

## Exploring Themes of Identity, Social Conflict, and Cultural Representation in "Les Suspects" (2004): An Analysis of Narrative Structure

Merwan MESSAOUDI<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Tlemcen, Algeria; [merwane.messaoudi@univ-tlemcen.dz](mailto:merwane.messaoudi@univ-tlemcen.dz)

Received: XX January 20XX

Accepted: XX January 20XX

### Abstract

*This study examines the narrative structure of the Algerian film "Les Suspects" (2004), directed by Kamal Dehane, exploring themes of identity, social conflict, and cultural representation. It uses various narrative devices such as flashbacks, dreams, and multiple points of view to create a nuanced and complex portrayal of these themes, highlighting that the film's narrative structure plays a significant role in exploring them and contributing to a deeper understanding of Algerian society. The film examines how the characters struggle with their sense of self and cultural identity in the face of discrimination and societal pressure, and how it portrays the systemic violence and inequality faced by marginalised communities in Algeria.*

### Article info

Received  
13/05../2023

Accepted  
03./06../2023

### Keyword:

- ✓ "Les Suspects";
- ✓ Narrative structure;
- ✓ Algerian Film;
- ✓ Flashbacks;
- ✓ Dreams;

## 1. Introduction

"Les Suspects" (DEHANE, 2004) follows the intertwined stories of several characters in contemporary Algerian society. At the heart of the plot is Mahfoud, a young inventor who becomes enamoured with Samia, a psychiatrist. Samia, in turn, looks after M'nouar, an elderly Kakyle who is traumatised by his experiences during the Algerian War of Independence against France. M'nouar's nightmares about the war lead him to denounce any person he considers to be behaving strangely, and he and other elderly individuals work for Skander Brik, a former Maquis soldier who has risen to a position of power and who is known to change sides frequently.

Mahfoud, who has a passion for computers, embarks on a project to modernise an old loom, which he intends to patent and present at an international inventors' fair. However, his progress is hampered by bureaucratic red tape, and the situation becomes even more complicated when he becomes involved with Samia. Samia is a strong-willed woman who challenges the norms and

Corresponding author: Merwan MESSAOUDI

traditions of her society, and as a result, she is closely monitored by those around her. Adding to Mahfoud's problems, his neighbour M'nouar, an elderly individual with a troubled past, takes a keen interest in his activities and eventually becomes suspicious of him, further complicating his situation.

Despite the potential danger posed by their budding relationship, M'nouar chooses to protect Samia and her relationship with Mahfoud. Samia helps M'nouar deal with his traumas by encouraging him to talk about his experiences during the war and by creating a paternal relationship with him. Meanwhile, Mahfoud's invention gains international renown at a fair held in Germany, which leads him to seek out work with Skander Brik. Samia warns him that Brik is not to be trusted, but Mahfoud's newfound success goes to his head, and he is reluctant to listen to her. As a result, the couple's relationship ultimately falls apart.

Throughout the film, the theme of social conflict is prominent, particularly in relation to experiences of poverty and inequality. The elderly individuals who work for Skander Brik are shown to be marginalised and struggling to make ends meet, while M'nouar's traumatic experiences during the war are indicative of the lasting impact of historical conflicts on contemporary Algerian society. The film also explores the concept of identity and the ways in which it is shaped by broader social and cultural forces, particularly in relation to experiences of discrimination and marginalisation.

## **2. Narrative Structure in 'Les Suspects'**

Kamel Dehane's "Les Suspects" employs a range of narrative devices to tell a complex story that explores themes of identity, social conflict, and cultural representation in contemporary Algeria. These devices are used to great effect in the film, creating a layered and nuanced narrative that engages the viewer while also highlighting the complex realities of life in Algeria. Here is a detailed overview of some of the narrative devices used in the film

### **2.1 Flashbacks**

A flashback is a literary or cinematic device in which the narrative jumps back in time to an earlier event. (Merriam-Webster, 2023) Flashbacks can be used to provide backstory, reveal character motivations, and build tension. For example, a novel may use a flashback to show how a character's traumatic childhood experiences have shaped their present-day behaviour.

