perceived as associated with terrorism due to their portrayal in American culture. Eleftheria Thanouli brings the notion of failure to represent even closer to the traumatic events of terrorism, using it as a framework for her analysis of cinematic depictions of the 9/11 attacks.[72] Rather than agreeing with the Levinasian imperative that representation should acknowledge its own failure, Thanouli adopts Thomas Elsaesser's more recent concept of 'parapraxis'.[73] The term comes from the English translation of the German word 'Fehlleistung' (*Fehl* meaning failed, *Leistung* meaning performance), coined by Freud and often referred to as the 'Freudian slip', meaning an error in speech. Elsaesser unpacks the German term, and gives it a twofold meaning of both failure to perform, and performance of failure: the simultaneous failure to represent trauma, and the representation of that failure itself. After applying this notion to her corpus, Thanouli concludes that 'a parapractic film chooses to tackle the impossibility of representation […] in ways that resist closure, symmetry, or balance' with 'elements that suggest miscommunications, reversals, causal gaps, unanticipated consequences, and deferred action'.[74]

In fact, Thanouli's earlier work, *Post-Classical Cinema: An International Poetics of Film Narration* analyses a variety of case studies where filmmakers have employed cinematic devices that reveal the failure of their ability to represent.[75] Thanouli terms this the 'post-classical paradigm', and defines these films as having 'an extremely high degree of self-consciousness'; accentuating their own reflexivity 'by calling explicit attention to the treatment of time and space through editing

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[72] Eleftheria Thanouli, 'Representing 9/11 in Hollywood Cinema', in *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Politics*, ed. by Yannis Tzioumakis and Claire Molloy (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 302–12.
[73] Thomas Elsaesser, *German Cinema - Terror and Trauma: Cultural Memory since 1945* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
[74] Thanouli, 'Representing 9/11 in Hollywood Cinema', p. 308.
[75] Eleftheria Thanouli, *Post-Classical Cinema: An International Poetics of Film Narration* (London: Wallflower, 2009).

Figure 3: Anna's alter-ego in the theatre in Paris est à nous

discontinuities, visual effects and hypermediated images'; and 'laying bare the

device'.[76] Ultimately, post-classical films will contain cinematic devices or editing

techniques which encourage viewers 'to regard the portrayed events as merely a

fictive account and to see through the conventions that regulate it'.[77] While

Thanouli's monograph does not specifically refer to post-classical cinema in relation

to representations of trauma, the foundations she establishes here to encourage

viewers to recognise the conventions of cinema are seen clearly in her later work (as

referenced above), where she applies them to depictions of trauma and cites

examples of cinema's failure to represent.

Perhaps surprisingly considering the ethically questionable methods used to

shoot *Paris est à nous*, the separation between the 'réel' of the historical event and

the 'mythe' of its portrayal through Thanouli's post-classical paradigm is

consistently present throughout the film. At sporadic moments, sequences filmed

amongst historical events such as the marches in solidarity with *Charlie Hebdo* are

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[76] Ibid., p. 139, 141, 140.
[77] Ibid., p. 140.

abruptly interrupted by surreal glimpses into what seems to be the main character's inner consciousness. Anna also appears as a blonde alter-ego of her brunette self, in nondescript locations. Often introduced by sudden cuts, these scenes jarring scenes feature low-key lighting reminiscent of film noir, and lack of contextualisation. In one such sequence, Anna's stream-of-consciousness narration directly addresses the separation between the event and its portrayal:

> Leurs mots font dériver le monde, comme si d'un côté il y a ce qu'ils disent mais qui est pas réel, et que de l'autre il y a ce que, nous, on vit mais qu'on pourra jamais exprimer. Il y a une frontière déformante qui me sépare du monde. Comme si j'étais dans une grande pièce séparée en deux par un voile. Du côté où je suis, je peux voir le monde qu'à travers des images. Des images d'un cauchemar. Même si je sais que de l'autre côté il y a la vie, la réalité, je peux pas traverser. Je reste du mauvais côté.

Clearly separating life and reality from that which can be explored or represented through images, Schmidt's character explains her present situation as one where she can only understand the world through 'nightmarish images; unable to see beyond the veil or curtain which obstructs her view. As the non-diegetic narration plays, we see Schmidt in a large theatre, with the camera moving away from her and spinning around the theatre in a surreal movement. The theatre's lighting shines directly into the camera, and we are presented with a cut back to Schmidt at the marches.

Figure 4: A hypermediated shot of an editing room in Paris est à nous

After a few seconds of footage from the marches, Vogler uses a cut to a hypermediated shot of an editing room. We are confronted with multiple screens showing images from the film itself. On one screen at the bottom of the frame, we see the words 'Faire du réel une fiction'. Fitting undeniably into Thanouli's post-classical paradigm by 'calling explicit attention to the treatment of time and space through editing discontinuities, visual effects and hypermediated images', *Paris est à nous* on closer inspection seems to use images of historically situated events not simply as a backdrop for its melodrama, but as a tool to interrogate the very impossibility of representing these events without turning them into a complete fiction.[78]

While the theories of Levinas and Deleuze throughout this chapter – particularly in reference to *13 novembre* – have seemed to be in opposition to one another, *Paris est à nous* allows us the opportunity to see the confluence between these two approaches. As discussed above, *Paris est à nous* clearly addresses the distinction between the 'mythe' and 'réel' it represents, as required by Levinasian theory. However, it does not do this in such a way that the distinction between myth and the real becomes easily discernible. As such, *Paris est à nous* embodies a Deleuzian approach: the past only exists in the present through evaluation produced by vision and speech.[79]

The connection between Vogler's film and Deleuzian theory, however, is not just a matter of mixing documentary and fiction. When discussing a film named *Paris est à nous* in conjunction with Deleuze, it would be remiss to overlook Jacques Rivette's 1961 film *Paris nous appartient*, which Deleuze himself discusses in

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[78] Thanouli, *Post-Classical Cinema*, p. 141.
[79] Deleuze, *Cinéma II*, p. 15.

Cinéma II. While it is unclear whether Vogler took inspiration from Rivette's film for *Paris est à nous*, there are multiple parallels between the two, spanning far beyond their similar titles, both of which can be translated as *Paris Belongs to Us*. On the one hand, we have *Paris est à nous,* which centres around the image of a plane crash due to a terrorist hijacking and follows its protagonist – Anna – as she strolls around Paris with her boyfriend, discussing their life. It is never made clear to the audience whether this plane crash occurred in the narrative of the film, was a nightmare Anna experienced, or some sort of hallucinatory imagination on her part. On the other hand, we have *Paris nous appartient*, which centres around a series of mysterious deaths in and around Paris and follows its protagonist – Anne – a *flâneuse* who strolls through Paris, discussing life with her friends. As Anne attempts to understand the deaths, the film shows a number of strange and disorienting shots which are neither attributed to the narrative, nor explicitly defined as Anne's nightmarish hallucinations. The films also share the motif of the theatre: while Rivette's film features a subplot in which the characters rehearse theatrical performances, *Paris est à nous* features frequent, surreal sequences of Anna's alter-ego in a theatre setting. Beyond this, we can also identify similarities in both films' self-referential qualities. While Rivette uses mise-en-abyme by showing Anne as she watches the Babel segment of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), Vogler's self-referential techniques are more in line with the post-classical style as discussed above – mainly through the hypermediated images in the editing room. Vogler has never publicly admitted or acknowledged the film's mirroring of *Paris nous appartient*, and press reviews have only made the connection between the films' titles. However, it is clear from closer consideration that the similarities between them are numerous and striking. Beyond their protagonists' similar names and the

films' shared themes of theatre and Paris, both filmmakers centre their films around the indecipherable boundary between fiction and reality, drawing attention to the artifice of cinema to emphasise this.

As a result, it is pertinent here to consider Deleuze's discussion – brief though it is – of Rivette's film. Although Deleuze allocates passages to Rivette's work in *Cinéma II*, *Paris nous appartient* is only mentioned by name twice in the work. However, Garin Dowd puts forward a sustained reconsideration of Rivette's films, exploring the concepts of the powers of the false and fabulation with specific focus on the films of Rivette which are set in Paris.[80] Discussing *Paris nous appartient* in particular, Dowd draws attention to a specific notion set forward by Deleuze, which takes on a new, palimpsestic meaning when we consider *Paris est à nous* as a reiteration of Rivette's film, with relation to terrorism:

> What one might call 'the problem of Paris' is articulated in the paradox which Rivette takes from Charles Péguy and which appears on screen in his first feature film: Paris belongs to us and Paris belongs to no one. This for Deleuze is an essential characteristic of the new type of character required by the cinema of the time-image: 'It is because what happens to them does not belong to them and only half-concerns them, because they know how to extract from the event the part that cannot be reduced to what happens: that part of the inexhaustible possibility that constitutes the unbearable, the intolerable, the visionary's part'.[81]

Here, Dowd suggests that the characters of Rivette's film, although experiencing strange events which they cannot explain, do not 'own' these events, but experience them tangentially and peripherally. Anne experiences the death of several of her friends, but she does not 'own' those events: they happen around her. She extracts 'the part that cannot be reduced to what happens', the 'inexhaustible possibility' that arises from what she has not directly experienced. In Deleuzian terms, she takes what she does not know (how these deaths occurred), and through fabulation she

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[80] Garin Dowd, 'Paris and Its Doubles: Deleuze/Rivette', *Deleuze Studies*, 3.2 (2009), 185–206 (p. 185).
[81] Ibid., p. 194.

creates her own 'truth', much like many of the True Crime documentaries discussed above. Dowd's attention to Deleuze's statement, however, is amplified when we apply it to *Paris est à nous*. Like Anne's experience of the events occurring around her, Anna's experience of Paris also does not belong to her. Regardless of whether we approach the film as fiction, documentary, or docu-fiction, the trauma-bound events which Anna experiences – such as the *Charlie Hebdo* marches, the building on fire, the plane crash, the explosion during the marches, and the protests – are peripheral to her. She does not experience them as a participant, a victim, or a survivor-witness. As such, the character assumes the same position in relation to these events (be they historical moments or figments of fiction) as the large majority of the audience.

Consequently, while Vogler's methods of capturing these images in the streets of Paris may be deemed 'ambulance-chasing' and ethically questionable, they nevertheless create a film which does not suggest that the characters – or by extension the viewers – 'own' the events; they are not reduced to Anna's understanding. On the contrary, the monologue Anna delivers towards the end of the film highlights the very fact that she cannot understand the 'truth' of these events: 'Du côté où je suis, je peux voir le monde qu'à travers des images. Des images d'un cauchemar. Même si je sais que de l'autre côté il y a la vie, la réalité, je peux pas traverser. Je reste du mauvais côté'. By interpreting *Paris est à nous* through a Deleuzian framework, it becomes clear that Vogler's film does not attempt to represent any type of pure truth. Further to this, unlike the True Crime documentaries discussed earlier in this chapter, *Paris est à nous* does not present the events it shows as knowable to the audience of the film. Just as Anna does not understand them, and cannot see them 'qu'à travers des images', neither can the

audience, who can only see and understand the events as mediated through the images shown on screen.

Conclusion

As I outlined at the beginning of the chapter, the content of Vogler's film and the methods used to capture the footage make it very difficult for a viewer to overcome the initial shock of seeing these images used in a film which seems to oscillate between reality and fiction. Undeniably, there is a questionable element to Vogler's filming methods. However, closer scrutiny of these works reveals the complexity of representing the event of terrorism in film. While *13 novembre* initially comes across as a more sophisticated documentary which lends itself to oral testimony from survivor-witnesses and mostly refrains from sensationalism, applying insights from Levinasian and Deleuzian theory highlights how its production may well be influenced by contemporary trends in the film and streaming industry, and that several elements are certainly in place for the entertainment of the viewer. In particular, *13 novembre* seems to have been included in the relatively new True Crime genre as it participates in the will to truth that has become so popular in recent years, presenting its audience with a supposedly clearer picture of what happened during the events it discusses. However, as a result, this means that certain traits which are specific to the True Crime genre also permeate the depiction of the terrorist event in ways which pose ethical issues, such as the jurification of the audience, allowing and encouraging judgement of survivor-witness testimony.

By contrast, while *Paris est à nous* initially appears to be a frustrating and melancholic representation of tensions in Paris – as many critics have suggested – a reading of this 'docu-fiction' alongside the theories of Levinas and Deleuze

highlights its reflexivity, and Vogler's heightened awareness of the plasticity of images.[82] While the film may engage in contentious filming practices, it nevertheless raises several questions with regard to the flexibility and indecipherability of the boundary between truth and falsehood. Furthermore, the positioning of the protagonist in *Paris est à nous* as peripheral to the events she encounters, and the conscious acknowledgement that she can neither 'own' nor fully access these events, foregrounds a viewing experience in line with Levinasian ethics. This also shows nuance by replicating the experience of the majority of audiences, who have not been survivor-witnesses, victims, or perpetrators of terrorist events, but may have experienced them peripherally where they live or via images and testimony.

Clearly, representing the event of terrorism remains an extremely complex matter. This is particularly true in the modern era, where media is under constant scrutiny from audiences as to its 'factuality', cinema is becoming an increasingly accessible form of entertainment due to streaming services, and the line between cinema as entertainment and as education is increasingly blurred, if not in some cases obsolete. Streaming services now undeniably exert a significant influence on cinema. As this chapter has demonstrated, films produced by and released solely via them can simultaneously educate, inform, and pose philosophical challenges to the subjects they represent. In order to discuss more specifically the ethics of representing terrorism, the following chapters will consider how victims, survivor-

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[82] Mintzer, '*Paris Is Us*'; Alexandre Bernard, '*Paris Est à Nous* Ou l'ambition Ratée d'une Révolution Cinématographique', *Le Figaro*, 2019 <https://www.lefigaro.fr/cinema/2019/02/21/03002-20190221ARTFIG00206--paris-est-a-nous-ou-l-ambition-ratee-d-une-revolution-cinematographique.php> [Accessed 13 December 2020]; Antoine Ruiz, '*Paris Est à Nous*, Le Film Dont Tout Le Monde Parle ?', *Numéro*, 2019 <https://www.numero.com/fr/cinema/paris-est-a-nous-netflix-attentats-manifestations-johnny-hallyday-bataclan-elisabeth-vogler> [Accessed 12 December 2020].

witnesses, and terrorist figures are presented to audiences in contemporary French

cinema and television.

2. Acknowledging the Subjective Alterity of the Other in *13 novembre*, *L'Humour à mort*, and *Amanda*

> En regardant ces images, j'avais l'impression de redécouvrir un trésor perdu, d'avoir accès à ces gens dont on nous avait tout à coup privé.
> – Emmanuel Leconte, on his experience while editing *L'Humour à mort*.[1]

In the previous chapter, I investigated how on-demand streaming services shape the depiction of terrorism in *13 novembre* and *Paris est à nous*. Through analysis of the blurring of the boundary between fact and fiction in those two films, the Nietzschean idea of the will to truth emerged as a central component of these works. While *13 novembre* engages in a 'play with time' which attempts to bring past events into the present moment of the film in order to allow audiences access to events at which they were not present, *Paris est à nous* interrogates the accessibility of these events for individuals absent from them.[2] This chapter will return to *13 novembre* with the accessibility of the experiences of survivor-witnesses in mind, building upon the previous discussion by considering the ethics of presenting such experiences as accessible to viewers. As this chapter will show, the concept of the ability for cinema and television to allow audiences 'd'avoir accès à ces gens', as Leconte describes in the quotation above, becomes a central component of the films and series considered here. Building upon these questions of accessibility, this chapter will interrogate the ethical issues of suggesting to audiences that they have immediate access to the experiences of survivor-witnesses through testimony in *13 novembre* and the 2015 documentary *L'Humour à mort* (Emmanuel and Daniel Leconte), before considering

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[1] Emmanuel and Daniel Leconte, '*Je suis Charlie: L'Humour à mort*: Dossier de Presse Français' (Pyramide Films, 2015) <https://medias.unifrance.org/medias/138/78/151178/presse/l-humour-a-mort-dossier-de-presse-francais.pdf> [accessed 6 January 2022].
[2] Stella Bruzzi, 'Making a Genre: The Case of the Contemporary True Crime Documentary', *Law and Humanities*, 10.2 (2016), 249–80 (p. 253).

the ethics of representing victims who perished in terrorist attacks in the 2018 film *Amanda* (Mikhaël Hers).

'Où la fiction rencontre la réalité, ou inversement': Considering documentary and fiction together

As per Chapter 1, this chapter will consider fiction and documentary productions side-by-side. In the previous chapter I focused particularly on the blurring of the boundary between fiction and reality in the two productions discussed, and therefore was able to compare documentary and fiction in detail. However, the works considered in this chapter, two documentaries and one fictional feature film, do not interrogate the parameters of fiction and documentary as openly. The question of why – and whether – these works can be considered alongside one another therefore needs to be considered.

In the introduction to Chapter 1, I outlined the theoretical literature surrounding documentary as 'fact' versus 'fiction'; while Christian Metz and Trinh T. Minh-ha have suggested that all films are fictional owing to the subjectivity and narrative imposed by the filmmakers, Michael Renov and Bill Nichols consider all films instead to be documentaries due to fiction's reflection of the society it is produced in.[3] This discussion laid the foundations for discussing documentary and fiction side-by-side by demonstrating that the boundaries between the two are much less fixed and defined than one might imagine. However, we might also consider the links which have been made between fiction and fact in discussions of terrorism itself.

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[3] Christian Metz, 'Le Signifiant Imaginaire: Psychanalyse et Cinéma', *Communications (Paris)*, 23.1 (1975), 3–55 (p. 31); Trinh T Minh-Ha, 'Documentary Is/Not a Name', *October*, 52 (1990), 76–98 (p. 76); Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, Visible Evidence, 16 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 1.

In the press kit for *L'Humour à mort*, Emmanuel Leconte draws attention specifically to the collision of fiction and reality in the case of terrorism. As he discusses the attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* offices, he notes, 'si je devais trouver le mot le plus approprié pour dire ce que j'ai ressenti c'est en effet celui de "sidération": ces terribles moments où la fiction rencontre la réalité, ou inversement'.[4] Although Leconte does not particularly expand on this meeting of fiction and reality, it has been discussed elsewhere. French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard, for example, drew attention to the collision of the real and the fictional in relation to the 9/11 attacks in his essay 'L'Esprit du Terrorisme':

> Qu'en est-il alors de l'événement réel, si partout l'image, la fiction, le virtuel perfusent dans la réalité ? Dans le cas présent, on a cru voir (avec un certain soulagement peut-être) une résurgence du réel et de la violence du réel dans un univers prétendument virtuel. 'Finies toutes vos histoires de virtuel – ça, c'est du réel!' De même, on a pu y voir une résurrection de l'histoire au-delà de sa fin annoncée. Mais la réalité dépasse-t-elle vraiment la fiction ? Si elle semble le faire, c'est qu'elle en a absorbé l'énergie, et qu'elle est elle-même devenue fiction. On pourrait presque dire que la réalité est jalouse de la fiction, que le réel est jaloux de l'image... C'est une sorte de duel entre eux, à qui sera le plus inimaginable. […] Réel et fiction sont inextricables, et la fascination de l'attentat est d'abord celle de l'image.[5]

Although written in 2001 after the attacks on the World Trade Centre, Baudrillard's observations here about the fictive, virtual, and hypermediated nature of modern terrorism are even more pertinent today as both fictional and documentary portrayals of terrorism have been made increasingly accessible by the proliferation of streaming services, social media, and online video hosting platforms. Furthermore, his reflections on the real's absorption of fiction, its transformation *into* fiction, reminds us of Bruzzi's suggestion that viewers no longer feel the need to adjust their perspective or attitude depending on whether they are sitting in front of a television,

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[4] Leconte and Leconte, p. 3.
[5] Jean Baudrillard, 'L'Esprit du Terrorisme', *Le Monde*, 2006 <https://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2007/03/06/l-esprit-du-terrorisme-par-jean-baudrillard_879920_3382.html> [accessed 3 January 2022]. Originally published in Le Monde on 3 November 2001. Published online 2006.

computer, or phone screen, and enjoying a documentary or a drama; the line between factual and fictional portrayals of terrorism is increasingly blurred not only because the real event is so unimaginable, but because viewers are becoming desensitised to the difference.[6]

Moreover, as this chapter will discuss in greater detail, the 'factuality' of witness testimony has been the subject of debate for decades.[7] As I highlighted in the Introduction, Alvin Rosenfeld and James Young, for example, have critiqued the capacity of language – be that oral or written – to convey the horrors experienced by survivor-witnesses of the Holocaust; if we are only able to access the experience of survivor-witnesses through their testimony – which language cannot fully express – then can we ever access these experiences at all?[8] This sentiment is found in much poetry and literature from the era. For example, French Holocaust survivor and author Charlotte Delbo queried her own memory in much of her work; she prefaces her meditation on her experiences during the Holocaust, *None of Us Will Return* (1965), with the note 'Today, I am not sure that what I wrote is true. I am certain it is truthful'.[9] The unfixed nature of her memories permeates the rest of the volume. Similarly, Marguerite Duras interrogated survivor-witness testimony throughout her career, questioning the memories of her husband Robert Antelme in his writing and challenging memory throughout the screenplay of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959).[10]

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[6] Bruzzi, 'Making a Genre', p. 258.

[7] I do not wish to suggest, here, that the testimony of survivor-witnesses is false. Rather, as will be discussed in this chapter, I suggest here that the capacity of language to communicate experiences of trauma is inadequate.

[8] Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 4; James Edward Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*, First Midland (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 3.

[9] Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, trans. by Rosette C. Lamont, 2nd edn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 1.

[10] Marguerite Duras, *La Douleur* (Paris: P.O.L., 1985), p. 77.

With these observations from philosophers, authors, and survivor-witnesses themselves taken into consideration, we must approach the testimony of survivor-witnesses not as fact, but as interpretation of their own experiences. As such, and as will be discussed at length in this chapter, viewers cannot truly access the experiences of survivor-witnesses even when observing a documentary containing their testimony; like fiction films, these experiences are communicated through interpretations before they are translated into images to appear on screen, which in turn are interpreted by audiences.

Discursive deliurum, *13 novembre*, and *L'Humour à mort*

The violent wave of terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015 was recognised by many as specifically targeting French culture and values. French journalist Edwy Plenel, for example, referred to them as an 'assassinat du droit de vivre, de penser et de s'exprimer en sécurité, dans la diversité de nos convictions et de nos croyances'.[11] As a result, France has focused a great deal of attention on scrutinising these events, now considered a national trauma, in numerous books, television programmes, and feature-length documentaries. Two prominent accounts of the attacks are *Je suis Charlie: L'Humour à mort*, and *13 novembre*, which was discussed in Chapter 1 in reference to its approach to portraying the events themselves.

In January 2016, less than one month after the film's commercial release, streaming service Netflix acquired the rights to distribute *L'Humour à mort*. Directed by father and son Emmanuel and Daniel Leconte, the documentary centres around the attacks on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo,* and the controversy surrounding the newspaper's depictions of the Prophet Muhammad. The documentary remained

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[11] Edwy Plenel, *Pour Les Musulmans* (Paris: La Découverte, 2015), p. 12.

on the majority of regional Netflix platforms until March 2019. In mid-2018, as part of its original documentary series, Netflix then released *13 novembre*, the three-part docu-series directed by Jules and Gédéon Naudet, focusing on the November multi-site attacks on Paris, discussed in the previous chapter. As two of the most readily available and widely distributed documentaries on terrorism in France, these two documentaries provide illuminating insights into how documentary filmmakers are presenting the testimony of survivor-witnesses to audiences which raise fascinating questions around how such films negotiate the relationship between self and other, and how they approach and apprehend the other and the subjectivity of their experiences.

As previously noted, the popularity of documentary films has increased exponentially in recent years, with increasing numbers of documentary films being produced, released, and embraced by the cinema-going and streaming public. While the emergence of the True Crime genre influenced the resulting form of *13 novembre*, *L'Humour à mort* was released and added to Netflix's library before the popularisation of the genre. As such, *L'Humour à mort* does not exhibit the same genre-coding we see in *13 novembre* and other True Crime documentaries. However, its 2016 release came at a time when documentaries were beginning to gain momentum – particularly on Netflix – and the genre was developing into a recognisable subset of films, as releases such as *Making a Murderer* (2015) and *Amanda Knox* (2017) gained large international audiences.

Randolph Lewis attributes the increased interest in documentaries to 'a culture in crisis' in the wake of terrorism as a sober antidote to the 'discursive

delirium' which surrounds such events.[12] We can understand this term as meaning the intense and, at times, tangential debates and discussions which arise in the wake of terrorist attacks. Lewis's understanding of the term, which he used in 2007, describes the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in New York, during which he suggests the United States was overcome by a 'mediascape filled with ephemera, illusion, and "spin control"'.[13] Lewis provides little justification for such an interpretation, but we can infer that he means the numerous and ongoing debates and discussions of terrorism and justice which followed 9/11, and the politicisation of these dialogues. Such a 'discursive delirium' also presented itself following the events of 2015 in France. From the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks came the 'Je suis Charlie' motto which spread across the globe, inspiring a debate on whether we can, or should, align ourselves with the actions of the journal, and the limits of freedom of expression. The state of emergency and the increased powers of surveillance imposed by the French state after the November attacks generated discussions about totalitarianism and individual privacy, along with accusations that following the events, 'France succumbed to an attack of hysteria'.[14] Similar phenomena can also be identified beyond France and the United States. During a Q&A session following a screening of his feature-length account of the 2011 Norway terrorist attack, *Utøya: 22 Juli* (2018), director Erik Poppe explained to the audience that his aim in making *Utøya* was to return the focus of discussions on the attack to the event itself and its victims, moving away from debates surrounding the sentencing of the perpetrator, or placement of monuments, which had subsequently dominated dialogue in Norway.

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[12] Randolph Lewis, 'Dossier: "The Face of the Other" and Documentaries', *The Velvet Light Trap*, 60 (2007), 83–84 (p. 83).
[13] Ibid.
[14] Emmanuel Todd, *Who Is Charlie?: Xenophobia and the New Middle Class*, trans. by Andrew Brown (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2015), p. 1.

Lewis similarly argues that by diverting the discussion from 'discursive delirium',

and focusing instead back on the event and its victims,

> [i]n our overly mediated world, humanistic documentary can provide a small source
> of Levinasian connection between human beings […] by looking through the eyes of
> a compassionate filmmaker, we can see and feel faraway lives in a way that cultural
> atomization makes so rare. To the extent that documentary encourages this ethical
> rapport with the Other, it is a beautiful thing.[15]

Lewis's article does not expand upon his interpretation of the 'Levinasian

connection' or the 'ethical rapport'. We could therefore argue that, without these

explanations, Lewis's reading of Levinasian ethics in documentary filmmaking

reduces Levinas's theory to its humanism, omitting the nuance and complexity of the

relation between the self and the other in Levinas's work. As this chapter will show,

when a fuller Levinasian framework is considered against the films in question,

focus can be and is diverted away from this discursive delirium, back towards to the

people affected by terrorist attacks. To demonstrate this, I consider how works which

allow audiences to 'see and feel faraway lives' risk totalising the experiences of

those affected by terrorism, presenting them as uncritical objects of scrutiny,

whereas works encourage the viewer to acknowledge the distance and inaccessibility

of these experiences show their subjects instead as unrepresentable, irreducible

beings.

Looking to Levinas

In the previous chapter, I discussed at length the recent trend in documentaries of a

'will to truth', which may well lead audiences to infer that these productions offer a

clearer and more truthful version of events than previously available. It became clear

that some documentaries aim to bring the past event into the present day, and present

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[15] Lewis, p. 83.

it to viewers for their consideration and judgement. Here I will build upon this idea by interrogating the ethics of this approach to representing terrorism, and focus more closely on Levinasian theorisation of the self-other relationship in order to answer the following questions: what are the ethical considerations and problems that arise from allowing audiences to feel as though they have immediate and unmediated access to traumatic events they did not witness? Is this ethical dilemma acknowledged in these documentaries and, if so, how? And ultimately, if filmmakers are presenting traumatic events for the consideration of contemporary audiences, where does this leave the survivor-witness and victims of those events? As this chapter will show, documentaries such as *13 novembre* and *L'Humour à mort* ultimately prioritise the will to truth and viewer entertainment over the irreducibly subjective experiences of survivor-witnesses and victims of terrorism.

In Levinas's thought, '[l]a philosophie occidentale a été le plus souvent une ontologie: une réduction de l'Autre au Même'.[16] His work is governed by the principle that the self has traditionally been privileged in Western philosophy, which has historically focused on the ontological relation between individuals; seeing and hearing the other in a physical way. Levinas maintains that this allows the other to be absorbed into the self, a process which he refers to as 'totalisation'. In his major works, *Totalité et infini* and *Autrement qu'être*, *Au delà de l'essence*, Levinas argues that in order for a relation to be ethical, the self must approach the other as an absolute alterity that the self can neither understand nor absorb, because '[n]otre rapport avec lui […] déborde la comprehension […] parce que, dans notre rapport avec autrui, celui-ci ne nous affecte pas à partir d'un concept. Il est étant et compte

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[16] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité*, Biblio Essais, 19th edn (France: Librairie Générale Française, 2018), p. 33.

comme tel'.[17] The other cannot therefore be reduced to my sphere of understanding: they cannot be condensed into a concept or an image, or confined to a representation within one's mind. The other is, and always will be, an alterity which exists beyond comprehension and perception, and can never be fully understood. In pronouncing that the other 'is a being and counts as such', Levinas suggests that the self must acknowledge its responsibility toward the other in order to recognise and respect the other's alterity.

It is worth noting, however, that Levinas championed a careful balance in distance between the self and the other; the specificity of this balance is well demonstrated in his disagreement with the work of German philosopher Martin Heidegger. A key aspect of Levinas's concept of ethical relations is his encouragement of an approach, or dialogue. Heidegger, whose work Levinas took issue with throughout his career, also acknowledged the other as entirely exterior to the self, but championed the concept of *Gelassenheit*, or the letting-be of the other, in an acceptance of the independence of the other from the self. Passive though this concept may seem, the notion of *Gelassenheit* is not entirely divorced from active engagement with the other. Bret W. Davis argues that 'while *Seinlassen* (letting-be) may be used in common speech to mean "to leave alone or stop doing," Heidegger's *Seinlassen* involves rather a *Sicheinlassen auf* in the sense of "getting into, engaging with, getting involved with things"; in other words, "actively letting" beings be themselves'.[18] It is therefore not activity or passivity which separates Levinas's thought from that of Heidegger. Instead, we must look deeper into the specific

[17] Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Essais Sur Le Penser-à-l'autre*, Biblio Essais, 7th edn (France: Grasset, 2016), p. 17.
[18] Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit*, Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. xxvii.

language used by Heidegger to understand precisely where Levinas takes issue with *Gelassenheit*. In *Wegmarken*, Heidegger specifies that 'letting-be is to engage oneself with beings [Sein-lassen ist das Sicheinlassen auf das Seiende]'.[19] What is notable here - which Davis highlights but does not analyse - is the prioritisation of the self in Heidegger's choice of the phrase 'das Sicheinlassen auf'. Indeed, as Davis points out, this is certainly an active notion rather than a passive one. Yet we must recognise the hierarchy implied by the German structure of 'sich **auf** das Seiende einlassen'. By using this phrase, *das Seiende* (which here refers to the other, or the *Essent* in Heideggerian terms) is placed in the accusative case - the case assigned to the object of the verb - whereas *sich* takes the nominative case. As such, the nuance of Heidegger's terminology reveals that his philosophy remains rooted in a prioritisation of the self over the other.

Further, while Heidegger's theory rests on the ontological relation, Levinas considers this to be an objectification of the other, a reduction of the other to a concept or an image which can be contained within the knowledge of the self, and therefore a totalisation. As he believes it 'incontestable que l'objectivation se joue d'une façon privilégiée dans le regard', Levinas rejects ontological engagement as a mode of ethically relating to the other, asserting throughout his work that that which he terms the 'face' refers to neither a physical, nor necessarily a human face, but '[l]a manière dont se présente l'Autre, dépassant *l'idée de l'Autre en moi*'.[20] He therefore presents the self-other relation as ethical only when it comes from a place beyond the ontological relation, and when the self and other are entirely separate

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[19] Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe: Wegmarken*, trans. by Friedrich-Wilhelm von. Herrmann, Veröffentlichte Schriften: 1914-1970 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), IX, p. 188.
[20] Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, p. 205, 43, emphasis original.

individuals, although there is an dialogue between the two which necessarily evokes the metaphysical 'face' of the other.

Initially, Levinas's rejection of vision as a means of ethically relating would seem to create some difficulty in using his theory with studies of cinema, given it is a primarily visual and representational medium. Yet, as discussed in Chapter 1, many scholars have turned their attention to Levinas in relation to Film Studies, and as such, a variety of interpretations of the disjunction between his work and its application to cinema have arisen. Sarah Cooper and Michael Renov have published landmark studies of Levinas's applicability to documentary film in particular.[21] Scholars including Judith Butler, Libby Saxton, and Jiewon Baek have also explored the issue of applying Levinasian theory in Film Studies more generally.[22] Perhaps as a result of the notorious complexity of Levinas's texts themselves, the current debate seems to consist of two (apparently) opposing arguments. The first, as held by Renov, Nash, and Butler, is that an effort must be made for the alterity of the other within a cinematic work – in this case the subject of the documentary, such as the survivor-witnesses of the attacks – to be preserved.[23] Particularly in the case of documentary films, there is the possibility that the other will be totalised by the audience if the viewer is led to believe that they have full access to the traumatic event, and therefore are led to assume that the survivor-witnesses' experiences can be contained within the frame of their perception.

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[21] Sarah Cooper, *Selfless Cinema?: Ethics and French Documentary*, Research Monographs in French Studies, 20 (London: Legenda, 2006); Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*.

[22] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004); Libby Saxton, 'Fragile Faces: Levinas and Lanzmann', *Film-Philosophy*, 11.2 (2007), 1–14; Jiewon Baek, 'Turning Toward the Other: The Face of Humans, the Face of Things and the Face of Language in the Documentaries of Sylvain George', *Studies in French Cinema*, 16.1 (2016), 61–77.

[23] Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*; Kate Nash, 'Documentary-for-the-Other: Relationships, Ethics and (Observational) Documentary', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 26.3 (2011), 224–39; Butler, *Precarious Life*.

The opposing standpoint, as advanced by Cooper and Baek, is that this is 'problematic in its presumption of the other as that which can be preserved, respected, or violated […] an object dependent on my representation'.[24] This dichotomy most likely arises from the ambiguity of Levinas's work. While Baek claims that '[a]lterity knows no violation. Levinasian ethics does not concern itself with how to preserve the alterity of the other', Levinas does in fact set out a responsibility on the part of the self to refrain from reducing the other's alterity, stating early on in *Totalité et Infini*, '[c]onnaître revient à saisir l'être à partir de rien ou à le ramener à rien, lui enlever son alterité'.[25] It therefore seems too radical to claim that Levinasian ethics do not account for the opportunity for the self to disrespect the alterity of the other. However, these two notions need not be mutually exclusive if we read them with regard to representation. It is possible to reduce the other to a representation, not entirely exterior, even if the other itself resists this reduction. The distinction here is that Levinas calls for the self to *acknowledge* that the other is absolutely and irreducibly exterior, rather than calling for the self to *allow* the other's alterity. In terms of Film Studies, this would translate to a film, filmmaker, and its viewer acknowledging that the other is not and cannot be contained within the frame, and exists beyond the realm of the film. As Levinas puts it, '[l]'intelligence de l'étant consiste à aller au-delà de l'étant dans l'ouvert précisément'.[26] Again, Levinas points to a site beyond the self-other relation as a requirement for that relation itself to be ethical. In concrete terms, while visually representing the other does not *provide* this site of ethical relation as it is based on vision, neither does it block audiences from accessing the site of this ethical relation,

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[24] Baek, p. 62.
[25] Baek, p. 62; Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, p. 34.
[26] Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, p. 207.

provided that they are encouraged or given the option of considering the subject

beyond the scope of the film. Ultimately, this is a question of viewing relations, and

if we are to consider our films in terms of Levinasian ethics, we must consider where

the power is placed – with the self/viewer (and filmmakers), or with the

other/subject.

