Jean Gabin: Doomed Worker-Hero of a Doomed France

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Abstract

The characters portrayed by Jean Gabin, a true star of 1930s films, are from the working class but lack the usual attributes; they are more part of the popular classes but without political identities. They are vividly urban, masculine, and individualistically French. Their antisocial tendencies and their helplessness in the face of outside forces beyond their control leading to violent escapes into oblivion made them seem heroic. Their often dual existence as criminal/legionnaire and worker played on the frissons long associated in France with the combination "working classes, dangerous classes." These attributes made the Gabin characters more than members of the working or popular classes and gave them a classless appeal as "everyman," with much the same universal appeal as Charlie Chaplin had for his audience. The collective psychological profile of the Gabin-everyman includes: alienation, depression, entrapment, helplessness, and escapes into nostalgia ending in violence and self-destruction. In his nine films from 1935 to 1939, there are eight murders and seven suicides! The atmosphere of Gabin's environment is one of doomed destiny, a fate created by forces beyond his control. The fate of Gabin's characters is in part inspired by an existing climate of hopelessness in French society and at the same time amplifies and reinforces it. The crisis in French society at which this study is directed had its denouement in the collapse of France in June 1940, resulting from immediate temporal and long-range structural problems. By 1939 France had become a stalemated society. Gabin's imagined presence at the side of his popular audience in its experience of these difficult times suggests a bonding between audience and star whereby the performance of the latter and the daily struggles of the former become one (the kind of convergence all film makers strive for but very rarely achieve).

PROLOGUE: The camera exposes a shabby room on the top floor of a tenement. It traces the final agony of a man, François, a worker, a killer, at the end of a night's confrontation with his fate. He stands before a smashed mirror; his lips move but make no sound. Casually, his right hand lifts the pistol from the table. His left hand searches for his sternum and directs the muzzle. A shot rings out, a body falls, and the alarm clock on the bedside table rings, shrilly announcing another ordinary workday. There is much in Marcel Carné's *Le jour se lève* to illuminate the mental climate in France before June 1940.

In 1935 Jean Gabin became an overnight leading star as a Spanish foreign legionnaire in Julien Duvivier's film *La bandera*. In eight major films that followed, which overlapped with the approach, arrival, and departure of the Popular Front government in France, Gabin topped such favorites as Fernandel,

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Louis Jouvet, Pierre Fresnay, Raimu, and Michel Simon in popularity among French film audiences, from the giant theaters of the *grands boulevards* to the thousands of provincial theaters.[1] At the time Gabin came to be viewed as the *populo-prolo* hero, as *un homme du peuple* (man of the people), and magically and metaphorically perhaps as the representation of troubled France itself.

In what ways are films related to the historical period in which they are popular entertainment? What forms of expression does this relationship take—verisimilitudinal or symbolic? In my view the historical accuracy of films or the characters depicted by actors is of no importance in assessing the role of films as data, as reflections and distillations of social and psychological climates.[2] Films are made as mass entertainment and generally sidestep the important events of their time.[3] All the same, films indirectly and tangentially provide a commentary on their contemporary world by providing image-surrogates for lived realities. The analysis of repeated images from director to director and film to film—the patterns they form, themes they repeat, and meanings they suggest—allows us to analyze the historical role of the cinema of a time period such as the final crisis of the French Third Republic.

My aim here is to look closely at the popular image of Gabin: at the variety of characters, attitudes, difficulties, convictions, fates, associations, and solutions he brought to the screen in these films. No historian is able to recapture the reaction of those distant audiences to the films discussed below. One can only mark the images that acted as stand-ins for reality, to count the frequency with which themes, actions, and moods recur in adding to the sense of "social-psychological climate" during the final years of the Third Republic.[4] The following films are discussed throughout: Julien Duvivier, *La bandera*, 1935; Julien Duvivier, *La belle équipe*, 1936; Jean Renoir, *Les bas-fonds*, 1936; Julien Duvivier, *Pépé le moko*, 1937; Jean Renoir, *La grande illusion*, 1937; Jean Gremillion, *Gueule d'amour*, 1937; Jean Renoir, *La bête humaine*, 1938; Marcel Carné, *Quai des brumes*, 1938; and Marcel Carné, *Le jour se lève*, 1939. All of these were among the most popular films of their year, with wide and varied audiences.[5]

In this essay I will examine the kind of workers Gabin portrayed in relation to the variety of flesh-and-blood workers of the late 1930s. This will be followed by a closer look at the characters assumed by Gabin and (through an analysis of the repeated images of characters, problems, and resolutions) by suggestions about the social-psychological climate reflected in the films. Lastly, I hope to relate this climate of images and moods to the profound crisis of French society in the last years before the war. In focusing on these relationships, I am fully aware that the Gabin films are only reflections of contemporaneous reality that act as historical data by the illuminations they offer of the "real world" that is the context of these films.