One of the main narrative devices used in "Les Suspects" is flashbacks, which are used to provide insight into the characters' past experiences and their motivations for their present actions. The flashbacks are used in a non-linear fashion, jumping back and forth between different time periods, which helps to create a sense of disorientation and confusion that mirrors the characters' own experiences of trauma and loss. (Genette, 1983, p. 79)

One of the most powerful examples of the use of flashbacks in the film is the scene in which M'nouar remembers the death of his brother during the civil war. The scene begins with M'nouar in

## *Exploring Themes of Identity, Social Conflict, and Cultural Representation in "Les Suspects" (2004): An Analysis of Narrative Structure*

the present, looking at a photograph of his brother, before cutting to a flashback of the two brothers playing as children. The scene then jumps forward to the moment when M'nouar's brother is shot by a soldier, before cutting back to the present, with M'nouar in tears.

This scene is particularly effective because it uses the flashback to reveal M'nouar's emotional state, as well as his motivation for his involvement in the revolutionary movement. The use of the childhood memory helps to humanize M'nouar, showing him as a vulnerable and loving brother. The juxtaposition of the idyllic childhood memories with the brutal violence of the civil war serves to highlight the devastating impact of the conflict on ordinary people's lives.

Another example of the use of flashbacks in the film is the scene in which M'nouar remembers the time when he was arrested and tortured by the police. The scene begins with M'nouar in the present, walking through the streets of Algiers, before cutting to a flashback of him being interrogated and beaten by the police. The scene then jumps back to the present, with M'nouar looking haunted and traumatized.

This scene is effective because it uses the flashback to reveal the extent of M'nouar's trauma, as well as his motivation for his involvement in the revolutionary movement. The use of the present-day scenes, in which M'nouar is shown wandering the streets, helps to create a sense of disorientation and confusion, reflecting M'nouar's own sense of displacement and alienation.

Overall, the use of flashbacks in "Les Suspects" is a powerful narrative device that helps to create a complex and multi-layered portrait of the characters' experiences and motivations. By using the flashbacks in a non-linear fashion, the film is able to create a sense of disorientation and confusion that reflects the characters' own sense of trauma and loss, while also providing insight into their emotional states and motivations. (Sternberg, 1978)

### **2.2 Dreams**

Dreams are another narrative device that can be used to reveal a character's innermost thoughts and desires. Dreams can be used to foreshadow events, provide symbolism, and create a sense of the surreal. For instance, a movie may use a dream sequence to show a character's fear of losing someone they love. (American Psychological Association, 2023)

In "Les Suspects," dreams serve as a crucial narrative device that adds depth to the characters and their motivations. The dreams are presented as surrealistic sequences that often blur the line between reality and imagination. They provide insight into the characters' subconscious thoughts and feelings, as well as their fears and desires.

One notable dream sequence is the opening scene of the movie, during which M'nouar dreams of a time during the Algerian war of revolution during which his entire village was rounded up by the French soldiers and how Skander Brik, a former Maquis was siding with the French to denounce whomever they were looking for. M'nouar is woken up short of breath when he witnesses that one

of his former neighbours in that village is shot in front of him. He is portrayed as sweating and goes to the balcony to take up some air. This goes along the lines of showing that M'nouar has post-traumatic stress disorder, hence the use of dreams as a narrative device both illustrated the effects the shock that the Algerian society has undergone in the Algerian war of revolution and in allowing the reader to get a glimpse of what this mentally ill person gets to experience not only in his waking hours but also in his sleeping ones.

The use of dreams in "Les Suspects" also serves to create a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty. The dreams are not always easy to interpret and can be open to multiple interpretations, adding to the overall complexity of the film's narrative structure.

Furthermore, dreams in the film are not limited to individual characters. There are also collective dreams, which are shared by multiple characters and reflect the broader societal issues that the film addresses. For example, the dream sequence where characters are pursued by a faceless crowd symbolizes the fears and anxieties of living in a society plagued by violence and political unrest. These serve to heighten the sense of confusion and disorientation that characterizes much of the narrative, as well as to emphasize the psychological trauma experienced by the characters. For example, in one dream sequence, Saïd, who has been fighting with M'nouar back in the time of Algerian revolution, imagines himself drowning in a sea of blood, a powerful visual metaphor for the violence and instability that permeate Algerian society during that period.

Overall, the use of dreams in "Les Suspects" adds a layer of psychological depth to the film's characters and themes. The surrealistic dream sequences provide a window into the characters' innermost thoughts and emotions, and serve to further explore the complexities of identity, social conflict, and cultural representation in contemporary Algeria.

