

Julien Duvivier's film "Pépé le Moko" is a remarkable story, and a powerful personal account of French colonial life. The socio-political subtext of the story is an important one, which brings to the forefront the particular allure of Casbah and the idiosyncrasies of its inhabitants. This subtext of the narrative connotes the desire and fascination with the exotic. Jean Gabin's character is a thief, who while running from the law becomes immersed in the maze of the city of Casbah. In light of Edward Said's ideas of Orientalism, specifically in terms of the cultural exchanges that take place in the affiliation of colonialism, the foreign element (as an "other") can become a model with which Western civilization defines itself. The character Pépé is stimulated by the idea of the other. Pépé is a native Parisian that hides within the walls of Casbah. He familiarizes himself with the Algerian city and uses it as a boundary between himself and the consequences that have been imposed on him by the French officials. Once this city becomes common to him, he takes on its properties.

A parallel is drawn in the film between the native culture of Algeria and the idea of women. They are both other to Pépé, and are both objects of domination (Algeria dominated by the French, women dominated by Pépé and his gang). The intersection of this similarity is in the fact that the girlfriends taken by most of the members of his gang are native women, and correspondingly the way that the native women are shown occasionally as prostitutes. The magnetism that is created around Pépé and Gaby is related to this. His fascination with her is an

exhibition of his longing for the familiarity of Paris and the sanctity of his past, a familiarity that is distant to him in Casbah. In her, P  p   is reminded of life outside the walls of Casbah. His gradual rejection of Ines in favor of Gaby suggests his shifting disposition and his consuming desire for Paris, possibly even a disgust of the colonialist enterprise on a deeper level. Gaby's jewelry is a constant reminder of these ideas. The diamond is one of the most readily identifiable symbols of the colonial process, a reminder of the exploitation of resources by the British in South Africa. Gaby is attracted to P  p   in a similar way. The radical distinction that he embodies as a gangster differentiates him from the upper-class, mainland Frenchmen that she would typically be acquainted with.

The fragility of P  p  's relationship with Gaby is that it is on the verge of intangibility. On the average day she could just as easily be his victim, as the cash value of her jewels are the main focus of the gang. P  p   as an individual can see past this attribute, which is concomitant with the recurring socio-political message of the film. The fixation that P  p   develops with things that are characterized as "other" is maintained in the entire narrative. He is engrossed in the Algerian other, he has shut himself off from the world. The climax of the film is a final attempt to return to this world. The significance of the final events in the context of colonialism are astoundingly creative. In P  p  's attempt to return to Gaby, to return to Paris he is utterly denied. He is not even afforded a sight of his beloved until the ship has sailed, figuratively and literally. Perhaps these events denote the irreversibility of the transition to colonialism, or the inalterability of the past in general.

Pépé's final call to Gaby goes unanswered. In *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Elia Kazan, 1951) and in *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967) there is a similar call, and in *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942) the woman leaves in a related manner, but none of these films end in such an abrupt and upsetting way. Surely none of those films carry the poignancy of "Pépé le Moko" either.