Both documentaries discussed here show interviewees stating that they will

not repeat parts of their experiences during the events, mirroring the idea that a

Levinasian other can resist reduction by the self. In the second part of *13 novembre*,

the survivor-witnesses of the attack at the Bataclan theatre recount their experiences.

The episode, like both others in the series, is made up of clips of interviews of

survivor-witnesses, emergency services workers who attended, politicians, and

footage from the evening taken both on smartphones or as part of news broadcasts.

Clips of interviews with survivor-witnesses are cut and arranged in such a way that

the narrative of the documentary recounts the evening chronologically, as though the

survivor-witnesses are narrating the evening in conversation with each other, so that

the audience can follow minute-for-minute what occurred, with commentary from

those who were there. Around 13 minutes into the second episode, Audrey – a

survivor-witness of the Bataclan attack – recounts her experience of the perpetrators

firing indiscriminately into the crowd in the theatre pit. The interview is filmed in a

darkened room with warm, orange-red shapes out of focus in the background,

reminiscent of the stalls in a theatre hall. Framed in medium close-up, she recounts

lying face down on the floor waiting to be shot, and explains that 'il y a une solitude

existentielle où la mort arrive, elle va être là, est je suis en paix avec moi-même.

C'est un moment de grâce extrême'. Here, the shot changes to a close-up of her face.

She continues, 'Je le dis avec ces mots-là, mais je peux pas aller plus loin, c'est

tellement quelque chose qui m'appartient et qui est intime, que je veux garder mon secret à moi, ce qui se passe à ce moment-là'. The image on screen changes to a diagram of the theatre balcony, as the focus of the narrative shifts there.

Audrey's guarding of her own experience here, although not stylistically significantly different from the rest of the series, acts as a reminder to the audience that these events are not entirely accessible, and that they cannot be known to the viewer apart from through mediation from the survivor-witnesses themselves. In refusing to fully explain her feelings or experience as she faces presumed death, Audrey forces the audience to acknowledge her own alterity, and stages the failure of representation. We see that regardless of the directors' intent, whether an effort is made to preserve her alterity or not, Audrey and her experiences are not and cannot be confined to the parameters of the series as her subjectivity and experience exceed them. Even as the mise-en-scène attempts to draw the viewer in to the experience she recounts by displaying a physical background that resembles the theatre, and through close-up shots of her face encouraging identification, Audrey's own words, and lack of words, refuse viewers full access to her experience.

Comparatively, the mise-en-scène of *L'Humour à mort* is similar to that of *13 novembre*. After a short introduction to the *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper and its history of facing accusations of Islamophobia, focus shifts towards interviews with the survivor-witnesses of the attacks, cartoonist Corinne "Coco" Rey, the journal's general director Eric Portheault, and cartoonist Laurent "Riss" Sourisseu. In a similar manner to the interviews of *13 novembre*, they are interviewed in areas that reflect the setting in which they experienced the attack, at desks and in seating areas reminiscent of the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*. The film cuts between sections of each of their interviews, arranging them so as to give the audience a clearer, chronological

narrative of the events, beginning with Coco as she is forced to enter the code of the offices to allow the perpetrators to enter. The three survivor-witnesses recount their experiences of seeing and hearing the attackers enter the offices, and the attackers' search for the newspaper employees who they targeted. Finally, they each describe their experiences of the moments in which they realised that the attackers had left the offices. Riss describes seeing and hearing other employees stand up, signalling the end of the attack. The image cuts to Eric, framed in a medium close-up in side profile, and the interviewer (off camera) asks, 'Donc vous arrivez dans la salle de conference, et là qu'est-ce que vous découvrez?' After a very short pause of a few seconds, the image cuts to Eric in a frontal close-up, and he answers, 'Des cadavres, dans le sang. Des blessés. Un choc, une vision apocalyptique. On se demandait où on était. Ça ressemblait à un champ de bataille où il y avait des morts enchevêtrés les uns dans les autres'. The image cuts to Riss, in close-up, as he says that he saw Stéphane "Charb" Charbonnier's body, lifeless. The image then cuts back to Eric in medium close-up, as he says 'Je rentrerai pas dans les détails de ce que j'ai vu parce que c'est une chose que je réserve,' the image cuts back to a frontal close-up of him as he finishes, 'que je ne veux pas infliger aux familles. Je sais ce que j'ai vu. Je le garderai pour moi'.

Like Audrey in *13 novembre*, Eric here refuses to allow the entirety of his experience to be contained within the film's confines. Here, in fact, Eric directly stifles the attempts made by the interviewer to have this included in the film by refusing to answer his question in any detail specific to the attack he experienced. Instead, he refers to images which can be found in the collective imaginary: images of an apocalypse, a battlefield. He refers to cadavers covered in blood, but without elaborating further. By mentioning the victims' families he also acknowledges the

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form of the film itself; that it would likely be viewed by the relatives of the deceased. This interaction, like we saw with Audrey's insistence that she reserve her secret for herself, forces audiences to acknowledge the limits of their viewing. Eric's refusal to divulge his experience of entering the conference room reminds viewers that without his explicit description, these events, images and experiences are not accessible to them; that he and his experience are entirely external to the self of the audience. Eric's steadfast refusal in the face of the interviewer's question goes some way to illustrate the ambiguity of Levinasian ethics when applied to cinema. As previously mentioned, there is some scholarly debate as to whether Levinasian ethics suggest that an other *can* be totalised, their absolute alterity diminished, or whether as Baek suggests 'alterity knows no violation'.[27] Here, Eric's statement reveals that it is possible for an other to refuse totalisation on the cinema screen, even when the filmmakers do not encourage audiences to recognise the unknowability and alterity of the other and their experiences.

Audrey and Eric's refusals to express their experiences on camera also raise the question of issues surrounding language and its capacity to express trauma. The concept of the unspeakable nature of experiences of trauma is a long-standing tradition within the study of representation of victims and survivor-witnesses. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the failure of language in expressing the experience of trauma was brought to light particularly in post-war studies of Holocaust film and literature, with Alvin Rosenfeld highlighting that 'no term available to us thus far is comprehensive enough or forceful enough to record a rupture in human history as severe as this'.[28] James Young has also highlighted the varying ways in which people

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[27] Baek p. 62.
[28] Rosenfeld, p. 4.

use language, resulting in sharply contrasting versions of historical fact: 'if Holocaust narrative is nothing but a system of signs merely referring to other signs, then where are the events themselves?'.[29] Marguerite Duras similarly criticised the attempt by her husband, Robert Antelme, to express his experience of the Holocaust: 'Il a écrit un livre sur ce qu'il croit avoir vécu en Allemagne : *L'Espèce humaine*'.[30] Duras's use of the phrase 'ce qu'il croit avoir vécu' suggests an unreliability in his memory and expression of it. Duras subsequently wrote the screenplay for *Hiroshima mon amour*, extending her thoughts on the failure of language from the Holocaust to the Hiroshima nuclear bombing. In her screenplay, questions of memory, forgetting and trauma feature heavily. During a sequence in which the main character, Elle, recounts the story of her trauma, Duras advances the idea that recounting an experience verbally may be reductive and unreliable. Elle visits a Japanese tearoom with her lover. She tells him about her experience of her relationship with a German solider, and his eventual death. After recounting this experience to her new lover, she returns to her hotel room and begins to talk to herself in the bathroom mirror, alternately addressing herself, no one, and her former German lover. In her dialogue addressing her former lover, she admits that 'Je t'ai trompé ce soir avec cet inconnu. J'ai raconté notre histoire. Elle était, vois-tu racontable […] Regarde-moi comme je t'oublie'. Instead of her new relationship, here, Elle seems to see the recounting of their story as a betrayal. Rosamund Davies highlights the contradiction in this scene between the Freudian concept of talking and narrative as a cure for trauma, and Elle's apparent rejection of oral testimony as

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[29] Young, p. 3.
[30] Duras, *La Douleur*, p. 77.

a cure.[31] Once Elle has verbally articulated her traumatic experience, 'it is in some profound way lost or betrayed […] the reality of the lived experience is denied […] the real, which cannot be directly represented, is replaced with a screen'.[32] When we consider Audrey and Eric's refusal to articulate their experiences on screen in confluence with this reading of *Hiroshima mon amour*, an added layer of complexity reveals itself. Beyond the refusal to allow viewers access to their own experiences as discussed above, Davies's reading of *Hiroshima mon amour* suggests that the articulation of trauma on the cinema screen itself may be considered reductive, as replacing the experience entirely with a form of expression which cannot convey the experience.

Indeed, this failure of language and representation returns us to the ethical theory of Levinas, who considers the other to be inaccessible to and incomprehensible by the self. While Levinas argues that the relation to the other is vital, he too considers language to be a somewhat incomplete form of revealing the 'face' of the other, as it is based in ontology. This notion can be traced throughout his works, but is especially clear in *En Découvrant l'Existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, where he writes that the 'relationship of proximity […] is the original language, language without words or propositions, pure communication', quite clearly privileging non-verbal communication.[33] As such, we can see the insights that Levinas's ethics can bring to studies of how trauma is represented.

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[31] Rosamund Davies, 'Screenwriting Strategies in Marguerite Duras's Script for *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1960)', *Journal of Screenwriting*, 1.1 (2010), 149–73 (p. 165).
[32] Davies, p. 166.
[33] Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis, Phaenomenologica, 100 (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Nijhoff, 1987), p. 119. For a fuller account of Levinas's privileging of non-verbal communication, see Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

As discussed in Chapter 1, many scholars have applied aspects of Levinasian thought to interrogate the ethics of representing trauma. Libby Saxton, working with Holocaust representation theory, and Judith Butler, discussing representations of Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, agree that to convey the Levinasian 'face', representations must not only fail, but show their failure.[34] I also discussed Eleftheria Thanouli's similar conclusion – although not reached via Levinas – that films representing trauma are more ethical when they are self-conscious, reflexive, and resist closure; methods which Thanouli terms 'parapractic'.[35] This discussion elucidated the blurred distinction between the real and the fictional in *Paris est à nous*, and I refer back to it here because of the potential to read the statements of Audrey and Eric as parapractic interventions in the two documentaries discussed in this chapter. Certainly, the statements resist closure by denying the audience a full and explicit image of the attacks. For example, Eric's reference to the families of the deceased can be considered reflexive, as it signals to the audience that viewing experience is not singular and that different viewers will have varying relationships to the events discussed.

However, this does not necessarily encourage the viewer to realise that the documentary, as a form of representation, is a failure: there are a number of other interviewees who make no such proclamations, and do, in fact, share their experiences. Indeed, apart from these moments, the large majority of survivor-witness interviews place the subject directly in steady close-up or medium close-up shots, a technique used often in cinema to illicit identification with the subject. As

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[34] Saxton, p. 11; Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 144.
[35] Eleftheria Thanouli, 'Representing 9/11 in Hollywood Cinema', in *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Politics*, ed. by Yannis Tzioumakis and Claire Molloy (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 302–12 (p. 308).

discussed in Chapter 1, the backdrops of these interviews also reflect the setting in which the subject of each interview experienced their trauma. In *13 novembre*, subjects are placed variably in cafés and bars, in the darkened setting of a concert hall, and in front of a fire station in the case of first responders – Audrey is filmed in a setting which reflects the stands of the concert hall. Similarly, the subjects of *L'Humour à mort* are interviewed in the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, at their respective workspaces – Eric is shown at his desk. We may also remember here that this use of a similar setting draws a similarity between the past event and the present moment, which we saw in Chapter 1 to be an attempt to 'play with time' in order to give viewers the impression that they have unmediated access to the experiences of the survivor-witnesses. As a result, the viewer is not entirely blocked from assuming that they can access, and therefore totalise, the others who they see on screen and their experiences. While the refusals by Eric and Audrey are an important distanciation between viewer and subject in terms of Levinasian ethics, these moments do not unsettle an audience's viewing experience as outlined by Thanouli's post-classical paradigm; or at least not enough to cancel out any totalisation which is present elsewhere in the documentaries. We must, therefore, look beyond this moment of relative self-reflexivity to determine whether these two documentaries do exhibit post-classicism and refer to their own failure to represent throughout their runtime.

Referring to the self

If an ethical approach *can* be encouraged in documentary film through self-reflexive devices and editing, is this achieved in the two documentaries we consider here? The statement of Randolph Lewis which opened this chapter draws attention to two common forms of proximity found in cinema, which Sarah Cooper problematises in

her account of documentary and Levinasian ethics: first- and second-order identification.[36] First-order identification, originally conceptualised by Christian Metz, is identification with the 'grand œil et grande oreille sans lesquels le perçu n'aurait personne pour le percevoir,' which can be understood simultaneously as the camera lens and the filmmaker.[37] This is described in Lewis's terms as 'looking through the eyes of a compassionate filmmaker', suggesting that the distance between the experience of the viewer and filmmaker is closed. The seeing and feeling of the 'faraway lives' in Lewis's article constitute secondary identification, which Metz assigns to identification with the 'characters' of cinematic works.[38]

The identification between viewer and camera or filmmaker is, as Cooper argues, not uncommon. She highlights a 'trend in documentary that aims to mark out the broader import of its individual but infinitely varied subjects' and that by creating the illusion of universalism, 'people are encouraged, through commentary, the images, or accompanying critical discourse, to recognise themselves and their history across geographical and temporal boundaries'.[39] This universalisation, however, borders on the unethical in terms of Levinasian theory in that it renders the perspective of the self/viewer transcendental, a god-like and privileged position which, as we have seen, does not align with the separateness and irreducibility of individuals, nor with the deprivileging of the self in Levinas's thought. A universalised point of view in documentary reduces the historical specificity of an event, and the individuals linked to it, solely to what the viewer perceives, culminating in a totalisation of the self and the other against which Levinas warns.

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[36] Cooper, *Selfless Cinema*, p. 19.
[37] Metz, 'Le Signifiant Imaginaire', p. 34.
[38] Ibid., p. 40.
[39] Cooper, *Selfless Cinema*, p. 1, 2.

As an antidote to this, critic Jay Ruby joins Thanouli, Butler, and Saxton in their calls for increased reflexivity, specifically in documentary filmmaking.[40] Indeed, Bill Nichols suggests that what he terms the 'reflexive mode' of such cinema 'deconstructs the impression of unimpeded access to reality and invites us to reflect on the process by which this impression is itself constructed through editing'.[41] Both Nichols and Cooper argue that to 'call attention to the formal conventions of the documentary film itself' is the principle method by which a documentary can be identified as 'reflexive'; a documentary which veils its own constructed nature allows the viewer to readily identify with the camera lens, whereas the presence of a filmmaker and the device, be it through commentary, camera angle, or editing techniques, reminds the viewer of its distance from the ontological event, and that the viewpoint is actually limited, rather than transcendental.[42]

13 novembre, for instance, combines interviews with victims of the November 13 attacks and specialists with archival footage and infographics detailing the scene at the Bataclan. Cooper focuses her study on the observational documentary, which captures subjects in terms of live action, with the camera placed in a participatory position, creating a proximity between the viewer, the filmmaker, and the subject at once. *13 novembre,* however, is not filmed in an observational mode, but rather an expository mode which, according to Nichols, 'assembles fragments of the historical world […] addresses the viewer directly, with titles or voices that propose a perspective or advance an argument'.[43] This commentary 'is typically presented as distinct from the images of the historical world that

[40] Jay Ruby, 'The Ethics of Imagemaking', in *New Challenges for Documentary*, ed. by Alan Rosenthal (London: University of California Press, 1988), p. 310.
[41] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 3rd edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), p. 125.
[42] Ibid., p. 110.
[43] Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 121.

Figure 5: Archival footage of marches in support of Charlie Hebdo *in* L'Humour à mort

accompany it […] therefore presumed to come from some place that remains unspecified but associated with objectivity or omniscience'.[44] *13 novembre*'s commentary does not come in the form of a narrator, but exists in the arrangement of interviews, archival footage, and infographics, combined to provide a narrative. Without a narrator, nor any significant expositions of the constructed nature of the documentary, the viewer of *13 novembre* is certainly offered a transcendental and totalising position over the others seen on screen.

     L'Humour à mort, by contrast, does feature narration by Daniel Leconte. Although this makes the filmmaker somewhat noticeable, it does not function as a revealing or self-reflexive intervention, primarily due to the fact that the narration includes the third-person plural pronoun 'nous' regularly throughout the documentary. Examples of this are seen as early as the opening shots of the film, which are accompanied by Emmanuel Leconte's narration: 'Après les massacres des 7, 8 et 9 janvier, quelle joie d'être là parmi ce peuple parisien. Nous sommes 4 millions dans les rues de France […] Mais que s'est-il passé pour que nous reconnaissions chez ces dessinateurs de petits bonhommes les dépositaires des

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[44] Ibid., p. 122.

valeurs de la République?' This use of the third-person plural conveniently assumes and implies that all viewers of the film agree that *Charlie Hebdo*'s political ideology represented guardianship of 'les valeurs de la République', bringing the audience subtly but undeniably into the viewpoint of the director. However, it is also notable that these shots are archival footage of the marches in question. All of them are taken from eye level within the crowd, or from the position of people who have scaled lamp posts and traffic lights for a better vantage point. This deliberately draws the audience's point of view in line with that of the filmmaker, and allows the viewer to collapse the separate and individual experiences of the subject, the filmmaker, and the viewer into one reduced and totalised understanding. Again, we see a tendency to offer the other up to the self by placing the viewer in a privileged and omniscient position created by first-order identification with the lens, where elements of self-reflexivity may have combatted such an effect.

In terms of documentary, distance between the viewer and the subject – or second-order identification – is even more vital in terms of Levinasian ethics, as the relation between self/viewer and other/subject is direct. Pointing out the tendency in documentary to universalise historically specific events, Cooper claims that this runs the risk that 'distinctiveness of any one particular experience will be erased' resulting in a loss of separation from the experience of others.[45] This lack in separation between varied experiences is precisely the reduction of the experience of the other into the understanding of the self which Levinas's thought attempts to combat. Unlike fiction film, documentary has more opportunity to avoid this second-order identification, as it does not necessarily rely on the viewer following the point of view of a main character or character group, but instead – particularly in the case

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[45] Cooper, *Selfless Cinema*, p. 2.

of historical documentaries – tends to follow a social issue or historical event more generally. Yet, this is certainly not true for all documentaries. Particularly in the case of documenting terrorist attacks, there is a trend of focusing on the experience of one or a few individual victims. In both *L'Humour à mort* and *13 novembre*, interviews are conducted with a select few survivor-witnesses. We can therefore see how it is entirely possible for documentaries to exhibit totalisation between viewer and subject. As Cooper demonstrates, many documentaries do in fact rely on the illusion of proximity between the viewer and the subject.

Taking *L'Humour à mort* as an example of this, archival footage places the viewer directly into a participatory position from the outset. This is particularly evident in the introductory sequence of the documentary. As discussed above, the opening shots place the viewer among the crowds on the streets of Paris during the marches in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks. The large majority of these shots also comprise smartphone footage or derive from handheld camera news coverage, increasing the immersion of the viewer. The selection of this footage by the Lecontes is by no means accidental. As the events were of international interest, there is a great deal of archival footage from sources which do not provide this participatory position to the viewer, such as that of fixed-camera news coverage. Following this introductory sequence, the viewer continues to be placed in a participatory position through repeated use of home-video footage taken inside the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* before the attacks. For example, we see the employees of the journal working on their drawings, and later dancing and singing together in a bar. The nature of home-video footage puts the viewer directly into the position of the *Charlie Hebdo* employees. This simultaneously allows the viewer unmediated access to the

experience of the other, and may close the distance between viewer and subject entirely.

Figure 6: A large time stamp obscures archival footage in 13 novembre

Although the Naudets also use archival footage, *13 novembre* does not place the viewer in the position of victim in the same way. The archival footage chosen for the docu-series is either shot from a position spatially removed from the victims of the attacks and the action it captures, it is used in slow motion, or it has a time stamp superimposed over the image, refusing the viewer the illusion of unmitigated access to the events from the subject's point of view, and fitting directly into the post-classical paradigm as conceptualised by Thanouli by 'calling explicit attention to the treatment of time and space through editing discontinuities'.[46]

Despite this, there are moments during the docu-series in which the point of view provided to viewers is subtly brought closer to that of the subject. For example, throughout the series, the camera is placed at the sites of the attacks, such as the Bataclan and the Stade de France. During one such shot, the camera is placed outside

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[46] Eleftheria Thanouli, *Post-Classical Cinema: An International Poetics of Film Narration* (London: Wallflower, 2009), p. 141.

of Le Carillon bar in the Saint-Martin area of Paris, where a shooting took place on 13 November 2015. The exterior of the bar is shown in low natural lighting, after dark, reproducing the time of the attack at 21:15. A few seconds into this shot, the viewer hears the sound of a Kalashnikov rifle, and the camera shakes, imitating the startlement of those who were present. Placing the viewer in the geographical location in which these events occurred, reproducing the sound of the attack, and imitating the reaction of those present does, undeniably, give the audience the opportunity to align themselves with those who experienced the attack. However, this reading is complicated slightly by other aspects of the sequence. The sequence is introduced by a large time marker imposed over the image of the café – 21:15 in large white letters – before it slowly fades. These sites are shown completely empty, and always from the exterior. No other supposedly diegetic sound, such as the bustle of the street or music from the bar, accompanies the sequence. This opens up an interesting possibility of offering the audience proximity to the events, while nevertheless drawing attention to the incongruence between the victim's experience and the representation offered to the viewer. Although this draws the viewer closer to the subject, it does not suggest that the viewer has unlimited or parallel access to the experience of the survivor-witness, and therefore retains an element of distance between them. Moreover, during other similar shots which appear earlier, such as the image of the empty and desolate entrance to the Bataclan, or the café neighbouring the Stade de France, audiences hear the testimony of survivor-witnesses as they see these images.

This disjuncture between the sound of testimony and the images of the empty, looming sites where the terrorist attacks occurred recalls other historical depictions of trauma. Alain Resnais's *Nuit et Brouillard* (1956) is one such example.

Released 10 years after the liberation of Europe's concentration camps, the short documentary opens with colour footage of the desolate, abandoned concentration camps shot in 1955, accompanied by narration (Michel Bouquet) describing the architecture and creation of the camps, and the horrific events which occurred there. Sylvie Lindeperg has suggested that Resnais specifically chose a vibrant film stock to shoot his colour sequences in order to contrast the tranquillity of the concentration camps with the horrific events that took place in these locations, as described by Bouquet.[47] This technique is also seen at length in Claude Lanzmann's nine-hour documentary film *Shoah* (1985), which often features still or panning shots of the empty concentration camps captured between 1976 and 1981, alongside audio testimony from Holocaust survivors. Saxton draws a direct connection between Lanzmann's documentary and Levinasian theory, detailing the many aspects of the production which directly align with Levinasian ethics. In fact, in her discussion of *Shoah*, Saxton draws specific attention to the 'disjunctive relationship between voice and image, between the atrocities described by the witnesses and the empty, derelict and deceptively tranquil murder sites to which they return in the present'.[48] This technique, she suggests, grants priority to sound over vision and 'is thus in keeping with Levinas's reflections on the ways in which the *visage* reveals itself and on the prohibition against representation which it expresses'.[49] Despite the very different context, the use of this technique in *13 novembre* produces the same effect. By editing the footage so that audiences see these desolate murder sites while hearing audio from survivor-witness interviews, the Naudets encourage the audience to recognise that these events remain inaccessible and beyond the relation the viewer

[47] Sylvie Lindeperg, *'Nuit et Brouillard': Un Film Dans l'histoire* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 2007).
[48] Saxton, p. 10.
[49] Ibid.

has to the other or survivor-witness, thereby affirming Levinas's claim that the ethical relation is to be found 'au-delà de l'étant dans l'ouvert précisement'.[50]

It therefore becomes clear that, while *L'Humour à mort* is lacking in reflexive techniques and allows proximity between self/viewer and other/survivor-witness, many instances of self-reflexivity can be found in *13 novembre*, which establish at least a partial barrier between the viewer and the experiences of those survivor-witnesses, and thereby, in Levinasian terms, avoid totalising the other. However, *13 novembre* does not exhibit self-reflexivity throughout: cinematic devices such as close-ups and mise-en-scène do continue to indicate the viewer that some level of access is possible.

As has become clear, applying a Levinasian ethical framework can reveal the subtleties of documentaries on terrorism and their complex ethical nuances, and can demonstrate that even works which attempt to safeguard the subjectivity of the survivor-witnesses' experiences may not be successful. What now remains to be discussed is the relation between self and other where the self is the audience, and the other is an individual with which relation and understanding are significantly more complex: namely, the victims who have died as a result of terrorist attacks. As Saxton claims regarding *Shoah*, 'it is through oral testimony that *Shoah* makes manifest the absence of those faces Lanzmann cannot or chooses not to show yet whose experiences remain the central subject of the film: the missing faces of the dead'.[51] While oral testimony of survivor-witnesses is central to *13 novembre* and *L'Humour à mort* as discussed above, the lack of testimony in *Amanda* contributes to its discussion of how we remember those who die during terrorist attacks.

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[50] Levinas, *Totalité et infini*, p. 207.
[51] Saxton, p. 10.

As this chapter has so far focused on documentary, before I analyse the relation between the self (viewer) and the other who has died (victims of terrorism) in *Amanda*, the film's approach to the relation between the self (viewer) and the living other (survivor-witnesses of terrorism) should be discussed. We have seen how analysing portrayals of survivor-witnesses according to Levinasian ethics can highlight the extent to which the self-viewer is encouraged (or discouraged) to see the other-survivor's experience as knowable and accessible. Within *Amanda*, I contend, these experiences are withheld from the audience both visually and narratively.

The film follows 24-year-old David (Vincent Lacoste), a gardener and holiday home letting agent living in Paris. He has a close relationship with his sister Sandrine (Ophélia Kolb), and her seven-year-old daughter Amanda (Isaure Multrier), whose father is absent. David becomes romantically involved with a piano teacher, Lena (Stacey Martin) at the beginning of the film, and their relationship swiftly develops. The lives of all four characters are dramatically disrupted when a terrorist attack at a park leaves Sandrine dead, and Lena badly injured; David, on his way to meet his sister and girlfriend, discovers the scene of the attack after the fact. The remaining eighty minutes of the film follows David as he negotiates his grief, and is left to decide whether he will become Amanda's legal guardian despite his relatively young age. Deciding to make use of plane tickets which Sandrine had bought before her death, David takes Amanda to London to meet her grandmother (his mother), who was estranged from him as a child. The film closes on the image of the Wimbledon park where the three of them meet.

As documentary often relies on testimony from survivor-witnesses – as per *13 novembre* and *L'Humour à mort* – these figures often take centre stage. By

contrast, fictional films which portray the aftermath of terrorism do not rely as heavily – if at all – on witness testimony. In the case of *Amanda*, Lena is the only surviving main character to have witnessed the attack. Despite this, she is not a central character in the film. After her release from hospital, Lena decides to return to her parents' home in Bordeaux to recover, remaining absent for the majority of the film, which instead focuses on the experiences of David. In the time between her release from hospital and her return to Bordeaux, Lena does not discuss her experience of the attack.

Figure 7: Lena exits a voyeuristic moment in Amanda

Insights into her state of mind are only provided in two instances. The first, immediately after she is released from hospital, is as David brings her back to her apartment. As they walk towards her building in medium close-up, she stops David and tells him that she needs to be alone. The following shot sees the pair cross the street to enter her building in long shot, keeping the viewer at a distance from them. We see the pair continue to talk, but we cannot hear what they say. The image then cuts to David in his own apartment washing dishes, and the camera moves subtly to

show him looking out of his window to Lena's apartment, which is visible across the street. The screen cuts to a full point-of-view shot from David's perspective, with Lena's open window in centre frame. Lena sits at a table in her nondescript apartment, lingers for a moment, and then exits the room out of view of the camera.

In this sequence, the lack of expository dialogue explaining her experience and emotions, combined with her escape from the view of David and the audience, evokes the failure to represent the experience of the survivor-witness, which, as we have seen, is central to Levinas's ethics of the other: the film fails to represent Lena's experience as a survivor-witness, and the pointed moment in which she escapes from the view of the audience acknowledges this failure to represent. The scene is set in such a way that audiences might expect to have some access, though distant, to Lena's state of mind via her behaviour. We look into her empty and colourless apartment through a large open window, with the brace on her wounded arm a firm reminder that she is a victim of the attack. Audiences might expect to glimpse a breakdown, tears, anger, or any other suggestion of her emotional response to the attack in this distinctly voyeuristic moment. Instead, almost as soon as we see her, she escapes the shot, the film thereby denying us access to her emotional state following the attack and stifling any expectation of emotional expression.

The second instance where insights are provided into Lena's state of mind occurs when David takes Amanda to the record shop where Lena works. As they leave and stroll down the street, David and Lena are framed in a frontal medium close-up, the camera steadily framing them as they walk. Amanda is on a scooter ahead, out of frame. There is no score, but the diegetic sound of the street accompanies the image. Without any change in shot, a firecracker is set off in the road, beyond the frame. The sound of the detonation startles Lena, causing her to

jump backwards and bump into David; the camera remains steady during these moments. A medium shot with the camera positioned behind David and Lena then follows, showing a group of children running past them and Amanda who continues to scoot ahead. Although we then return to a frontal medium shot of David and Lena, in this moment of post-traumatic stress Lena turns away from the camera, appearing in profile with her hair shielding her face from the audience's view. Lasting only a few seconds, this shot is interrupted by a cut to Amanda in medium-full shot as she turns to realise the disturbance. She moves closer to the camera, stopping in medium close-up. On the one hand, the focus of the viewer in this scene is shifted away from the stress Lena is experiencing, and onto the gaze of Amanda, whose tilted head and intense stare suggest curiosity. On the other hand, the camera's position allows Amanda to look almost directly at the audience, confronting the viewer during a voyeuristic moment.

Figure 8: Amanda reacts to Lena's shock in Amanda

Although we continue to hear David comfort Lena, we no longer see the pair as the camera lingers on Amanda's gaze. Once again, the post-traumatic experience of the survivor-witness is shielded from the viewer, and the film deliberately fails to

represent Lena's emotional state in any detail. The representation of this failure is intensified here, as the medium close-up of Amanda's curious gaze mirrors the gaze of the audience, drawing attention to the voyeuristic quality of representing trauma, and our inability to understand or access the experiences of trauma victims because of their irreducible subjectivity. As such, although the survivor-witness of the attack in *Amanda* is not a central character, the film pointedly does not contain her experience within the confines of the film and it also engages in the reflexive devices championed by parapraxis – the simultaneous failure to represent and representation of that failure – as discussed above. In contrast to *L'Humour à mort* and *13 novembre*, experiences of the survivor-witness in *Amanda* therefore tend to be withheld from the audience in both subtle and reflexive manners.

Remembering victims in *Amanda*

While a clear comparison can be made between the potrayals of survivor-witnesses in these works, *Amanda* also features a victim of terrorism who did not survive the attacks, and with whose death the surviving characters must come to terms. While this chapter has so far focused on the relationship between audience and survivor-witness, as this thesis aims to interrogate the depiction of terrorism more broadly in contemporary French film, it is important to consider the relationship between the self/audience and the other who has died. These two approaches to on-screen relations require nuance, as methods of testimony used with the living survivors of terrorism necessarily cannot apply to those who, through death, remain unable to testify their experience.

The portrayal of those who have died in traumatic circumstances is an area which has, of course, already been widely researched within the fields of Trauma

Theory, Holocaust Studies, and various other fields of Film Studies. Holocaust

Studies provides perhaps the most longstanding discussion of representing those who

have not survived such traumas. As discussed in the Introduction, perhaps one of the

most poignant observations on this topic comes from Holocaust survivor and chemist

Primo Levi, who reminds us that survivor-witnesses, although victims in their own

right, cannot know, understand, or reiterate the experience of those who died,

underlining the individuality of suffering and the need to differentiate between

survivor-witnesses and victims who died.[52] As discussed in the Introduction and

Chapter 1, although the Holocaust is an undeniably unique event, the genesis and

development of scholarship surrounding its portrayal offers many insights which can

be productively applied to representations of other national traumas, such as the

terrorist attacks discussed here. As I indicated in Chapter 1, reference to Holocaust

Studies in this chapter is informed by Michael Rothberg's ground-breaking work

Multidirectional Memory, which explores the possibility for remembrance and

discussion of the Holocaust to 'contribute to the articulation of other histories'.[53] By

considering the questions raised by Holocaust Studies and the theoretical insights it

provides, such as Holocaust representation theory, constructive discussion can be

generated about the films considered here. Are survivor-witnesses and deceased

victims treated distinctly in *Amanda*? We have already seen how an attempt is made

to shield viewers from the survivor-witness's experience of trauma, but is the same

true for the deceased victims? And ultimately, how are deceased victims of terrorism

remembered in the film?

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[52] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, Vintage International Series (Vintage International, 1989), pp. 83–84.
[53] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 6.

As literary and cinematic works in the 1950s began to represent the Holocaust, the question of how to represent the unknowable experience of the dead quickly engendered debate. Cultural critic Theodor Adorno sparked a new generation of thinking about post-war art by claiming that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'.[54] As Cathy Gelbin contends, this was not a prohibition of art in its entirety after the atrocities of National Socialism, but rather an observation on 'the problem of deriving aesthetic pleasure from the Holocaust'.[55] The problem of mimetic reconstruction of the unthinkable was discussed in scholarship from the late 1960s, most notably by George Steiner and Alvin Rosenfeld, but also persisted throughout the late twentieth century as such types of portrayals continued to be produced.[56] For example, as discussed in Chapter 1, French film critic Serge Daney condemned the now famous tracking shot of *Kapò*, in which a Holocaust victim played by Emmanuelle Riva commits suicide by throwing herself against an electric fence, and the camera pans to reframe her lifeless body in a problematically graceful pose.[57] Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) similarly garnered negative attention for its depiction of the experience of Holocaust victims perishing inside a gas chamber (among other problematic elements of the film); an experience which no one had ever survived to describe.[58] Lajos Koltai's *Fateless* (2005) was also subject to heavy criticism of what critics saw as an aestheticisation of the Holocaust, due to the beauty with which the film's cinematographer Gyula Pados captured scenes of

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[54] Theodore W. Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. by R. Tiedemann and R. Livingstone, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 162.
[55] Cathy Gelbin, 'Cinematic Representations of the Holocaust', in *Writing the Holocaust*, ed. by J.M. Dreyfuss and D. Langton, Writing History (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), pp. 26–40 (p. 28).
[56] Gelbin, p. 28.
[57] Serge Daney, 'Le Travelling de *Kapò*', *Trafic*, 4 (1992), 5–19.
[58] Miriam Bratu Hansen, '*Schindler's List* Is Not "Shoah": The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory', *Critical Inquiry*, 22.2 (1996), 292–312.

suffering.[59] Certainly, these discussions can inform thinking about representations of terrorism. Although many scholars have highlighted the theatrical nature of terrorism, which is orchestrated by its perpetrators to garner spectators, the reproduction of this spectatorship and voyeurism through the aestheticisation of the deaths of its victims – like the tracking shot of *Kapò* – remains morally questionable.[60] Furthermore, like the events which occurred inside the gas chambers, it is impossible for those who were not present to know or understand what happens at the site of a terrorist attack. Although the introduction of smartphones has created the possibility for footage of attacks to be spread online and in news media, as seen in the Bataclan attack, these cannot reproduce or represent the experiences of those who died even if they simulate witnessing these deaths. Despite the impossibility of knowing these experiences, the relationship between audiences and those who have died during traumatic events continues to be mediated through reconstruction, usually taking one of two forms. On the one hand, filmmakers continue to reconstruct the experience of the dead from the perspective of the dead themselves, as in films such as *United 93* (Paul Greengrass, 2006), *Utøya: July 22*, and many Holocaust films. Alternatively, their relationship to the audience may be mediated through memory of the deceased as conveyed by survivors or loved ones, as is the case in *Amanda*.