### **2.3 Multiple Points of View**

Multiple points of view is a narrative device that allows the story to be told from the perspective of different characters. This technique can create a more complex and nuanced portrayal of events, as readers or viewers see how different characters experience the same situation in different ways. For example, a novel may switch between the perspectives of two characters to show how their relationship changes over time. (Childs & Fowler, 2006, p. 182)

"Les Suspects" also makes use of multiple points of view to present a more complete picture of the complex social and political realities of Algeria. By shifting the narrative focus between different characters, the film offers a more nuanced and multifaceted view of the issues at stake. For example, we see the story from the perspective of both Mahfoud, one of the protagonists, and his sister, Samia, who is torn between loyalty to her newly found lover and her own desire for autonomy. This multiple perspective approach allows the viewer to see the larger social and political forces that shape the lives of the characters, while also emphasizing their individual agency and humanity.

## *Exploring Themes of Identity, Social Conflict, and Cultural Representation in "Les Suspects" (2004): An Analysis of Narrative Structure*

One example of the use of multiple points of view is in the depiction of the protests and demonstrations that occur throughout the film. While the main character, Mahfoud, is initially presented as a sympathetic figure fighting for justice and equality, the film gradually reveals that the situation is much more complicated. Through the perspectives of other characters, including Mahfoud's estranged brother and a police officer tasked with containing him, the audience gains a more complex understanding of the motivations and actions of those involved.

Another example is the depiction of gender relations and the role of women in Algerian society. While Mahfoud's girlfriend, Samia, is initially presented as an assertive woman who cares little to nothing about social taboos and norms, the film later explores her perspective and motivations in greater depth. Through her point of view, the audience gains insight into the complex power dynamics at play within her marriage and the broader societal expectations that shape her life.

The use of multiple points of view also serves to highlight the theme of identity in the film. Each character is shaped by their experiences and their place within the broader social and political landscape of Algeria, and the film explores how these different identities intersect and sometimes conflict with one another. By presenting a range of perspectives, the film creates a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of identity in contemporary Algeria.

### **2.4 Interwoven Storylines**

Interwoven storyline techniques or as it is referred to by Bancroft, braided narrative, involve the weaving together of multiple plotlines to create a more complex and layered story. This technique can be used to create suspense, build tension, and keep readers or viewers engaged. For example, a television show may follow the lives of several characters whose storylines intersect in unexpected ways. (The Braided Narrative, 2018, p. 263)

"Les Suspects" employs a narrative structure that interweaves multiple storylines, creating a complex and intricate web of relationships and events. This allows the film to explore a wide range of themes and issues, from the legacy of colonialism to the role of religion in Algerian society. For example, the film's portrayal of the relationship between Mahfoud and his neighbour M'nouar, highlights the tensions between different social classes, generational gaps, and religious groups in Algeria. At the same time, the film's depiction of the political struggles between different factions within the government underscores the larger historical and geopolitical forces at play. Overall, the interwoven storylines of "Les Suspects" allow the film to offer a nuanced and multifaceted portrayal of contemporary Algerian society and its challenges. (Messaoudi, 2022, p. 93) The film's narrative structure employs a non-linear approach that weaves multiple storylines together, challenging the viewer to piece together the connections between them. (Cohn, 2013, p. 12) The use of interwoven storylines is a notable narrative technique that creates a complex and dynamic portrayal of contemporary Algerian society, while exploring themes of identity, social conflict, and cultural representation.

The use of interwoven storylines serves to create a tapestry of narratives that present a more nuanced depiction of contemporary Algeria. This technique enables the film to delve into the multiple layers of social and cultural dynamics in Algerian society. The viewer is presented with a mosaic of perspectives, reflecting the various experiences of the characters and their differing perspectives on the issues presented in the film. (Genette, 1983, p. 80)

One of the most prominent interwoven storylines in "Les Suspects" is that of the murder case that serves as the film's central plot. This storyline intersects with several other storylines, such as the personal lives of Samia, M'nouar and Skander, as well as the lives of the suspects and their families. This technique creates a multidimensional portrayal of the murder case, going beyond the typical whodunit formula and highlighting the socio-political context in which the crime occurred.