Gabin as Worker-Hero

Who was Gabin the actor and what were his affinities to the popular characters he portrayed?[6] Born in Paris in 1904 with parents on the vaudeville stage, an un-

interested and difficult student, he drifted in his early manhood years. After holding odd jobs as a concrete worker, laborer in a foundry, and warehouse worker, Gabin began to appear in vaudeville, where he quickly became successful as a song-and-dance-man. After appearances in several minor films came his breakthrough in *La bandera*. Given his popular origins, Gabin's projections of the *faubourien* (denizen of poor suburbs) on the screen became a persona which he nurtured: the local accents, restrained and even awkward gestures, contrasted by a self-assured body language and aura of masculinity with hints of violence. In the four years of his prewar stardom (1935–39), he retained the common touch of his origins, viewed the Popular Front government as the champion of social justice, and signed antifascist manifestoes.[7]

Gabin created a remarkable idol who worked with his hands and had an atypical collection of traits for a cinema hero: a hardened body and enormous reserves of physical energy, Gallo-Roman features, curt and almost inarticulate speech, expressive body language, a cocky cloth cap and dangling cigarette, and an explosive temper. Gabin projected the virility of the common man and made the image of the *mec* (the working stiff) admirable. But his worker was not drawn from the new industrial proletariat, was not a trade union member, did not engage in any politics; he was more an ideal worker of the *belle époque*.[8] A yearning for the past, for a time less uncertain and more hopeful, was expressed as a fond memory and desperate nostalgia in all of Gabin's prewar films and in many other films of the late 1930s. But in the Gabin films of the period, this prototypical everyman is also a marginal figure maladapted to his time and place and an object of forces beyond his control.[9]

During the 1930s, the *atelier* (workshop) with artisanal forms of production, small numbers of workers, and individualistic workplace socialization gave way to more modern factory production in centralized plants. The Berliet, Renault, and Citroën plants in suburbs of Paris, with workforces up to 30,000, were typical of this transition.[10] But even in Paris, in the thirteenth *arrondissement* (district), a variety of middle-sized factories employing from five hundred to one thousand workers produced flour, paper, compressed air, chocolate, gas, and automobiles.[11]

The worker identities assumed by Gabin are far removed from these new centers of production, technology, and organization in which workers were and acted as proletarians.[12] Nor can they be found in the mining sector, where large shifts of workers were the norm. In three of the films, Gabin is just simply a worker: in Duvivier's *Belle équipe* he is one of five unemployed artisans in the construction trades who win the lottery and decide to use the money to refurbish an *auberge* (inn) in the countryside using their own skills; in Renoir's *Bête humaine* he is a railroad engine driver who, as witness to a murder, becomes ensnared in a deadly triangle; and in Carné's *Jour se lève* he is a sandblaster in a foundry driven by his emotions to love and death.

In four films Gabin plays the dual role of soldier or legionnaire with a prior career as worker either obvious or suggested. In Duvivier's *Bandera* he is a worker of unspecified *métier* (profession) who kills a man, joins the Spanish for-

eign legion, and expiates his crime. In Grémillon's *Gueule d'amour* he is a quartermaster sergeant in the French Spahis (Foreign Legion cavalry) who leaves the service in pursuit of a woman and is forced to assume a prior identity as typesetter. In Carné's *Quai des brumes* he is a deserter from the French colonial infantry turned pacifist. Finally, in Renoir's *La grande illusion* he is a lieutenant in the French air force with a prewar career as mechanic.

In two further films Gabin is a criminal with a past as workingman. In Renoir's *Bas-fonds* the thief Pepel is a former locksmith. In Duvivier's *Pépé le moko*, Pépé, the leader of an Algiers criminal gang, experiences flashbacks of his prior life as cabinet maker in Paris.

In all of the film narratives and denouements powerful emotions are the defining traits of the characters portrayed by Gabin: an admixture of alienation, depression, and imprisonment, with flashes of nostalgia for other times and previous existences—leading to violence. In *Bandera* a desperate flight from France sends the hero into the Spanish Foreign Legion, where a continued sense of being hounded leads him into a desperate act. The cooperative country inn being constructed in *Belle équipe* experiences a series of catastrophes, leaving the two principal characters in a depressed and desperate mood, which annuls former nostalgic Impressionist reveries about beauties of the countryside. Jeannot and Charlot in fierce competition for the latter's estranged wife Gina face off in a violent confrontation. Even in the depressive atmosphere of *Bas-fonds* there are dreams of a clean and normal world, but they are too ephemeral to forestall a deadly outcome. Pépé le moko is cock-of-the-walk in the Casbah—his domain but also his prison—which he dare not leave. A sense of suffocating confinement leads him in desperation to pursue the high-priced mistress of a rich man (she has passionately given herself to him) into the forbidden world outside. The nostalgia which Gaby and Pépé share for common landmarks of Paris, the metro ticket that Pépé carries—symbol of his days as a working cabinet maker—and the plaintive song that Frehel (a great pop singer of the time) sings tearfully about other times in Paris[13] heighten Pépé's desire to risk all to break out and accept his fate. Similarly, Lucien in *Gueule d'amour* is driven by his passion for Madeleine, an elegant kept woman, into leaving the Spahis to be by her side. Out of his dashing uniform and facing a dreary existence as a typesetter, his fantasies about the glamorous past only heighten his depression and sense of alienation for which only violence offers relief.