Memory is, in fact, a central theme of *Amanda*. From the first scenes, we are introduced to the themes of memory and memorialisation as key elements of the narrative. In the first sequence, after David drops Amanda off with Sandrine after

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[59] Catherine Coquio, 'La réception d'*Être sans destin* de Lajos Koltai: le scandale et l'énigme', *Revue d'Histoire de la Shoah*, 195.2 (2011), 587–619 (p. 588).
[60] Baudrillard, *L'Esprit du Terrorisme*; *The Age of Spectacular Death*, ed. by Michael Hviid Jacobsen (London: Routledge, 2020).

school, Amanda notices her mother's book, titled *Elvis has left the building*. Asking her mother what the phrase means, Sandrine explains who Elvis Presley was, the effect of his celebrity on his audiences, and how the phrase came to be an expression meaning – in Sandrine's words – 'C'est plus la peine de rester, d'ésperer. C'est fini. C'est plié'. She suggests that they find a clip online of Horace Logan using the phrase for the first time, they watch the clip, and then dance together to Elvis's 1956 song *Don't be Cruel*. The function of memory in this sequence is multifaceted. As Sandrine explains Elvis's celebrity to Amanda, audiences are reminded of the lasting effect that a person can have on the world after their death, introducing both themes of cultural memory and the lasting memory of the dead within the film. Although cultural memory does not feature heavily in the remainder of the film, it is referenced subtly throughout.

Sandrine's explanation of Elvis also introduces the subtle motif of cultural memory passing between generations: just as Sandrine passes down the memory of Elvis, David's friend connects with Amanda over the parlour game *jeu de l'oie*, and Lena explains the ritual of *dégustation* of wine to Amanda, all signalling the transmission of cultural memory from generation to generation. The film also discreetly hints at elements of cultural change due to the memory of traumatic events scattered throughout the narrative. For example, when David visits the school where Sandrine teaches, his bag is searched by a guard at the entrance – a change implemented widely in French society after the 2015 attacks.

Furthermore, Sandrine's explanation of the phrase as a method of relieving people of their need to 'stay' and 'hope', that whatever has preceded the utterance is 'finished' and 'over', evokes the notion of relegating memory of the dead to an aorist existence, one in which the subject is confined to the past – their life is over, there is

no longer any need to stay, the vigil of remaining by an ill or dying loved one is complete. This is complicated, then, when we consider that this phrase was created because of audiences' resistance to the idea of leaving, despite the knowledge that Elvis himself had departed. The choice of Elvis as the celebrity in this scene further reinforces the notion of resistance to letting go, as his death famously sparked a myriad of conspiracy theories amongst the public that he was, in fact, still alive. The resistance against letting go, or giving up on a loved one, not only physically at the time of their death but long afterwards, returns us to the question of memory and memorialisation, and the lasting effect the dead can have on the living. The film deals regularly with the lasting memory of the dead on an individual scale, as Amanda and David both face the lasting memory of Sandrine after her death. This is at its most obvious in two instances during the film, as David attempts to throw away Sandrine's toothbrush and is confronted by Amanda as they struggle to decide whether to keep or throw away the toothbrush, and later in the film as David reminds Amanda of the ritual of eating Paris-Brest for dessert every other day, which was introduced to her by her mother. However, the memory of Sandrine lingers in the subtext of the film, as her death continues to disrupt the lives of both David and Amanda.

Finally, as the mother and daughter dance together to the sound of Elvis's music, a new memory is created in the diegetic present. From the legacy of the dead, new moments of care and responsibility are created within the relationships of the living. These varied elements of memory, as well as setting up a major theme within *Amanda*, build the foundation for a film which is nuanced in its portrayal of victims of terrorism. In the following section, I return to a framework of Levinasian ethics to explore how *Amanda* can be read as an example of cinema which in many ways

deprivileges the self of the viewer and safeguards the irreducible alterity of the other who has died.

Centred around grief which ignites new or renewed responsibility toward the other, the concept of vigilant memory we see in the dance between mother and daughter is prevalent throughout *Amanda*. Beyond David's individual grief for his sister, the plot is driven almost entirely by his newfound responsibility for his niece. In the wake of Sandrine's death, David is left with the responsibility of caring for her daughter: informing Amanda of her mother's death, ensuring that she is fed, that she continues to go to school, and ultimately deciding who will take over guardianship of her until she reaches the age of eighteen. As he reveals to his friend Axel that he is scared about this new responsibility, he discloses that it is not the loss of his freedom as a twenty-four-year-old man which scares him, but fear of failing in his duty of care, as he does not know what to feed her and forgets about her homework. Trivial though these details may seem, they reflect the responsibility which the death of his sister has awoken in him.

David's relationship with Amanda is not the only one which is positively impacted by the death of Sandrine. Before her death, Sandrine informs David that she has arranged for them both to visit their mother Alison (Greta Scacchi), from whom they were estranged during childhood, and who now lives in London. David initially resists the idea of visiting his mother, but tells her that he will come with her to London. Following Sandrine's death, David gradually warms to the idea of reconnecting with his mother, asking his aunt about her and revealing to a journalist that he plans to take Amanda to London. The final scenes of the film take place in London, as David decides to take Amanda to meet Alison. In a park, the two adults converse while Amanda plays, and David explains that his decision to take the trip

was because Sandrine had told him she felt that it was important that Amanda meet her grandmother. Alison responds that she came to tell him that she is there for him, and for Amanda if they need her. Once again, we see how Sandrine's death has awoken David's sense of responsibility not only towards Amanda, but towards his mother, and has highlighted to him his part in allowing Alison to care for Amanda by extension.

The relationship between the surviving characters and the deceased Sandrine here can be read as the anti-aorist, continuing, care-driven type of memory championed by Levinas's ethics. This chapter has already discussed Levinasian ethics in terms of the relation between the self (audience) and the living other (survivor-witnesses), and has explored Levinas's objections to totalisation of the other through representation. However, Levinas's attitude to the relation between the self and the other who has died is slightly different. As a philosopher whose work was dedicated to Judaism and the atrocities of the twentieth century, Levinas's writings on death (such as 'Mourir pour…' and *Totalité et infini*) mostly refer to biblical discussions of the dead, and the lives taken by the National Socialists during the twentieth century.[61] Although he uses examples from these areas to reinforce his ethical theory, his concept of the relation between the living self and the other who has died is applicable to many different periods of history. Whereas, as we saw earlier, he contends that the representation of the living other amounts to unethical totalisation, he suggests that mournful memory is necessarily dedicated to the alterity of the other who has died. This apparently contradicts the idea that representation of the other within the mind of the self is totalisation, and therefore unethical, and also

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[61] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Mourir Pour...', in *Entre Nous: Essais Sur Le Penser-à-l'autre*, Biblio Essais, 7th edn (France: Grasset, 2016), pp. 204–14; Levinas, *Totalité et infini*.

presents difficulties when considered alongside Levi's suggestion that even survivor-witnesses cannot understand or speak about the experience of the dead. If representation of the other is unethical, then how can the reverse be true for the other who has died?

To explain this difference in attitude, it is productive to turn to Levinas's essay 'Mourir pour…' in *Entre Nous*, in which he challenges Heidegger's suggestion that mournful behaviour is ineffectual, and also the existentialist notion that mournful behaviour is enacted by the living because of the dread of the self's own death, privileging the self over the other. Particularly, Levinas disputes Heidegger's suggestion that in death, 'all relations [of the person who has died] to any other *Dasein* have been undone'.[62] Instead, for Levinas, death has the potential to

> se réveiller en guise de résponsabilité pour l'autre homme […] où le 'pour l'autre' déborde la simple Für-sorge s'exerçant dans un mode où les autres, autour des choses, *sont* ce qu'ils font […] où l'inquiétude pour la mort d'autrui passe avant le souci pour soi.[63]

Essentially, for Levinas, the radical unknowability of death and the concern which it arouses in the self are necessarily dedicated to alterity. Levinas's specific referral to the act of being 'gathered round things' signals his criticism of certain types of memory and memorialisation, particularly the tendency to reduce the memory of the dead to artifacts and souvenirs, which, as R. Clifton Spargo highlights, is filtered through the lens of the survivor or historian.[64] Incidentally, this type of memorialisation is signalled in *Amanda* by the repeated panning shots of Paris' monuments which David cycles past during the film. These moments make distinct reference to an early scene where David and Sandrine race each other through the

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[62] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 294.
[63] Levinas, 'Mourir pour…', p. 213.
[64] R. Clifton Spargo, *Vigilant Memory: Emmanuel Levinas, the Holocaust, and the Unjust Death* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 46.

city by bicycle. They pay no attention to their surroundings, and the camera focuses instead on the siblings and their joy. Further to this reference, the transitory yet contemplative nature of shots of monuments – the historical context and function of which we are not given in the film – contrasts strongly with the deeply personal and intimate forms of memory which David and Amanda experience throughout the rest of the film. The score which accompanies them does not differ from that which plays in the moments before and following their appearance and varies from slow and whimsical to fast-paced and dramatic. The same is true of the lighting used, which matches that present throughout the wider sequences, and is almost entirely natural throughout the film. Fleeting and unobtrusive though these moments may be, they function as a motif within the film.

Figure 9: A fleeting shot of the Fontaine de la Porte-Dorée in Amanda

The first example occurs a few seconds before David arrives at the scene of the attack. Cycling to the Bois de Vincennes to meet his friends, we see a montage of the streets he navigates. He first passes the Fontaine du Château-d'Eau at Place Félix-Éboué, which is shown briefly, and not in full, as the camera pans around its ornate bronze lion sculptures. Then we see the Fontaine de la Porte-Dorée and its

statue of the Greek goddess Athena shown in full as the camera, now stationary, follows David as he cycles past and out of frame. The score is upbeat, whimsical and light-hearted. The camera remains on the monument for a brief moment after David exits the frame. The second instance occurs sometime after the attack, and Sandrine's death, as David cycles to a meeting with a social worker to discuss who will take legal guardianship of Amanda. As he passes the Le Triomphe de la République monument at the Place de la Nation, the camera cuts from a frontal medium close-up of David on his bicycle to a panning shot of the monument and surrounding garden, before cutting again to a slightly closer view of the monument's statue as seen through the surrounding trees. The score here is very similar to that heard in the previous instance: whimsical, slightly slower than in the previous shot of a monument, and could be described as melancholy. The final occurrence is shown much later in the film, as David cycles back to his apartment after dropping Amanda off at his aunt's in the evening, and passes the Fontaine de Rambouillet at the Place du Colonel Bourgoin. In the low natural lighting of the evening the fountain is difficult to discern, and likely not instantly recognisable to many viewers, in spite of the slow panning shot. In this instance, the score is fast-paced, reflecting the urgency David feels as he decides to travel to Bordeaux to see Lena.

Although they punctuate the film at its most intense moments, there is a general lack of consensus as to their meaning, and the effect of these shots can certainly be interpreted in many ways. In her *Cahiers du Cinéma* review, Florence Maillard identifies a contrast between the 'glissements à velo' and 'la beauté des lumières changeantes' and the sombre subject of a terrorist attack.[65] In *Le Monde*,

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[65] Florence Maillard, '*Amanda* de Mikhaël Hers: Grand Garçon et Petite Fille', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 749 (2018), 46–48 (p. 46).

Véronique Cauhapé reads such elements as an image of 'Paris, où la vie continue, où les terrasses de café sont pleines, où les rues défilent à la grâce d'une promenade à bicyclette'.[66] Reviews in publications such as *Positif*, *Libération* or *Les Inrockuptibles*, however, make no mention of such aspects.[67] In the interviews with the director Mikhaël Hers and actor Vincent Lacoste included in the film's press kit, Claire Vassé asks about whether these bicycle rides signify the reclaiming of Paris after the attacks. While both discuss reclaiming Paris after national trauma in a general manner, neither indicates this as intentional, or mentions the bicycle rides or these shots in particular.[68] Hers repeatedly suggests in interviews that the film is not meant to be about real-world events, and the English-language press kit states outright that 'this is the whole point of Mikhaël Hers' film: it is not a film about November 13'.[69] What is clear, in contrast, is how different these moments are from the rest of the film: not only, as reviews suggest, with regard to their aesthetic nature set against a traumatic event, but in the nature of memory they convey. While the panning and pensive shots of memorials and statues may remind us of national, collective, and public forms of memory and the objects designed to consecrate them in a more general sense, the intensely private and individual manner in which David and Amanda's memory of Sandrine is approached contrasts with them starkly.

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[66] Véronique Cauhapé, '*Amanda*: Chronique de La Vie d'après', *Le Monde*, 2018 <https://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2018/11/21/amanda-chronique-de-la-vie-d-apres_5386334_3476.html> [accessed 3 January 2022].

[67] Louise Dumas, '*Amanda*, Mikhaël Hers: Ne pas quitter les lieux', *Positif*, 693 (2018), 54; Marcos Uzal, '*Amanda*, Tentative de Drame Post-Attentat', *Libération*, 2018 <https://www.liberation.fr/cinema/2018/11/20/amanda-tentative-de-drame-post-attentat_1693246/> [accessed 3 January 2022]; Gérard Lefort, '*Amanda*: Un Magnifique Film Sur Les Attentats et La Résilience', *Les Inrockuptibles*, 2018 <https://www.lesinrocks.com/cinema/amanda-182913-16-11-2018/> [accessed 3 January 2022].

[68] Claire Vassé, '*Amanda*: Dossier de Presse Français' (Pyramide Films, 2018), pp. 5, 8 <http://distrib.pyramidefilms.com/pyramide-distribution-catalogue/amanda.html> [accessed 8 January 2022].

[69] Claire Vassé, '*Amanda*: English Press Kit' (Pyramide Films, 2018) <http://distrib.pyramidefilms.com/pyramide-distribution-catalogue/amanda.html> [accessed 8 January 2022]. This section is not included in the French press kit.

This juxtaposition between memory as material legacy whereby a person is memorialised by physical items (through the acts of gathering around them or passing them down to the next generation), and a more care-bound memory which expresses itself in relationships in the present is, perhaps unknowingly, referenced in the film's press kit. In the interview, Vassé asks Hers about the opening scene in which Amanda waits alone outside her school for David, who is running late, and how this moment prefigures her mother's forthcoming absence. In response, Hers suggests that this opening scene foregrounds the development of the pair's relationship, and thereby constitutes 'une façon de parler de la […] paternité accidentelle, par **héritage**'.[70] The idea of heritage (or inheritance, as it is translated in the English-language version of the press kit), used to describe material possessions and land passed down through generations, is ascribed here instead to Amanda herself, David's new-found fatherhood, and the new relationship dynamic borne of Sandrine's death. Incidental though this choice of lexis might be, the shift of focus away from material legacy and inheritance in favour of a focus on David's new-found responsibility towards his niece and mother reflect a form of vigilant, care-bound memory based upon responsibility towards the other, which when read through a Levinasian framework reveals itself as potentially more ethical.

Spargo's reading of *Mourir pour…* suggests that in Levinasian ethics, '[a]ny sentiment or act of memory defining the other through a recognised and fixed emotional determination has already surrendered the force of the other's alterity […] allowing the other who has died to become nothing but past'.[71] In opposition to this aorist version of memorialisation, Spargo sees in Levinas's work a reversal of the

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[70] Vassé, '*Amanda*: Dossier de Presse Français', p. 4, emphasis mine.
[71] Spargo, p. 46.

'commonsensical conclusion that the community of the living must bestow meaning upon the dead' instead arguing that in death, the other who has died is 'the one who begets the movement of *e-motion* […] who assigns meaning unto the self – the other's expressiveness seeming no longer annihilated in death but referred, as it were, to the radical unknown of death as departure'.[72] In more concrete terms, Levinas denounces recollective acts of memory, which treat the other who has died as a fixed and knowable being, such as monuments and museums. He does, however, see memory as ethical when those acts of memory come from a place in which the self is deprivileged, in which the self's 'fundamental inexperience with regard to death' is emphasised, in which the self is inspired towards ethics through 'inquiétude pour la mort d'autrui'.[73] Spargo calls this 'vigilant memory', which refers us back to the Latin root of the words 'vigilant', meaning careful, and 'vigil', meaning devotional watching and wakefulness. The key component of these meanings is the concept of care for the other, rather than privilege of the self, which is central to Levinasian ethics, and which are central in *Amanda*. These active, devotional, care-bound concepts further reinforce Spargo's concept of vigilant memory as a specifically Levinasian idea, which orients memory towards the other rather than the self, foregrounding care for the life (and death) of the other over that of the self. Ultimately, the 'vigilance' of memory in Levinasian ethics requires acts of memory to avoid fixing the life of the dead in the past, and ensuring that the dead remain expressive even after death by igniting in the living a sense of care for and responsibility toward the other.

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[72] Ibid., pp. 46–47, emphasis original. Spargo's use of the term 'e-motion' highlights that the emotion elicited by grief is one which inspires care in a continual, proactive, evolving sense.

[73] Spargo, p. 47; Levinas, 'Mourir pour…', p. 213.

However, as previously discussed, Levinas was not primarily concerned with the ethics of media and representations. The theorisation of memory in his original texts is firmly based in the real world of relationships. If we are to read cinematic portrayals of memory according to Levinasian ethics, we must therefore take this into account: rather than solely discussing funerary behaviour and eulogising, we also need to acknowledge that these acts are represented for an audience, and solidified in a moment on film. The relationship is no longer between the dead and the rememberer, but also the viewer. Here, it is productive to return to Levinas's 1948 essay 'La Réalité et son Ombre'. In Chapter 1, I discussed this in conjunction with Deleuzian theory as a framework for understanding the tendency in representations of terrorism to summon past events into the present, drawing upon their shared belief that artwork (here film) creates its own temporality, a 'moment without past and without future'.[74] As seen in the previous chapter, in 'La Réalité et son Ombre', Levinas argues that art is incompatible with ethics precisely because it suspends its subject in a virtual temporality; it becomes a 'vie sans vie'.[75] As a result, this complicates the idea of vigilant memory, which is ethically permissible when the other (who has died) is not treated in an aorist way and is allowed to continually express itself by igniting in the living a responsibility toward the other. If, as Levinas suggests in 'La Réalité et son Ombre', art relegates the memory of the dead to a virtual temporality 'without future', and makes of the deceased a derivative life which is not its own master, then by consequence outward memory of the dead in cinema cannot be considered ethical by a Levinasian standard. Consequently, while the interpersonal relationships between the surviving characters of *Amanda* and the

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[74] Richard A Cohen, 'Levinas on Art and Aestheticism: Getting "Reality and Its Shadow" Right', *Levinas Studies*, 11.1 (2016), 149–94 (p. 177).

[75] Levinas, 'La Réalité et son Ombre', p. 781.

deceased Sandrine are evidently very delicately presented, the audience's positioning in relation to memory of Sandrine can be questioned. Ultimately, we need to consider the extent to which Sandrine, as an individual, is presented to the audience as a fixed entity and therefore her existence solidified within the film's virtual temporality.

Unlike many films which broach such topics, *Amanda* does not comprise of any memorialisation of the victims of terrorism through outward mournful or funerary behaviour, such as memorial services, gatherings, or vigils. No reference is made to Sandrine's funeral or burial, there are no images of memorials to the victims of the attack as seen in *Hotel Mumbai* (Anthony Maras, 2018), and the film is not dedicated to the victims of terrorism as in *World Trade Centre* (Oliver Stone, 2006). *Amanda* does not contain any scenes of, or even reference to, 'un mode où les autres, autour des choses' remember the dead.[76] In fact, discussion of Sandrine's death itself is almost entirely kept off-screen, and out of earshot of the viewer.

It is perhaps, in part, the position of the eponymous Amanda which gives the film this particularly unique dimension in comparison to other films about terrorism, as her age often frames the audience's understanding of events in the narrative. The film functions with a subjective perspective based on David's experience, and yet his emotional progression, experiences and thought processes are rarely explained. Although *Amanda* focuses on his experience after his sister's death, there is only one moment when he vocalises his emotions, as he speaks to his friend Axel about his fears of failing to take care of Amanda. The rest of the film is punctuated with medium and full close-ups of David which show his facial expressions – thoughtful stares, joyful smiles, and even an outburst of tears – and yet these moments are

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[76] Levinas, 'Mourir pour…', p. 213.

presented to the audience without explanation, expository dialogue, and for the most part without extradiegetic score to suggest his inner emotions. We can again see a reflection of Levinas's ethics in this treatment of the character, as the self/audience is not placed in an omniscient position of privilege. However, beyond the ethics of the depiction of David's character, this lack of exposition of his emotions and experience also functions as a barrier between the audience and any possible exhibition of Sandrine's death, the terrorist attack itself, and the related events audiences might expect to learn of in a film about terrorism. Rather than focusing on expository dialogue between adult characters, who in films about traumatic and sudden deaths often relay facts about the deaths and describe their emotions for the benefit of the audience, *Amanda* presents these moments in a perhaps more impartial manner, providing only simple facts when they would naturally be verbally expressed in such a situation.

As David arrives at the scene of the attack after the fact, the audience remains unaware of Sandrine and Lena's fate. During the subsequent brief hospital scene, he lends his mobile phone to a woman and her daughter. He does not speak, and so reveals no information about the fates of Sandrine or Lena. The audience only learns of Sandrine's death in the following sequence, in which David returns to her apartment to wait for Amanda to wake up. He takes her on a walk and tells her what has happened to her mother as they sit on a bench. As a result of Amanda's young age, David's description of Sandrine's death is simple and uncomplicated. He tells her that at the park, there were men with weapons, and that those men shot many people, including her mother. Amanda asks why they shot people, and when she will be able to see her mother again. David responds that she will not see her mother again, because she is dead. The description remains factual, and only the essential

information is given. Although David cries during this conversation, the camera during the scene remains steady, and no extradiegetic sound or music is used. As the scene takes place in the early morning, there is no ambient sound, only the voices of David and Amanda.

This is the only description of Sandrine's death given throughout the film which is audible to the viewer. The other characters David encounters after Sandrine's death seem to have learned of her passing off-camera. For example, following the attack, his aunt asks him 'Comment c'est possible, une chose pareille?', suggesting that she knows what has happened, and elsewhere when he meets a friend in a café and they wait to hear news of her husband, the lack of reference made to Sandrine's death could infer it was previously discussed. There is, however, a later scene where David seems to inform a friend of Sandrine's death. In the street David encounters Lydia, his and Sandrine's mutual friend. When she enquires about Sandrine, he does not initially reveal to her that she has died. After a brief conversation, Lydia then walks away from David and the camera to the other side of the square, remaining in shot. The camera follows David in frontal medium close-up as he begins to walk in the opposite direction, but he stops and turns to look over his shoulder, and suddenly runs from the camera, which remains stationary. A dialogue between the two then takes place which the audience can see, but not hear, as the camera remains in its original position with the pair filmed in long shot. We can assume from their body language that he is informing Lydia of Sandrine's death – he speaks, she covers her mouth and then embraces him – but viewers have no knowledge of what is said or even if he is in fact informing her of Sandrine's passing. As a result, representation of Sandrine's death is visually and orally absent from the film, apart from David's brief, factual description to Amanda. Whereas the

majority of cinematic portrayals of death and mourning contain entire scenes or at least some reference to funerals, wakes, and burials, the absence of this behaviour in *Amanda* directs the viewers' attention away from the fact of Sandrine's death. Rather than a fixation on how the victims of terrorism have died and what they may have experienced, *Amanda* instead stifles any expectation of expository dialogue regarding Sandrine's death. As well as deprivileging David's emotional turmoil in favour of a care-bound concept of memory, the viewer's position is therefore also deprivileged, and knowledge of Sandrine's death is reserved for her on-screen family and loved ones. Such frustration of comfortable, omnipresent narration for audiences subverts any expectations of visual closure, and instead of fixating on Sandrine's death, audiences can only consider her passing in terms of the effects it has had on the living, evoking once again the care-driven quality of vigilant memory.

Furthermore, beyond the absence of Sandrine's death on screen, there is in fact very little discussion of her life. Whereas box-office successes which deal with the topic of grief after deaths through terrorism – such as *Reign over Me* (Mike Binder, 2007), *World Trade Centre* (Oliver Stone, 2006), *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (Stephen Daldry, 2011) and *22 July* (Paul Greengrass, 2019) – tend to include dialogue in which grieving survivors and family members eulogise the victims of attacks, reminding audiences of the deceased's place in the world and what they achieved in their life, discussion of the dead in *Amanda* remains factual. After David's explanation of her death to Amanda, Sandrine's life is not mentioned in any significant detail. One scene shortly after his explanation sees him take Amanda to his aunt's apartment, where he puts her to bed. His aunt asks if Amanda has managed to fall asleep and if she talked about her mother, to which he replies, 'Non, je n'ai pas besoin d'en parler non plus'. In the few instances following this

whereby David's friends ask how Amanda is doing, he reveals repeatedly that she does not talk about Sandrine, even when prompted.

Later on, David meets with a journalist who is collecting 'portraits' of the victims of the attacks. He begins the interview by revealing only information about Sandrine in the present and future; her mother is English, and he plans to use the tickets she had bought to go to London the following weekend with Amanda. In shot-countershot style, the interview continues as the journalist asks questions about Sandrine. When the journalist notes that he had not told her that Sandrine had a child, he asks 'En quoi ça regarde vos lecteurs?' She attempts to explain that the idea of the piece she is writing is to 'raconter l'histoire de ces gens qui étaient comme vous et moi'. Hearing this, David tells her that the interview should stop, that he has changed his mind. The shot changes to a medium shot of the two from the side, and David stands up, places some change on the table to pay for his coffee, and leaves without offering any further explanation of why he does not want to continue with the interview. The camera lingers, still in medium shot, on the journalist sitting alone at the table, with only the diegetic sounds of the café accompanying the image. Although the technical aspects of the scene are relatively traditional – shot-countershot editing, centred framing, and medium shots of the café – the dialogue here presents an opportunity for reflexivity. As David interrogates the need for readers to learn about the details of Sandrine's life, audiences are invited to question their own unease at his unwillingness to disclose this information. The journalist's description of her project to recount the stories of the dead simultaneously conjures similar media and news stories in the wake of real-world terrorist attacks such as those in Paris in 2015, and also the cinematic compulsion to create these biographies both in fiction and documentary format. The lingering shot of the journalist at the

table alone which concludes the scene mirrors the potential confusion of viewers, whose expectation of eulogisation has not only been left unfulfilled, but has also been directly questioned by the mourning family of the victim. As such, this scene represents the culmination of the film's refusal to exhibit Sandrine as a victim of terrorism for the viewer. The audience knows that this is the cause of her death, but is consistently reminded that both the details of this death and the full extent of her life are not collapsible into the film itself. In this sense, Sandrine's life and death are not relegated to the aorist or virtual temporality of the film.

This lack of recollective memory of Sandrine and eulogisation of her life has led critics to call the film 'unsentimental' and 'oddly devoid of passion or psychological nuance'.[77] While this may create an unfamiliar viewing experience for audiences who are accustomed to eulogisation of the dead in such films, this approach reflects several central tenets of Levinasian ethics. One the one hand, the film's guarding of the inner emotions of its living characters – David and Amanda – demonstrates the acknowledgement of the inaccessibility of the (living) other, which, as we saw in the first section of this chapter, is a key component of an ethical relation in Levinasian thought. On the other hand, this avoids the relegation of Sandrine's life to an aorist or virtual temporality for the benefit of the audience. As her life before death is not featured in any significant way during the film, it is not committed to the memory of the film (as it were), and does not enter into the virtual reality of the film-as-artefact. Instead, by focusing on the lasting memory of Sandrine in David and Amanda's lives, and the impact her death has on David's

[77] Tara Brady, '*Amanda*: An Unsentimental Film, Especially in Its Treatment of Children', *Irish Times*, 2020 <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/amanda-an-unsentimental-film-especially-in-its-treatment-of-children-1.4111112> [accessed 24 April 2021]; Stephen Dalton, '*Amanda*: Film Review | Venice 2018', *Hollywood Reporter*, 2018 <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/amanda-review-1138516> [accessed 24 April 2021].

present relationships, Sandrine's character is afforded the expressive, future-driven quality of memory which is championed by Levinasian ethics as discussed in this chapter. As we have seen, this also encourages audiences to interrogate and question their own involvement and fascination with the lives and deaths of victims of terrorism who, like Sandrine, they did not know personally, reflecting the post-classical and reflexive qualities of ethical representation as discussed in Chapter 1 and the start of this chapter.

Conclusion

13 novembre, L'Humour à mort and *Amanda* all foreground the survivor-witnesses and victims – fictional or real – of terrorism. Despite differences in format, style, and approach, these three productions all raise – and in some cases, explore – questions of ownership of the experience of terrorism and the ethics surrounding representations of these events, and their aftermath, on screen. The expository documentary mode of *L'Humour à mort* and *13 novembre* place an emphasis on the testimony of the survivor-witnesses of the real-world terrorist attacks of January and November 2015, approaching the subject of representing terrorism in a didactic manner. *Amanda* differs from these works not only in its form as a fiction film, but also in that it meditates on the survivor-witnesses and victims of terrorism through their friends and relatives, rather than directly.

One of the key elements that separates these works is the extent to which their audiences are given the impression of access to the experience of terrorism. While *L'Humour à mort* for the most part presents the experiences of survivor-witnesses as accessible to audiences and collapses the distance between viewer and survivor-witness, *13 novembre* deploys several devices which maintain at least

partial distance between viewers and the survivor-witnesses interviewed. However, both films are underpinned by stylistic qualities which recreate the physical setting in which survivor-witnesses experienced their trauma, which, even beyond a Levinasian reading, reminds us of the issues of representing the unrepresentable as highlighted in much scholarship on Holocaust cinema. Because these films suggest to audiences that they can access the experience of terrorism through a resurfacing of the historical moment in the present, they arguably privilege the viewer's entertainment and understanding over the survivor-witnesses' ownership of and privacy regarding their experience. By comparison, the experience of Lena in *Amanda* is held at a much greater distance from audiences, who learn very little about the attack from her. As we have seen, narrative choices, camera angles, editing techniques and shot scale are utilised there as reflexive and distancing devices, and disallow audiences any access to Lena's emotions in the aftermath of the attack, thereby privileging the alterity of the survivor-witnesses' experience over that of the viewer.

These works also fundamentally differ in their treatment of the victims of terrorism who do not survive. While *13 novembre* avoids representation of the deceased victims of terrorism almost entirely, *L'Humour à mort* represents them through home videos and archival interview footage as part of a didactic, expository mode of documentary. This, while not commenting overtly on the experience of the deceased during the terrorist attack, has a two-fold effect. On one hand, this draws the audience's viewing experience closer to the experience of the survivor-witnesses, as viewers are given access to home-video taken in the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*. On the other hand, this reduces the lives of the deceased victims solely to their political activism and legacy, as interviews with the cartoonists are used to explain the

background of the attack. The deceased victim of terrorism in *Amanda*, by contrast, is both central to and absent from the film. While Sandrine is not discussed in great detail, as we have seen, her death continues to drive the narrative forward as David and Amanda negotiate their grief and memory of her. To a much greater extent than the other two films considered here, however, *Amanda* negotiates the memory and portrayal of the deceased victim of terrorism with delicacy. Her life and the facts of her death are guarded from the audience, and her legacy is presented not through material or fixed notions such as funerals or objects, but through the creation and strengthening of the relationships of the friends and relatives she leaves behind. This arguably counteracts – to a certain extent – the problem of fixing the lives of the deceased victims of terrorism on the cinema screen. While *13 novembre* avoids this aorist fixation by choosing not to portray the deceased victims at all, and *L'Humour à mort* participates in relegating the lives of the dead to an aorist existence, *Amanda* withholds Sandrine from the screen and dialogue while still honouring her legacy.

Such significant differences in approach notwithstanding, *13 novembre*, *L'Humour à mort* and *Amanda* all constitute varied and complex approaches to portraying survivor-witnesses and victims of terrorism, at a time when these figures remain under great scrutiny in France and French media. While these portrayals each individually have strengths and pitfalls, they nevertheless all raise, and in the case of *Amanda* may begin to answer, new questions surrounding the representation of trauma of those affected by terrorism, and the (dis)similarities between collective and individual trauma.

3. Subjectivity of the Figure of the Terrorist in *La Désintégration* and *Le Jeune Ahmed*

The first and second chapters of this thesis focused respectively on the portrayal of the act of terrorism itself, and the portrayal of victims and survivor-witnesses of terrorism. They considered the ethics of portraying the event and the experience of terrorism with reference to Levinas's ethical theory, concluding for the most part that the experience of the viewer, or the self, remains privileged in the works discussed. This chapter now builds upon my discussion of the ethics of portraying terrorism by considering how individuals who commit such acts of terrorism have been portrayed.

In recent years, terrorism has become an area of burgeoning interest among French filmmakers, and this thesis aims, ultimately, to analyse the recent films which broach this subject. Such an analysis would not be complete without giving due attention to the construction of the figure of the terrorist in these films. On the one hand, some of these films feature no victims of terrorist acts, such as *Made in France* and *L'Adieu à la nuit*, which will be discussed in Chapter 4. However, this chapter will consider two films which feature terrorist figures who do harm others and, in some cases, kill: *La Désintégration* and *Le Jeune Ahmed*. As such, the analysis conducted for this chapter encounters difficulty in terms of ethics: what kind of ethical and moral considerations arise when films elicit or encourage empathy for terrorists?