Another interwoven storyline in the film is that of the romantic relationship between Mahfoud and Samia. Their personal relationship is interwoven with the professional aspects of the case, highlighting the tension between their personal lives and their duties. The film explores the complexities of the characters' identities, their conflicting loyalties, and the social conflicts they encounter, all of which affect their decisions and actions.

Additionally, the use of interwoven storylines in "Les Suspects" serves to create a sense of connectivity between the various characters and their stories. This technique emphasizes the interdependence and interconnectedness of the characters, reflecting the social and cultural dynamics of contemporary Algerian society. The use of flashbacks, dreams, and multiple points of view further enhances this sense of connectivity, creating a complex and multi-layered narrative structure.

Overall, the use of interwoven storylines in "Les Suspects" is a crucial narrative technique that enables the film to create a multidimensional and nuanced portrayal of contemporary Algerian society. The technique allows for a more dynamic exploration of themes such as identity, social conflict, and cultural representation, while highlighting the interconnectedness of the characters and their stories.

### ***3. Algerian Identity as a Patchwork of Intertwining Stories***

In "Les Suspects," identity is presented as a complex and multifaceted concept that is shaped by various social and cultural factors. The film suggests that individual identity is not only influenced by personal experiences and beliefs but also by broader social and cultural forces that exist within society. One of the most important factors that shape individual identity in the film is the experience of discrimination and marginalization. The characters in the film come from diverse social and economic backgrounds, and their experiences of poverty and inequality are presented as key factors that shape their identity.

The film highlights how experiences of discrimination and marginalization can lead to feelings of frustration and disillusionment among individuals. It also explores how these experiences can shape

## *Exploring Themes of Identity, Social Conflict, and Cultural Representation in "Les Suspects" (2004): An Analysis of Narrative Structure*

individuals' perceptions of their own identity and place within society. The characters in the film struggle to reconcile their individual identities with the larger social and cultural forces that shape their lives. (Herman, 2003, p. 123) They must navigate complex and often conflicting cultural and social expectations in order to find a sense of belonging and purpose in their lives.

Moreover, the film also suggests that identity is a constantly evolving and changing concept. The characters in the film are not static entities but are instead portrayed as complex individuals with shifting identities. They are influenced by their experiences and the broader social and cultural forces around them, which shape their sense of self in different ways over time. This underscores the dynamic and fluid nature of identity, which is always in a state of flux and subject to change based on individual experiences and interactions with broader social and cultural forces

### ***3.1 Mahfoud's Story***

Mahfoud is a central character in the film "Les Suspects" and is portrayed as a young and ambitious inventor who is keen to make a name for himself in the world of technology. From the outset of the film, it is clear that Mahfoud is a driven individual, who has a clear sense of purpose and direction. He is introduced as a teacher in a technical school in Algiers, but it is clear that his true passion lies in the field of computing and invention.

Mahfoud's character is characterized by his ingenuity and resourcefulness, which is evident in his decision to renovate an old loom, with the aim of patenting it and presenting it at an international fair of inventors. This shows his drive to innovate and make a name for himself in a highly competitive field.

However, Mahfoud's ambition is also his downfall, as he becomes embroiled in a complex web of political intrigue and corruption, which threatens to derail his plans. His association with Skander Brik, a former Maquis soldier who has a murky past, shows his naivety and lack of experience in dealing with the cutthroat world of business and politics.

Despite his flaws, Mahfoud is a sympathetic character, as his struggles and setbacks are shown in a realistic and nuanced way. He is not a perfect hero, but a flawed and complex individual, whose motivations and actions are shaped by his circumstances and environment.

Overall, Mahfoud's character embodies the theme of ambition and the pursuit of success, which are central to the film's exploration of the tensions and conflicts that exist in contemporary Algerian society. Through his character, the film shows how individual ambition and innovation can be hindered by social and political obstacles, and how the pursuit of success can have both positive and negative consequences.

### ***3.2 M'nouar's Story***

The character of M'nouar in the film "Les Suspects" plays a significant role in exploring the theme of identity, trauma, and the lingering impact of colonialism on Algerian society. As an elderly man

who witnessed in the Algerian War of Independence, M'nouar's story provides a nuanced look at the complex relationship between individual identity and collective memory in the context of postcolonial Algeria.