In the three Gabin films released shortly before the war both narrative and denouement reach an ultimate level of despair and pessimism. In *Quai des brumes*, Jean, the deserter from the colonial infantry, is seeking a peaceful escape away from the killing fields of Tonkin and the African desert and to clear the fog from his brain. In the waterfront honky-tonk bar "Panama" he meets Nelly, an attractive waif, herself at loose ends. Pursued by a punk (from what appears to be a right-wing league) and the army, Jean finds one night of refuge in Nelly's arms. Attempting to escape, running, returning, running again, Jean circles and succumbs to the forces that close in on him.[14]

In the winter of 1938 Renoir abandoned the pacifism and hopefulness

which animated *Grande illusion* (more of that later) and denounced the Munich pact just concluded as a humiliation for the French. *Bête humaine*, released in December, after the abortive general strike and the collapse of the Popular Front, exuded a pessimism every bit as unrelenting as that of Carné, which he had criticized only months earlier.[15] Based on one of Emile Zola's eugenic novels, the film traces the life in extremis of the railroad engine driver Jacques Lantier, who is caught between inherited tendencies to oblivion through violence and the demands by the woman he loves to kill her husband.

Jour se lève was released only three months before the declaration of war and left audiences stunned if not hostile.[16] The foundry worker François is desperately in love with the florist assistant Françoise, childish and flowerlike in apparent innocence. François is a defeated man, estranged from everything and everyone, with the only hope that his love will provide a personal salvation. His discovery that his beloved's innocence has been compromised by Valentin, a music hall dog trainer, unhinges him completely. In frantic acts of violence he loses all vestiges of humanity and denies even his identity.

Heroes drawn from the popular classes, especially Gabin, an everyman figure, fail to inspire hope. They are tormented souls made to express the threnody of doom, which was a major leitmotif of 1930s films. As victims of a blend of personal and social alienation they are driven to desperate acts, and murder is committed by a significant number. (In the nine films under discussion, there are eight murders.) For Gabin love is no haven in a heartless world; it is the reason for his crimes. Two of Gabin's characters kill their mistresses: Jean Lantier in *Bête humaine* kills Séverine, with whom he can neither live nor do without; Gueule d'amour finally kills Madeleine, a rich man's mistress, who has been toying with him. The rest kill to protect their loved ones in acts of jealousy. Pepel, in *Bas-fonds*, kills the landlord to protect the innocence of his desired Natasha. Jean, the deserter in *Quai des brumes*, kills Zabel, his beloved Nelly's venomous guardian. François, the foundry worker in *Jour se lève*, kills Valentin, the despoiler of his virginal Françoise. Charlot, in *Belle équipe*, kills his mate Jeannot in a quarrel over the latter's sexually provocative wife Gina.

Murder and other acts of desperation are not unique to the films of this decade, although one could argue that the frequency of such violent acts is revealing about the tensions of the time. But the recurrence of suicide in 1930s films is peculiar both to the times and to France, where they appear to mirror a sense of resignation and hopelessness in the last years of the Third Republic. A general theme prevails: The suicides are driven by fate into a negative destiny they cannot avoid; they are powerless before the forces that override their will, making self-destruction the only exit from an unbearable existence.

The actual fates are varied by temperament and circumstance, but a world-weariness alternating with a sense of confinement pervades all of them. In *La bandera* a man guilty of murder runs off to the Spanish Foreign Legion. He expiates his guilt and regains his honor by willing his death in a hopeless desert outpost under "native"[17] attack. The criminal Pépé le moko is no Hollywood-style gangster. He almost takes on the appearance of a social rebel—as chief of a crim-

inal gang who defies the French authorities. His yearning for the expensive mistress of an old man lures him to certain destruction. His kismet is his past; there are no new beginnings for his kind. Shackled at the departure gates of the ship that bears his paramour out of sight and sound, he drives a knife into his heart. There are two suicides in *Quai des brumes*. The painter Kraus verbalizes his vision of the world as one of lurking evil, violence, and chaos, and takes direct action by choosing death in the sea. Jean, the army deserter, follows no such clear path to his destruction. The fog he complains of is not the atmosphere of Panama's gin mill in the port of Le Havre; it is in his brain, put there by years in Tonkin and Africa, pulling the trigger and watching his targets clutch their guts before disappearing from view. His discovery of Nelly and their love is too good to be true. It is challenged by the young thug Lucien and even more by Nelly's guardian, a hypocritical secondhand dealer who lusts after his charge. Jean must leave to avoid being caught as a deserter. He books passage on a boat and almost escapes, but his destiny refuses to be cheated. Prescient of his doom, he returns to Nelly once more, kills Zabel, and is gunned down in front of the shop by Lucien, much as had been foretold by his cards.[18]

Renoir's Jacques Lantier in *La bête humaine* was no less self-destructive than Carné's deserter.[19] The engine driver is trapped between his love for Séverine (the station master's wife, who demands that he kill her husband) and his inability to commit a cold-blooded murder. As the lovers' relationship runs down, Lantier acts to free himself of desire and kills Séverine. The penultimate scene alternates between a railroaders' ball, at which the confrontation of Lantier and Séverine is pure anguish, and Séverine's bedroom, where a randomly discovered knife becomes the instrument of Lantier's doomed release. The two locales are beautifully joined by Renoir through the song "Petit coeur de Ninon." The murderer Lantier appears late for the morning run to Paris, fully in the grip of the fate that has haunted him from the beginning. The train's pulsations as it enters and leaves tunnels on its confining route corresponds to the violent alterations in Lantier's feelings. At full speed, without a word, he leaps to his death. Renoir's "hero" suffers from the excesses of his forebears (Zola's primitive eugenics) and is ensnared by his passion, much as Pépé le moko had been.