As this chapter will show, the question of how and whether one should empathise with the terrorist figures has attracted academic debate for many decades. The landmark text *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism* by Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass, was among the first to foreground what they call the 'taboo' surrounding the figure of the terrorist, who is treated as 'the

paradigm of inhuman bestiality, the quintessential proscribed or tabooed figure of our times'.[1] Many academics have since turned their attention to the paradoxical fascination often displayed with the terrorist figure and ignorance shown towards their subjectivity. Political scientist Richard Jackson identifies in this a faulty inference: 'we look at what they do and extrapolate from there: they commit inhuman acts, therefore they must be inhuman'.[2] Professor of Literatures, Michael C. Frank, suggests that 'voices of terrorists themselves are usually silenced. As a rule, terrorism experts speak *about* terrorists, not *with* the actors thus described'.[3] As a result, the figure of the terrorist in Western media has typically been 'dehumanized, demonized, and most importantly, depoliticized in the process'.[4]

As such, the key aim of this chapter is to address this 'taboo' surrounding the terrorist figure, to make space in the analysis of portrayals of this figure for the subjectivity of individuals who commit terrorism, and to consider how, and indeed *if*, the ethical theory of Levinas discussed previously can address the taboo of the terrorist figure. As we will see, Levinasian theory does, in some cases, leave space for judgement of the other as good or bad, which arguably therefore permits the demonisation of the terrorist figure. The chapter will therefore incorporate the work of other theorists, such as French philosopher Alain Badiou and Slovenian

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[1] Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables and Faces of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 6. I am indebted to Maria Flood and Michael C. Frank, whose 2019 conference 'The Figure of the Terrorist in Literature, Film and Media' introduced me to this text. Their guidance since then has informed a great deal of the thought in this and the following chapter of this thesis.

[2] Richard Jackson, 'Afterword', in *Confessions of a Terrorist* (London: Zedd Books, 2015), pp. 317–22 (p. 318).

[3] Michael C. Frank, 'Terrorist Self-Fashioning: Politics, Identity and the Making of "Martyrdom" Videos—From the 7/7 Bombers to Four Lions', in *Imaging Identity: Text, Mediality and Contemporary Visual Culture*, ed. by Johannes Riquet and Martin Heusser (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), pp. 237–58 (p. 239, emphasis original).

[4] Richard Jackson, 'Sympathy for the Devil: Evil, Taboo, and the Terrorist Figure in Literature', in *Terrorism and Literature*, ed. by Peter C. Herman, Cambridge Critical Concepts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 377–94 (p. 382).

philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who emphasise the importance of acknowledging the networks of violence within which terrorists act in order to recognise their political subjectivity.

Figuration of the terrorist from France to Belgium

Notably, unlike the other films considered in this thesis, *La Désintégration* and *Le Jeune Ahmed* draw connections between France and Belgium. In *La Désintégration*, although the radicalisation of young Muslims is set in Lille, the characters and narrative cross the border as they commit an attack on the NATO headquarters in Brussels. Similarly, although it was filmed and set in Belgium, Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne cite the various terrorist incidents across France and Belgium alike as their inspiration for *Le Jeune Ahmed*, and compare their film to works shot in, financed by, and set in France such as *Made in France*, *Adieu à la nuit*, and *Le Ciel attendra*.[5] These two films are therefore extremely significant, not only because they invite us to see the figure of the terrorist in a more subjective manner, but also because they draw direct attention to the connection between the Arab and Muslim populations of France and Belgium.

While Belgium has its own torrid past as a colonial empire, most of its Arab and Muslim population did not originally migrate from its former colonies, such as the Congo or Rwanda and Burundi. Unlike other European countries, Belgium did not recruit labour after the Second World War from its empire, and until the 1960s most immigrants in Belgium came from European countries such as Italy and

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[5] Aurore Engelen, 'Jean-Pierre et Luc Dardenne, Réalisateurs de *Le Jeune Ahmed*: "L'enfant est plus radical que les radicaux"', *Cineuropa*, 2019 <https://cineuropa.org/fr/interview/372135/> [accessed 8 June 2021]; Etienne Sorin and Marie-Noëlle Tranchant, 'Jean-Pierre et Luc Dardenne: "On Ne Regarde Pas *Le Jeune Ahmed* Comme Une Victime"', *Le Figaro*, 2019 <https://www.lefigaro.fr/festival-de-cannes/jean-pierre-et-luc-dardenne-on-ne-regarde-pas-le-jeune-ahmed-comme-une-victime-20190520> [accessed 8 March 2021].

Germany.[6] In 1964, Belgium requested workers from Morocco and Turkey, and in 1969 and 1970 agreements were signed with Tunisia and Algeria to recruit manpower.[7] As such, the Arab and Muslim population in Belgium increased significantly, with Morocco sending the most people to live and work there.[8] As a result, immigrant populations in Belgium were, oddly, largely composed of individuals and families from former French colonies which had only gained independence a few years prior. This created a strange environment for Maghrebi diaspora in Belgium, who had largely immigrated from the recently liberated Maghreb region into a country which itself had been a colonial empire until recently, and which continued to display public pride in its own *mission civilisatrice*.

Belgian exploitation and violence within the Congo are well documented, particularly during the era of the Congo Free State (1885–1908) established by King Leopold II.[9] The majority of the Free State's revenues were derived from the export of rubber, and a system was implemented which led to famine, 'effective slavery', private theft, and the death of several million Congolese natives.[10] Renton, Seddon, and Zeilig suggest in *The Congo: Plunder and Resistance* that although the Free State is often considered – particularly in British accounts – to be the most violent period of Belgium's colonisation, this era had a lasting effect and left a legacy of violence long after it had come to a close. Forced labour continued in different forms, the assassination of Patrice Lumumba – which Renton, Seddon, and Zeilig

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[6] Thérèse De Raedt, 'Muslims in Belgium: A Case Study of Emerging Identities', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 24.1 (2004), 9–30 (p. 14). For a fuller discussion on European immigrants in Belgium, see Anne Morelli, *Histoire Des Étrangers et de l'immigration En Belgique, de La Préhistoire à Nos Jours*, EVO Histoire (Brussels: Editions Vie Ouvrière, 1992).
[7] De Raedt, p. 14.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Not only for francophone audiences, but so too for anglophone audiences as the issue was popularised by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899).
[10] Robert Harms, 'The World Abir Made: The Margina-Lopori Basin, 1885-1903', *African Economic History*, 12 (1983), 125–39; David Renton, David Seddon, and Leo Zeilig, *The Congo: Plunder and Resistance* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007), pp. 3, 26, 40.

controversially attribute to inference from America and Belgium – led immediately to civil war, and Belgium, France, and the US have assisted successive militarised leaders to maintain power to the detriment of the country's civilian population.[11]

Despite this longstanding history of violence, Belgium continued to display pride in its colonial history. For example, the former Palace of the Colonies in Tervuren, an affluent suburb of Brussels, was renamed the Royal Museum for Central Africa in the 1960s following the Congo's liberation from Belgian rule.[12] Despite this name change, 'museum exhibition spaces remained stagnant from the colonial period' until following the turn of the century.[13] It was not until 2005, after the publication of Adam Hochschild's inflammatory book *King Leopold's Ghost*, that the museum reviewed its own use of curation, which until then had made no mention of the atrocities committed during the colonial era.[14] Indeed, scholars tend to agree that Belgium has still not overcome the neglect towards the atrocities of its colonial history in public discourse. Georgi Verbeeck suggests that 'Belgium never developed a strong collective memory of its colonial past', while Idesbald Goddeeris

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[11] Renton, Seddon, and Zeilig, p. 4. Following Lumumba's assassination, inquiries were conducted by the US and Belgium, both of which found that their respective governments had their own assassination plans (which were not carried out), were aware of the assassination plans and did not intervene, and supported the Congolese parties who wanted to eliminate Lumumba. 'Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders: An Interim Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate, Together with Additional, Supplemental, and Separate Views' (US Government Printing Office, 1975) <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94465.pdf> [accessed 8 November 2021]; 'Enquête parlementaire visant à déterminer les circonstances exactes de l'assassinat de Patrice Lumumba et l'implication éventuelle des responsables politiques belges dans celui-ci.' (Chambre des réprésentants de Belgique, 2001) <https://www.lachambre.be/kvvcr/pdf_sections/comm/lmb/312_6_volume1.pdf> [accessed 8 November 2021].

[12] Guido Gryseels, Gabrielle Landry, and Koeki Claessens, 'Integrating the Past: Transformation and Renovation of the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium', *European Review*, 13.4 (2005), 637–47 (p. 638).

[13] Ibid., p. 639.

[14] Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1998); Charlotte McDonald-Gibson, 'Belgian Museum Faces up to Its Brutal Colonial Legacy', *Independent*, 2013 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/belgian-museum-faces-up-to-its-brutal-colonial-legacy-8973870.html> [accessed 7 November 2021].

suggests that the dominant rhetoric in Belgium is 'recognizing the failures but still nostalgic and triumphalist' and that 'possible counter-voices and views, such as the radical Left, Congolese historians, the Congolese diaspora, Belgian academia, and international scholarship […] have not succeeded in counterbalancing the discourse'.[15]

In today's news media, the largely Moroccan district of Molenbeek in Brussels has become synonymous with Islamist radicalisation and terrorism. This district is not only tied to France, as mentioned above, through those and their families in its population who emanated from a former French colony. The district has also been cited by many as a factor uniting the attackers involved in the 2015 and 2016 terrorist incidents in France and Belgium. It has been alleged that the weapons used in the attack on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* were supplied by the so-called 'Brussels underground'; many of the perpetrators of the November 13 attack in Paris were residing or arrested in Molenbeek; and the perpetrator of the Thalys train attack in 2016 boarded the train in Brussels, where he had allegedly been homeless.[16]

As such, Islamic and Arab communities in France and Belgium are inextricably linked through their shared history. By extension, France's understanding of the terrorist figure is also largely influenced by a perceived radicalisation of the terrorist in Belgium. It is therefore vital to consider the construction of the terrorist figure in a Franco-Belgian setting. Unlike the other films

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[15] Georgi Verbeeck, 'Legacies of an Imperial Past in a Small Nation: Patterns of Postcolonialism in Belgium', *European Politics and Society*, 21.3 (2020), 292–306 (p. 294); Idesbald Goddeeris, 'Postcolonial Belgium: The Memory of the Congo', *Interventions*, 17.3 (2015), 434–51 (p. 436).
[16] Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen, and Emilie Oftedal, 'Jihadi Terrorism in Europe', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 10.6 (2016), 3–24 (pp. 15–16); Ben Farmer, Eleanor Steafel, and Josie Ensor, 'Who Is Salah Abdeslam and Who Were the Paris Terrorists? Everything We Know about the Isil Attackers', *The Telegraph*, 2016 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11996120/Paris-attack-what-we-know-about-the-suspects.html> [accessed 8 September 2021]; Le Monde avec AFP, 'Ayoub El-Khazzani, Un "SDF" "squelettique" et "paumé", Selon Son Avocate', *Le Monde*, 2015 <https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/08/23/ayoub-el-khazzani-un-sdf-squelettique-peu-instruit-et-paume-selon-son-avocate_4734452_3224.html> [accessed 8 November 2021].

analysed in this thesis, such as *13 novembre*, *L'Humour à mort*, and *Paris est à nous*, the two works considered here pay attention to terrorism as part of a wider network of violence, which is linked to colonialism and continuing power relations in francophone countries. As we will see, this depends mainly on their encouragement of objectivity on the part of the viewer in order to make space for the subjectivity of the terrorist figure to be acknowledged.

Objective and subjective violence

As many academic historians and political scientists have highlighted, the relationship between francophone countries and terrorism has vastly different roots than those of the US and the UK. Jim Wolfreys argues that 'the French "war on terror" predates 9/11', and in fact traces it as far back as the French Republic's colonial mission.[17] Paul Silverstein suggests similarly that France's specific version of the 'war on terror' is a war which 'antedates 9/11 and [he] would trace to the early 1990s'.[18] Wolfreys contends that the 'tropes and reflexes' of the anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiment during France's colonial empire 'were revived in the early 1990s as the Algerian civil war spilled over into France'.[19] He also adds that since then, and particularly surrounding the hijab controversy and the events of 2015, Islamophobia has spiralled in France and allowed Islam and Islamist extremism to be used as synonymous terms in the Republic.

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[17] Jim Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia: The Rise of Respectable Racism in France* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), p. 2. It is important to note Wolfreys's use of quote marks around the term 'war on terror': he does not suggest that there is an intrinsic link between terrorism and the Muslim and Arab population of France, but intimates that the French popular imaginary considers this link to be factual.
[18] Paul A. Silverstein, 'The Context of Antisemitism and Islamophobia in France', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 42.1 (2008), 1–26 (p. 4).
[19] Wolfreys, p. 2.

Similarly, in *The French Intifada: The Long War between France and its Arabs*, Andrew Hussey argues that the 2015 Islamist extremist terrorist attacks in Paris find similar ideological roots to the 2005 *banlieue* riots and the Algerian Civil War, which Hussey connects under the umbrella of a 'long war' between the immigrant and second-generation North African population of France, and the Republic itself. This account, however, lacks some of the required nuance when discussing Islamophobia and anti-Arab sentiment. As Alec Hargreaves points out in his thorough review of the book, it is a sweeping generalisation for Hussey to assert that Algerians fighting in the Civil War, the rioters of 2005 (and the population of the *banlieues* more generally), and the terrorists of 2015 are 'united in their hostility towards the French state'.[20] More astoundingly, perhaps, Hussey suggests in his title and subtitle that the 2005 riots were motivated by Islamist extremism. As Hargreaves highlights, there is no evidence to support this.[21]

It would seem, then, that the contrast between Wolfreys's and Hussey's conclusions is a matter of nuance. Whereas Wolfreys devotes due attention to France's problematic depiction of 'Islam as a block, impervious to progressive values', Hussey seems to suggest that the Muslim population of France's banlieues are one homogenous mass: 'the positions and tactics of the immigrants of the banlieues – their identification with Palestine, their hatred of France – reveal the struggle to be part of the "long war"'.[22] Furthermore, while Wolfreys focuses on the Islamophobia and anti-Arab sentiment which unite these events, Hussey obfuscates the distinction between the youth of the *banlieue* turning to violence as 'an

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[20] Andrew Hussey, *The French Intifada: The Long War Between France and Its Arabs* (London: Granta, 2015), p. 10.
[21] Alec Hargreaves, 'The French Intifada Review', *Contemporary French Civilization*, 39.3 (2014), 411–14 (p. 412).
[22] Wolfreys, p. 3; Hussey, p. 404.

expression of frustration and resentment over social exclusion rooted in inequality and discrimination,' and a blanket hatred of France's cultures, values, and society.[23] There are several passages in Hussey's book which attempt to draw attention to the French state's culpability in the violence perpetrated by (some of) the young men of the *banlieues*. For example, he refers to an interview with French political scientist Gilles Kepel, who he quotes as saying that 'Many French political commentators are blind […] They do not want to see the world beyond France. And so they do not understand that what happens here is because of [France's] relationship with the Arab world, and [its] history there'.[24] However, he fails to make clear (or perhaps, to acknowledge) that the Republic's relationship with its former colonies has created a socio-political environment in metropolitan France which treats Muslims and Maghrebis as second-class citizens, and it is *this* which has led to violence. Rather, he allows his reader to believe that 'relations "between France and its Arabs" can be boiled down to a "long [Islamist] war"'.[25] In doing so, Hussey participates in the very homogenisation of Islam as a longstanding and monolithic threat which Wolfreys and Kepel warn against, perhaps not overlooking, but certainly downplaying France's own culpability in these types of violence.

This ignorance towards France's own part in the violence experienced in its metropolitan state was pervasive after the events of 2015. In a speech given at Versailles following the 13 November attacks, President François Hollande asserted that:

> c'est la France tout entière qui était la cible des terroristes. La France qui aime la vie, la culture, le sport, la fête. La France sans distinction de couleur, d'origine, de

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[23] Hargreaves, p. 412.
[24] Kepel quoted in Hussey, p. 10.
[25] Hargreaves, p. 412.

parcours, de religion. La France que les assassins voulaient tuer, c'était la jeunesse dans toute sa diversité.[26]

These words echo the sentiment discussed above that this type of violence is perpetrated as a result of blind hatred of the Republic. A few days later, Prime Minister Manuel Valls went as far as to redirect focus away from the geopolitical aspect of terrorist motivations entirely:

> Vendredi, les terroristes n'ont pas choisi leurs cibles au hasard. Ils ont frappé une jeunesse éprise de vie, aspirant à l'émancipation, par le savoir, le goût des différences, la culture, la musique, l'élan vers les autres. Ne nous y trompons pas: le terrorisme a frappé la France, non pas pour ce qu'elle fait en Irak, en Syrie ou au Sahel, mais pour ce qu'elle est.[27]

Again, by directing attention away from France's treatment of the Arab and Muslim world (while also suggesting that France has a 'taste for difference' and 'curiosity about the other'), Valls reframes the violence of the events as an attack on a diverse and tolerant French Republic, rather than partially caused by the rage and anger towards what Wolfreys describes as 'respectable racism', both in metropolitan France and in former colonies.[28] This undeniably supports Kepel's notion that French political commentators have little to no interest in seeing this relationship beyond France, or its roots in France's historical treatment of Muslims and the Arab world.

One might reasonably argue that France's negative figuration of the Islamist terrorist in particular is compounded by its refusal to acknowledge the relationship between the Republic and the Maghrebi and Muslim world. It has become

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[26] François Hollande, 'Discours du président de la République devant le Parlement réuni en Congrès' (Représentation permanente de la France, 2015) <https://onu.delegfrance.org/Discours-du-president-de-la-Republique-devant-le-Congres> [accessed 3 February 2021].

[27] Assemblée nationale, 'XIVe législature, Session ordinaire de 2015-2016. Compte rendu intégral. Séance du jeudi 19 novembre 2015.' (Assemblée Nationale, 2015) <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/cri/2015-2016/20160059.asp> [accessed 3 February 2021].

[28] Wolfreys. Wolfreys defines this term as follows: 'In a country where mass unemployment hits youth of North African backgrounds particularly hard, and where discrimination disproportionately affects Muslims, the trumpeting of the right to blaspheme against a "minority religion" [after the 2015 attacks] was symptomatic of a repressed violence on the part of the demonstrators, the assertion of a form of domination' (pp. 20–21).

increasingly evident recently in the field of terrorism studies that the Western world

has a strong tendency to both other and dehumanise the terrorist figure.

In 1996, Zulaika and Douglass contributed significantly to the field of

Terrorism Studies by being among the first to unpack the 'taboo' surrounding the

figure of the terrorist. They identify the tendency in the West for 'the very attempt to

"know" how the terrorist thinks or lives [to] be deemed an abomination'.[29] This is

not to be confused with a refusal to discuss terrorism itself. Indeed, Zulaika and

Douglass are very clear in acknowledging the discursive cacophony which often

surrounds acts of terrorism. They point out – even before the contribution of

streaming, social media, and smartphones – that many in the West have become

fixated upon murder and terrorism, as discussed at length in Chapter 1 with relation

to the True Crime genre.[30] The 'taboo' therefore applies not to the act of terrorism,

but to the political subjectivity and humanity of its perpetrator, and to the

acknowledgment of the terrorists' own sense of victimisation. In *Terror and Taboo*,

they discuss in great detail that the terrorist is not only othered by Western society,

but that there is a fundamental lack of acknowledgement that Western society is at

least in part responsible for major discrimination against Arabs and Muslims in the

West, and for large scale military intervention and colonisation across Africa and the

Middle East.

This refusal to acknowledge the terrorist figure's own subjectivity is in turn

compounded by what Zulaika and Douglass call the 'rhetorical circularity' of

terrorism discourse.[31] On the one hand, terrorist acts are often used as justification

for invasions and offensives in the Middle East and Africa (and micro-aggressions

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[29] Zulaika and Douglass, p. 149.
[30] Ibid., p. x.
[31] Ibid., p. ix.

and discrimination in the West), which exacerbates tensions between Western

societies and the Arab and Muslim world, causing more frequent radicalisation and

therefore more frequent terrorist incidents. On the other hand, official definitions of

terrorism – which are used to identify and persecute potential and alleged terrorists –

rely on 'signifiers [which] are free-floating and [whose] meanings derive from

language itself', as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis.[32] For example, in

French law, Act No. 86-1020 of 9 September 1986 sets out the following definition

for terrorist activity: '[activités] en relation avec une entreprise individuelle ou

collective ayant pour but de troubler gravement l'ordre public par l'intimidation ou

la terreur'.[33] As highlighted in the Introduction, 'En relation avec' is a vague phrase

– are family members and friends included under this umbrella? Are unknowing

participants included? Furthermore, 'une entreprise individuelle ou collective' is

perhaps even more vague. The term 'an individual or collective enterprise' fails to

set any real parameters for its own definition. The definition of terrorism within the

French legal system lacks concrete parameters, allowing for the homogenisation and

trivialisation of extremely different social and cultural realities under the umbrella of

'terrorism'. As we saw in the Introduction, the same is true of Belgian legislation.

Ghassan Hage has meditated on this othering of the terrorist and the

reluctance to acknowledge the figure's political and human agency, calling this a

'condemnation imperative'.[34] Hage discusses the tendency to dogmatically condemn

the terrorist figure, and concludes that this stems not from xenophobia or fear of the

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[32] Ibid.

[33] République Française, *Journal Officiel de La République Française. Lois et Décrets (Version Papier Numérisée) N° 0210 Du 10/09/1986*, 1986, pp. 10950–80 (p. 10956) <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/download/securePrint?token=54kqWNfGXTA02O0vsmFP> [accessed 9 June 2019].

[34] Ghassan Hage, '"Comes a Time We Are All Enthusiasm": Understanding Palestinian Suicide Bombers in Times of Exighophobia', *Public Culture*, 15.1 (2003), 65–89 (p. 67).

'otherness' of the terrorist, but rather quite the opposite: a fear of the explanation of the 'human sameness of the other'.[35] In concrete terms, warring societies rely on distinct and divisive categories of 'us' and 'them'; any social explanation of the so-called enemy stands to reveal and unravel this construct, making us morally vulnerable to the other ('them'). As such, the other, or the enemy, must remain different and distant.

The figuration of the terrorist as distant is significant. On the one hand, a distant terrorist allows the society he or she terrorises to refute any idea that the terrorist is a result of that society itself, and therefore solutions to terrorism are often considered issues of Foreign Policy – that society is not encouraged to look inward and consider its own part in radicalisation. On the other hand, a distant terrorist allows for the terrorised society to position itself as a victim of what Slavoj Žižek has referred to as 'subjective violence,' 'experienced as such against the background of a non-violent zero level', 'a perturbation of the "normal", peaceful state of things'.[36] Žižek's notion of subjective violence refers to 'directly visible [...] violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent'.[37] For example, terrorist attacks on North America and Western Europe are seen subjectively by the populations of those areas as violence. By contrast, violence perpetrated *by* North America and Western Europe which is not 'directly visible' by the populations of those places, be that because of media censorship or the nature of secretive government actions, largely goes unnoticed *in* those areas.

[35] Ibid., p. 87.
[36] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Big Ideas (London: Profile Books, 2009), p. 2.
[37] Ibid., p. 1.

The type of violence which is not 'directly visible' in those areas largely falls under two categories, which Žižek calls 'symbolic' and 'systemic' violence.[38] Symbolic violence is the violence embodied in language and habitual speech forms, such as body language, comportment, self-presentation, and so on, as originally theorised by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron.[39] Žižek expands on this concept of symbolic violence by suggesting that it can also be found in the very signification of language itself.[40] Systemic violence, however, refers to the 'catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of [Western] economic and political systems'.[41] For example, Žižek considers capitalism to be a form of systemic violence, as a 'smooth functioning' capitalist society will leave behind a trail of preventable harms and suffering, such as poverty and exploitation. Symbolic and systemic violence are both forms of what Žižek calls 'objective violence' – forms of violence which can only be seen once subjectivity is overcome (or in Žižek's words, once we 'learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of this directly visible "subjective" violence').[42]

In the context of terrorism in the West, Žižek elucidates the concept of subjective and objective violence with the following example:

> When the US media reproached the public in foreign countries for not displaying enough sympathy for the victims of the 9/11 attacks, one was tempted to answer them in the words Robespierre addressed to those who complained about the innocent victims of revolutionary terror: 'Stop shaking the tyrant's bloody robe in my face, or I will believe that you wish to put Rome in chains'.[43]

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *La Reproduction: Éléments Pour Une Théorie Du Système d'enseignement*, Le Sens Commun (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1970).

[40] Arguably, this concept of violence contained within semantics vastly predates Žižek's publication. For example, Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* highlights the way in which lexical expressions such as 'throw like a girl' perpetuate the subordination of femininity. However, Žižek's connection of symbolic violence to systemic and subjective violence is key when considering the imperative condemnation of terrorists.

[41] Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, p. 1.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., p. 3.

Here, Žižek refers to the subjective violence of the 9/11 attacks (the directly visible violence of hijacking passenger planes and flying them into highly populated buildings) against the background of 'objective' violence such as the US involvement in the Iraq-Iran conflict, which remain relatively unseen or unacknowledged from a North American perspective, but nevertheless form part of the violent background of such events on a geopolitical scale. By referring to Robespierre's statement, Žižek points out that although the US had now been a victim of violence, it was still a 'tyrant' in objective terms, i.e. it was a subjectively violent agent from many non-US perspectives.

The same can certainly be said for the case of terrorism in France. As mentioned above, Manuel Valls publicly drew attention away from the subjective nature of the violence of the November 2015 attacks in Paris by suggesting that 'terrorism has hit France not for what it does – in Iraq, Syria or in the Sahel – but for what it is'.[44] In this striking reframing of terrorist motivations, Valls implicitly refers to the objective violence occurring abroad, while simultaneously suggesting that the violence of November 13 was *subjective*; that the terrorists appeared as if from nowhere, and that the attacks occurred without connection to the objective violence seen abroad or within French society. Žižek suggests that in fact, 'subjective and objective violence cannot be perceived from the same standpoint […] objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent'.[45] As such, at the moment one becomes aware of the objective nature of violence, it becomes impossible to simultaneously

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[44] Quoted in Florence Faucher and Laurie Boussaguet, 'The Politics of Symbols: Reflections on the French Government's Framing of the 2015 Terrorist Attacks', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 71.1 (2018), 169–95 (pp. 182–83).

[45] Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, p. 2.

see violence as subjective. Valls's reframing of the violence experienced on the evening of November 13 can therefore be seen as a veiled attempt to solidify the public perception of these events as subjective. By referring explicitly to France's activity in Iraq, Syria and the Sahel, Valls reveals the objectivity of this violence, but imposes a pseudo-subjective framing of it. Not entirely in-line with Žižek's notion of subjective violence, which requires passivity in that violence is seen as subjective only until it is seen to be objective, Valls suggests instead a *wilful* ignorance towards the objective nature of the violence experienced.

Acknowledging objective violence in *La Désintégration*

Acknowledgement of the objective nature of the violence of radicalisation is a key component of Philippe Faucon's 2012 drama *La Désintégration*. The film follows Ali (Rashid Debbouze), a French *lycéen* living in the suburbs of Lille who struggles to find his place in society as his multiple job applications are rejected despite him having achieved good grades in his *baccalaureate*. The son of Algerian immigrants, Ali sees his mother (Zahra Addioui) struggle to work a menial job while his father (Habib Bejaoui) nears death in hospital. Dissatisfied with his social rejection and the wasted sacrifices made by his father's generation to secure their children's future in France, Ali seeks a place in society, and he and his childhood friends become increasingly close to the Salafist Djamel (Yassine Azzouz). Throughout the course of the film, Djamel radicalises and recruits the youths, with the group eventually plotting and committing a terrorist attack on the NATO headquarters in Brussels. The film's concentration on the issues surrounding integration allows it to point towards the objective violence of and in French society, and affords the terrorist figures a status which goes beyond a Manichaean victim/perpetrator dichotomy,

creating a space in which the audience is encouraged to see the terrorist figure as humanised and (re)politicised.

The experiences of the protagonist as the son of Algerian immigrants are arguably derived from Faucon's own background and lived experiences, although his situation differs from Ali's. Born to a French father and an Algerian pied-noir mother in Oujda, North Morocco, Faucon has often recounted the influence of his parents' experience during the Algerian War of Independence on his filmmaking.[46] Faucon's filmography has often explored the experiences of diasporic communities within French society (*Fatima* [2020], *Amin* [2018]), and he has frequently stressed that he considers French cinema to be 'en décalage avec la réalité de la société française'.[47] He explains that he sees this as a symptom of the makeup of the French cinema industry:

> Ils se focalisent d'une façon prépondérante sur quelques couches sociales. Et pour cause: ceux qui font ces films sont issus de ces couches sociales et parlent naturellement de ce qu'ils connaissent. Il en va d'ailleurs de même chez les hommes et femmes en poste dans les structures décisionnaires du cinéma français. Très peu de gens viennent d'un milieu différent.[48]

Faucon's diverse representation of the ways in which Muslims choose to (or in some cases, are forced to) navigate their religious identity in a secular country is compounded in *La Désintégration*, as he meditates on the extreme outcomes of the tensions between secularism and Islam in France through a variety of characters with distinct and nuanced religious identities.

In her analysis of the film, Carrie Tarr suggests that Faucon's representation of Muslim identities 'risks inflaming rather than assuaging Islamophobia among its

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[46] Frédéric Strauss, 'César 2016 - Philippe Faucon, Réalisateur de *Fatima*, Sacré Meilleur Film : "Les Films Français Sont En Décalage Avec La Société"', *Télérama*, 2015 <https://www.telerama.fr/cinema/philippe-faucon-realisateur-de-fatima-les-films-francais-sont-en-decalage-avec-la-societe,132272.php> [accessed 23 January 2020].

[47] Strauss.

[48] Strauss.

French audiences' by 'renewing fears that Islam [is] incompatible with republican values, and that fundamentalist terrorism might be taking root among the children of France's postcolonial migrants from the Maghreb'.[49] Faucon's film has even been called premonitory given the Toulouse, *Charlie Hebdo*, and Bataclan attacks which occurred after its release, yet the same has been said for many of the films considered here. The extent to which the film's depiction of religious identities contributed to Islamophobic sentiment is beyond the scope of this analysis. However, I will suggest in this chapter that *La Désintégration* acknowledges what Žižek terms objective violence – discussed above – portraying its terrorist figures as human and political, and acting within these larger systems of violence.

The film's opening sequence, for example, is seen from the point of view of Ali's mother, who watches a prayer meeting in the open space between blocks of flats from her apartment window. This scene explicitly references the growing problem for the French Muslim community in the early 2010s of lack of mosque space, as the imam tells his audience that this is the reason they are meeting outside. In 2010, leader of the National Front party Marine Le Pen described these public prayers as an 'occupation', promoting the rhetoric that Islam is supposedly incompatible with the official secularism of French public spaces.[50] Watching this public prayer from the inside of her apartment, Ali's mother opens the film as a figure whose religious identity is confined to the private sphere. Throughout the film, she promotes respect for and sharing with others as key values of Islam, often acting as a mediator between her children's varied religious expressions. As Ali becomes increasingly radicalised, refusing to shake the hand of his brother's French

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[49] Carrie Tarr, 'Looking at Muslims: The Visibility of Islam in Contemporary French Cinema', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 48.5 (2014), 516–33 (pp. 528–29).
[50] Quoted in Wolfreys, p. 33.

fiancée and insulting his sister for not wearing the veil, Ali's mother attempts to restore these values of respect and harmoniousness in him. Despite the confinement of her religious identity to the private sphere, and her religious pluralism, she is often shown watching news reports about events in North Africa, pointing towards the objective violence abroad and micro-aggressions experienced by immigrants and their children within French society, and positioning her – albeit subtly – as a politically charged character. She is not involved in or aware of the terrorist activities her son takes part in, yet the portrayal of her character as politically charged from the very outset is significant to this study, as it allows Faucon to draw attention to the objective violence surrounding the terrorist motivations depicted, both within and outside of French territory. This is an acknowledgement which does not often occur in other contemporary French depictions of terrorist figures, which tend to maintain the notion of subjective violence seen in political rhetoric and public discourse in the aftermath of the attacks.[51]

Figure 10: Film poster for La Désintégration

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[51] See, for example, the discussion of *Made in France* in the following chapter.

Taking the film's poster and title as examples, we begin to see Faucon dismantle the idea that French society represents the '"normal", peaceful state of things'.[52] The film's title refers to the pertinent issue of France's diasporic communities and their children being considered unable or unwilling to 'integrate' into French society. This title is stylised on the film's poster, with 'intégration' separated from its article and prefix 'La Dés-', highlighting the wordplay intended without question. Superimposed on the poster is the French flag, further reinforcing French society's role in the *désintégration* of diasporic communities and their children.

Ali in particular is shown as a victim of France's failure to integrate such communities, as he struggles to find work experience despite his good baccalaureate grades and his effort in the job search, having sent over 100 applications. In the early scenes of the film, we see Ali's sister help him with his CV, and jokingly announce that she can find no fault with it other than his Arab name. We later see Ali's frustration mount as his older brother tells him that it is likely that he is facing discrimination, but that this is normal and he must persevere nevertheless. Tarr suggests that this choice of plot for the terrorist figure 'perhaps unwittingly offer[s] a critique of what contemporary Islam has to offer young people in France', as Ali's frustrations are manipulated by Djamel in his attempts to recruit the young man.[53] While this may certainly be a pertinent observation, Faucon's choice of plot is instrumental in his depiction of the radicalisation of the terrorist figure as a result of objective violence.

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[52] Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, p. 2.
[53] Tarr, p. 531.

By presenting Ali as an individual at the mercy of discrimination within French society, Faucon points the audience to a space beyond their relationship with the character in which he is shown beyond power relations, and his humanity can be seen. It is pertinent to mention here that although the audience is invited to see Ali in this space, we are not invited to know his thoughts, feelings, or reasoning. Ali consistently refuses to explain himself, and often leaves the frame in times of emotional turbulence which might otherwise be used to invite the audience into his headspace. This refusal to allow the audience access to Ali's experience reminds us of Levinasian theory as discussed in Chapter 2, as it acknowledges his irreducible subjective experience without holding him at such a distance that we do not see him as a being in himself. Through the course of the film, Ali exists in a space of transcendence from his relationship with the audience, where he is neither pardoned nor condoned, but his situation is openly acknowledged.

In her review of the film, Ariane Allard highlights that Faucon provides 'Nulle accusation manichéenne, nulle excuse associée à tel ou tel personnage ou telle ou telle situation, finalement'.[54] Throughout the film, Ali oscillates between spaces of victimhood and perpetration, never fully or finally inhabiting either. A sequence in which he confronts his college teacher about the discrimination he is facing in his job search exemplifies the muddying of the victim/perpetrator boundary. In a computer cluster at college, Ali and his classmates are receiving feedback on their CVs. Ali becomes frustrated as he tells the teacher that he has sent 108 CVs in four months with no success. The situation quickly becomes heated as the subject turns to racism, and Ali becomes angry at his teacher's suggestion that 'Si tu penses que les recruteurs soient des racistes tu leur envois quand même ton CV. Parce que si c'est

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[54] Ariane Allard, '*La Désintégration*', *Positif*, 612 (2012), 30–31 (pp. 30–31).

des racistes comme tu dis, c'est à eux de te discriminer. Ce n'est pas à toi de le faire'. After raising his voice at the teacher and ripping apart his printed CV, Ali is asked to leave the classroom and does so, slamming the door behind him. Despite Ali's violence in this scene, the dialogue reminds us of the objective violence he is experiencing within society. Filmed entirely at eye level and with medium or medium close-up shots regardless of the character on screen, the mise-en-scène ensures that no character – and therefore no opinion – is privileged. Here, we see Ali violently act out, and we are given the impression that his radicalisation is developing, yet we are reminded of his own victimisation, position in the political arena and humanity, and also of the objective violence within French society.