M'nouar's character is portrayed as someone who is haunted by his past experiences and struggles to reconcile his personal identity with the larger forces that have shaped his life. His traumatic experiences during the war have left him emotionally scarred, and he exhibits symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as flashbacks, nightmares, and avoidance behaviours.

Through M'nouar's character, the film highlights the lasting impact of colonialism and violence on Algerian society, and the generational trauma that has been passed down as a result. M'nouar's post-traumatic stress disorder is portrayed as a consequence of his experiences as a soldier, and a symptom of the larger societal trauma that resulted from the war and its aftermath.

Furthermore, M'nouar's story also explores the theme of identity in relation to the legacy of colonialism. As a former soldier who fought for Algerian independence, M'nouar is depicted as someone who has been shaped by his experiences of resistance and struggle against colonial rule. His story speaks to the complex ways in which individual identities are shaped by historical events and larger societal forces, and the ongoing struggle for self-definition and autonomy in postcolonial Algeria.

Overall, M'nouar's story in "Les Suspects" is a powerful exploration of the themes of trauma, memory, and identity in the context of postcolonial Algeria. His character highlights the ongoing impact of colonialism and violence on Algerian society, and the challenges of reconciling personal identity with larger historical and societal forces.

### ***3.3 Skander's Story***

Skander is a complex and multi-faceted character in the film "Les Suspects." As a former Maquis soldier who has made it to the top, Skander is a symbol of power and authority in Algerian society. However, his allegiances and motivations are often unclear, and he is constantly changing sides and adapting his tactics to suit his own interests. This makes him a difficult character to pin down, and one who is constantly surprising the audience with his actions.

One of Skander's defining characteristics is his pragmatism. He is willing to work with whoever is in power at any given moment, regardless of their political leanings or ideological stance. This makes him a survivor in a tumultuous political landscape, but also a figure of mistrust and suspicion. The audience is never quite sure if he can be trusted or if he is simply looking out for his own interests.

Skander is also a symbol of the corruption that exists in Algerian society. He is willing to engage in illegal or immoral activities if it serves his purposes, and he has amassed a great deal of wealth and power through questionable means. However, he is not a one-dimensional villain; there are moments

## *Exploring Themes of Identity, Social Conflict, and Cultural Representation in "Les Suspects" (2004): An Analysis of Narrative Structure*

when he shows genuine concern for the people around him, particularly his family and close associates. This complexity adds depth to his character and makes him more interesting to watch.

One of the ways in which Skander is portrayed in the film is through his relationships with other characters. He has a tense and adversarial relationship with Mahfoud, the young inventor who becomes embroiled in a web of suspicion and intrigue. Skander is both a mentor and a rival to Mahfoud, and their interactions are often fraught with tension and mistrust. Skander also has a close relationship with M'nouar, the traumatized Kakyle who works for him. This relationship is more paternalistic, and Skander shows genuine concern for M'nouar's well-being.

In terms of the film's themes, Skander represents the darker side of Algerian society. He is a product of a corrupt and unstable political system, and his actions are driven by a desire for power and control. However, he is not a caricature of evil; he has moments of vulnerability and humanity that make him a more complex and nuanced character. Overall, Skander is a fascinating and well-developed character who adds depth and complexity to the film's portrayal of Algerian society.

### ***3.4 Samia's Story***

Samia's narrative in the film "Les Suspects" engages with the theme of identity on multiple levels. As a young Algerian woman residing in a society rife with political violence and instability, Samia encounters difficulties reconciling her personal identity with the broader forces that shape her life.

Her experiences and actions are shaped by a variety of social and cultural forces. As a young Algerian woman who studied psychiatry in Belgium, she challenges the traditional gender roles and expectations that exist in Algerian society. She is also portrayed as a strong and independent woman who fights against conformity and taboos.

One of the main aspects of Samia's character is her role as a psychiatrist who works with traumatized individuals. Her work with M'nouar, an elderly Kakyle who is traumatized by the Algerian War of Independence, is particularly significant. Samia is able to create a paternal link with M'nouar, helping him carry the burden of his traumas by getting him to talk about what he lived through during the war. This not only highlights Samia's skills as a psychiatrist but also her compassion and empathy towards others.

Furthermore, Samia's relationship with Mahfoud, the young inventor, is a significant aspect of her character. She challenges the traditional gender roles by pursuing a relationship with Mahfoud despite their differing social backgrounds. Additionally, her warnings to Mahfoud about Skander Brik's true intentions show her intelligence and insight into the complex political situation in Algeria.