The final descent into pessimism came with the release of Carné's *Le jour se lève* in June 1939, as the last-minute collective security attempts in Moscow were turning sour and France was forced to face a much-feared destiny. As a protagonist, François is more hopeless than any of the other suicidal antiheroes—Pépé, Lantier, or Jean the deserter. François is beaten from the start; the worker image he projects is at the limit of his class. He is no longer young, but experience has given him nothing; he has no roots and belongs to no place; all jobs and all towns are the same to him; unemployment is as normal as working; he holds no views, has no friends, and belongs to no party or union; his daily life, including sex on Sundays, is a routine. It is an existence but not a life, and his relationship with Clara, a real and mature women, can go no further than other such pairings in other places and at other times. He harbors a hope against hope for salvation from his ugly and meaningless life through his desperate love for

Françoise, an orphan like him but much younger. He creates an image of her as a flower-woman, a child-woman, delicate, pure, and virginal.

It is a fantasy of a man waiting to be destroyed, of a man no longer in command of a basic sense of reality. In the final scene between Valentin, trainer of dogs and despoiler of young women, and François in his dingy tenement room (with which I began this essay) in which a series of skillful flashbacks create the plot, Françoise's loss of virginity is revealed and Valentin is murdered. In the final hour before his suicide, François stands at the window talking to the crowd below, many of whom have been encouraging him to give himself up. In a poignant stutter of emotion he strips away the few strands that bind him to life: mockingly offering that there is a good job to be had; insisting that there is no use yelling for François, because he doesn't exist anymore.[20] What was lost when Jean lay dead as the alarm clock rang? What would be lost if all others like him suddenly disappeared? Despite its depressing mood and message, or perhaps because of it, the film had a strong run only cut short by the outbreak of war in September and its banning by the government of Edouard Daladier in December.

It would be more than negligent to overlook the one film in which Gabin is not a doomed hero; it serves as the exception that proves the rule. Renoir was at the height of optimism in response to the Popular Front government and a declared pacifist when he directed *La grande illusion* in 1936–37.[21] Far from the battlefields in German prisoner-of-war camps harboring French, English, and Russian officers, the visual narrative unfolds. Throughout, the relations between German guards and French prisoners are very civil, even friendly, and Lieutenant Maréchal (Gabin) finds no nationalist barrier to his amorous relations with a Württemberg farmer's widow. Renoir implies that the reasonable side of man calls for peace and understanding across national divides and that only occasional instinctual outbursts bring a patriotic hatred to the fore. There is a suicide, but of a very noble variety. The aristocratic captain De Boeldieu simulates an escape, allowing two comrades (representing the new France) to gain their liberty, knowing full well that he will be killed. Gabin/Maréchal emerges victorious at the end: He steps on Swiss soil, gains his freedom, *and* "gets the girl."

Before turning from the worker images projected by Gabin to the illuminations they offer of crisis-ridden France, it may be useful to assemble a composite of the varied and at times contradictory qualities of his doomed heroes—to attempt to explain what made the French movie-going public identify with Gabin the unrivalled star.[22]

If we review the roles played by Gabin in the nine films of this period, the "worker image" that emerges hardly corresponds to the variety of real workers at the time (as defined, for instance, by the trade unions or as stereotyped in the conservative press). Gabin characters are from the working class but lack the usual attributes; they are more a part of the popular classes but without political identities. They are vividly urban, masculine, and individualistically French. Their antisocial tendencies, their helplessness in the face of outside forces beyond their control leading to violent escapes into oblivion made them seem heroic. Their often dual existence as criminal/legionnaire and worker played on

the frissons long associated in France with the combination "working classes, dangerous classes."[23] These attributes made the Gabin characters more than members of the working or popular classes and gave them a classless appeal as "everyman," with much the same universal attraction as Charlie Chaplin had for his audiences.

Audiences were enticed to view Gabin-everyman and his characters' repeated situations, problems, and fates as supplements to their everyday existence. Reality was thus exaggerated by the films but also never actually replaced. These representations together with the characters' defining traits—alienation, depression, ensnarement, helplessness, and nostalgic escapes—ending in violence and self-destruction offer illuminations of contemporary France and of the social-psychological climate in the last years of the Third Republic that led to the collapse of June 1940. Gabin-everyman was preordained to a "fate"—a clearly projected lethal end. The "destiny" of France—its predestination with a generally positive connotation—became fateful during the late 1930s.

Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, one of the most perceptive contemporary film historians, has suggested an excellent association between Gabin films and illuminations of reality: "France was suffering from a depression and had to face an increasingly threatening reality: the specter of war. She didn't want to confront it. She exorcised it with a sacrifice—she sacrificed Jean Gabin."[24]

Illuminations: Spotlights

Before turning to the way Gabin's worker-hero films illuminate the social-psychological climate of late 1930s France, there are two conjunctions between films and recorded history that lend themselves to a focused analysis: colonialism/racism and the images/conditions of women.

Its colonial empire played an important role in France's national self-image as a principal power. In official government pronouncements, its civilizing mission was proclaimed, especially if there were "native" rumblings for self-government or if doubts were raised about the economic benefits of empire. With the world poised for war in 1939, the Minister of Colonies, Georges Mandel, boasted that with a population of 110 million the French empire was able to raise two million soldiers and half a million workers.[25] In 1931 a colonial exhibit in Paris commemorating one hundred years of rule over Algeria had already illustrated the success of France's civilizing mission with displays of Orientalist otherness (mosques, souks, dancers, camels, etc.) and had been well attended by large audiences, especially from the popular classes.[26]

Surprisingly, the official colonial policy, essentially based on "no change," was supported across the political spectrum: by the conservative parties for ideological reasons and by the Radicals who, more as a matter of protecting privileges, rallied behind the status quo; the Socialist party remained in favor of assimilation but talked vaguely about freedom for Moslems without giving any support to self-government; the Communist party did an about-face from cham-

pioning anti-imperialism in 1922 to abandoning national independence movements by 1935.[27]

Not all of the public imperial triumphalism went unanswered by social and political critics. In 1932 the automobile company Citroën organized an African rally which it publicized with a film called *L'Afrique vous parle*. The popular novelist Georges Simenon had just returned from an extended African trip and wrote a series of articles about his experiences for the periodical *Vu*. He subtitled his series "L'Afrique vous parle: Elle vous dit merde."[28]

The paternalism of official colonial policy and popular sentiment was expressed in racist terms.[29] North Africans were regarded either as ornamentally present in their locales (like camels or mosques) or as fanatical villains congenitally driven to violence against their benefactors. Their women were classified as dancers, prostitutes, and fortunetellers in the casbahs. The most popular image of Europeans in the colonies was of the legionnaire, Spahi, the colonial infantryman who, denigrated and declassed in his metropolitan setting, seeks the magic of the colonies to gain status as a white man. As executors of the nation's colonial will, who as often as not were in flight from the police, they hoped to gain personal redemption by pacifying the *salopards* (sons of bitches). Especially during the Depression, the ranks of these uniformed civilizers were swelled by workers. It was the boys of the Parisian proletarian districts of Pantin and Belleville for whom the popular singers Frehel and Edith Piaf had created such songs as "Derrière la clique" and "Mon légionnaire."[30]

Four of the Gabin films linked with empire and colonies reinforce and amplify existing beliefs and attitudes: *Bandera*, *Pépé*, *Gueule*, and *Quai*. They are based on popular novels and neither aim at social criticism nor pretend to be historical; all had very successful runs in the working-class neighborhoods. Where natives and native settings are shown—*Bandera* and *Pépé* —racism is quite explicit. In the former, the Arabs in the town perched on the edge of the desert in Spanish Morocco are shadowy figures, an absence in contrast to the whites; the enemy attacking the outpost at which Gilieth "seeks death on the field of honor" are only identified as *salopards*; his Arab mistress Aîcha is a prostitute.[31] In the latter, the Casbah, which is the domain/prison of the gang leader Pépé, is shown to harbor a population of mixed colors and nations but no ordinary Arabs. Arabic is hardly heard even though it is the predominant language, spoken by Slimane (the Algerian policeman tracking Pépé) as well as the Algerian gang member Regis who informs on his comrades and is murdered. The white members of the gang are all honorable criminals—Frenchmen. Only the Arabs are untrustworthy. Inèz, Pépé's steady Algerian mistress, is rendered unattractive by lighting, while Gaby, the rich man's tart, who drives Pépé to his desperate fate, is given all the props of attractiveness. The white, French criminal is pictured like a lion in a domain of lesser creatures, but the reality of his cage assures that he cannot escape his predestined end.

Lucien in *Gueule d'amour* adds another powerful image to explain the popularity of colonial films: the romantic figure on horseback, tough and ruthless

when necessary, the white man called upon by his nation to keep order, fight miscreants, and uphold its honor. Riding out from the Spahi garrison at Orange on a magnificent stallion, enveloped in a huge cape and turbaned, Lucien is indeed the "lover boy" of all the ladies and deferred to by everyone. This aura is further enhanced by Gabin's silences, mocking speech, and attachment to his regiment, which ensures his popular image. As we know, attachment to Madeleine, a rich man's paramour, becomes a compulsion that puts him in the hands of uncontrollable forces leading to murder. Without his steed, shed of his theatrical uniform, and reduced to his prior profession as typesetter, Lucien is no longer lover-boy and has lost his machismo, which he attempts to regain by destroying the object of his compulsion. Symbols are ephemeral and deceptive: in civilian clothes the proud emblem of the French empire is a nobody.