As well as highlighting objective violence throughout the film, Faucon also avoids the presentation of the French Republic as a victim. Faucon makes the subtle but significant decision to have the terrorists commit their attack on the headquarters of NATO in Belgium, rather than at any site in France. Of course, Belgium has its own significant history of objective violence through colonisation, and certainly faces problems of discrimination within its own society, as discussed earlier in this chapter. However, by focusing on France specifically throughout the film and deciding to set the terrorist attack itself outside of French territory, Faucon ensures that the French nation is not victimised in the film. This allows the space for a critique of French society's aggression towards diasporic communities and the children of immigrants, without directing attention towards French society as a victim itself.

Furthermore, Faucon's decision to have the group cross France's border into Belgium to commit their attack allows for the subtleties of objective violence against Arab and Muslim communities within France to be highlighted. An extensive

sequence towards the end of the film shows the three young men travel from their home city of Lille to the NATO headquarters in Brussels in order to commit the terrorist attack they have planned. Taking place entirely on motorways until the group reach NATO, this sequence brims with transient and liminal imagery. In his landmark text on supermodernity, Marc Augé discusses the significance of the motorway as a 'non-place'. According to Augé, one particularly notable feature of the modern motorway is that it bypasses the displays of 'local' history exhibited in monuments, street names, and the like, which would otherwise be seen by a motorist. However, motorways 'short-circuit the historical context by avoiding the monuments that embody it'.[55] Ali, Hamza, and Nasser pass no historical monuments or identifiable sites, but rows of trees, landscape, and peri-urban areas. Even as they reach the NATO headquarters, their surroundings remain supermodern: the headquarters finds itself on the outskirts of the city (but still within the E40 autoroute which separates the centre from the suburbs) near the Aéroport de Bruxelles, and as such is surrounded by chain hotels, warehouses, and office buildings. The historical and cultural footprints of both France and Belgium are entirely absent from this sequence. As such, the placement of Ali and his fellow cell members on the motorway in their final and most emotional moments reminds us of their displacement from French society, and subtly comments on the disconnect between their experiences of discrimination in Lille and the 'proud' history of France. 'La France qui aime la vie, la culture, le sport, la fête', to return to the words of Valls, is absent from these images, and Ali and his fellow cell members meet their fate having never been allowed to be a part of it. This displacement is reminiscent of the feeling

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[55] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 68.

of *dépaysement* experienced among the African and Black diaspora, and invokes the blurring of identity which Augé describes as a result of the supermodern, both of which have been a major preoccupation of filmmakers in the past two decades.[56]

Furthermore, the sequence serves as a subtle reminder of the supposed separation between the Arab and Muslim communities and the '*souchards*' of France and Belgium. As Hussey points out, in the majority of France's cities, motorways 'mark the frontier between the city and the suburbs or *banlieues*', with the inner city (or *intra-muros*) being a place of privilege, and the *banlieues* commonly understood to be a disorganised, unknowable and impoverished place.[57] Conversely, almost the reverse is true of Brussels. As discussed above, Molenbeek – a district of Brussels city famous for radicalisation and poverty – is located in the heart of the city. By contrast, the suburbs of the city, such as Leuven and Terveuren, are extremely affluent areas.[58] The motorway therefore highlights the contrast between Belgian and French *banlieues*/suburbs, while also reiterating their similar separation of the classes. As such, Ali's crossing of the France-Belgium border evokes the border crossing that Ali's parents underwent to get to Europe, but also reminds us of the boundaries faced by Ali's generation *within* Europe, and the objective aggression faced by those relegated to the *banlieues* of Paris and their counterparts in Brussels.

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[56] Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, 'Rethinking Diasporicity: Embodiment, Emotion, and the Displaced Origin', *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 1.2 (2008), 147–58; Sheila Petty, '"Interstitial Spaces and Sites of Struggle": Displacement, Identity, and Belonging in Contemporary French Accented Cinema', *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East & North African Migration Studies*, 9.1 (2022), 121–43 (p. 121).

[57] Hussey, p. 19.

[58] Despite Brussels' use of French as an official language, the term *banlieues* is avoided when discussing Brussels, as the symbolic and abstract meanings of the term in French usage (particularly in reference to Paris) cannot be applied equally to Brussels or other European cities. As such, 'suburbs' is used here instead. For more on this, see Lieve Vanderstraeten and Etienne Van Hecke, 'Les Régions Urbaines En Belgique', *Belgeo. Revue Belge de Géographie*, 1 (2019), 1–24; Hervé Vieillard-Baron, 'Banlieue, quartier, ghetto: de l'ambiguïté des définitions aux représentations', *Nouvelle revue de psychosociologie*, 12.2 (2011), 27–40.

Beyond the transient imagery of the non-place motorways, the sequence continues to blur the boundary between victim and perpetrator by reinforcing what Allard identifies as 'le fil rouge (ou plutôt noir) qui parcourt le film tout entier, à savoir la notion (bien sûr négative) d'enfermement'.[59] As Ali, Nasser, and Hamza approach NATO, they each pull over to the side of the road, where they use wire to bind their feet to the accelerator pedal of their individual vehicles and attach their hands to the steering wheels with handcuffs. This throws into question any resolute or determined nature of suicide bombing. Suicide bombings in a wide variety of Western cinema are presented as voluntary, with suicide bombers as determined and steadfast, and with martyrdom as the ultimate and desired goal. For example, the opening scenes of *The Kingdom* (Peter Berg, 2007) and *Body of Lies* (Ridley Scott, 2008) feature suicide bombers detonating home-made explosives via cell phone and manual triggers respectively, without much attention paid to the mindset of the terrorist. Some, instead of showing suicide bombers as determined throughout their actions, show such bombings as accidental, occurring after the individual has made the decision to commit terrorism, but before the intended attack. The French drama-thriller *Made in France*, which will be discussed in the following chapter, features a terrorist cell member, Christophe, dying as a result of the accidental detonation of a bomb intended to be used later in a suicide bombing. One notable exception to this rule is the British satirical film *Four Lions* (Chris Morris, 2010), which shows two of its terrorist figures – Omar and Waj – questioning the morality of the planned attack. Once the attack is underway, one of the terrorists (Hassan) is killed by another (Barry), one is killed by accident (Barry), and the remaining two detonate their bombs in confusion (Waj) and despair (Omar). Frank, discussing the concept of

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[59] Allard, p. 31.

martyrdom in the film, argues that *Four Lions* is one of very few Western depictions

of terrorism to '[avoid] the common dehumanisation of terrorists […] an approach

that clearly goes beyond essentialist views of "evil" terrorists',[60] by showing us these

figures in the process of becoming terrorists. However, Frank suggests that the film

does not reach its full potential in this regard, as it 'shies away from depicting the

political subjectivity of its protagonists' by downplaying the relationship between

contemporary Islamist extremism and the War on Terror, as well as earlier Western

interventions in the Islamic world.[61] This, Frank highlights, means the film does not

fully break from the 'terrorism taboo' described by Zulaika and Douglass discussed

earlier.[62]

Figure 11: Ali visits his father in La Désintégration

By contrast, *La Désintégration* incorporates its protagonists' political

subjectivity throughout the film, as discussed here, and in showing the terrorist

figures as constrained even in their terrorist acts, underlines the socio-political

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[60] Frank, p. 255.
[61] Ibid., pp. 255–56.
[62] Zulaika and Douglass.

entrapment they experience. This theme of constraint, as Allard suggests, pervades

the film. Beginning in the opening scene in which Ali's mother watches the prayer

from the containment of her own home, the mise-en-scène frequently conveys a

sense of enclosure, particularly when Ali is on screen. In the large majority of

medium close-ups of Ali alone, objects in the foreground encroach on his visual

space, and harsh lines surround him. These effects increase as the film progresses,

and as he comes closer to his terrorist act and death. In longer shots, Ali is often

tucked to the side of the frame, or framed in very close proximity to his surrounding

objects with very little negative space separating them, creating a sense of physical

entrapment.

Figure 12: Ali's mother learns of his death in La Désintégration

The film is bookended by this theme, as the constriction of Ali's mother in

the opening scene is echoed as the film closes. The final scene shows Ali's mother at

her hotel cleaning job. As she works, she hears a news report on the television

recounting the attack in Belgium. Understanding that her son, who has now been

missing for some weeks, is likely one of the dead suicide bombers, she breaks down

in tears. The closing shot of the film shows her bursting out of the room, staggering grief-stricken down the corridor, and wailing in Arabic that 'they have killed my son'.[63] The camera is placed in the centre of the hallway, allowing the vertical lines of the walls, the rows of doors, and the horizontal lines of the carpet pattern to create a one-point perspective shot. This has the dual effect of placing Ali's mother at the focal point of the shot, and of creating a visual cage around her. Although the shot may be long, the space surrounding her is claustrophobic.

Leaving the audience to come to their own conclusion about the identity of 'they', Faucon closes his film with a sombre utterance in which Ali is the victim of an unspoken killer, whether that may be the Islamist fundamentalists which lead him to his death, or the constraints of French society which led him to turn to extremism. As discussed above, Carrie Tarr suggests that the failure of efforts from his mother, his brother, and his imam to redirect Ali away from the violent trajectory they see him on, is 'perhaps unwittingly offering a critique of what contemporary Islam has to offer young people in France'.[64] As such, Tarr suggests that the responsibility here rests on the shoulders of fundamentalist ideologies of Islam, rather than 'a postcolonial France that has systematically failed to enable its young Arab Muslim population to feel fully integrated'.[65] While Tarr's analysis of *La Désintégration* holds true in many respects, this moment in the film leaves open the question of who has brought about Ali's fate, and Faucon allows all parties to be held responsible.[66] Neither absolving fundamentalist extremists nor French society from their role in the radicalisation of disadvantaged youths, Faucon paints a careful portrait of a terrorist

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[63] The French subtitles for these lines read 'Ils ont tué mon fils'.
[64] Tarr, p. 531.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

figure as both perpetrator and victim. Ali's criminal activity does not preclude his victimisation, nor the politics of his radicalisation. Rather, his character is presented to the audience beyond the confines of victim/perpetrator dichotomies, allowing the audience to see the objective context of his actions.

By contrast, *Le Jeune Ahmed* does less to combat the victim/perpetrator dichotomy surrounding terrorism. As will be discussed below, the Dardenne brothers express Ahmed's subjectivity more through their cinematic technique than through their narrative. However, objective violence within Belgian society is highlighted during a few key moments of the film's narrative.

Safeguarding subjectivity in *Le Jeune Ahmed*

Le Jeune Ahmed is one of the most recent works by the well-known directors Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne.[67] Released in 2019, the film follows the thirteen-year-old Belgian Ahmed (Idir Ben Addi) as he plots to kill his Arabic teacher Mme Inès (Myriem Akheddiou), who he considers an 'impure' Muslim. After his first failed attempt, Ahmed spends time in juvenile detention and takes part in community service on a farm. After a second failed attempted murder, Ahmed escapes custody and makes a final attempt to accost Mme Inès at the school. Scaling the locked building in order to gain access, Ahmed loses his grip and falls to the ground, leaving him partially paralysed.

The film was well received by the majority of critics, winning the *Prix de la mise en scène* at the 2019 Cannes film festival. Charlotte Garson writes in *Études*

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[67] Their most recent film at the time of writing this thesis is *Tori et Lokita* (2022), which also focuses on the difficulty faced by minority ethnic communities in Belgium (Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne, '*Tori et Lokita*, Dossier de Presse' (Diaphana Distribution, 2022) <https://medias.unifrance.org/medias/152/209/250264/presse/tori-and-lokita-presskit-french.pdf> [accessed 18 May 2022]).

that the Dardennes 'prennent à rebours les clichés' in comparison to other films about radicalisation; Nicolas Bauche of *Positif* appreciates the 'impitoyable' portrayal of the terrorist teenager.[68] Certainly, the Dardennes' choice of a radicalised thirteen-year-old instead of an adult is a reversal of the typical portrayal of the terrorist figure, and their choice for his narrative arc to end in his death may be described as pitiless. However, I contend that they do portray Ahmed with a certain delicacy. Throughout the film, Ahmed's struggles are presented to the audience in an impartial manner: they are offered up without comment. As will be the focus of this section, Ahmed is portrayed with the careful balance in proximity championed by Levinas as discussed in Chapter 2. He is neither so close to the audience that his subjective individuality merges with that of the viewer, nor so far from them that he cannot be considered a being in and of himself.

There are many moments in the film which present the difficulties which Muslims and those of North African immigrant background face regarding integration in Belgium. Frequently throughout the film, Ahmed's dedication to his prayers becomes a source of tension. Early in his stay at the detention centre, he and a few other inmates are held in the kitchen by the centre's social workers as a pair of scissors have been misplaced. After telling the social workers that he must leave or he will be late to his daily prayers, Ahmed is told that he must stay while the youths are searched for the scissors. Ahmed becomes agitated that he will be late to begin his prayer. Suddenly, Ahmed breaks away from the kitchen. The handheld camera swings left to follow him as he runs into the corridor, pursued by social workers. The camera, still handheld and unstable but not moving towards Ahmed, remains on the

four until they round the corner towards Ahmed's cell. There is a cut, and we see

Ahmed caught and physically restrained by three of the social workers in front of his

cell. The handheld camera, now moving swiftly and erratically to follow the struggle

between Ahmed and the social workers, creates a sense of intense anxiety and

struggle, reflecting the anxious tension between Ahmed's religious practices and the

dictation of the state which has detained him. Finally, the camera settles as a fourth

social worker reveals that the scissors have been found, and Ahmed is released and

allowed to go to his prayer. It is important to note that the anxiety evoked in the

scene is not manifested in dark lighting or a cool palette as is typical in similar

scenes of constraint and anxiety, such as those seen above in *La Désintégration*.

Instead, the palette of the scene is bright: the walls of the Centre Ferme are a bright

yellow, the doors of the cells are sky blue, brightly-coloured posters adorn the walls,

and the social workers wear deep green and maroon t-shirts. This juxtaposition of the

camera movements and the mise-en-scène may create an odd sense of indecision for

the viewer, encouraging them to question whether the anxiety felt by Ahmed in this

situation is merited. The element of constraint is certainly present, both physically as

Ahmed is restrained, and on a broader scale as he is prevented from engaging in his

religious practices. However, the mise-en-scène here presents a certain impartiality

in the aesthetic of the scene, refusing to portray the events in a didactic manner.

This sense of anxiety, however, is not always mirrored by the camerawork in

similar situations. As the film progresses, we see Ahmed spend time on the farm

where he takes part in community service. Throughout his time at the farm, he

spends time with the farmer's daughter, Louise, who is a similar age to him, but is

white, blonde, and is not shown as having any particular religious affiliation. Louise

asks Ahmed questions about his faith, and the two seem to get along reasonably in

Figure 13: Ahmed escapes the frame as Louise attempts to kiss him in Le Jeune Ahmed

the early stages of his community service, sharing duties and eating lunch together.

This, however, changes when Louise attempts to engage Ahmed in a romantic

relationship. Midway through the film, Louise and Ahmed are alone as she shows

him how to discern a ripe beetroot. The pair crouch into the field to touch the leaves

of the plant, and appear in centre frame surrounded by the natural green of the leaves

of the crop. The camera, although still handheld, is relatively stable during this shot.

As they both inspect the leaves, Louise turns to Ahmed and says 'embrasse-moi'.

When he does not respond, Louise leans in to kiss him and he recoils, falling

backwards into the crops. The camera moves slightly left to keep both of the

teenagers in shot. Louise leans forward, persistent, and Ahmed stands up to avoid

her. The camera moves up, keeping Ahmed in frame at eye level, and Louise falls

out of shot. Louise, still out of shot, tells him that he is free to leave, and the camera

pans down to rest on her in medium shot, as she announces that if he stays it is

because he wants to kiss her but does not dare to. She takes his hand, pulling him

downwards towards her and back into shot, and they are once again centrally framed

and surrounded by the green of the crop. Louise asks if Ahmed has kissed before, to

185

which he responds that no, he has not. She leans forward once more and kisses him on the mouth. This time, Ahmed does not recoil, but allows her to kiss him for a moment, before he suddenly stands up again. The camera now remains steady on Louise, allowing Ahmed's movement to take him out of shot for a moment, before panning up once more to rest on his face in medium shot. This shot is maintained for a few seconds, and neither teenager speaks.

At this point, Ahmed's conflict arises from the tension between the pressure from Louise, and the traditions of his religion. The camera here is handheld, rather than static, but the movement does not translate such a sense of immediate anxiety. Rather, the calm movement of the camera allows Ahmed to escape the frame in moments of uncertainty, remaining trained on the crouching Louise and only slowly panning up to the standing Ahmed. Unlike the more violent and aggressive scene in the Centre Ferme, the tension in this scene is translated by a contrast between Louise's calm and firm expression, and Ahmed's confused and erratic movement. Whereas the anxious camerawork in the Centre Ferme produces an outright aggressive tension between Ahmed and the social workers, here the camera's movement instead creates an awkward and uncomfortable atmosphere. A first kiss between young characters in Western cinema is often treated as a tender and innocent moment showing closeness of two children exploring the adult world. The encounter between Ahmed and Louise, however, does more to highlight the difference between these children than to exemplify their closeness. Rather, the steady camerawork and unease draw attention to the lack of understanding and respect for Islamic religious practices in Belgian society (and francophone society by extension). Louise's attitude within the scene reads as if it were a coming-of-age moment, playing out the tropes of romantic film and literature: the imperative

'embrasse-moi', the question of whether Ahmed is experienced. However, it would seem that she has no recognition – or any will to recognise – that such adolescent needs for romance and experimentation might not figure high on Ahmed's lists of interests. Furthermore, Louise does not seem to recognise that, for someone who is so religiously inclined and practising the principles of conservative Islam, a kiss might be fraught with anxieties.

While *La Désintégration* provides a direct and unabashed acknowledgement of objective violence foregrounded in its narrative, the aggression highlighted in these and other sequences in *Le Jeune Ahmed* functions as a more subtle nod towards what, as we have seen, Žižek calls 'symbolic' violence, a form of objective violence which is present in habitual speech forms, behaviours, and self-presentation. As Louise enacts a traditionally Western coming-of-age scene – the first kiss between adolescents – she arguably does not intend to harm or disrespect Ahmed. However, her insistence on his participation is indicative of a much wider problem of ignorance towards Islamic religious values and traditions in French and Belgian societies; forms of objective violence which are not necessarily wilful or malicious, but stem from and contribute to systemic violence and exclusion on a wider scale in these societies.

This scene does not only highlight this difference and exclusion, but points to a central tension between Western cinema and the depiction of traditional Muslim values. Ahmed's frequent escapes from the frame during this scene and throughout the rest of the film act as a subtle metaphor for the fact that his drives and emotions – rooted ultimately in his steadfast dedication to the values of traditional Islam – exceed and cannot be contained by the conventional Western narrative of a coming-of-age sexual awakening. In interviews, the Dardennes have admitted that when

conceptualising the film they had originally envisioned 'une histoire d'amour de jeunes de vigt ans', deciding, however, that 'c'était trop romanesque'.[69] Instead of the romantic and Westernised coming-of-age story, the viewer is confronted with the problematic nature of that concept itself when portraying religious individuals who cannot and, in the case of Ahmed, do not wish to, partake in it. In this sense, the character of Louise becomes a subtle metaphor for the ways in which religious difference, here embodied by Ahmed, is absorbed and reduced into the typical functioning of Western society, here embodied by Louise. This reduction of alterity into the self/same is highly reminiscent of Levinasian theory as discussed in Chapter 2, which focused on the ethical implications of cinema which does not acknowledge the irreducible alterity of victims of terrorism. Here, we begin to see how totalisation of the figure of the terrorist can be a result of (wilful) ignorance towards his or her individuality and difference from the self, but is nevertheless harmful in that it often perpetuates the (white) Western worldview.

As discussed earlier, Žižek insinuates in his theory of objective and subjective violence that in order to acknowledge the extent of objective violence, it is necessary to 'step back' from the subjective viewpoint and understand the networks of objective violence which contribute to the acts of violence directly visible to Western societies. It is here that certain aspects of Levinasian theory regarding subjectivity and objectivity can prove particularly illuminating. As outlined in Chapter 2, Levinasian theory foregrounds a deprivileging of the self and, by extension, deprivileging the subjective worldview of the self in favour of a more objective worldview. I earlier discussed how Levinas's theory of the face-to-face

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[69] Luc Dardenne, quoted in Élise Domenache, '*Le Jeune Ahmed*, un djihadisme de proximité: Entretien avec Jean-Pierre et Luc Dardenne', *Esprit*, 7–8 (2019), 207–16 (p. 208).

encounter requires objectivity and acknowledgement that the other exists beyond the realm of the self's comprehension: the 'face' of the other is not a physical or human face, but '[l]a manière dont se présente l'Autre, dépassant *l'idée de l'Autre en moi*'.[70] The idea that the encounter with the other must be approached from a position of acknowledgement that the other is not a concept within the self's mind certainly bears resemblance to Žižek's assertion that we must 'step back' from subjectivity and recognise the wider networks of objective violence at play. However, it is vital to acknowledge here that many scholars, such as Zahi Zalloua, Alain Badiou, and Žižek himself, have highlighted a tension in this aspect of Levinas's work.[71]

In his essay, 'The Ethics of Trauma/The Trauma of Ethics: Terror After Levinas', Zalloua discusses the Levinasian concept of the face-to-face encounter as a form of persecution – as terror itself – because the self experiences a shock when faced with the other. He builds upon this notion by discussing victimhood in relation to the Israel/Palestine conflict, questioning the space for the 'other of the other', and the distinction between the good and bad other, in Levinasian theory. The main body of Levinas's work asserts that the other enters the encounter 'à partir du contexte […] sans cette médiation'.[72] Zalloua, however, highlights that Levinas himself struggled to articulate a philosophy of the other which allows this assertion to pass from the abstract into the real world.[73] As an example of this, he draws attention to a 1982 radio interview in which Levinas was asked about the massacres of hundreds of

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[70] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité*, Biblio Essais, 19th edn (France: Librairie Générale Française, 2018), p. 43.
[71] Zahi Zalloua, 'The Ethics of Trauma/The Trauma of Ethics: Terror After Levinas', in *Terror, Theory, and the Humanities*, Critical Climate Change (Michigan: Open Humanities Press, 2012), pp. 223–43; Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. by Peter Hallward (London; New York: Verso, 2001); Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
[72] Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1972), p. 51.
[73] Zalloua, p. 225.

Palestinians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Israeli-occupied Lebanon, which had occurred shortly before the interview. The interviewer asked Levinas, '[…] for the Israeli isn't the "other" above all Palestinian?' Levinas answered as follows:

> My definition of the other is completely different. The other is the neighbour, who is not necessarily kin, but who can be. And in that sense, if you're for the other, you're for the neighbour. But if your neighbour attacks another neighbour or treats him unjustly, what can you do? Then alterity takes on another character, in alterity we can find an enemy, or at least then we are faced with the problem of knowing who is right and who is wrong, who is just and who is unjust. There are people who are wrong.[74]

For Badiou and Žižek, Levinas's statement confuses his own theory of the other. Badiou takes issue with the idea that the other 'is acceptable only if he is a good other',[75] while Žižek takes this further and suggests that this causes the entire Levinasian notion of respect for the other's alterity to crumble when translated into the real world:

> What Levinas is basically saying is that, as a principle, respect for alterity is unconditional (the highest sort of respect), but, when faced with a concrete other, one should nonetheless see if he is a friend or an enemy. In short, in practical politics, the respect for alterity strictly *means nothing*.[76]

Extreme though this viewpoint may be, we can certainly see the pertinence of Žižek's point. If we are to consider Ahmed here, would he be considered a "bad" neighbour, because he has attacked his other neighbour, Mme Inès? Where is the acknowledgement of the other's radical and irreducible alterity here? It is lost as we fail to consider the other's other, Ahmed's other; namely, the systemic violence he has experienced within Belgian society, portrayed as such through the metaphor of Louise's insistent kiss.

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[74] Emmanuel Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*, ed. by Seán Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 294.
[75] Badiou, *Ethics*, p. 24.
[76] Žižek, *Organs without Bodies*, p. 106.

Zalloua frames his argument in terms of the Israel/Palestine conflict, and discusses the question of what Badiou has called 'philo-Semitism' following the Holocaust, which 'transforms them [Jewish people] as a people from "victims" to "Victims" of Humanity, guaranteeing them the (timeless) status of (morally untouchable) other'.[77] It is important to note that neither Zalloua nor Badiou suggests that Jewish people are *not* victims, and both acknowledge that the historical suffering of the Jews necessitates consistent vigilance in the face of anti-Semitism. However, they argue that they have been given a 'paradigmatic status in trauma studies' as a result of philo-Semitism, particularly in reference to the Israel/Palestine conflict.[78] Zalloua suggests that this phenomenon precludes Palestinians from being seen as victims in any sense because, in his account: '[the] Jews are always the object of terror', and as such, 'in the American [or Western] imaginary, the Palestinian is not a traumatized subject'.[79] Although I do not wish to equate Palestinians with individuals who commit terrorism in Western countries, this line of thought can be extended to the figure of the terrorist explored in this chapter.

To refer back to Žižek's theory of objective and subjective violence discussed earlier, Western countries which experience acts of terrorism – such as the 9/11 attacks in the US, the 7/7 bombings in the UK, or the 2015 attacks in Paris – subjectively see and frame themselves as victims. This is recurrent throughout Western media, and exemplified by the statements of Hollande and Valls after the attacks on the *Charlie Hebdo* offices and the Bataclan. From this subjective viewpoint, the figure of the terrorist cannot possibly be seen as a traumatised subject. This is compounded, in Zallou's analysis, by the construction of these figures as the

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[77] Zalloua, p. 229.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., pp. 229–30.

primary agents of their misery: Palestinians have on many occasions chosen violence over peace, and therefore cannot be seen as victims.[80] The same rhetoric can be found in the debates surrounding the integration of Muslims and individuals of North African ethnic background in French and Belgian society; if Ahmed were to relinquish his dedication to faith and wait to be searched for the scissors, or allow Louise to kiss him, the following anxiety and violence would not occur (but Ahmed's repression would still exist). Zallou suggests that as a result of the framing of the Palestinian as the agent of their own misery, they are ascribed the status of *homo sacer*, 'excluded or exiled other par excellence, someone who is cast out of the community, who could be killed with impunity by anyone but whose life lacked any sacrificial value'.[81] Although, as mentioned above, I do not wish to equate Palestinians with those who commit terrorism in Western countries, applying Zalloua's thinking here can be productive in our understanding of the figure of the terrorist we see in the films discussed here. As the West has constructed itself in its own narrative as the victim of terrorism and overlooks its own objective violence, the figure of the terrorist within these narratives is therefore a radically distant other, whose life cannot be seen as 'grievable', to borrow Judith Butler's term, or worthy of ethical relation.[82]

Zalloua concludes by referring to Badiou's argument for an ethics which comprises a 'generic humanity' which rejects identity politics, taking into account what is being done, rather than the political identity of who is doing it.[83] This, in turn, can lead us back to Žižek's theory of objective and subjective violence: we

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[80] Ibid., p. 230.
[81] Ibid., p. 231.
[82] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, Radical Thinkers (London: Verso, 2016).
[83] Quoted in Zalloua, p. 235.

must 'step back' from subjective views of violent aggressors and consider the networks of violence (on all sides) in which they act. By this account, the rhetorical circularity of terrorism discourse as underlined by Zulaika and Douglass can and must be interrupted by an acknowledgement of the terrorist as a potentially victimised individual, and by an understanding of terrorism as a reaction to objective violence. Žižek's suggestion that for this to be possible, we must 'learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of this directly visible "subjective" violence', is compatible with a Levinasian deprivileging of the subjective 'self'-oriented worldview which encourages us to acknowledge the other's subjectivity and alterity.[84] However, it is not compatible with what Žižek sees as Levinas's concept of the good and bad neighbours. Essentially, the Levinasian idea of the face of the other appearing 'à partir du contexte' can be reinterpreted: the other is approached without the context of political identity *in order for* the context surrounding their violence to be acknowledged.

This line of thinking creates a certain tension when we consider the murderous acts of Ahmed against his teacher, Mme Inès. According to Sarah Cooper, the Dardennes' filmography foregrounds the principle of 'to kill or not to kill', a central tenet of Levinasian ethics, and one which Zallou, Badiou, and Žižek might consider to be an extension of the judgement of the other as either good or bad.[85] Cooper suggests that the Dardenne brothers shift the focus of Hamlet's infamous soliloquy away from self-centred concern with being towards the survival of the other; killing or failing to kill someone else.[86] On the one hand, the plot of *Le*

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[84] Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, p. 1.
[85] Sarah Cooper, 'Mortal Ethics: Reading Levinas with the Dardenne Brothers', *Film-Philosophy*, 11.2 (2007), 66–87 (p. 66).
[86] Ibid.

Jeune Ahmed revolves around Ahmed's aim and failure to kill his teacher, Mme

Inès, who he considers to be an 'impure' Muslim. On the other hand, the audience

may also inhabit this position of tension in relation to Ahmed as the other, as they

watch him commit atrocities, and finally face death. Cooper suggests that their

filmography 'creates the conditions of possibility for murderous acts to be repeated',

but also 'breaks with this cycle of repetition, taking us from murder to the

prohibition of this very act'.[87] Indeed, this is central to the plot of *Le Jeune Ahmed*.

His attempts to murder his teacher are repeated throughout the film, but are finally

prohibited at the end of the film, as he is critically injured and faces death.

Cooper does acknowledge these two different applications of Levinasian

ethics to cinema – the relation between character and other character, and the relation

between the audience and subject. She discusses how in the Dardennes' films, the

camera never offers a straightforward position of identification, and that proximity is

key to both Levinasian ethics and the approach of the Dardenne brothers. Luc

Dardenne calls the distance between camera and character the 'space of the secret,'

giving the characters 'an existence of their own'.[88] As discussed earlier in this thesis,

this space beyond the ontological encounter in which the other is acknowledged as

irreducibly alterior is vital not only to Levinasian ethics, but in moving beyond

portrayals of radicalised figures as depoliticised and dehumanised. This movement

beyond the encounter itself is encouraged by Žižek, who suggests that 'the true

ethical step is the one *beyond* the face of the other', which acknowledges what he

calls the 'Third', or the other's other.[89] While Levinas does not discuss the

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[87] Ibid., p. 69.
[88] Quoted in Cooper, 'Mortal Ethics', p. 84.
[89] Slavoj Žižek, Eric L Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*, Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 183.

significance of the other's other, the space beyond the encounter can be identified as one which allows for the humanity and political subjectivity of the terrorist figure to be acknowledged.

In his published diary, *Au dos de nos images* (2005), Luc Dardenne often refers to the brothers' desire to incorporate this space beyond the encounter, or private space, into their filming practice through challenges to the habitual images seen in cinema.[90] How they frame their characters constitutes one of the clearest ways they break with conventional cinematic codes. In *Rosetta* (1999) and *La Promesse* (1996), their characters are frequently filmed from behind even when in discussion, and continuously evade the confines of the frame. As Cooper suggests, 'their framing brings fictional lives into being but can never fully contain them: their characters' bodies overflow the edges of the frame, rather than being contained within the shots'.[91] Similarly, Butler's reading of Levinas's *Peace and Proximity* highlights his concentration on the back as a body part from which the cry of the 'face' emits: 'the face is to be found in the back and the neck, but it is not quite a face […]. So we can see already that the "face" seems to consist in a series of displacements such that the face is figured as a back which, in turn, is figured as a scene of agonized vocalization'.[92] *Le Jeune Ahmed* is no exception to this, and resembles *Rosetta* in the degree to which the Dardennes deploy this method. Much like *Rosetta*, the film's opening scene sees Ahmed continuously escape the frame as he sprints through the school corridors. As discussed earlier, he also escapes the frame when his anxieties surrounding missing his prayer, and a kiss with Louise,

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[90] Cooper, 'Mortal Ethics', p. 72.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 133.

arise. In fact, it is striking how this refusal to steadily capture his face in the frame is most obvious during scenes of prayer and wudu.[93]

Figure 14: Ali performs wudu in La Désintégration

Figure 15: Ahmed performs wudu in Le Jeune Ahmed

In *La Désintégration*, such scenes of wudu are mostly steady shots over the character's shoulder in medium close-up, inviting the viewer closer into the

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[93] Wudu (or Wudhu) is a cleansing ritual or ablution considered part of purity and cleanliness in Islam, to be completed before performing worship.

character's subjective position by focusing on their face. By contrast, in *Le Jeune Ahmed* the mirror is excluded from the frame, and Ahmed is shown from the side.

Compared with similar shots in *La Désintégration*, which frame the character from behind but allow the audience the frontal view of the character's reflection, these shots in *Le Jeune Ahmed* are predominantly shots of Ahmed's upper back and obscured face. By allowing Ahmed this space from the camera and audience's gaze, the Dardennes preserve his alterity and, therefore, his subjectivity. Beyond the protection of Ahmed's subjectivity, not showing his reflection in the mirror here also signals the preservation of his identity and sense of self. While we have seen that rhetorical circularity surrounding terrorism should be interrupted by the acknowledgement of the terrorist as a traumatised individual, the Dardennes do not engage in filming practices which present the terrorist figure as *either* victim or perpetrator, in a Manichean sense. As in the scene where Ahmed is restrained by his social workers, we are neither fully aligned to Ahmed's viewpoint, nor fully disconnected from it. Rather, what we see here is a more balanced approach to representing the figure of the terrorist as irreducibly alterior.

Ahmed's alterity and subjectivity are further protected throughout the film by the lack of expository dialogue. This, again, differs from Faucon's approach in *La Désintégration*, where expository dialogue is often used to express characters' frustrations at their situation, and to highlight objective violence. For example, in a scene where the Salafist Djamel attempts to radicalise the three youths he has recruited, he discusses Ali's difficulty in finding work. He asks Ali:

> Comment tu t'expliques que tu trouves pas ? Vous êtes français. Vous êtes instruit mais vous avez droit à rien. Ils ont eu besoin de vos parents pour ramasser des poubelles et tenir des marteaux-piquer, mais quand vous aspirez à autre chose ils veulent plus de vous. Pourquoi ? Ils pensent que vous valez moins qu'eux.

Here, Faucon draws attention to the experience of marginalised communities, and to the objective, symbolic and systemic violence they face. However, his use of expository dialogue to highlight these issues prioritises the subjective viewpoint of the audience (or the self, in Levinasian terms). By prioritising the self/audience's understanding of the issue, it is brought into the subjective position of the audience. By contrast, *Le Jeune Ahmed* features almost no expository dialogue regarding Ahmed. Admittedly, there are a few brief moments when Ahmed explains his feelings to a psychologist, but objective violence towards him or his community is not evoked. Instances where objective violence is highlighted in *Le Jeune Ahmed*, such as the scenes of struggle in the Centre Ferme or Ahmed's encounter with Louise, feature no dialogue from him at all. Unlike *La Désintégration*, *Le Jeune Ahmed* deprivileges the audience's position, and encourages the audience to reach their own understanding of the violence shown. Not only does this approach result in a less polemical tone for the film overall, but it embodies the Levinasian theory of inherent failure to identify with an other by taking their place (i.e. viewing events through their subjectivity) or by attempting to 'understand' their point of view by absorbing their words. In this sense, *La Désintégration* explicitly highlights the other's other (the systemic violence of French society experienced by Ali), whereas *Le Jeune Ahmed* requires an active and participatory audience to identify Ahmed's other on their own terms.