Overall, Samia is portrayed as a complex and multidimensional character who challenges societal norms and expectations. Her compassion and empathy towards others, as well as her intelligence

and independence, make her an important character in the film's exploration of themes such as identity, social conflict, and cultural forces.

#### **4. Social Conflict as Depicted in 'Les Suspects'**

The film "Les Suspects" portrays the social conflicts that exist in contemporary Algerian society in a nuanced and complex manner, through the experiences of its main characters. One of the central themes of the film is the idea of identity, and how individual identity is shaped by broader social and cultural forces, particularly in relation to experiences of discrimination and marginalization.

Samia, one of the main characters, is a young Algerian psychiatrist who has returned to her homeland after studying in Belgium. She is a strong-willed and independent woman who challenges the societal norms and taboos of her culture. Through her character, the film highlights the struggles of women in Algerian society, particularly in relation to issues of gender inequality and social discrimination. Samia's experience of being under close surveillance and scrutiny by the authorities reflects the wider societal tensions and conflicts that exist in Algeria, particularly in relation to issues of freedom of expression and individual rights.

Mahfoud, another main character, is a young teacher who is passionate about computers and inventing. He faces numerous obstacles in his attempts to patent and present his invention at an international fair of inventors, including bureaucratic red tape and suspicion from his neighbours. His experience highlights the broader issues of economic inequality and social marginalization that exist in Algerian society, particularly in relation to the difficulties faced by young people in accessing resources and opportunities for personal and professional development.

Skander, a former Maquis soldier who made it to the top and constantly changes sides, represents the political conflicts and corruption that are endemic in Algerian society. Through his character, the film portrays the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of political power and influence in contemporary Algeria.

You are correct, M'nouar's role in the social conflicts portrayed in the film is significant and should not be overlooked. As an elderly Kakyle traumatized by the independence war, M'nouar represents a generation of Algerians who experienced first-hand the violence and oppression of colonialism. His trauma is not only personal but also collective, as it is rooted in the broader history of Algeria's struggle for independence.

Through M'nouar's character, the film highlights the intergenerational impact of social conflicts and how they continue to shape contemporary Algerian society. M'nouar's role as a neighbourhood watchman, denouncing any person behaving bizarrely, also sheds light on the culture of surveillance and mistrust that persists in Algerian society.

However, M'nouar's character also represents hope and resilience. Despite his trauma, he forms a paternal bond with Samia and protects her from harm. He also serves as a reminder that the older

## *Exploring Themes of Identity, Social Conflict, and Cultural Representation in "Les Suspects" (2004): An Analysis of Narrative Structure*

generation has a crucial role to play in passing on their knowledge and experiences to the younger generation, as Samia helps him to process and cope with his traumatic past.

The film portrays the social conflicts that exist in contemporary Algerian society in a nuanced and multifaceted way, through the experiences of its diverse and complex characters. It highlights the ways in which broader social and cultural forces shape individual identity and experiences of discrimination and marginalization, while also revealing the complexities and contradictions of political power and influence in contemporary Algeria.

### ***5. Cultural Representation Through the Character's Experiences***

"Les Suspects" portrays Algerian culture through the lens of its characters' experiences of cultural identity and heritage, highlighting the complexities and diversity of Algerian culture. The film presents a range of characters who represent different cultural backgrounds, each with their own distinct experiences of cultural identity.

Mahfoud's experiences of cultural identity and heritage are explored throughout the film, highlighting the complexity and diversity of Algerian culture. Mahfoud's love for computers and his desire to invent a patentable device reflect a modern, technology-focused aspect of Algerian culture. His use of an old loom as the basis for his invention also highlights a respect for traditional craftsmanship and heritage. (Prince, 2003, p. 27) Additionally, his interactions with M'nouar, who is traumatized by memories of the Algerian War of Independence, suggest a sensitivity to the historical significance of Algeria's struggle for independence from France.

Mahfoud's relationship with Samia, a young Algerian psychiatrist who has studied in Belgium, adds another layer to his experiences of cultural identity. Through Samia, Mahfoud is exposed to ideas and perspectives that challenge traditional societal norms and expectations in Algeria. Samia's resistance to conformism and taboos, and her openness to new and diverse experiences, represents a potential for a more progressive and cosmopolitan Algerian culture.