If Gilieth, Pépé, and Lucien are heroic figures of colonialism, Jean, the deserter from the colonial infantry in *Quai des brumes*, is an antihero who was never glamorous, never commanding, never more than a cog in the colonial machine. He served in the most proletarian of the colonial organizations; we know little about how he shouldered "the white man's burden" in Tonkin and the desert of Africa to which he refers. When we first encounter him arriving at Panama's gin mill in Le Havre he has already denounced all killing out there, which had created a great fog in his mind. Jean talks as if he wants nothing but peace, but he remains basically a violent man who uses his fists to attack a young rival for Nelly's attentions and kills an older one before meeting his fate. Jean seems always to have been slated for a bad destiny. He deserted from the colonial service because of the "work" demanded of him that he grew to hate. He paid for that desertion in the end (as the Ministry of War preferred).

Regardless of whether he is a Spahi on horseback or a defeated deserter, Gabin consorts with a woman or women who act as foils, define his aims and desires, create or add to his sense of entrapment, and ultimately turn an uncertain destiny into a doomed fate. The roles assigned to women add important dimensions to these films by revealing: the restricted definitions of their personas, permitted aspirations, and arenas of action; and male taboos, machismo, and resistance to challenges of their privileges. For the purposes of analysis we might use the stereotypic designation of "good women" and "bad women" and thereby mark the absence of that vast majority of women who lie in between these extremes in the real world.

There are four "good women," all of whom are distinguished by a passive willingness to let circumstances shape their personas and the Gabin character to define them. The German farm widow in *Grande illusion* says that she has lost her identity without a man, accepts Maréchal in her bed for the night, and promises patiently to await his return. Nelly in *Quai des brumes* is a waif in the body of a woman, who has no personality other than to tempt her guardian and to inspire the world-weary deserter Jean. For the defeated foundry worker François in *Jour se lève*, Françoise represents a flower-like ideal for whom he kills when he discovers that her assumed virginal purity had been defiled.[32]

Natasha in *Bas-fonds* has no persona other than as object of men's desires. Pepel the thief regards her as the means of his salvation.

There are six "bad women," all of whom use their sexuality in defining their life style and aspirations and in gaining moments of control over men who dominate them, sometimes to the point of destroying them. Four of them are from the demimonde of kept women. Aïcha in *Bandera* is an Arab prostitute in the legionnaire town, content to receive Gilieth's favors and waiting passively for him when he embarks on his suicide mission. Another Aïcha is Pépe le moko's servile Algerian mistress, pushed aside for the high-priced French mistress Gaby, unwilling to trade her life of luxury for the good sex offered by Pépé in his casbah-cage. Madeleine is a rich man's paramour in *Gueule d'amour* unwilling to abandon her comforts for the physical pleasure offered by the Spahi Lucien. To win and dominate her he abandons the trappings that had defined him as "lover-boy" only to turn to murder in frustration.

Two of these "bad women" lead more ordinary lives as dependent wives. Ginette in *Belle équipe* is Charlot's estranged wife, who seduces his best friend Jeannot at the *auberge* (inn) being built, thereby unleashing a jealous confrontation between the two men and destroying the collective enterprise. Séverine, the station master's wife in *Bête humaine*, uses her sexual hold over the engine driver Lantier to encourage him to kill her husband. Ensnarement and desperation end in murder and suicide.

The most persistent spotlight thrown by these film images on women regardless of their social status is their definition by men—by fathers, guardians, husbands, retainers, and lovers.[33] Regeneration to make up the deficit of French wartime casualties became the battle cry of male legislators and repopulationists, making reproduction women's primary goal.[34] Calls for women's return to the *foyer* (hearth) flew in the face of the reality that France had the highest percentage of women in the work force (39 percent in 1921 and 36.4 percent in 1936), demonstrating that they were needed in public life outside the home. Although abortion was outlawed in most industrial countries, except for very special circumstances, contraception and birth control publicity was increasingly widespread. But in France two laws of 1920 and 1923 criminalized all activities restricting birth, which in no way reduced illegal abortions (600,000 per year) or increased the birth rate.

Neither force nor the feeble attempts at family assistance and child support[35] succeeded in altering the overwhelming prevalence of the one-child family. It was accomplished by the women themselves, with or without their partner's cooperation, at a hazard to their health, and under the threat of legal punishment. This demonstration of private power only underlined the legal, electoral, and political powerlessness of French women. By 1939 they still had the least political rights in Europe, on a par only with Switzerland and Bulgaria. A reform of the Civil Code in 1938 gave some rights to property-owning women, but these too were well below the norm in other countries.

Good or bad, the women of the Gabin films were dependents and objects

of male needs and fantasies, infantilized child-women or seductresses without the selfhood of independent beings. In real life citizenship and personal fulfillment of capabilities was denied to French women, who continued to be narrowly defined by the male world.