The inherent failure of identification with the other, key to Levinasian ethics and the Dardennes' filmmaking, is also interesting when we consider character relations in *Le Jeune Ahmed*. Cooper suggests that in the audience-subject relationship, 'it is the ability *not* to take the place of the characters by identifying

with an image, that facilitates recognition of responsibility'.[94] Here, she is referring

to the very fact of not identifying with, or taking the place of, the other which allows

for the Levinasian face's call of 'thou shalt not kill' to be heard. This notion is

literalised in *Le Jeune Ahmed* not only through the audience-subject relationship, but

also in the relationships between characters.

Shortly before Ahmed attempts to murder Mme Inès a second time, his

psychologist tells him that she thinks he is ready to meet Mme Inès because – for the

first time during their conversations – he has put himself 'à la place de [sa] victime'.

This is interesting wording considering the Dardennes' application of Levinasian

ethics, as Ahmed 'putting himself in the place of' Mme Inès inadvertently allows

him to reattempt her murder, as it is this which convinces the psychologist to allow

him to see her again. It is not until the final scene as Ahmed falls from a great height

and faces his own death that he seems to understand the command of 'thou shalt not

kill'. In this scene, Ahmed's fall partially paralyses him. Knowing that the shutters

of the windows are closed, and he will not be seen, he inches himself toward a metal

frame at the side of the grass-covered yard and hits a metal peg against the frame to

draw attention to himself. As Mme Inès comes out of the school, responding to this

sound, she kneels next to Ahmed and asks him 'Tu m'entends?' Here, the film

literalises the Levinasian call of the face by focusing on hearing the other, rather than

seeing them. It is by hearing the metallic distress call of Ahmed that Mme Inès

responds to her responsibility for the survival of the other. Her first utterance to

Ahmed, 'Tu m'entends?' reflects this call of responsibility onto Ahmed, and in turn

elucidates his responsibility for her survival. The repetitive cycle of murderous acts

is broken by this exchange, and in asking for forgiveness from Mme Inès, Ahmed is

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[94] Cooper, 'Mortal Ethics', p. 85, emphasis original.

released from the ideological confines of radicalisation. While such a reading would seem to cohere with aspects of Levinasian ethics, we must consider what this conclusion suggests regarding radicalisation.

When interviewed, the Dardennes have frequently suggested that their intention was not to ask how or why Ahmed is radicalised, but how he can escape the ideological prison of radicalisation.[95] Notwithstanding this, the closure of the film remains problematic. Throughout the film, Ahmed's friends and relatives make multiple attempts to guide him away from violence. For example, Mme Inès recognises from the outset that he is being radicalised and encourages him to come to her Arabic classes instead of learning through his fundamentalist imam. In the detention centre, Ahmed has a heartfelt conversation with his mother in which she pleads with him to change his ways. Even his fundamentalist imam reproaches him for his violence, telling him that 'Là, maintenant, c'est pas le jihad'. While the Dardennes' studies of Levinasian ethics may have informed their conclusion that only the acknowledgement of responsibility for the other might allow a radicalised individual to shed their violent ideology, it is also possible to conclude that *Le Jeune Ahmed* suggests that this acknowledgement can only be achieved by the approach of death for the radicalised individual. Although Ahmed's fate in the final scene makes this a fitting literalisation of Levinasian ethics, this can be seen as a repetition of the tendency in traditional cinema of 'compensating moral value'.[96] A residual effect of the Motion Picture Production Code in effect in the US from 1934 to 1968, this tendency to compensate moral value refers to films which compensate for the crimes

[95] Philippe Rouyer and Yann Tobin, 'Arriver à filmer la vie qui revient', *Positif*, 700 (2019), 39–42 (p. 39).

[96] Leonard J. Leff and Jerold Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code*, 2nd edn (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), p. 309n48.

or morally questionable actions of characters by punishing that character in some way, often by death. Certainly, I do not wish to suggest that acts of terrorism are not morally reprehensible, but rather that this demonisation of the terrorist figure perpetuates the taboo surrounding such individuals, and conforms to the problematic aspect of Levinasian ethics which assumes judgement of the other as a "good" or "bad" neighbour.

Conclusion

La Désintégration and *Le Jeune Ahmed* both privilege the subjectivity of Islamist extremist figures radicalised in France and Belgium to a certain extent. Both films present a sense of awareness on the part of the filmmakers of the objective nature of terrorist violence; that is, as violence forming part of a wider network of violent acts and behaviours across the globe, rather than occurring suddenly, and without responsibility on the part of the French Republic or Belgium. Their approach to the notion of subjectivity, however, differs significantly. *La Désintégration* focuses its narrative and a large portion of its expository dialogue on the objective violence experienced by Muslims and those of Maghrebi ethnic background in French society, encouraging audiences to consider (and to an extent, assume) the subjectivity of the characters to understand these issues. By contrast, *Le Jeune Ahmed* – which heavily evokes Levinasian theory – makes no attempt to allow the viewer into the subjective viewpoint of the character. Instead, the Dardennes apply their understanding of Levinasian theory to the representation of Ahmed, creating a space for the terrorist figure in which the audience is encouraged to theoretically approach Ahmed and understand the context surrounding his experiences, while also safeguarding his subjectivity and acknowledging his irreducible alterity.

While Ali – and to a certain extent, the other terrorist figures in *La Désintégration* – provides a pedagogic tool to expose audiences to the objective violence experienced by marginalised communities in France and Belgium, his subjectivity as a human being is, at least partially, presented to the audience as an object of consumption to achieve this goal. Although there are certainly moments in which audiences are encouraged to acknowledge Ali's alterity, this approach does not remain consistent throughout the film. When read in Levinasian terms, this minimises the experience of the terrorist figure, totalising his alterity into the subjectivity of the self/audience and perpetuating the subjective position criticised by Žižek. Although objective violence is highlighted throughout the film on a narrative level, the perception of this violence remains framed through a lens which prioritises the viewpoint of the self/audience. Rather than encouraging the audience to 'step back, to disentangle [themselves] from the fascinating lure of this directly visible "subjective" violence,' Faucon has (albeit unwittingly) brought these forms of violence into the subjective view of the Western audience.[97] By contrast, the self/audience's subjective position is not prioritised in *Le Jeune Ahmed*, but deprivileged through Ahmed's continual escape from the frame and an almost complete lack of expository dialogue. As such, the Dardennes create a space where the alterity of the terrorist figure is preserved, and the objective violence experienced by Ahmed is made visible, but not framed in a way that caters to the subjective view of the audience.

While both films draw important conclusions regarding the objective violence experienced by marginalised communities in French and Belgian societies, arguably it is the Dardennes' approach that navigates more deftly some of the major

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[97] Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, p. 1.

challenges of depicting terrorist figures in cinema. Ultimately, as this chapter has shown, the ways in which objective violence is acknowledged in portrayals of terrorist figures can have significant effects on the ethics of these depictions. Although recognising objective violence in French and Belgian society is in itself an important step forward for these films, this must be balanced with a safeguarding of the alterior subjectivity of the terrorist figure in order to avoid reproducing the traditional prioritisation of white Western worldviews which have historically diminished the experiences of marginalised communities.

4. Racial Hierarchies in *Made in France* and *L'Adieu à la nuit*

In the previous chapter, I discussed the taboo of the subjectivity of the terrorist figure and its manifestation in French and Belgian cinema. Aiming to address the *homo sacer* status ascribed to terrorist figures – who are typically dehumanised, demonised, and depoliticised in Western media – the chapter analysed the extent to which *La Désintégration* and *Le Jeune Ahmed* acknowledge the systemic and symbolic violence experienced by its protagonists within French and Belgian society. It is vital, now, to turn this analysis inward and consider the systemic violence which individuals of Muslim and North African ethnic background experience within French cinema. As this chapter aims to show, non-white Muslims and North Africans in France tend to be portrayed in a less favourable manner than their white counterparts, with the terrorist figure stereotypically presented as a Middle Eastern, North African, or Muslim figure in the majority of Western Cinema.

For many decades, academia has drawn attention to the stereotyping of terrorists in Western cinema, TV, and media as Middle Eastern or Muslim figures, in the same way that communists and Russians were the stereotypical villains in 1950s cinema.[1] Hollywood films such as *The Kingdom* (Peter Berg, 2007), *Body of Lies* (Ridley Scott, 2008), *Vantage Point* (Pete Travis, 2008), and *London has Fallen* (Babak Najafi, 2016) focused on Islam and the Middle East as the source of terrorism. In French cinema, far fewer films about terrorism were released in the 2000s and early 2010s, and these were mainly non-fiction or based on real events, such as *Carlos* (Olivier Assayas, 2010) and *L'Assaut* (Julien Leclercq, 2010), and did not tend to invent stereotypical Islamist terrorist figures. Since 2010, French

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[1] James Marrison, 'Arabs Not the First: To Be Blown Away by the Movies', *Afterimage*, 31.5 (2004), 14.

cinema has ventured further into fictional portrayals of terrorists, and such figures do tend to feature Islamist fundamentalists as characters, although not always Middle Eastern or Arab. For example, *La Désintégration* and *Le Ciel attendra* (Marie-Castille Mention-Schaar, 2016) show Islamist terrorist groups composed of both second-generation Maghrebi characters and white Muslim converts. *Chez Nous* (Lucas Belvaux, 2017) focuses on white supremacist terrorism, while *Nocturama* (Bertrand Bonello, 2016) follows an ethnically diverse terrorist cell but offers no explanation of their motivations.

Evidently, French filmmakers have begun to acknowledge and show that terrorists can be and often are white, and are not solely motivated by Islamist fundamentalism. However, simply putting white actors on screen when representing terrorism does not mean that the issue of racial bias in portrayals of the terrorist figure does not apply to French cinema. To address this, this final chapter will consider how terrorist figures are represented according to their skin tone in two films which show racially and ethnically diverse terrorist cells: *Made in France* and *L'Adieu à la nuit*. The chapter will focus on two aspects of this issue: the extent to which audiences are encouraged to empathise with terrorist figures according to their skin tone, and how this is affected by the lighting and colouring of different skin tones in production and post-production of these films. This will allow me to elucidate how the subtleties of lighting and arranging a scene can affect the ways in which audiences may perceive terrorist figures with darker skin tones, particularly when their role as supporting characters within these films does not encourage audiences to identify with them as closely.

As many scholars have noted, Western media habitually privileges the visibility of individuals it deems to be more valuable; generally Christian, Western,

and usually white. As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, Judith Butler

discusses the hierarchy of public grief after 9/11, arguing that: 'Certain lives will be

highly protected […] Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will

not even qualify as "grievable"'.[2] Referring specifically to the case of death and

mourning, Butler suggests that the 'grievability' of an individual depends on whether

they fall within the bounds of what is considered 'human' by Western society, and

directly questions whether 'Arab peoples, predominantly practitioners of Islam,

[have] fallen outside the "human" as it has been naturalised in its "Western" mold'.[3]

Maria Flood similarly highlights this 'differential distribution of compassion' when

referring to the victims of the attacks on the *Charlie Hebdo* offices and those of

Boko Haram's massacres in Borno, Nigeria, which occurred simultaneously but

attracted vastly different levels of attention.[4] Flood also observes this inequality of

compassion in relation to Xavier Beauvois's *Des hommes et des dieux* (2010), a film

set during the Algerian Civil War which privileges 'the deaths of a small group of

French men over the elimination of approximately 100,000 Algerians'.[5]

This hierarchy of grief can be expanded to consider the visibility of the lives

of Muslims, as well as their deaths. Carrie Tarr, for example, discusses the

increasing visibility of Muslims in everyday life in metropolitan France and the ways

in which Islam has 'come to be perceived in dominant discourses as a threat to the

secularism of the state'.[6] Tarr connects this perceived threat also to French

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[2] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 32. See also Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, Radical Thinkers (London: Verso, 2016).
[3] Ibid.
[4] Maria Flood, 'Terrorism and Visibility in Algeria's "Black Decade": *Des Hommes et Des Dieux* (2010)', *French Cultural Studies*, 27.1 (2016), 62–72 (p. 63).
[5] Ibid., p. 67.
[6] Carrie Tarr, 'Looking at Muslims: The Visibility of Islam in Contemporary French Cinema', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 48.5 (2014), 516–33 (p. 518).

postcolonialism, suggesting that France's Muslim population has been 'increasingly stigmatised to divert attention away from the failure of urban policies' which were meant to aid the influx of Arab and Berber migrants following the Algerian War (1962) and *les trente glorieuses*, the thirty-year period of post-WW2 reconstruction, but instead created multi-ethnic suburban ghettos characterised by poor social conditions.[7] Tarr highlights how French cinema has tended to confine the practice of Islam to 'private, domestic spaces', or 'less threatening settings outside metropolitan French territory', seemingly suggesting that Islam is compatible only with France's secular society when it is not visible.[8] The visible Muslim, and particularly the visible Arab or Berber Muslim, is therefore perceived in dominant discourses to be a threat to French society. This is compounded in relation to terrorism: as Jimia Boutouba suggests, there now exists the 'stereotype of the young disenfranchised Arab Muslim-turned-terrorist'.[9]

It is therefore important to consider how Islamist terrorist figures, especially of Arab and Berber heritage, are presented to audiences in comparison to their white counterparts. By applying these observations to recent French depictions of terrorist figures, we begin to see how racial biases are encoded into the narrative and form of these films. As will become clear, *Made in France* tends to encourage more empathy from audiences towards lighter-skinned terrorist figures by dedicating more narrative time to their family situations, their thoughts and their motivations, while darker-skinned terrorists remain in the margins, with far fewer explorations of their character. This imbalance is compounded by the use of lighting and mise-en-scène,

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[7] Ibid., p. 518.
[8] Ibid., p. 519–20.
[9] Jimia Boutouba, 'Through the Lens of Terror: Re-Imaging Terrorist Violence in Boukhrief's *Made in France*', *Studies in French Cinema*, 19.3 (2019), 215–32 (p. 216).

which prioritises paler faces on screen, often leaving the darker actors in shadow, if not barely visible. By contrast, *L'Adieu à la nuit* maintains the audience at a distance from its terrorist characters, at most giving little background on them. However, lighting techniques and mise-en-scène which cater to all skin tones allow audiences to see the emotions and expressions of every character, creating a much more balanced film.

Approaches to race and ethnicity in contemporary France

As this chapter deals specifically with the depiction of the terrorist figure in contemporary French cinema, it is important to acknowledge how the subjects of race and ethnicity have been approached in the French Republican context. As a result of France's specific form of republican universalism, which considers all individuals to be unquestionably equal under the constitution, markers of identity such as race, ethnicity, and religion cannot be collected in a legally sanctioned manner, or as Jean Beaman succinctly puts it, 'the only meaningful identity is a French one'.[10] Consequently, accurate data on race and racism in France can be extremely hard to obtain. In fact, Macron's government has gone as far as to publicly question the need for academic study or university teaching of intersectionality, postcolonial studies, and other race-related fields, which the Minister of Higher Education Frédérique Vidal controversially termed 'islamo-gauchisme'.[11] The idea that studying postcolonialism and the negative effects of colonialism might lead to a

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[10] Jean Beaman, 'Are French People White?: Towards an Understanding of Whiteness in Republican France', *Identities*, 26.5 (2019), 546–62 (p. 547). For more on the lack of legally sanctioned methods of monitoring ethnic diversity in French, see Alec G. Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France: Immigration, Politics, Culture, and Society*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2007).
[11] Assemblée nationale, 'XVe législature: Session ordinaire de 2020-2021; Séance du mardi 16 février 2021', *Assemblée nationale*, 2021 <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/comptes-rendus/seance/session-ordinaire-de-2020-2021/deuxieme-seance-du-mardi-16-fevrier-2021> [accessed 21 May 2021].

type of leftist radicalism, conflated then with Islamist fundamentalism and its

proliferation, predates Vidal's statement at the Assemblée nationale. After the 2015

Charlie Hebdo attack, the political editor for major national television station *France

2*, Nathalie Saint-Cricq, made the claim: 'C'est justement ceux qui ne sont pas

"Charlie" qu'il faut repérer, ceux qui, dans certains établissements scolaires ont

refusé la minute de silence […] ceux qui ne voient pas en quoi ce combat est le

leur'.[12] Here, Saint-Cricq points at those who did not agree with the 'Je suis Charlie'

motto which became a cultural phenomenon after the attacks signalling support of

the journal, and supposedly, by extension, freedom of speech. Many cultural critics

such as Teju Cole and Emmanuel Todd criticised the use of the slogan, pointing to

the content of the satirical newspaper which has, throughout its history, attracted

controversy. 'Just because one condemns their brutal murders doesn't mean one

must condone their ideology,' suggests Cole in an article for the *New Yorker*

published two days after the attack.[13] Todd highlights what came to be the

underlying meaning of the phrase: '"Je suis Charlie", désormais synonyme de "Je

suis français"'.[14] Jim Wolfreys, while admitting that Todd's analysis suffers from

sociological determinism, agrees that the phrase amounted to a 'trumpeting of the

right to blaspheme against a "minority religion"'.[15] Saint-Cricq – and arguably Vidal

too – erroneously equates the denunciation of the politics of *Charlie Hebdo* as

terrorist sympathising, suggesting that those who 'ne sont pas Charlie' are thereby

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[12] Reproduced in part in '"Repérer et Traiter Ceux Qui Ne Sont Pas Charlie", Une Brillante Analyse de Nathalie Saint-Cricq', *La Rotative*, 2015 <https://larotative.info/reperer-et-traiter-ceux-qui-ne-785.html> [accessed 2 January 2021].
[13] Teju Cole, 'Unmournable Bodies', *The New Yorker*, 2015 <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/unmournable-bodies> [accessed 8 January 2021].
[14] Emmanuel Todd, *Qui Est Charlie?: Sociologie d'une Crise Religieuse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2015), p. 12.
[15] Jim Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia: The Rise of Respectable Racism in France* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), p. 21.

not French, and by extension, pose a physical threat to the Republic. Such is the difficulty of acknowledging France's postcolonial status from within the state.

Similarly, Katya Salmi has charted the history of French governmental and legislative resistance towards acknowledging or discussing race, racism, ethnicity, and similar markers of identity, and the practical and legal implications of such a taboo. She highlights how challenging it is for lawyers to prosecute cases of racial discrimination in French courts, the difficulty faced by researchers in acknowledging the lasting effects and injustices of French colonialism, and the simultaneous public and legislative ignorance towards racist discrimination and 'White privilege'.[16] Beaman draws a similar conclusion, suggesting that 'just as French Republicanism denies the existence of race and racism […] it simultaneously denies the existence of whiteness and white supremacy'.[17] In addition to the ignorance towards white privilege, Beaman convincingly argues that 'part of France's racial project is the continued production and reproduction of white as normal or default', and that within French society, 'French identity is understood at macro and micro levels as white'.[18] Such a state of affairs is, of course, not solely reserved to France. As scholars such as Richard Dyer and bell hooks highlighted over twenty years ago, whiteness as the default norm within the collective imaginary is endemic to Western culture.[19] However, it is possible to identify two aspects of racialisation specific to the French context. The first, as discussed above, is that France's particular model of

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[16] Katya Salmi, '"Race Does Not Exist Here": Applying Critical Race Theory to the French Republican Context', in *Atlantic Crossings: International Dialogues on Critical Race Theory*, ed. by Kevin Hylton and others (Birmingham, UK: C-SAP, 2011), pp. 177–97. 'White privilege' here refers to inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterised by racial inequality and injustice.
[17] Beaman, p. 553.
[18] Ibid., p. 553, 548.
[19] Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997); bell hooks, 'Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination' (New York: Duke University Press, 2020), pp. 165–79.

republican universalism and its taboo towards race has allowed white privilege to remain legally invisible – and therefore ignored in popular culture and media – and has also impeded marginalised and racialised groups from forming 'non-mixte' (non-mixed) dialogues as these are often labelled as purporting 'anti-white racism'.[20] The second is an implication, often overlooked, of France's reticence towards race: namely, the 'disparate treatment of the histories of different marginalised minorities, whereby a certain concurrence [*sic*] occurs over whose history will be acknowledged'.[21] While Salmi rightly acknowledges that 'experiences of Black people, as a racialized minority, have been overlooked for a very long time', the extent to which the historical suffering of different minorities at the hands of the French nation has been recognised still varies.[22] For example, as she indicates, 'steps have been made to recognise the deep cuts caused by slavery and racism towards Blacks' such as the 2001 law recognising slavery as a crime against humanity and President Chirac's 2006 decision to annually commemorate slavery's abolition.[23] By contrast, she suggests that 'there has been little progress in fully acknowledging the brutality of the Algerian war', but rather a series of laws have been introduced – such as the 2005 law citing the 'positive role' of colonialism – which actively demonstrate France's continued difficulty in critically addressing its colonial past.[24] Salmi does not suggest that the suffering of Black people in French society is more or less deserving of attention than that of Maghrebi-French people, but in underlining this disparity, sheds light on the legacies of colonial warfare and the hierarchy operating

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[20] Beaman, p. 547.
[21] Salmi, p. 186.
[22] Ibid., p. 184.
[23] Ibid., p. 186.
[24] Ibid.

in France based upon perceived race, influenced first and foremost by phenotype, but also by markers of identity such as religion, residence, clothing, and speech.

Rather than debate which groups or communities suffer the most from this hierarchy, scholars have tended to focus on the various aspects which contribute to the racialisation of marginalised groups. While Salmi focuses on the differing levels of France's acknowledgement of its own involvement in the Algerian conflict and the transatlantic slave trade, Beaman argues that 'Muslim is a racialized category located at the bottom of France's racial and ethnic hierarchy'.[25] Notably, Beaman's argument also alludes here to the common practice in contemporary France for the Muslim faith to be seen in racialised terms, and conversely, for those of North African heritage to be conflated with Muslims, a phenomenon which Paul Silverstein refers to as the 'interprellation (in the Althusserian sense of the term) of Franco-Maghrebis as "Muslims"'.[26] Alec Hargreaves, discussing the visibility of African-Caribbeans and North Africans in Paris, also highlights the 'popular equation between Muslims and North Africans which ignores sizeable numbers of Muslims originating from other regions, notably West Africa'.[27] Hargreaves cites both the changing demographics of mass migration to France, and wider patterns of geopolitical and geo-cultural change, as influences on attitudes towards the African-Caribbean and North African communities. He reminds us that in interwar and postwar France,

> colonization in North Africa was a more recent phenomenon than in the Caribbean, […] Through the violence of forced migration and slavery, France had stripped away many more layers of precolonial cultures among its subjects in the Caribbean than among those in the Maghreb. […] postwar migration from the Maghreb had made France home to the largest Muslim population in western Europe. North

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[25] Beaman, p. 555.
[26] Paul A. Silverstein, 'The Context of Antisemitism and Islamophobia in France', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 42.1 (2008), 1–26 (p. 4).
[27] Alec G. Hargreaves, 'Black-Blanc-Beur: Multi-Coloured Paris', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 5.3 (2005), 91–100 (p. 93).

> Africans, who have remained widely distrusted in France because of the enmity which marked the Algerian war of independence, thus came to occupy a central position in the debate over immigration.[28]

As such, the more recent tension between France and the Maghreb as a result of France's colonial violence has 'turn[ed] a relatively harsh spotlight on Maghrebis in France'.[29] By contrast, Hargreaves suggests that as a result of the emergence of the United States as a major global force, particularly in terms of popular culture, African-Caribbeans and their descendants are seen as French counterparts of popular African/Caribbean-American celebrities. This has been documented in industries such as advertising, in which Black individuals are cast much more frequently than Maghrebis: Hargreaves cites a pertinent quotation from the head of the advertising agency Les Hemisphères, who suggests that 'Youths of Maghrebi origin aren't sufficiently exotic; they tend to conjure up images of *banlieue* ghettoes'.[30] Undoubtedly a harmful form of racist discrimination, this both highlights the problematic exoticisation of African-Caribbeans, and the popular tendency to refer to 'menacing images associated with Maghrebis'.[31]

This association with 'menacing images' is compounded both by the tendency for the roles of terrorist figures to be cast as characters of Maghrebi heritage and played by Maghrebi-French actors, and by a documented failure to light actors with non-white complexions in a way which allows their facial features to be seen as clearly as their white counterparts. These tendencies risk a perpetuation in cinema of the stereotyping of terrorists in France as being of Maghrebi heritage, and also risks bolstering the prioritisation of the white terrorist as more visible, and

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[28] Ibid., pp. 93–94.
[29] Ibid., p. 95.
[30] Ibid., p. 96, emphasis original.
[31] Ibid.

potentially therefore more relatable, than the Maghrebi terrorist; the white terrorist as the "good terrorist", and the Maghrebi terrorist as the "bad" one.

Lighting darker skin in cinema

In recent years, Western media has begun to address the issue of US cinema's failure in (or ignorance with regard to) balancing the lighting of darker skin tones in comparison to the white and pale faces it has historically prioritised on screen. The issue, however, took many years to come to public attention. In 2009, Professor of Communications at Concordia University in Canada, Lorna Roth, published an influential article on the inherent bias against darker skin tones in the industries of visual representation. In 'Looking at Shirley', Roth summarised the existing multidisciplinary scholarship on whiteness as a norm and used this to critique the apparatuses of visual reproduction, specifically with reference to the now-infamous 'Shirley Cards'; colour reference cards featuring the face of a white woman named Shirley Page which were used by photography technicians to balance their equipment, meaning that photographs of any person with darker skin would likely be unbalanced. In so doing, Roth confronted a task which only a handful of scholars had broached before her.[32] Jean-Louis Comolli, for example, questioned the ideological neutrality of the cinematic device in relation to race in 1971, while Brian Winston highlighted in 1985 that 'color film […] more readily photographs Caucasians than other human types'.[33] Winston elaborates by suggesting that the cultural context in

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[32] Lorna Roth, 'Looking at Shirley, the Ultimate Norm: Colour Balance, Image Technologies, and Cognitive Equity', *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 34.1 (2009), 111–36.

[33] Jean-Louis Comolli, *Cinema Against Spectacle*, trans. by Daniel Fairfax (Amsterdam University Press, 2015); Brian Winston, 'A Whole Technology of Dyeing: A Note on Ideology and the Apparatus of the Chromatic Moving Image', *Daedalus*, 114.4 (1985), 105–23 (p. 106).

which the photographic apparatus was invented continued to influence even the most recent updates to photographic equipment (at the time of his publication):

> The photographic image accommodates the previously established codes of representation just as the social circumstances in which these new images are consumed conform to preexisting and culturally specific patterns. The apparatus [of the camera] is not neutral, and altering its purpose requires considerable deformation of its inherent (i.e., designed-in) capacities and capabilities.[34]

The works of Comolli and Winston, as such, highlight the failure to update photographic apparatuses to accommodate and cater to skin tones which are not white. Roth suggests that these works, although important and illuminating, had focused on the bias within existing technologies, and had not considered the extent to which 'industries of visual representation, including alternative media (TV, video, film, photography), are responding to or ignoring public and economic pressures to colour-modify their technologies'.[35] Essentially, Roth's article acknowledged the existing critique of colour bias in visual imaging technologies, and asked why it had not been acted upon by the industries that created those technologies.

Although Roth's article aimed to push the discussion of this issue beyond the borders of academia and into the public, commercial, and corporate eye, the American film industry only recently began to address this issue publicly. In 2013, director Ava DuVernay addressed her frustration in an interview: 'I don't appreciate seeing black folks that are unlit [...] you don't automatically light for the lighter-skinned person and leave [the darker-skinned actor] in shadow'.[36] DuVernay's comments were followed shortly by the release of *12 Years a Slave* (Steve McQueen, 2013), which was later praised for its realistic lighting of Lupita Nyong'o's dark

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[34] Winston, 'A Whole Technology of Dyeing', pp. 106–07.

[35] Roth, p. 115.

[36] Nichole Perkins, 'Ava DuVernay's Episode Of *Scandal* Starts Off With A Scream', *Buzzfeed*, 2013 <https://www.buzzfeed.com/tnwhiskeywoman/ava-duvernay-is-used-to-being-her-own-shonda-rhimes> [accessed 6 October 2021].

complexion. In 2014, Syreeta McFadden wrote a biographical piece for *Buzzfeed*, 'Teaching the Camera To See My Skin: Navigating Photography's Inherited Bias against Dark Skin', in which she discusses her personal experience with photographic equipment and its inherent bias towards darker skin tones, drawing attention to the influence of 'Shirley Cards' and making reference to Roth's publication.[37] Since its release, McFadden's article has been cited by many of her fellow academic scholars. However, it was after the release of *Moonlight* (Barry Jenkins, 2016) that Hollywood's failure to appropriately light darker skin came to the forefront of discussions of Black actors on the cinema screen.

Aware of the industry's historic failure to light actors who were not white with the same attention as their white counterparts, Jenkins and the cinematography team of *Moonlight* paid a great deal of attention to the aesthetic of the cast's skin once it had been shot. Cinematographer James Laxton and colourist Alex Bickel worked together to test the technologies and techniques available to highlight the richness of darker skin and draw out the texture of the actors' complexions, so as not to have the ashy, flat quality often seen in Hollywood representations of Black skin.[38] Since the release of *Moonlight* and its success at the Oscars, many media platforms have turned their attention to how films portray Black and darker skin, with older releases like *Selma* (Ava DuVernay, 2014), and *Straight Outta Compton* (F. Gary Gray, 2015) garnering positive attention for their approach, and later releases such as *Mudbound* (Dee Rees, 2017) and the TV series *Insecure* (Issa Rae

[37] Syreeta McFadden, 'Teaching The Camera To See My Skin: Navigating Photography's Inherited Bias against Dark Skin', *Buzzfeed*, 2014 <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/syreetamcfadden/teaching-the-camera-to-see-my-skin> [accessed 5 October 2021].
[38] Chris O'Falt, '*Moonlight* Glow: Creating the Bold Color and Contrast of Barry Jenkins' Emotional Landscape', *IndieWire*, 2016 <https://www.indiewire.com/2016/10/moonlight-cinematography-color-barry-jenkins-james-laxton-alex-bickel-1201740402/> [accessed 5 October 2021].

and Larry Wilmore, 2016–present) being praised for their vibrant portrayals of skin tone and texture.[39] In her recent monograph, *Moonlight: Screening Queer Black Youth*, Maria Flood explores the complexities of the language surrounding these discussions of lighting Black skin.[40]

Consideration of how techniques can improve the lighting of darker skin has not, however, advanced as far in French cinema. Although many of the authors critiquing Hollywood's filming of dark skin have cited French director Jean-Luc Godard's denunciation of Kodak film stock as racist in the 1970s, the French cinema industry and scholarship have not paid the issue much attention. Diarra Sourang, a French filmmaker and author, comments in her book *Filmer les peaux foncées* that work that directly addresses the inadequate lighting of darker skin tones is limited mostly to published undergraduate and Masters' theses by Film students (like herself), and French scholarship beyond that focuses on all skin in cinema rather than the specificity of dark skin.[41] For example, the introduction of *Filmer la peau* by Priska Morrissey and Emmanuel Siety does touch on the history of inadequate filming of darker skin, but only to cite the anglophone studies already highlighted here before moving on to discuss the significance of skin within cinema as a whole.[42]

Sourang suggests that 'à cause du manque de diversité ethnique à l'écran, la question du rendu de la peau n'est malheureusement pas une priorité du cinéma

[39] Nadia Latif, 'It's Lit! How Film Finally Learned to Light Black Skin', *The Guardian*, 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/sep/21/its-lit-how-film-finally-learned-how-to-light-black-skin> [accessed 3 October 2021]; Trevell Anderson, 'This Queer Cinematographer Is Why Insecure Looks So Good', *Out*, 2019 <https://www.out.com/television/2019/3/18/queer-cinematographer-why-insecure-looks-so-good> [accessed 2 October 2021].
[40] Maria Flood, *Moonlight: Screening Black Queer Youth*, Cinema and Youth Cultures (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 60–62.
[41] Diarra Sourang, *Filmer Les Peaux Foncées: Réflexions Plurielles*, Images Plurielles: Scènes et Écrans (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2019).
[42] Priska Morrissey and Emmanuel Siety, *Filmer La Peau*, Le Spectaculaire (France: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2017), pp. 7–8.

français'.[43] Indeed, this issue has been raised a number of times by Black and darker-skinned actors in the French cinema industry in recent years. Sourang reminds us that in 2017, 259 French films were released, totalling around 2600 roles; 171 of those roles were played by Black actors, and only 31 of those 171 were principal roles.[44] In 2018, sixteen French actresses came together to publish *Noire n'est pas mon métier* (Aïssa Maïga, 2018), a collection of essays on the discrimination and stereotyping they face as 'actrices noires ou métisses du cinéma français'.[45] A few days after its publication, on 16 May 2018, the contributing actresses climbed the steps of the Palais des Festivals at the Cannes Film Festival, bringing the issue into the public eye. Two years later in February 2020, thirty French actors signed a statement criticising the lack of diversity at France's César Awards, which was released just a few days before the forty-fifth awards ceremony. At the ceremony itself, actress Aïssa Maïga made a speech denouncing the treatment of Black, Arab and Asian actors in French cinema, in which she highlighted the lack of roles for non-white actors, and the stereotyping of the roles non-white actors are often given:

> À chaque fois que je me retrouve comma ça dans une grande réunion du métier, je peux pas m'empêcher de compter le nombre de Noirs dans la salle. […] J'ai toujours pu compter sur les doigts d'une main le nombre de non-blancs. Je sais qu'on est en France et qu'on n'a pas vraiment le droit de compter […] nous on a survécu au whitewashing, on a survécu aux blackface […] on a survécu autant de rôles du dealer, de femme de ménage à l'accent Bwana, on a survécu au rôle de terroristes, on a survécu à tous les rôles de filles hyper-sexualisées.[46]

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[43] Sourang.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Aïssa Maïga, Nadège Beausson-Diagne, and Charlotte Rotman, *Noire n'est Pas Mon Métier* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2018).

[46] *Les Meilleurs Moments et Le Palmarès de La 45e Cérémonie Des César 2020: Aïssa Maïga : 'On Est Une Famille on Se Dit Tout, Non ?' - César 2020* (CANAL+, 2020) <https://www.canalplus.com/articles/cinema/les-meilleurs-moments-et-le-palmares-de-la-45e-ceremonie-des-cesar-2020?token=46c05622bca22a8ef5c81f40e0b8cdc2&timestamp=1582736682&fbclid=IwAR0A-F95ipf60RRZH8zIIFrwHvztiNcm6Tjdz2kq7k1Y2d7i8ay1K47tltw> [accessed 3 October 2021].

In one fell swoop, Maïga brings to light the lack of representation for non-white French citizens, the difficulty in addressing issues of racial discrimination within France, the stereotyping of non-white roles as demonised and diminutive, and the exoticisation of non-white complexions within French cinema. Evidently, attention to diversity – or lack thereof – in French cinema is only recently raising the question of how darker skin is filmed. However, Maïga's pertinent reminder of the stereotyping of people with darker skin tones as drug dealers and terrorists brings to light an equally important consideration, which this chapter will address: already stereotyped as menacing and criminal elements of society, how does the inadequate lighting of deeper and darker skin tones in French cinema affect the representation of these minorities, particularly when they are cast in the role of terrorists? Through close readings of *Made in France* and *L'Adieu à la nuit*, I argue that lighting choices which do not consider darker skin tones compound the demonisation and dehumanisation of darker-skinned terrorists.