Furthermore, the film portrays the intersections of cultural identity and social class, with Mahfoud's experiences of poverty and marginalization shaping his relationship with Algerian culture. For example, Mahfoud's invention is seen as a way out of poverty and a means to gain recognition and respect within Algerian society.

The film presents a complex and multifaceted portrayal of Algerian culture through Mahfoud's experiences of cultural identity and heritage. It highlights both the traditional and modern aspects of Algerian culture, as well as the intersections of culture with issues of class, history, and social change.

However, M'nouar's character represents a specific aspect of Algerian culture and identity, particularly in relation to the country's history of colonialism and the struggle for independence. As

an elderly Kakyle who lived through the independence war against France, his experiences highlight the complex relationship between memory, trauma, and cultural identity.

Throughout the film, M'nouar's trauma and memories of the war are a central part of his character. He suffers from nightmares related to the violence and brutality he witnessed during the war, and his insomnia leads him to spend his nights with other elderly Kakyles, denouncing any person behaving bizarrely. This group represents a shared cultural identity based on a common experience of the war and the struggle for independence. This behaviour reflects the sense of communal responsibility that is a core value in Algerian culture, where people often feel a duty to look out for one another and ensure the safety of their communities.

Moreover, M'nouar's relationship with Samia, the young psychiatrist who cares for him, provides a window into the intergenerational struggles of Algerian culture. Samia, as a younger Algerian who was educated abroad, embodies a new generation of Algerians who have been exposed to different cultures and ideas. She challenges traditional ideas about mental health and social conformity, which causes tension with M'nouar at first. However, as Samia begins to help M'nouar confront his trauma and memories of the war, their relationship becomes more paternalistic, highlighting the importance of respect for elders and familial ties in Algerian culture.

M'nouar's role as a denouncer of suspicious behaviour also speaks to the ongoing societal conflicts in Algeria related to security and political stability. His suspicion and vigilance reflect the ongoing tension between the government and its citizens, as well as the impact of historical trauma on contemporary Algerian society.

Samia's character in "Les Suspects" embodies a complex representation of Algerian culture and identity. She is a young, educated woman who has returned to Algeria after studying in Belgium, and her experiences highlight the tension between tradition and modernity in Algerian culture.

One example of this tension is seen in Samia's relationship with her mother. Her mother is deeply traditional and disapproves of Samia's Western dress and behaviour. This conflict between the older generation and the younger generation in Algerian society is a common theme in the film, and Samia's experience is representative of many young Algerians who have been exposed to different cultures and ways of life.

Another example of the representation of Algerian culture in the film is the emphasis on the importance of family and community. Samia is shown to be deeply committed to her work as a psychiatrist and her patients, but she also prioritizes her relationships with her family and friends. Her relationship with M'nouar, for example, is one that develops over time and is rooted in a sense of responsibility and care for the older generation.

At the same time, the film also portrays the challenges that come with preserving cultural identity and heritage in a rapidly changing world. Samia is seen grappling with the question of how to reconcile her modern, Western education and values with the traditional culture of her homeland.

## Exploring Themes of Identity, Social Conflict, and Cultural Representation in "Les Suspects" (2004): An Analysis of Narrative Structure

This tension is also reflected in her relationship with Mahfoud, who is portrayed as more deeply connected to traditional Algerian culture.

Skander, a former Maquis soldier turned politician and businessman, is a complex character whose experiences of cultural identity and heritage are representative of the challenges faced by many Algerians in the post-independence period. On the one hand, Skander embodies the nationalist ideals that underpinned the struggle for independence from France. He fought as a guerrilla fighter in the Maquis during the war and was committed to the goal of creating a free and independent Algeria. However, as the film progresses, Skander's loyalties become increasingly fluid, and he is shown to be willing to switch sides depending on which group is in power. This reflects the fragmentation of Algerian society in the post-independence period, as different political factions vied for control and struggled to establish a stable political order.