Illuminations: Floodlights

I ended the section on Gabin as worker with his collective psychological profile as everyman: alienation, depression, entrapment, helplessness, and escapes into nostalgia ending in violence and self-destruction. The atmosphere of his environment is one of a doomed destiny, a fate created by forces beyond his control. In what follows a broad floodlight will be thrown on the final crisis of the Third Republic by using the Gabin image surrogates to illuminate its social-psychological climate set against a background of political, economic, and social conditions. My argument will be that there is no one-to-one relationship between the films and French reality in the late 1930s. Rather, I hope to illustrate how the fate of Gabin's characters is in part inspired by a pervasive feeling of hopelessness in society and at the same time amplifies and reinforces it.

The crisis in French society at which this study is directed had its denouement in the collapse of France in June 1940 in the face of the German onslaught. Military historians have persistently refused to regard the defeat of 1940 as anything but a strictly military defeat.[36] Such monocausal explanations only beg the question of why, the complicated answers to which are provided by a host of distinguished historians. Philippe Burin observes: "Defeat struck France as lightning strikes a tree. . . . The world, hanging upon the event, was stupefied. . . . In every respect the 1930s had undermined the cohesion of French society, recreating old cleavages and complicating them further with new confrontations."[37] This interpretation is in clear sympathy with Marc Bloch's early attempt to link military defeat to conditions in interwar France.[38] No one has more clearly and more consistently analyzed French society during the crisis years of the 1930s than Stanley Hoffmann, who, although a staunch Francophile, has never hesitated from stating the hardest truths. Over a period of thirty-five years he has explained the "great disaster" of June 1940 as an outcome of the collapse of the "republican synthesis" that turned France into a "stalemated society" between 1934 and 1940.[39] French institutions, he argued, were too weak and immobile to deal with an increasingly dynamic, even revolutionary world leading to a combination of explosiveness and paralysis. Looking at the same French trauma thirty-five years later, he concludes that "the death of France's liberal democracy resulted from suicide."[40]

The temporal problems facing France in the 1930s—encirclement by the dictatorships of Germany, Italy, and Spain; Munich; pacifism; and the collapse of the Popular Front—all stemmed from political, economic, social, and cultural conditions, conflicts, and dysfunction. Let us now take a *tour d'horizon* (general survey) of the key elements of the national crisis, with the aim of exposing the realities underlying the psychological climate into which the Gabin films

were projected. Gabin's characters, as analyzed above, and their common anguish and sense of being bystanders and victims in events beyond their control are a silent presence in this short excursion into structural problems that set limits to action and dampened the public's expectations. Gabin's imagined presence at the side of his popular audience in its experience of difficult times suggests a bonding between audience and star whereby the performance of the latter and the daily struggles of the former become one (the kind of convergence all film makers strive for but very rarely attain).

Psychologically, the experience of World War One played an inordinate role in postwar life. On the one hand, there was a victor's sense of having vanquished the enemy and driven him off. On the other hand, there were the enormous costs of the long struggle: the high casualties and destruction of the economy of northeastern France.[41] It seemed as though the cost of victory had been too high, as defeated Germany appeared quite soon to be better off than France. At all levels of French public life the diminished size of the nation's population became an obsession, as natalists urged families to procreate.[42] The real reason for the failure of population growth was the death rate, which was the highest among industrial nations and the causes of which—poor public health and hygiene—were neither paraded before the public nor addressed by the state authorities.[43]

Both the real costs of the war and its psychological surcharge, which made the loss in manpower the ready explanation for the serious problems faced by the nation and for the failure to address these in significant ways, created a sense of stagnation and listless resignation. The real loss was in dynamism and tempo, in the failure to renew aging systems, in the inability to keep pace with forms of modernization readily adopted elsewhere, and in living off an excessive diet of past glories and national pride.

Parliamentary government was at the root of the immobilism, which, according to Stanley Hoffmann, produced the "stalemated society."[44] In the twenty interwar years the system appeared to be in constant crisis with forty-two governments lasting an average of six months and circulating the same 281 elite figures in their cabinets. Under these circumstances the initiation or execution of programs to revitalize existing institutions or to initiate much needed projects (such as public housing or public health) was all but impossible. With initiatives by the cabinet and Chamber of Deputies blocked, the bureaucracy gained in power but without being able to substitute itself for the elected government. Electoral politics was dominated by small towns, which, rather than urban and industrial areas, were favored by the distribution of seats in the Chamber. The same imbalance determined the composition of the Senate, which acted as an obstacle to reforms throughout the period by granting or withholding decree powers from the executive when the legislature had reached an impasse. Street politics added a public sense of instability, with confrontations between right-wing leagues and communist militants, growing xenophobia toward past and arriving immigrants, and hate mongering of the right-wing and gutter press threatening one of those historic national explosions that tear the nation asunder.[45]

In comparison to other industrial countries the French economy appeared

to stagnate.[46] Too much of its active population was still engaged in agriculture (32.5 percent, compared to 38.3 percent in industry and transportation) which, though lauded to the skies as the seat of the "true" France, was a major barrier to growth of the economy. Alfred Sauvy concludes that French agriculture remained one of the most backward in Europe, about the level of Spain.[47] The development of modern industrial production faced a variety of obstacles: Family-owned small-sized firms were resistant to innovation, and industrial machinery was over-aged. By 1931 France finally became urban, with 51.2 percent of the population living in towns of 2,000 or more, but the predominant mentality remained small-town and rural, marked by a clinging to tradition in the face of threatened economic or social change.[48] Hoffmann underscores that the ethos of the bourgeoisie was social status to the exclusion of economic rationality.[49]