The "good" and "bad" terrorist in *Made in France*

Made in France focuses on an Islamist extremist terrorist cell, a topic which made the film difficult to distribute. Filming began at the end of summer 2014 and, due to the limited budget, lasted only six weeks. Boukhrief had already encountered difficulty in securing funding for the production, which many producers considered to be too controversial at a time when Brussels, Kenya, northern Mali and many other territories had fallen victim to Islamist extremist violence.[47] Nevertheless, the film was eventually picked up by Pretty Pictures and Radar films, with backing from

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[47] Olivier Bouchara, '*Made in France*, Le Film Maudit', *Vanity Fair FR*, 2016 <https://www.vanityfair.fr/culture/ecrans/articles/-made-in-france-le-film-maudit-par-olivier-bouchara/31201> [accessed 9 August 2021].

Canal+. Boukhrief continued to experience resistance, struggling to obtain filming permission from local councils; a hurdle he overcame by submitting a fake script in which the jihadists were reimagined as Russian mafia.[48] The release was set for 18 November 2015, just five days after the fateful attacks across Paris on 13 November. At the time of the attacks, copies of the film's poster – an image of the Eiffel Tower composed in part of a Kalashnikov – were still pasted across Paris. The film's theatrical release was cancelled, and it was eventually released on the French television channel TF1's online streaming service on 29 January 2016. The DVD release begins with a three-second flash of text on screen, which simply reads 'Ce film a été tourné avant les attentats de janvier 2015'. Despite the time elapsed between the November attacks and the film's eventual streaming release, no reference to the November attacks is made.

The film follows Sam (Malik Zidi), a white Muslim journalist of Algerian and French heritage, who infiltrates an Islamist extremist terrorist cell in Paris and passes information to the French police about the cell's movements. The cell is made up of Sidi (Ahmed Dramé), a Black Muslim of Malian descent; Driss (Nassim Si Ahmed), a Muslim of Maghrebi descent; Christophe (François Civil), a white Muslim convert from Christianity; and Hassan (Dimitri Storoge), also a white Muslim convert. The film tracks their plotting of a terrorist attack, which ultimately fails to occur as all members of the cell perish by various means, with the exception of Sam. Although all of the main characters in *Made in France* are Muslim men, by birth or following conversion, and French citizens, they are portrayed with varying degrees of proximity to audiences.

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[48] Ibid.

Jima Boutouba convincingly argues that *Made in France* 'challenges the consensual notion of terrorism as a foreign import while dismantling normative scripts premised on essentialist representations or religious pre-determination of the figure of the terrorist,' and that it 'subverts the "colonial" legacy of Western films in which "the Western hero" inhabits the narrative foreground and embodies a universal subjectivity, while the racialised others, often reduced to deviant subjects or disposable bodies, remain in the background'.[49] The film's director Nicolas Boukhrief does create a film which subverts many of the typical conventions of representing terrorism, such as the Western world as a victim of a foreign perpetrator, and the terrorist figure as dehumanised and depoliticised in a general sense. Boutouba also suggests that Boukhrief implicates French society in terrorist violence: 'the four terrorists he presents are all French. They all live in France'.[50] Certainly, they are all French citizens, and *should* be considered as such. However, this is complicated slightly when we remember that, as discussed above, the popular imaginary positions 'whiteness as synonymous with Frenchness'.[51] We therefore need to interrogate how the ethnic diversity of this terrorist cell is presented, and consider which of these terrorist figures are prioritised visually.

The character of Sam – like the actor Malik Zidi who portrays him – has a white French mother and an Algerian father. Zidi's own father was a Kabyle Berber man – a northern Algerian ethnic group whose skin tones are often very light, and many of whom were enlisted as *harkis* (indigenous Algerians who served as part of the French army during the Algerian War).[52] As Boutouba suggests, this character

[49] Jimia Boutouba, 'Through the Lens of Terror: Re-Imaging Terrorist Violence in Boukhrief's *Made in France*', *Studies in French Cinema*, 19.3 (2019), 215–32 (p. 219, 224).
[50] Ibid., p. 220.
[51] Beaman, p. 552.
[52] François-Xavier Hautreux, 'L'engagement Des Harkis (1954-1962): Essai de Périodisation', *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 90.2 (2006), 33–45 (p. 35).

can be read as providing 'renewed understanding of what constitutes religious and national identity', and as acknowledging how racialisation of Algerians in France based on their appearance is reductive, ignoring the ethnic diversity within the region.[53] However, while this may challenge the idea discussed above of 'whiteness as synonymous with Frenchness', Sam's role can also be seen as problematically mirroring French colonial attitudes towards Algerians. Discussing the construction of the Arab in French media, Deltombe and Rigouste highlight that this image often reflects the republican assimilation model. Using two diametrically opposed examples – Khaled Kelkal, the co-author of the 1995 Parisian RER attack, and the celebrated footballer Zinedine Zidane – they demonstrate how polarised the characterisation of Muslims in France can be. Whereas Kelkal – as immigrant, Muslim-turned-extremist, and delinquent-turned-terrorist – became a paradigmatic example of the perceived threat posed by banlieue youth, Zidane was championed as the exception to the Arab rule: according to which, 'if an Arab tried hard enough or happened to be brilliant, there was no reason for them not to be loved by racists'.[54] To describe the this, Deltombe and Rigouste use the term *préfet* (prefect), meaning the media-driven ideology that the Arab can only be successful when in the entertainment industry, or when serving the Republic.[55] The term *préfet* in this sense refers to the 'promotion of "good Muslims" to positions of responsibility […] in order to better keep the "native masses" in line', much like the promotion of school students to the status of prefect with the expectation that they enforce discipline upon other students.[56] The concept that Arabs can only be successful when in

[53] Boutouba, p. 224.

[54] Thomas Deltombe and Mathieu Rigouste, 'The Enemy Within: The Construction of the "Arab" in the Media', in *The Colonial Legacy in France*, ed. by Alexis Pernsteiner and others, Fracture, Rupture, and Apartheid (Indiana University Press, 2017), pp. 115–22 (pp. 119–20).

[55] Ibid., p. 119.

[56] Ibid., p. 121.

entertainment or when serving the Republic closely echoes the French colonial empire's treatment of colonised subjects as entertainment in human zoos during the Colonial Exposition of 1931, or in the role of *harki*.[57] In this way, Sam can be seen as the *préfet* figure of the film. He is a French-Algerian Muslim, who has supposedly successfully assimilated under the republican model: he lives in a spacious and clean apartment – always shown as brightly lit and containing brimming bookshelves – with his wife and child, has a successful career as a journalist, and serves the Republic by allying himself to the police. As we will see, Sam is privileged not only in the narrative as the film's protagonist, but also within the mise-en-scène of the film even at moments when he is not the logical focus of the narrative.

Set in the urban Parisian banlieue, and taking place mostly at night, *Made in France* is overall a gloomy and dimly-lit film. Boukhrief is not the only French director to choose a darker visual aesthetic for a film about terrorism – *La Désintégration*, *Chez Nous* (Lucas Belvaux, 2017), *13 novembre*, and many other French portrayals of terrorism also feature a mostly dark, gloomy visual tone. However, when this film's lighting is closely considered, we begin to see how it privileges the visibility of white-presenting and lighter-skinned characters, while darker-skinned characters are visually disadvantaged, often literally left in the shadows of the film.

This visual hierarchy takes effect from the first scene. As the group finish a meeting with a radicalised Imam in a suburb of Paris, Driss, Sidi, and Sam sit down in the entry hall to put their shoes back on after prayer. Sam's pale face is highlighted and clearly visible in its entirety. Driss's face, slightly darker than

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[57] Brett A. Berliner, 'Savages in the Garden: The Nègre on Exhibition', in *Ambivalent Desire: The Exotic Black Other in Jazz-Age France* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), pp. 107–22.

Sam's, is less visible, and Sidi's facial features disappear almost entirely, as the lighting makes him appear more a silhouette.

Figure 16: Sidi, Sam, and Driss in the opening scene of Made in France

At this point in the narrative, we know that Sam is a journalist who is infiltrating a terrorist cell, but we do not know the identities of Driss and Sidi, nor anything about their background or radicalisation. Although it may be necessary for audiences to identify Sam visually given his principal role, the decision to include Sidi and Driss without lighting them appropriately presents them in the first instance as characters to which audiences are not encouraged to relate, empathise with, or even be particularly aware of. Right from their introduction, Driss and Sidi are therefore placed beneath Sam in the film's visual hierarchy, exemplifying the consequences of lighting non-white actors poorly.

Although Sam is naturally privileged within the visual space of the film as its protagonist, we can see the visual hierarchy of the characters through lighting even in scenes which do not require Sam to be central. For example, one of the first criminal activities the cell takes part in is an underground arms deal, arranged and negotiated by Driss and Hassan. During the negotiations, Sam utters only a few words, while Driss speaks to the dealers the most as he knows them personally.

Figure 17: Sam, Hassan, and Driss negotiate with arms dealers in Made in France

However, even here, Sam and Hassan's paler faces are brightly lit by high-contrast broadside lighting, making them clearly visible, and their expressions clear to see. By contrast, Driss's position in the frame relative to the placement of the lighting sources means that he is left in shadow. His face remains visible, but so dimly lit that we can only make out its basic contours (the nose, eyes, and lips), and his expression is difficult to fully discern. While the inadequate lighting of Sidi and Driss in the first scene demonstrates this visual hierarchy for characters, it is here that we begin to see the full effect that lighting can have on their representation. Sam's expression reveals his naiveté in the situation; he chews his cheek with a slightly furrowed brow. Hassan appears calm, and calculated, considering the wares the dealers put before him. Driss, despite being the one who knows the dealers and arranged the meeting, has no discernible expression largely because of his placement and lighting. We cannot see the look he is giving the dealer, or much at all of his body language, because of the lack of clarity. As a result, the thoughts, emotions, and character of Sam and Hassan are revealed to the audience, giving viewers the opportunity to empathise with Sam and evaluate Hassan's personality. Driss, on the other hand,

remains distanced visually from the audience, displaying no discernible emotion to evaluate, much less to empathise with.

Even during scenes where the emotions of non-white characters might readily be foregrounded, Sam's pale face is visually privileged by lighting choices. One prominent example occurs as Sam approaches Sidi to discuss his motivations for being involved in the cell, and he opens up to Sam about his cousin killed by a French soldier in Mali. In a conversation which presents a distinct opportunity for audiences to acknowledge Sidi's emotions and character, the lighting again thwarts this. Here, Sam is brightly lit within the frame, all of his features are available to see, and his expression is open and caring. By contrast, the lighting of the scene does not cater to Sidi's features and expression. Although visible, the contours of his face seem to blend into each other – his eyebrow is only slightly visible thanks to a small reflection on his upper brow bone, the details of his eyes are invisible, the area around his lips is obscured by shadow – making an expression of emotion difficult to discern. It seems here that the opportunity to use cross lighting to highlight both characters equally was passed upon, or perhaps – as we have seen is historically the case in film – cross lighting was used but not appropriately enough for Sidi's darker skin. A small amount of natural light from the window behind them reflects on Sidi's neck under his ear, but because the blind is drawn, this does not reflect on many of his features, leaving his jawline invisible. This natural light from the window bounces off the front of Sam's neck, highlighting his Adam's apple – a feature on male actors which can be indicative of emotion or temperament. Sidi's neck, by contrast, is obscured by shadow due to a lack of frontal lighting provided for him. Although Sidi's background and emotion are the focus of the dialogue, Sam's facial expression and visual presence are favoured.

To fully understand the implications of showing Sidi's struggle without allowing audiences to see the true extent of his emotions, it is productive here to borrow a concept from E. Ann Kaplan, who discusses her theory of 'empty empathy' in relation to images of the Rwanda and the Iraq War.[58] In her work, Kaplan compares her response when viewing a French documentary about women suffering trauma as a result of the violence in Rwanda to her response to viewing Western (mostly American) media coverage of the Iraq War, which focused on the American soldiers on the ground. She describes finding the film about the suffering of Rwandan women 'only too real […] and thus overwhelming', while 'coverage of the Iraq war seemed unreal even though it was clear that the reporters […] were actually there in Baghdad'.[59] For Kaplan, the key difference between her responses to these two portrayals of violence and trauma is their contextualisation, or lack thereof. While in the documentary on Rwanda, the 'larger context for their suffering—that is, the violent interethnic hatred—was abundantly clear and made the women's suffering seem senseless', the coverage of the Iraq war tended to 'focus on individuals rather than on the larger issues to do with the reason for war on Iraq […] and especially its devastating impact on Iraqi women, children, and innocent civilians'.[60] Kaplan also criticises media coverage of the Iraq War, and its 'practice of providing fragmented images of individual pain'.[61] She recalls seeing the coverage and media photos of Iraqis suffering as a result of the combat, but being unable to fully understand the reasons for this suffering due to the absence of any wider context. As she asked, 'Why were the children injured? Why are the people carrying

[58] E. Ann Kaplan, 'Vicarious Trauma and "Empty" Empathy: Media Images of Rwanda and the Iraq War', in *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (Rutgers University Press, 2005), pp. 87–100.
[59] Ibid., p. 94.
[60] Ibid., p. 92, 95.
[61] Ibid., p. 94.

a white flag? What are our soldiers really doing in Iraq?'[62] This is certainly

reminiscent of Žižek's theory of objective and subjective violence as discussed in

Chapter 3. While the French documentary on Rwanda provided the context of the

women's suffering, stepping back from the subjective viewpoint to see the bigger

picture of the objective networks of violence in which this trauma was occurring, the

media coverage of the Iraq war functioned through the prism of subjective violence;

the wider context of objective violence was not provided.

Kaplan's empty empathy refers to 'empathy elicited by images of suffering

provided without any context or background knowledge'.[63] She explains that these

individualised images of suffering make the plight of the people in the images seem

less 'real', because this is a sentimentalised view of suffering.[64] Although Kaplan

centres her concept of empty empathy on case studies of media and documentary

regarding Rwanda and Iraq, an application of her theory to this scene in *Made in*

France allows us to understand the effect that such portrayals of suffering can have.

In this scene, Sidi tells Sam that he is unsure about his capabilities as a fighter, but

that he feels compelled to fight because his cousin in Mali – who was 'comme un

frère' to him and wanted to be a doctor – was shot in the face by a French soldier

even though he was not a jihadist. Here, we can see a similar line of questioning

arise from Sidi's admissions: why was his cousin shot in the face? Why were French

soldiers in Mali? At no other point in the film is the objective violence experienced

abroad at the hands of French military referenced. By Boukhrief's own admission in

interviews, 'derrière le jeune qui se fait exploser, pensant avoir commis un acte

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[62] Ibid., p. 97.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid., p. 94. Although Kaplan does not offer a concrete definition of her use of 'sentimental', it is implied throughout the chapter that she is referring to feelings of tenderness and sadness, but particularly in a self-indulgent sense.

héroïque, se cache un être humain bercé par les injustices sociales et le manque flagrant de possibilités d'intégration. […] la France, depuis Mitterand, a abandonné les pauvres. La radicalisation est l'une des conséquences de cette injustice'.[65] Yet, other than Sidi's extremely brief mention of Mali, *Made in France* does little to highlight this type of violence. As such, our relation to Sidi is one of empty empathy; we are encouraged to briefly sympathise with his plight, but not to understand it in context. This empty empathy is then compounded further by the fact that Sam's facial expressions are the focus of the shot, rather than Sidi's. While Sidi's suffering is already presented in a way that diminishes the reality of the social injustices faced by minorities in France, audiences cannot even clearly see the effect that it has on the individual experiencing the suffering on screen. This has the problematic effect of not only diminishing the experience of the darker-skinned character, but of impeding audiences' acknowledgement of his experience entirely. This, in turn, further substantiates the notion that visual and ethnic hierarchies are at play within the film.

Furthermore, this visual disadvantage towards darker-skinned characters frames the roles of both Sidi and Driss, from them being placed in the shadows of the first scene to both of their deaths. Sidi is the first of the group to die, at the film's midpoint. After the group's failed attempt to steal explosives, Sidi is shot by a security guard. Reluctant to take him to hospital and be discovered, the cell members take him to a remote location and discuss their options, where he bleeds out, and dies. Significantly, as Sidi nears death, the camera zooms in slowly on him, surrounded by the group, as he prays. In this shot, Sidi is centre frame, and the other cell members surround him. Despite this positioning, and what might seem like an

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[65] Élie Castiel, 'Nicolas Boukhrief: Une Question de Prise de Conscience Morale', *Séquences: La Revue de Cinéma*, 302 (2016), 8–11 (p. 9).

obvious central position at this point in the narrative (he is dying, and therefore might be expected to be the focus both visually and within the dialogue), the lighting does not cater to him at all. Instead, the face of Hassan is the most visible, and therefore the most easily identifiable to the audience. Sidi, in fact, almost disappears again into the darkness of the surroundings, discernible only by small patches of light reflecting from the sweat on his forehead, from the bridge of his nose, and from his lower lip. Already disadvantaged by the lighting, Sidi's emotion and experience are further disregarded as the camera pans up to Sam's face to focus on his reaction. Well-lit as usual, Sam's entire face is visible, despite the broadside lighting leaving the right side of his face in shadow. His furrowed brow and slightly open mouth allow us to recognise his concerned, panicked, and troubled emotions. Once again, in such an intensely intimate moment where the audience might be encouraged to relate to Sidi and consider his emotional turmoil, the paler-skinned expressions of Sam and Hassan are visually privileged.

Driss is presented in a similar way, but instead of figuration of his character as a 'disposable body', he is portrayed throughout the film as the racialised 'deviant subject'.[66] While context about the lives and radicalisation of the other characters is given, the film offers audiences no context about Driss's life, and unlike the other terrorist characters, viewers remain unaware of the reasons for his radicalisation. While audiences' empathy for Sidi may be empty, viewers are not encouraged to empathise with Driss at all. This is particularly apparent during a scene in which he is murdered by Hassan. During a disagreement, the pair descend into a physical altercation which culminates with Hassan stabbing Driss in the torso, causing his death. The camera captures Driss's face for a moment, cupped in Sam's hands,

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[66] Boutouba, p. 224.

before Driss drops to the floor and out of the frame, leaving the camera lingering on Sam's horrified reaction in a close-up. This is strikingly similar to the death of Sidi, in that any attention to the emotion and turmoil of a non-white character is foregone in order to focus on the experience of the white character.

Further to solidifying them as disposable bodies, the deaths of Sidi and Driss play into a more widely observable tendency to have 'the colonial native […] disappear in an instant through the auto-combustive agency of their own violence'.[67] Paul Gilroy highlights one such example in Michael Haneke's *Caché* (2005), in which Majid, the son of two Algerians killed in the 1961 Paris massacre, commits suicide. Gilroy argues that within the schema of the film, Majid's suicide functions as an 'exclusively aesthetic event, devoid of all meaning apart from what it communicates about Georges', who is the film's white, middle-class protagonist.[68] Although *Caché* is not a film about terrorist violence, we can certainly identify a similar framing of the death of minority ethnic characters in *Made in France*. Sidi and Driss are both killed as a result of their own violence: Sidi through his involvement in criminal activity, and Driss through his confrontation with Hassan. The focalisation of the framing during their deaths on Sam's reaction and emotion also renders their deaths meaningful only in relation to the effect it has on him, and allows the remaining third of the film to focus exclusively on the white terrorists. As such, the treatment of Sidi and Driss as disposable bodies is compounded as they are denied any character development beyond the stereotype of the self-destructive terrorist figure.

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[67] Paul Gilroy, 'Shooting Crabs in a Barrel', *Screen*, 48.2 (2007), 233–35 (p. 234).
[68] Ibid., p. 234.

By contrast, the deaths of Christophe and Hassan allow much more opportunity for audiences to recognise their emotional state. The death of converted Christian Christophe by car bomb is shown in slow motion and medium close-up, giving the audience ample time to see him perform the sign of the cross as he realises that he is about to die, and encouraging viewers to acknowledge his emotions, a proximity which is neither granted to Driss nor Sidi. Similarly, Hassan is killed in a standoff with a RAID police tactical unit. Although the moment of his death is shown via a long shot, and does not focus on his face, it is preceded by a brief point of view shot from his line of vision, and he is shown with arms outstretched as a shower of bullets kills him. Undeniably couched in a Christian imagery of Christ, the framing of Hassan's death combined with a point-of-view shot brings him into extreme proximity to the audience, even to the point of occupying the same position. The contrast between Christophe and Hassan's deaths from those of Driss and Sidi is striking. Directing attention away from Sidi and Driss as they die and towards the white-presenting Sam reinforces the audience's identification with the latter, solidifying the distance between the viewer and non-white terrorists, while Hassan and Christophe are connected with images of their former Christian faith and allowed a much greater level of proximity to the audience.

The privileging of paler skin tones over darker ones is evidently problematic. As we have seen, camera equipment has typically catered to paler skin tones. As such, in scenes which feature both pale and darker skin, it is common for the paler actors to appear more clearly. However, at several points in *Made in France*, Sidi and Driss appear in frame alone and are still poorly lit. Whether deliberate or accidental, the failure to light darker-skinned actors even when they are the sole focus of the shot signals ignorance toward the portrayal of these figures as a whole.

To demonstrate this further, it is productive to refer to an instance where audiences may be encouraged to relate to an individual character on screen: in the domestic space. There are many times when Sam, Hassan, and Christophe are shown in their respective homes. Sam's home is featured at the film's start, and is presented as a bright, clean and joyous space where he enjoys life with his wife and child. Every subsequent shot of the apartment is naturally and brightly lit, and Sam is continuously well-lit in his own home. Hassan's home, although not as brightly lit in most instances, is presented usually with a warm orange or yellow filter, and lit well enough for Hassan and his wife's faces to always be clearly visible. Christophe, too, is also shown in domestic scenes that are usually brightly and naturally lit, therefore displaying his physical appearance very clearly. By comparison, Driss and Sidi's homes are both shown with blue filters, and appear dull or dark in every shot we see.

In one sequence, after the arms deal goes awry and Hassan murders the dealers out of spite, we see each of the cell members in their homes, contemplating the severity of the situation they have witnessed. This sequence is particularly pertinent to the current discussion because it is one of the few instances where all of the homes are portrayed at night, and in darkness. It is also one of the rare instances during which we see Driss and Sidi respectively alone in the frame. Despite the separation of the characters and the possibility to adjust lighting conditions to accurately (or at least equally) display all characters, the paler faces in this sequence remain privileged. Christophe, for example, sits in his bed in complete darkness, watching footage he took at the arms deal on his laptop. The green light emitting from the computer illuminates his face entirely, making it the focal point of the shot. He puts down his laptop, plunging the shot into darkness, and lights a cigarette, illuminating the shot again as warm orange light bounces off his features. His

expression is clear, and shows that he is enthralled by the footage. His calm but thoughtful demeanour and expression in the face of the violence he has seen reveal him to the audience as 'a rich, idle, social parasite in search of thrills'.[69] Unflattering though this portrayal may be, the clear visibility of his expression allows audiences to acknowledge his motivations, and understand his character as hedonistic and slightly immature. Comparatively, Driss is shown briefly working out with a punching bag, before he moves outside to his apartment balcony. The low lighting at the front of his face makes his features visible, but appear dark. We can divine from his expression that he is frustrated, but not much else. He is portrayed as violent, he is moved from the familiar domestic sphere into the outside world of his balcony, and the lighting discourages audiences from detecting any emotional subtleties. While Christophe's unfavourable portrayal is multidimensional, Driss is portrayed simply as aggressive and angry. The portrayal of Sidi in this sequence is equally, if not more, dismissive than that of Driss. Like Christophe, Sidi is also shown in his bed at home in darkness. He clutches a string of prayer or Subhah beads. Unlike Christophe, he is so dimly lit that his features, again, become almost indiscernible. Light reflects from his elbow, chin, the bottom of his nose, and his brow bone, and the catchlight on his eye is visible. However, the brightest reflection bounces off the beads and bed sheets, which are bottom centre frame.

We can understand from his clutching of the beads close to his chest that he is anxious or troubled by the events at the arms deal, but it is significant that this emotion is connoted via the beads rather than his face, which we cannot see in any significant detail. While Christophe's brightly-lit face allows audiences to see his expression and evaluate his character based upon his emotions, Driss's and Sidi's

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[69] Boutouba, p. 229.

Figure 18: Sidi lies in his bed clutching Subhah beads in Made in France

emotions are marked mainly by other visual cues (aggression exerted upon a punch bag, concern of clutching prayer beads). By withholding the detail of their facial expressions, Boukhrief also withholds the primary means of identification audiences use to evaluate characters. While audiences' evaluation of Christophe's character may not be a favourable one, it would certainly be more in-depth than any they can divine from the obscured expressions of Sidi and Driss.

Here, we can clearly see how racial biases play into Bouhkrief's depiction of terrorist figures, with their relation to the audience depending on their connection to conceptual whiteness. Although they are all practicing Muslims, we see that white-presenting Muslims are given much more visual priority than their darker-skinned counterparts, who in turn are screened away from the audience both through narrative choices and lighting inadequacies. Affording audiences proximity to white-presenting terrorists through closer exploration of their backgrounds and illuminating their emotions, while denying non-white terrorists this familiarity risks categorising white-presenting terrorists as somehow more human, imposing a supposed categorisation between "good terrorists", or those we can empathise with, and "bad terrorists", with whom we can and should not empathise.

Ultimately, this categorisation reminds us of the "good" and "bad" neighbour distinction seen in Chapter 3. While Chapter 3 discussed the implications of Levinas's judgement of "good" and "bad" neighbours in terms of its ignorance towards the context of objective violence, which plays a part in the radicalisation of terrorists, this chapter shows that such a categorisation can also be a result of the – often subtle – systemic violence of society. While the terrorist characters of *Made in France* may not be presented as morally divergent – with the exception of Sam, they are all criminals who have chosen to engage in terrorism – the inequity in the aesthetics of their time on screen is in itself a form of systemic violence which distances audiences from the non-white terrorist figure, presenting him as the "bad" neighbour.

As such, it becomes clear that despite some elements which subvert the traditional and stereotypical depiction of the terrorist figure in Western media, the portrayal of the terrorist figures in *Made in France* perpetuates the racial hierarchies displayed in French media, with white figures positioned closer to audiences to elicit sympathy, while darker-skinned figures are either treated as disposable bodies or shadowy threats.

Balanced portrayals in *L'Adieu à la nuit*

As it is now clear that poor lighting and narrative diminishment of darker-skinned terrorist figures can have a disadvantageous effect on the depiction of these individuals and on minorities as a whole, we should consider whether this is present in other French cinematic portrayals of terrorist figures. In this section I will look closely at André Téchiné's *L'Adieu à la nuit* which, like *Made in France*, features an ethnically diverse group of radicalised young Muslims whose plans to engage in acts

of terrorism never materialise. Unlike *Made in France*, *L'Adieu à la nuit* does not feature a gloomy or dark tone, but is for the most part brightly and naturally lit. The film also diverges from *Made in France* – and the stereotypical portrayal of modern terrorism – in that it does not take place in an urban setting. Rather, the film is set in the rural Pyrenees and in the surroundings of the southern coastal town of Perpignan. As the diametric opposite of *Made in France* as far as lighting and colour choices are concerned, *L'Adieu à la nuit* offers an opportunity to explore if and how lighting and narrative are being adapted in French depictions of terrorists in ways which do not disadvantage minority ethnic groups, or distance them from audiences more so than their paler-skinned counterparts.

  L'Adieu à la nuit is the most recent film directed by French filmmaker André Téchiné, and received mixed reviews in the press. While De Bruyn suggests that '[le film] rend compte d'une réalité rarement traitée par le cinéma français et, simultanément, parvient à émouvoir avec des personnages qui échappent aux généralités', Eisenreich criticises it for the 'faiblesse du scenario qui semble survoler l'intrigue'.[70] *L'Adieu à la nuit* follows equestrian school owner and farmer Muriel (Catherine Deneuve), as she welcomes her grandson Alex (Kacey Mottet Klein) back to her farm after he has been at medical school. Shortly after his arrival, she learns that Alex has converted to Islam, and is not planning to return to medical school for the following semester. This discovery leads her to probe Alex and his girlfriend Lila (Oulaya Amamra), who he has known since childhood and who works on the farm, about their practice of Islam. It gradually becomes clear that the pair have been

[70] Olivier De Bruyn, 'Téchiné, Deneuve et le djihadisme', *Les Echos*, 2019 <https://www.lesechos.fr/weekend/cinema-series/ladieu-a-la-nuit-techine-deneuve-et-le-djihadisme-1212051> [accessed 8 September 2021]; Pierre Eisenreich, '*L'Adieu à la nuit*', *Positif*, 699 (2019), 57.

radicalised by Islamist extremists and are preparing to travel to Syria to get married and commit to the Islamist extremist cause abroad. After learning of Alex's plans and being alerted that he has forged her signature on a number of cheques to fund their departure, Muriel descends into a desperate state and resorts to luring her grandson into the stables of the farm, and padlocking him in to stop him from leaving. She contacts Fouad (Kamel Labroudi), a former jihadist of Maghrebi heritage who has repented and returned to France, in the hope that he will be able to talk Alex out of his plans. Indifferent to Fouad's reasoning, Alex attacks him and escapes the stables, joining Lila and their extremist friend Bilal (Stéphane Bak) at a hostel as they prepare to leave. In a desperate final attempt to stop her grandson from leaving, Muriel alerts the authorities, and the trio – having left the city by coach – are stopped at the border and arrested.

From the outset, it is undeniable that the film's narrative favours Muriel and Alex. We know much more about them and their family relationships than we do about Lila, Bilal, and Fouad. Indeed, in a press kit interview for the film, Téchiné admits that 'On s'identifie forcément plus facilement à Muriel, la grand-mère jouée par Catherine', although he does not elaborate further.[71] Deneuve is undoubtedly the most famous cast member, as an award-winning actress who has worked with many of French cinema's most prominent directors. Muriel and Alex also, as protagonists, feature in more scenes than the others: Muriel and Alex appear in twenty-seven scenes each, Lila in twenty-three, Bilal in twelve, and Fouad in seven. As such, considering the lack of Black and Arab actors given principal roles in French cinema as highlighted by Sourang and Maïga earlier in this chapter, it must be acknowledged

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[71] '*L'Adieu à La Nuit*: Dossier de Presse Français' (Advitam Distribution, 2019) <https://www.advitamdistribution.com/films/ladieu-a-la-nuit/> [accessed 6 October 2021], p. 4.

that *L'Adieu à la nuit* perpetuates this inequality. However, we must also remember that Black and Arab actors are stereotyped as terrorist figures.[72] The decision to have white-presenting actors as protagonists, both in *L'Adieu à la nuit* and *Made in France*, can be seen simultaneously as conforming to the typical privileging of white faces on the French cinema screen, and as refusing to conform to the stereotyping of Black and Maghrebi individuals as terrorists. However, as discussed above, the visual hierarchy of *Made in France* distances the Black and Maghrebi terrorist figures from the audience, making them less relatable. By contrast, although the darker-skinned terrorist figures in *L'Adieu à la nuit* are on screen less than their paler counterparts, we must consider how they are presented.

L'Adieu à la nuit* certainly shares many traits with *Made in France*. These include: the diverse cast; the acknowledgement that terrorist figures can be and are often born and radicalised in metropolitan France; the susceptibility of young people to radicalisation; and the thwarted attempt to commit terrorism. However, unlike Boukhrief, Téchiné was applauded for the impartiality and equality with which he treats his terrorist characters. Mathieu Macharet writes in *Études* that 'Téchiné ne condamne pas d'office sous le feu d'un regard moralisant son trio de jeunes radicalisés, mais observe simplement leurs démarches, aspirations et dérives'; David Rooney suggests in an otherwise unfavourable review that Téchiné is 'even-handed' in his portrayal of the characters; and Ariel Schweitzer views the film as having 'ni tentative de sociologie de comptoir, ni exorcisme bien pensant'.[73]

[72] Maïga, *Les Meilleurs Moments et Le Palmarès*.
[73] Mathieu Macheret, '*L'adieu à la nuit*', *Études*, 5 (2019), 109–16; David Rooney, '*Farewell to the Night* (*L'Adieu à la nuit*): Film Review | Berlin 2019', *Hollywood Reporter*, 2019 <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-reviews/farewell-night-review-berlin-2019-1185724/> [accessed 3 October 2021]; Ariel Schweitzer, 'Cahier Critique: *L'Adieu à la nuit*', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 754 (2019), 72.

Téchiné avoids any attempt at sociological explanation of the trio's radicalisation.[74] Similarly, unlike the clear ethnic and religious markers applied to the characters of *Made in France* (Christophe and Hassan as converted Christians, Sam as a French-Algerian, Sidi as having Malian descent), the terrorist figures of *L'Adieu à la nuit* do not have any solid markers of ethnicity or descent, other than their skin tone. We know, for example, that Alex's grandmother and late mother are white-presenting, but we do not know anything about their ethnicity, or the ethnicity of his estranged father. We know that Lila is orphaned, and has slightly darker skin than Alex, but we know nothing about her ethnic background or her parents. The same is true for Bilal, who never reveals his background or talks about his ethnicity. While the characters of *Made in France* are all ostensibly French citizens, but are all clearly categorised as having specific religious and ethnic backgrounds, the characters of *L'Adieu à la nuit* are all French-born, and no further explanation is given. In fact, as Bill Marshall points out, this deliberate ambiguity is a signature of Téchiné's filmography, which often

> [interrogates] the meanings of France and Frenchness […] by 'making strange' and defamiliarising, in Brechtian manner in fact, any given, fixed, finished or 'natural' idea of the nation […] Téchiné's films prompt the question, 'which France?'[75]

Indeed, Téchiné revealed this as one of his aims for the film:

> Serge Kaganski: […] vous avez voulu montrer que l'appétence pour l'islamisme radical ou son rejet ne sont pas forcément une affaire d'origine ethnique ou sociale ? Téchiné: […] Dans la documentation que j'ai consultée, les candidats jihadistes français viennent à 60% des classes moyennes, à 30% des classes populaires et à 10% des classes aisées. On voit bien qu'il n'y a pas un profil-type. De plus, je tenais absolument à éviter que les personnages soient des posters sociologiques. Je voulais

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[74] Some reviews erroneously suggest that Lila is responsible for Alex's radicalisation (Jay Weissberg, 'Berlin Film Review: *Farewell to the Night*', *Variety*, 2019 <https://variety.com/2019/film/reviews/farewell-to-the-night-review-1203136948/> [accessed 6 October 2021]). There is no evidence within the film to suggest this, and in fact all three of the terrorist figures within the film are already radicalised when the film begins *in medias res*. No reference to the reasons for their radicalisation is made.

[75] Bill Marshall, *André Téchiné* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 98.

rester dans la subjectivité et la singularité.[76]

With this in mind, it is possible to read the absence of defined ethnicities for these characters as a subtle acknowledgement of the diversity of modern France, revealing the fallacy of concepts of 'whiteness as synonymous with Frenchness' discussed earlier. This simultaneously puts all three terrorist figures on equal footing as far as their relationship with 'Frenchness' is concerned, and highlights the disconnect between them and the older generation represented by Muriel, who cannot understand how her French-born grandson and employee have been radicalised in France.