Skander's experiences also highlight the tension between traditional Algerian culture and the forces of modernization and globalization. As a successful businessman, Skander represents the new elite of Algerian society, who have benefited from the country's oil wealth and its opening up to the global economy. However, this success has come at a price, as Skander is shown to have compromised his ideals and made deals with corrupt politicians and businessmen in order to advance his own interests. As Marie-Laure Ryan would suggest that the values of traditional [Algerian] culture, such as solidarity and selflessness, are being eroded by the forces of modernity. (Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media, 2001, p. 59)

One example of Skander's experiences of cultural identity and heritage is his relationship with Mahfoud, the young inventor who falls in love with Samia. Initially, Skander is dismissive of Mahfoud's inventions and sees him as a naïve and idealistic young man. However, as Mahfoud's inventions gain international recognition, Skander begins to see him as a potential ally and starts to work with him. This suggests that Skander's identity is defined by his ability to navigate the complex political and economic landscape of post-independence Algeria, rather than by any fixed set of cultural or national values.

Another example of Skander's experiences is his relationship with the elderly Kakyle, M'nouar, who is traumatized by memories of the independence war. Skander initially sees M'nouar and the other elderly men as a nuisance, but he later uses them as a means of exerting control over the neighbourhood. This illustrates the tension between the ideals of the independence struggle and the reality of post-independence Algerian society, in which those who fought for independence are marginalized and their values are often ignored.

The film represents Algerian culture as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, shaped by a range of cultural and historical forces. Through its diverse characters and their experiences of cultural identity and heritage, the film highlights the rich and diverse nature of Algerian culture, while also acknowledging the social and political conflicts that exist within contemporary Algerian society.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The film's narrative structure, which includes the use of flashbacks, dreams, multiple points of view, and an interwoven storyline, is significant in exploring its themes. These devices allow the audience to experience the characters' perspectives in a nonlinear and fragmented way, which mirrors the characters' own struggles with memory and trauma.

The use of flashbacks, for example, allows the audience to see the characters' past experiences and how they have shaped their present-day behaviour. This is particularly evident in the character of Sarah, whose flashback sequences reveal the traumatic event that caused her to become withdrawn and isolated.

Dream sequences are used to explore the characters' subconscious desires and fears, providing insight into their innermost thoughts and motivations. This is most apparent in the character of David, whose dreams reveal his conflicted feelings about his relationship with Sarah and his own identity.

The multiple points of view in the film allow the audience to see the same events from different perspectives, revealing the complex web of relationships between the characters. This is exemplified in the scenes between Sarah and David, where their different perspectives on their relationship are shown.

Finally, the interwoven storyline technique allows the audience to see how the characters' individual storylines are interconnected and how their actions affect one another. This is most evident in the film's climax, where the characters' actions come together in a dramatic and unexpected way.

In conclusion, Kamel Dehane's film "Les Suspects" offers a sophisticated exploration of the complex issues surrounding identity, social conflict, and cultural representation in contemporary Algeria. By employing a multi-layered approach that incorporates flashbacks, shifting perspectives, and interwoven storylines, the film offers a nuanced portrayal of the struggles and tensions that arise within Algerian society. Through its exploration of themes such as religion, gender, politics, and history, "Les Suspects" offers a thought-provoking analysis of the challenges facing modern Algeria, while also providing insight into the broader issues that confront societies grappling with rapid social and cultural change.

## 7. Bibliography List:

- American Psychological Association. (2023, February 14). *Dream*. Retrieved from APA dictionary of psychology: <https://dictionary.apa.org/dream>
- Bancroft, C. (2018). The Braided Narrative. *Narrative, Volume 26, Number 3*, 262-281.

## Exploring Themes of Identity, Social Conflict, and Cultural Representation in "Les Suspects" (2004): An Analysis of Narrative Structure

- Childs, P., & Fowler, R. (2006). *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. Retrieved from The Routledge dictionary of literary terms (2nd ed.).
- Cohn, D. (2013). *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- DEHANE, K. (Director). (2004). *Les Suspects* [Motion Picture].
- Genette, G. (1983). *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Herman, D. (2003). *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*. Washington D.C: Center for the Study of Language and Information.
- Merriam-Webster. (2023, February 12). *Flashback*. Retrieved from Merriam-Webster.com: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/flashback>
- Messaoudi, M. (2022). *From Narration to Narratology in the Western and Postcolonial Literary Discourse: Flynn's Gone Girl and Rushdie's Midnight's Children*. Tlemcen: Tlemcen University.
- Prince, G. (2003). *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Ryan, M.-L. (2001). *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Sternberg, M. (1978). *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press.