The questioning of the social makeup of 'Frenchness' is compounded by the presence of Deneuve herself in the role of Muriel. Over her fifty-year career, Deneuve has often been regarded as the 'face of the [French] nation', with whose name 'beauty is one of the primary associations'.[77] In fact, from October 1985, French town halls ordering busts of the effigy of the French republic for display could choose between a model based on Brigitte Bardot, or one based on Deneuve.[78] This positioning of Deneuve as an icon of French nationhood, as Downing and Harris point out, has not diminished significantly with passing time: when Deneuve starred in *Place Vendôme* (Nicole Garcia, 1998) at the age of 55, her co-star Jean-Pierre Bacri announced that 'Deneuve is no living divinity', a proclamation which Downing and Harris suggest 'only pointed out, on the contrary, that if any contemporary French star has attained the status of "divinity", it is Deneuve'.[79] Clearly, Deneuve's star image is firmly rooted in an association with Frenchness,

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[76] '*L'Adieu à la nuit*: Dossier de Presse Français', pp. 4–5.
[77] Ginette Vincendeau, *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema* (London: Continuum, 2000), p. 196; Lisa Downing and Sue Harris, 'Introduction', in *From Perversion to Purity: The Stardom of Catherine Deneuve* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), p. 17.
[78] Vincendeau, p. 196.
[79] Quoted in Vincendeau, p. 198.

and the focus on her appearance compounds the notion of whiteness as a French

norm. However, in *L'Adieu à la nuit*, Deneuve's role as Muriel is not one of

'divinity'. Rather, her character represents what Téchiné sees as a 'fracture […]

générationnelle' between the older generation and the youth of today's France.[80] This

'fracture' is evoked sporadically throughout the film: for example, she has to install a

Wi-Fi router when Alex visits as she does not frequently use the internet herself; and

during a family dinner, the younger generation dance to Sia's 2014 song

'Chandelier' and Muriel remains seated, refusing to dance. Yet the generational

disconnect is strongest when Muriel discovers Alex's radicalisation, and she

attempts to discourage him. Discussing this, Téchiné suggests that '[il] fallait que

Muriel soit complètement désarmée, déroutée, désarçonnée. Elle finit par perdre un

peu la raison: elle séquestre Alex, elle ne sait plus comment réagir. Elle ne cesse de

se battre et de se débattre'.[81] Her communication with Alex completely breaks down

here; her ultimate course of action is to imprison him in the barn and enlist Fouad – a

stranger to Alex – to communicate with him on her behalf. As such, Deneuve's

portrayal of Muriel functions to question Frenchness on two levels. On the one hand,

Deneuve's star image as the 'face of the nation' collides with Muriel's discomfort to

comment on the outdated nature of traditional Frenchness. On the other hand, in her

position as a symbol of Frenchness, Deneuve's portrayal of a woman who cannot

come to terms with the radicalisation of her middle-class white grandson distinctly

calls into question the French Republic's ability to acknowledge and address

radicalisation as separate from ethnic, religious, or class-related components,

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[80] '*L'Adieu à la nuit*: Dossier de Presse Français', p. 11.
[81] Ibid.

challenging implicit assumptions regarding who becomes radicalised and the reasons for this.

Further to this questioning of the meaning of Frenchness, Marshall highlights that 'a word of which Téchiné is fond when describing his films is *dépaysement* […] being made to change country (pays), to be exiled, uprooted, lost, and thus in general to change place or milieu […] For Téchiné, it is a kind of ontological category, describing the nature of human existence'.[82] Although Marshall writes well before the release of *L'Adieu à la nuit*, this signature is certainly present. Unlike the characters of *Made in France*, none of Téchiné's terrorist figures are shown in permanent homes. Alex is, undeniably, shown in a domestic familial situation as he visits his grandmother's house. However, it is made very clear by his dismissive attitude towards Muriel and by the very short amount of time he spends in the house while visiting Perpignan that he does not feel at home on the farm, and that he does not intend to stay. The scenes of his detainment in the stables by Muriel further underline how his presence at the farm is not related to any loving, familial sense of homeliness or domesticity, nor to a sense of rootedness. Lila, similarly, is shown briefly at an apartment she shares with an elderly gentleman. As she returns home late one evening, he confronts her for never spending time with him, and she suggests that he find someone else to live with. Following this, she stays at the same hostel as Bilal. Her living situation is presented as transitory, and certainly not a picture of familial warmth or domestic comfort. Instead, the trio are all continually connected to liminal spaces: the hostel, the inside of the car they frequently journey in, the coach they attempt to cross the border in, and numerous bus and coach stops around the town. Although their geographical *dépaysement* is thwarted at the end of

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[82] Marshall, p. 98.

the film, they certainly experience the constant state of being uprooted and lost, which is common in Téchiné's works.

These techniques of defamiliarisation do not necessarily encourage audiences to empathise with or relate to these figures. On the contrary, by refusing to exhibit any of the terrorist figures' backgrounds, upbringings, familial relationships or even radicalisation, Téchiné presents these individuals as impossible to fully know or understand, a sentiment reminiscent of Levinasian ethics, which as discussed in previous chapters, encourages the acknowledgement of the other as never fully understandable or knowable, but a being in and of themselves.[83] The characters appear before the audience as if from nowhere, without explanation, and disappear at the end in much the same way as they are arrested.

It is key to acknowledge here that the appearance of the terrorist figure as if from nowhere and without context can be problematic in several ways. As discussed in Chapter 3, the notion of the terrorist figure who appears as if from nowhere is tied to the exoticisation of the terrorist, and the suggestion that terrorism and radicalisation are an issue of foreign policy: the terrorist as a distant figure is a key component of Western framing of terrorism discourse. Furthermore, the portrayal of a terrorist figure without providing any wider context regarding their inspiration for violence, as discussed earlier in relation to *Made in France*, can be considered an elicitation of empty empathy.[84] Certainly, like Sidi in *Made in France*, the characters of *L'Adieu à la nuit* do not benefit from exploration or explanation of the wider context of their radicalisation. While Téchiné suggests that '[on] peut y retrouver le préjudice causé par le colonialisme (entre autres la guerre d'Algérie) et brandi

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[83] Levinas's ethical theory is discussed in more detail and referenced fully in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis.
[84] Kaplan.

comme un étendard identitaire et vengeur', colonialism and its consequences are not discussed in the film.[85] Indeed, there is no significant allusion to colonialism beyond the presence of Muriel's partner, Youssef, who is of Maghrebi descent; nor is there any discussion of or allusion to the reasons for Alex's radicalisation. As such, the film could possibly be seen as eliciting empty empathy.

I would contend, however, that *L'Adieu à la nuit* does not, in fact, produce images of empty empathy precisely because audiences are not encouraged to empathise strongly with *any* of its characters. Interviewing Téchiné, film critic Serge Kaganski highlights the ambiguity with which all of the film's characters are presented: Alex and Lila engage in reprehensible choices and violent acts but are shown with the humanity of two young people in love; Muriel, by contrast, is well-meaning but similarly acts in erratic and morally questionable ways.[86] In response, Téchiné discusses the 'complexité morale' surrounding Muriel's behaviour, and suggests of Alex and Lila that 'le processus de déshumanisation dans lequel ils s'engagent est terrifiant, mais en même temps, ils restent humains'.[87] By presenting a portrait of radicalised French youth and the irrational desperation of the older French generation, while simultaneously withholding any judgement of these characters, Téchiné avoids empty empathy, creating a film which acknowledges the irreducible and unknowable alterity of the other, without 'othering' the terrorist figure. All of his characters are kept at a slight distance from the viewer, but are shown as humans; this creates an equality across portrayals of the characters.

This approach significantly diverges from the unknowability of characters seen in *Made in France* in that it is less discriminatory, more equitable. In *Made in*

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[85] '*L'Adieu à la nuit*: Dossier de Presse Français', p. 11.
[86] Ibid., p. 8.
[87] Ibid.

France we are encouraged to empathise with certain characters (Sam most significantly), while other characters' suffering is shown without context or due attention. As discussed above, this hierarchy is also emphasised by the film's visual aspects; lighting choices and camera angles solidify the emphasis on Sam's subjective experience, and reduce audiences' attention towards Sidi and Driss. Whereas the visual dynamics of *Made in France* obscure the figures of Driss and Sidi to the extent that they often become literally invisible, the visual aspects of *L'Adieu à la nuit* do not obfuscate any of the characters. The equitable approach to characters' moral status in *L'Adieu à la nuit* is extended by the aesthetics of the film.

Light, in fact, takes a central role in the film's aesthetic. The rural coastal setting of *L'Adieu à la nuit* is translated by cinematographer Julien Hirsch into bright, colourful, and naturally lit scenes for the majority of the film. The opening scene shows Muriel and her partner Youssef strolling through their cherry orchard, when a solar eclipse plunges the day into darkness. Lingering only for a fraction of a second on a long shot of the couple's reaction, the camera pans up to focus on the eclipse before cutting to the opening credits, which are superposed over an eclipsed sun. The darkness referenced by this opening image, and hinted at by the 'night' in the film's title, is left behind for the rest of the film. There are scenes which are comparatively less brightly-lit scattered throughout the film, but unlike the dark scenes of *Made in France*, these are still mostly relatively light, and are presented with a warm orange hue.

One such scene occurs immediately after the opening credits. Folding laundry together in the farmhouse, Muriel and Lila chat with each other about Lila and Alex's relationship. Muriel admits that she would struggle to maintain a long-distance relationship, and Lila explains that she feels that he is present even when he

246

is far away. They then discuss when he will arrive, and Muriel jokes that he has not told them a particular time because he does not want her to pick him up from the station, and they both to laugh together. The room has only a small window, which we see later in the scene, letting in only a very small amount of light. However, when positioned in front of this window – in almost the same positions as Sidi and Sam appear as discussed earlier – the faces of Muriel and Lila both benefit from low contrast fill lighting. While gentle shadows remain on both of their faces, this use of lighting ensures that each face is as exposed as the other, and that the scene's warmth, and by extension the warmth between characters, is retained. As such, Muriel and Lila are equally visible, their open expressions and smiles revealing their comfort with each other. Rather than leaving Lila in the shadows, the low orange lighting presents both women as warm, soft, and caring, and draws them together rather than separating them. Deneuve's lighter skin is not privileged visually, and both characters, regardless of skin tone or terrorist affiliation, are therefore presented equally.

A similar technique is used much later, even after we discover that Lila intends to commit terrorist acts. After a short formal nikah ceremony confirming the marriage of Alex and Lila, the pair return to Lila's hostel room, and share a glass of milk before consummating their marriage, as Islamic teaching dictates. The scene, taking place at night, is filmed in relatively low lighting, again with an orange hue. Despite the audience's knowledge of their intentions to join Islamist extremists, and the scene's low lighting, the couple are both lit well enough for viewers to see their expressions and understand their emotions; both are anxious about the consummation, but comfortable enough to joke with one another. Although the key light in the scene is very low, the pair are filmed in front of a large white wall,

allowing light to refract from the bright wall and act as a soft short side light for both figures. While similar lighting conditions in *Made in France* saw Sidi and Driss's features disappear into the darkness, Lila's features are clear and visible. In fact, subtle camera adjustments and movements in the blocking of the scene leave Lila as the central point of the shot, with Alex's face moving out of focus and turning slightly away from the camera. Flashes of white light sweep across Lila's face – perhaps intended to be the headlights of passing cars – highlighting the intensity of her emotion. By lighting and blocking these scenes in such a way that Lila's emotions are visible, clear, and even highlighted, Téchiné allows and encourages audiences to acknowledge her as an emotional human being, while still maintaining a certain distance between her and the audience as her emotions are not explained verbally. Although within the narrative this scene signifies Alex and Lila's transition from French youths to a terrorist couple who intend to travel to Syria and train to commit acts of violence, the lighting and camerawork present them as human beings with relatable emotions; while the audience is not encouraged to believe that they can fully understand the couple's experiences or reasoning, the acknowledgement of their emotions and tenderness challenges the typical dehumanisation of the terrorist figure. This scene is key in understanding the nuance between *othering* the terrorist figure, and acknowledging their alterity *as an other*. Neither Alex nor Lila is presented as so distant that they become dehumanised – as is the stereotype of the terrorist figure in Western media, discussed above and also previously in Chapter 3 – but the immorality of their actions is also not diminished. While they engage in behaviour alien to most Western viewers, such as radicalisation and jihadism, their emotion and subjectivity are acknowledged. This balance in representing the terrorist figure ultimately allows Téchiné to achieve his aim, stated as: 'c'est la liberté de

chaque spectateur d'être triste ou soulagé quand le rêve toxique de ces jeunes s'effondre avec l'arrestation'.[88]

By privileging her emotions over those of Alex here, audiences are encouraged to consider her character to be equally complex and worthy of attention as Muriel and Alex. Lila is, in fact, shown throughout the film as having a multifaceted and complex personality. Although we know little about her family or home life, she is shown frequently at her job as a carer in a residential home for the elderly. These scenes, all brightly and naturally lit, reveal her as sincere and dedicated to her job, and as extremely tender and caring towards her clients through her facial expressions, body language, and dialogue. While she appears in slightly fewer scenes than Alex and Muriel, Lila's character – although still ultimately unknowable in her entirety – encourages no less empathy in audiences.

Similarly, although Bilal is in far fewer scenes than Muriel, Alex or Lila, and is introduced only halfway through the film – thereby disadvantaging him within the narrative – he is not marginalised visually. In a number of his scenes shared with Lila and Alex, Bilal does not fade into the background or suffer from a lack of clarity of his features, but is lit in such a way that he remains visible and identifiable to audiences. For example, as the trio head to a meeting of Islamist fundamentalists,

Figure 19: Bilal, Lila, and Alex take a selfie in the car in L'Adieu à la nuit

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[88] '*L'Adieu à la nuit*: Dossier de Presse Français', p. 8.

they discuss their plans in the car. They transition seamlessly from sincere discussions of their plans to depart for Syria to taking selfies together. Here, whereas Lila and Alex are on the far side of the car and benefit from the natural light through the windscreen, Bilal is in the foreground of the shot, leaving him vulnerable to having the natural light blocked by camera equipment. Despite this, his features are still well-lit – presumably by fill lighting – in a way that allows us to see his calm, collected, and at times indifferent demeanour. More complex aspects of his character are later shown to the audience as he and Lila discuss how to navigate Alex's unexplained absence while he is held hostage at the stables.

At the hostel, Lila and Bilal discuss the impact Alex's absence might have on their plans to leave the country. Clearly distressed by the news, Bilal lights a cigarette, which Lila points out is haram in Islamic teaching. He jokingly retorts that smoking is the last vice of his Western life, and he will quit when he gets 'there' (meaning Syria). She warns him that he will set off the smoke alarm, and he replies that he has disabled it, to which she jokingly replies that he is a know-it-all. This scene not only invites audiences to see Bilal as having a complex personality and relationship with Islam and a playful interpersonal relationship with Lila, but is also lit in such a way that Bilal and Lila are equally visible to the audience. With the natural light from the window behind them acting as a backlight, filler light is used to highlight their faces and reveal their features, making Bilal's calm demeanour and Lila's surprise clear to see.

Shots of Bilal alone also reveal his features and expression clearly. A prominent example of this occurs towards the end, as the trio attempt to cross the border by coach. Sitting separately, the scene cuts between shots of their faces. Although not particularly dark, it has a distinctly gloomier tone than the rest of the

film. The interior of the bus is a mixture of deep blues and greys, and the lighting is comparatively much cooler in tone. Yet, the expressions of all three are clear. Low-contrast short side lighting (which appears to be the natural light from the bus window) reflects the gloomy tone due to their fear of being arrested, but does not obscure or shadow Bilal or Lila's expressions to the point of indiscernibility, as is often the case in *Made in France*. Instead, the short side lighting on Bilal's face creates a dramatic effect which nevertheless allows viewers to see his lowered brow, his slightly open mouth, and his pointed stare, indicative of his concern. This is also achieved without creating the washed out or ashy quality which has been noted as a symptom of poor lighting of dark skin: viewers can discern his complexion's detailed texture, and his skin tone retains its depth and warmth, particularly on the bridge of his nose.[89] This holds true for all shots where Bilal appears alone, which – despite his relatively minor role compared to Alex, Muriel and Lila – are numerous.

Figure 20: Bilal on the coach as the protagonists cross the border in L'Adieu à la nuit

Significantly, not only are there many shots of a well-lit Bilal alone in the frame, but these shots are all in close-up or medium close-up scale, keeping Bilal

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[89] Latif.

closer physically to audiences, and exhibiting his expressions to a greater extent. This allows audiences to consider him, like Lila, a character worthy of emotional consideration and visual attention as much as Alex or Muriel. The attention to Bilal's expressions during these moments of contemplation also contrasts distinctively with the treatment of Sidi's character in *Made in France*, whose skin tone is very similar to Bilal's. Like Bilal, Sidi is only present for half of the film, and yet is afforded very few close-ups or medium close-ups, which do not express his facial features when he is shown.

Even Fouad, the rehabilitated former jihadist of Maghrebi ethnic heritage, is afforded appropriate lighting and a number of close-up and medium close-up shots despite his particularly limited screen time. As he discusses his time in Syria and his subsequent prison sentence with Muriel, a brightly-lit close-up allows audiences to recognise his emotion. Low-contrast short side lighting reflects the severity of the situation he describes to Muriel – the reasons for radicalisation and the difficulty of deradicalisation – while maintaining the visibility of his features and his troubled expression. After their discussion, Muriel drives Fouad to her farm to talk to Alex. As they travel up the long driveway of the farm, Fouad asks her what she is growing in her orchard. She replies that they are cherry trees, and the depth of field – which
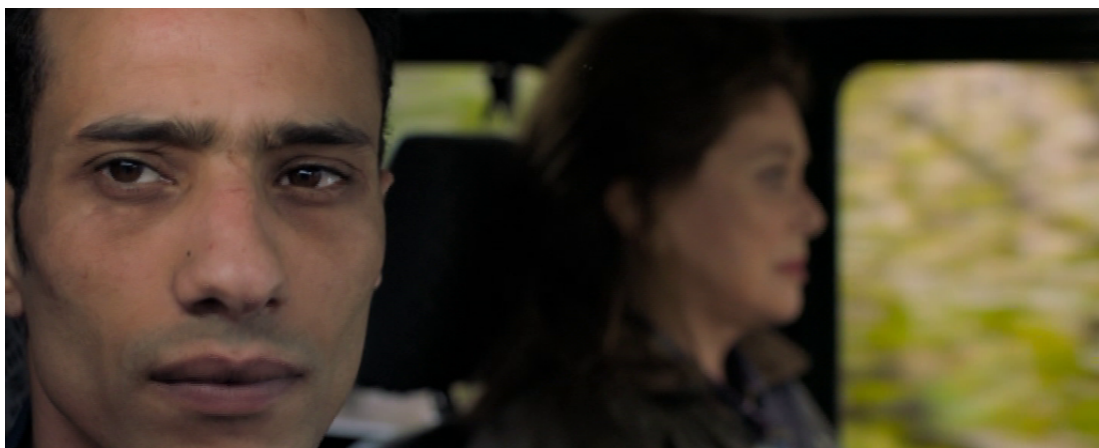

Figure 21: Fouad stares out of the car window in L'Adieu à la nuit

had previously shown both characters in focus – shifts to a shallow focus centred on Fouad in close-up. His lack of response provides no verbal cue to viewers, who therefore cannot definitively know what emotion he is feeling, but the visual cue of his facial emotion is nevertheless highlighted, and presented to the audience as significant. His distant stare and slightly furrowed brow suggest that he is in inner turmoil and perhaps considering his past. While the audience are invited to recognise that he is experiencing significant emotions, there is no suggestion that viewers can in fact know what emotions these are, or the reason for them. As such, Téchiné's careful balancing of the visual aspects of the scene encourages the audience to consider Fouad as human and destigmatised, yet his experience is not offered up to the viewer as an object of uncritical scrutiny in a totalising way.

In the next scene, after Fouad finds that he cannot reason with Alex and is instead attacked by him, Muriel drives him to the hospital and then back to the train station. The lighting of their conversation during the car journey is significant, as it is one of the only instances where low lighting somewhat obscures characters' faces. Unlike the shots of the trio discussed earlier, this exchange takes the form of shot/reverse shots between the characters, rather than a singular frontal shot. Here, both Muriel and Fouad appear shadowy, the lighting of their faces almost exactly replicated in each shot. Bright light from the car window behind them acts as a backlight for both characters, and a slight highlight at the front of their faces on their foreheads, eyebrows and cheek bones is provided by light through the windscreen, while their hair disappears into the darkness of the car seats. Although the contrast is not so high as to render them silhouettes, the contours of their faces are harder to discern, and their expressions therefore not as clear as elsewhere. This allows the low lighting to reflect the dejection they both experience after failing to convince

Alex to remain in France, while nevertheless maintaining the equality of the visual space, in which neither Deneuve's paler face nor Labroudi's darker face is privileged.

Conclusion

Made in France and *L'Adieu à la nuit* both foreground diverse groups of terrorist figures and the disintegration of their plans to commit various forms of jihad. Despite their similarities in fundamental narrative structure, their vastly different stylistic and tonal approaches to the depiction of terrorist figures reveals the significance of the impact of lighting, blocking, and editing. While audiences are distanced from Driss and Sidi in *Made in France* more so than their paler-skinned counterparts, all of the terrorist figures in *L'Adieu à la nuit* are kept at a distance from viewers. However, sensitivity towards lighting and framing of the characters in the latter ensures that regardless of their skin tone or terrorist affiliation, no character – and therefore no subjective experience – is privileged visually over another, creating a more equal and balanced visual portrayal of characters in the film.

L'Adieu à la nuit certainly does present some problems as a portrayal of terrorist figures in French cinema: Téchiné's refusal to divulge the reasons for the trio's radicalisation can be read as a refusal to acknowledge the aspects of French society that facilitate radicalisation, and the focus on Muriel and Alex as protagonists risks perpetuating the problematic tradition of white faces as the rightful leads in cinema. Yet, the visual equality in portraying the emotions and experiences of the characters in *L'Adieu à la nuit* avoids the stigmatisation of darker-skinned terrorist figures seen in *Made in France*, which positions darker-skinned terrorists as others with whom audiences cannot empathise. *Made in France* exhibits a clear visual

hierarchy among its terrorist figures, categorising the white terrorists as more relatable and therefore as "good" terrorists, while its darker-skinned terrorists are treated as disposable bodies, less worthy of empathy and even of grief, in turn relegating them to the position of "bad" terrorists with *homo sacer* status. In distinct contrast to this, the terrorist figures in *L'Adieu à la nuit* are presented equally: they are all portrayed as humanised figures, who nonetheless engage in morally reprehensible behaviour and are held at a distance from the audience. The lack of visual hierarchy therefore refuses to participate in moral judgement: never categorised solely as "good" or "bad", the terrorist figures are ultimately shown as individuals in their own right. While both films engage in practices which perpetuate the prioritisation of whiteness in the French cinema industry, this chapter has shown the importance of balanced lighting and camerawork for all skin tones – particularly to avoid the typecasting of minority ethnic actors who have so often been seen playing demonised terrorist roles.[90] Ultimately, this chapter has revealed that such subtleties as imbalanced lighting techniques and mise-en-scène in portrayals of terrorist figures can risk diminishing the uniquely subjective experiences of people who are radicalised and who commit terrorist acts, in turn upholding the traditional prioritisation of the white Western worldview in French cinema.

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[90] Maïga, *Les Meilleurs Moments et Le Palmarès*.

Conclusion

The overarching aim of this thesis has been to analyse the depictions of terrorism in contemporary French and, to a lesser extent, Belgian cinema, in an effort to understand the ethical implications of how the recent phenomenon of terrorism in these two countries is being constructed for audiences. In the process, it identified some areas of French and Belgian cinema and television productions which reproduce and perpetuate the dichotomous terrorism discourse which has dominated since 9/11, in which Western Europe and the United States are positioned as a generalised victim of the supposedly monolithic threat of Islasmist terrorism originating in North Africa and the Middle East. To achieve this, I considered a corpus of seven French films and series, and one Belgian film, which foreground various subjective experiences of terrorism, including those of victims, survivor-witnesses, and terrorist figures. Whereas the films in Chapters 1 and 2 show the experience of individuals who have suffered trauma as a result of terrorism, either as survivors or victims, those in Chapters 3 and 4 focus instead on the experience of radicalised individuals who either attempt to, or successfully commit, acts of terrorism. Their differences in approach notwithstanding, the focus on experiences of terrorism in all of these films reflects the pertinence, topicality, and complexity of this subject.

The ethical imperative of acknowledging the irreducible alterity of the other's subjective experience, as influenced primarily by Levinasian thought, has been explored throughout this thesis. Chapter 1 elucidated the ways in which *13 novembre* attempts to relocate the historical and subjective specificity of the experiences of the survivor-witnesses of the November 2015 Paris attacks into the present moment of

the cinematic image for the entertainment of the viewer. It also revealed how

hypermediation, intertextuality, dialogue and editing in *Paris est à nous* challenge

the distinction between reality and fiction, encouraging viewers to acknowledge the

impossibility and futility of attempting to access the subjectivity of survivor-

witnesses of terrorism.

Building upon these discussions, Chapter 2 comparatively analysed how the

survivor-witness's subjectivity is constructed as other in *13 novembre*, *L'Humour à

mort*, and *Amanda*. Despite scattered moments which remind the viewer of the

inaccessibility of survivor-witnesses' subjective experience, the chapter argued that

the first two works share a tendency to conflate the experience of the survivor-

witness and the viewer through editing, special effects, archival footage and

narration. By contrast, an analysis of *Amanda* revealed the ethical care with which

Mikhaël Hers navigates the construction of the subjective experience of David and

Amanda, maintaining a balance in both 'proximity and separation' between the

protagonists and the viewer which, as I argued in the Introduction and Chapter 2,

allows the irreducible subjectivity of the survivor-witness to be preserved.

[1] The chapter then discussed how *Amanda* depicts the victims of terrorism with

similar ethical care and, through narrative choices and lack of expository dialogue,

ensures that the victim is not portrayed *only* as a victim of terrorism, but

acknowledges that she is a being and counts as such without context; her subjective

experience as a deceased victim is entirely inaccessible, and is therefore presented as

such to audiences.[2]

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[1] Libby Saxton, 'Fragile Faces: Levinas and Lanzmann', *Film-Philosophy*, 11.2 (2007), 1–14 (p. 6).
[2] Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Essais Sur Le Penser-à-l'autre*, Biblio Essais, 7th edn (France: Grasset, 2016), p. 17.

While the first two chapters aimed to bridge the gap in scholarship concerning the ethics of representing the survivor-witnesses and victims of terrorism in contemporary French cinema – which, as I argued in the Introduction, remains significantly overlooked – the final two chapters turn their attention to the subjectivity of the figure which Western media has largely ignored: the figure of the terrorist. As I argued in the Introduction and Chapter 3, the political and human subjectivity of the figure of the terrorist has traditionally been a taboo subject in Western discourse, and only recently has scholarship begun to address this issue. The final chapters therefore aimed to build upon this recent scholarship – which has begun to analyse the political and human subjectivity of terrorist figures in both Hollywood cinema and Franco-Belgian cinema set in the context of the Algerian War – by applying these debates to francophone cinema which depicts terrorism on European soil. This allowed me to make key observations regarding the corpus's construction of the figure of the terrorist, and by extension their subjective experience; namely, that a small number of films have begun to challenge the dehumanisation and depoliticisation of terrorist figures in Western media by depicting them with greater levels of care.

Building upon these ideas, Chapter 3 demonstrated how *La Désintégration* and *Le Jeune Ahmed* attempt to challenge the neo-colonial construction of the terrorist figure as a foreign import, disconnected from the legacies of French and Belgian colonialism. By examining their dialogue, framing, and mise-en-scène, it highlighted how these films encourage audiences to step back from their own subjective understanding of terrorism and terrorists in order to acknowledge the wider networks of systemic and symbolic objective violence in which these figures operate. This foregrounds the subjectivity of the terrorist figure without (necessarily)

absolving them of the guilt of their criminal acts; instead, these films present a depiction of the terrorist figure's political and human subjectivity.

Chapter 4 expanded upon the notion of a taboo surrounding the political subjectivity of terrorist figures by analysing a form of discrimination which affects cinema more broadly, namely the imbalance in lighting of white and non-white actors. Via detailed examination of the physical visibility of the terrorist figures in *Made in France*, the chapter demonstrated that adverse lighting conditions which do not cater to darker skin perpetuate the demonisation of terrorist figures of Maghrebi and North-African immigrant background, while depicting their white counterparts as more relatable to audiences, reproducing the tradition of privileging white actors (and thereby the white subjective experience) in Euro-American cinema. By contrast, analysis of the lighting and framing of the terrorist figures in *L'Adieu à la nuit* revealed more balanced lighting techniques which ensure the visibility of all actors, regardless of their skin tone, resulting in a film which does not categorise the terrorist figures they play as good or bad, but presents each of them as morally ambiguous characters who have relatable experiences, yet also as perpetrators of criminal acts.

Ultimately, this thesis has revealed a tendency in many contemporary Franco-Belgian depictions of terrorism to cohere to traditional (Western white) norms, and perpetuate the privileging of this subjectivity. I have shown that in works which depict survivor-witnesses and victims, ethical care and reflexivity can be used as tools which avoid the universalisation of the experience of victimhood. Without such interventions, the historical specificity and subjective experience of the victims are lost, propagating the traditional Western rhetoric of the West as a singular victim of the monolithic threat of terrorism. By extension, this thesis has demonstrated that

in works which focus instead on terrorist figures, a careful balance in depictions of the terrorist must be imposed in order to avoid dehumanisation or depoliticisation of the terrorist figure, and the racial stereotyping of the terrorist as necessarily of Arab or Middle-Eastern heritage. These interventions are a key contribution to the fields of Terrorism Studies and Film Studies, which have previously underestimated the importance of moving beyond the dichotomous discourse surrounding both survivor-witnesses and perpetrators of terrorism.

Thanks to its interdisciplinary approach the thesis has highlighted the complexities of depicting terrorism, yet it is important to acknowledge some of the limitations of this project's scope. As I argued in the Introduction, the lack of comparable studies into the subject of French and Belgian depictions of terrorism obliged me to develop my own methodological approach in order to understand the nature of the works considered. While I was able to benefit from the large bodies of research on similar subjects – two key fields being Holocaust representation theory and previous studies of depicting terrorism in Hollywood cinema – I was consistently reminded of the specificities of French and Belgian culture and identity, and therefore had to make significant adjustments to previous methodologies in order to analyse these works effectively. As I highlighted in Chapter 2, while many researchers have applied a Levinasian framework to the study of cinema, and some to the study of terrorism, very few have applied his work to terrorism on film. As such, the application of Levinas here required me to revisit his original works in-depth, and discover an often widely dispersed network of research into his theory spanning many fields. Drawing upon this variety of approaches to his work allowed me to apply his ethical theory in ways which have not previously been attempted – namely, to both victims and perpetrators of violence. This allowed me to

demonstrate both the strengths and weaknesses of Levinasian theory as a framework for analysing depictions of terrorism. Challenging though this was, it was also rewarding to weave Levinas's original theory together with existing applications of his work in an interdisciplinary approach to the object of study. The choice to apply Levinas here also highlighted for me the significance of a concept of the other which champions a balance between distance from and proximity to the self. As I have shown, viewing cinematic depictions of both victims and perpetrators of terrorism through this framework can reveal the ethical complexities surrounding these works.

While Levinasian theory was particularly useful throughout the thesis in this capacity, Chapter 4 in particular demonstrated that the highly specific nature of Levinas's thought at times make it incompatible with a nuanced understanding of the modern terrorist figure, as it encourages a judgement of the other as good or bad. This type of judgement against the perpetrator of violence without acknowledgement of their subjective experience is precisely the type of prejudice which has been present in the dominant terrorism discourse since 9/11, and which this thesis seeks to highlight and overcome. As such, the final chapter of the thesis retains the core concept of Levinasian theory – the emphasis on recognising the other's alterity and humanity – but incorporates into this discussion more recent thinking from Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou in order to bring these concepts in line with a more recent understanding of the figure of the terrorist. Ultimately, while Levinasian theory in a general sense can be extremely beneficial in moving beyond the dichotomous and dehumanising discourse of terrorism seen since 9/11, it is key for any researcher working with Levinas's thought in Terrorism Studies and studies of terrorism on film and television to pay attention to the areas of his work which may, in today's climate, be outdated.

Furthermore, the thesis has both benefited, and suffered from my distance from the countries of study. On the one hand, my position as a researcher outside of France somewhat limited the corpus of the study: had I been based in France or Belgium, or not limited by the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on travel, I may have had more success in accessing French documentary films and series about the 2015 terrorist attacks. While the now globalised ecommerce market and digitisation of cinema has allowed me relative ease of access to French and Belgian films on DVD and streaming services, I did experience some difficulty in particular in finding and accessing French television documentaries and series which have not been commercially released, and as such could not include them in my corpus. On the other hand, I argued in Chapter 4 in particular that it is difficult for researchers working within France to expose racial disparities in many aspects of French life due to French Republican universalism, and more recently due to the scrutiny French media and politics have applied to the study of race and ethnicity in higher education.[3] While the absence of official statistics regarding racial discrimination in France at times made it difficult to demonstrate the extent of discrimination, the ability to highlight these limitations in French research and statistics and build upon these debates from an anglophone perspective demonstrates the originality of this thesis.

Future studies could build upon the foundations established in this thesis by applying a similar methodology to depictions of far-right extremist terrorism, cinematic productions from other regions of Europe, and/or different types of cultural production such as art and literature. Such analyses might reveal whether the

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[3] 'XVe Législature: Session Ordinaire de 2020-2021; Séance Du Mardi 16 Février 2021' (Assemblée Nationale, 2021) <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/comptes-rendus/seance/session-ordinaire-de-2020-2021/deuxieme-seance-du-mardi-16-fevrier-2021> [accessed 21 May 2021].

construction of subjectivities identified here remains specific to contemporary

French and Belgian cinema, or part of a wider common European practice that

transcends the specificities of French and Belgian colonial history.

Above all, an interdisciplinary approach allowed me to foreground the thesis

in its ethical considerations. While I have paid due attention to the socio-political and

historical context of the films within the corpus and the subjects they depict, the key

contribution of this thesis is its focus on the people involved in and affected by

terrorism. Through a Levinasian framework, the thesis has challenged media trends

which offer victims and survivor-witnesses of terrorism to audiences as uncritical

objects of scrutiny, aiming to address the often-overlooked area of trauma

representation theory in relation to terrorism. Furthermore, the thesis builds upon the

vital – although relatively recent – scholarship which aims to dismantle the harmful

stereotyping and dehumanisation of the terrorist figure, by highlighting the ways in

which French and Belgian socio-political contexts may contribute to media and

cinematic iterations of such rhetoric. As the cinema industry in France continues to

produce depictions of terrorism with increasing thematic diversity, we are reminded

of the significance that cinematic portrayals of terrorism can have on our

understanding of how the phenomenon of terrorism and the people it affects are

constructed in media and public discourse.

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