The Popular Front government commenced with a public outburst of hope and ended in widespread feelings of despair. How had it managed to fire popular imagination with great expectations and fail to fulfill them?[50] The initial sense of public euphoria stemmed from the spontaneous strike movement of May-June 1936 (during which business men had asked Léon Blum, "Is it a revolution?"), and not from the modest platform of the Popular Front or from Blum's conception of his mandate. The most remarkable gains of this avalanche of sit-down strikes—the forty-hour week and paid vacations—were won by the workers themselves and not by their leaders. But the results of the election upon closer examination revealed that the mood of the country was not for a restructuring of society. The electoral slide to the right in 1936 signaled that the combined strength of the rural population and bourgeoisie was greater than the power of the urban work force and that, consequently, the socialists would not be able to carry out much needed social reforms.[51] This political reality helps to explain Blum's failures after September 1936: abandonment of the public works program, failure to reform the bureaucracy, and unwillingness to take his struggle with the Senate to the nation.

Interwar France was burdened by a large number of contradictions that sapped the energy of its people and left the country ill-prepared to bring about changes or to respond to unexpected crises. Pacifism, rooted in the nightmare visions of World War One, grew by leaps and bounds across the political spectrum. By 1938 the antifascist movement had become totally preoccupied with domestic proponents of fascism to the neglect of Adolf Hitler's very threatening expansionist policies. The Munich Accord epitomized the lack of national will to face harsh realities, escapism, and abandonment of France's international commitments.[52] Alexander Werth, one of the most astute journalist observers of the French scene in the 1930s, concluded that "France's responsibility for Berchtesgaden was immense." He commented on the *blasé* calm of the Parisian *grand monde* (upper crust) and the cynicism with which Daladier, speaking in the Chamber, minimized what had been done to Czechoslovakia.[53] Pacifism led to a virtual split of the Socialist party at its Royan Congress in 1938. The *Munichoise* faction under party secretary Paul Faure, who in April 1939 summed up its position with the remark that "Danzig isn't worth the life of a single wine-

grower from Macon,"[54] abandoned all pretensions to socialism. Pacifism was at the root of the schizophrenic position on Spain, a sister popular front, which was abandoned to the transparent policy of "non-intervention" all the same. Consequently, France stumbled between sentimental pacifism and a rearmament program, begun by Blum in 1937, and was prepared to act on neither peace nor war.[55]

On the domestic front, social problems, inherited from years of neglect and exacerbated by a lagging economy and governments lacking the power and will to act, grew worse and threw a pall over expectations, especially by the working class that reforms would now improve the quality of life. Habitations in Paris and major cities were of a poor standard unique among European cities in which massive slum clearance and building programs created livable domiciles and neighborhoods with increased concern for sanitation and public health. In Paris, by contrast, some eleven slum islands dispersed throughout the city symbolized the failure to provide adequate housing or to build sufficient new housing to meet desperate public needs.[56] The deplorable state of public health and sanitation accounts for the continuing high rates of tuberculosis (twenty-five percent of all mortality) until 1939.[57] Tuberculosis together with a high rate of venereal disease and a staggering amount of alcoholism accounted for the highest death rate among industrial countries. It was the latter and not declining births that really explains the failure of France's population to grow.[58] The disinterest of the government in fighting widespread alcoholism was a disgrace. Annual consumption of pure (one hundred percent) alcohol per person over twenty years of age between 1930 and 1939 was thirty-three liters (or 264 bottles of wine at twelve percent alcohol!).[59]

France's foreign policy during virtually the whole interwar period was contradictory. Despite flirtations with a Soviet treaty including a military convention, France operated in the shadow of or as an appendage to British foreign policy. At the same time the French media once more conjured up images of "perfidious Albion," a propaganda that became shrill and clearly hateful after the French capitulation in June 1940.[60] National-chauvinist distinctions between true Frenchmen and foreigners increased dramatically between the onset of the economic crisis in 1931 to the outbreak of war when the reaction to all foreigners became xenophobic.[61] The level of anti-Semitism in the press grew to a feverish pitch when Blum became prime minister, extending from verbal abuse to physical attacks by Cagoulards and other agents of the right-wing leagues.[62] Xenophobia was fed by leaders from all walks of life, who proclaimed their peasant ancestors and rural roots and made village life (largely imaginary and with no mention of the widespread rural poverty) the emblem of a national ethos resistant to the allures of modernity imported from abroad, which were perceived as a threat to France's ancient heritage.[63]

By the end of 1938 the earlier sparks of hope to make the impossible possible had died in a climate of defeat, despondency, and seeming submission to fate:[64] The Popular Front coalition was ended by the defection of the Radicals. The cost of living had risen by forty-six percent, vitiating the gains of the

Matignon Accords. The general strike of November had been badly beaten by the Daladier government. First Spain and then Munich had split the nation. Finally, fatigue carried the day in the last year before the war.[65]

Between Christmas 1939 and the end of the phony war in May 1940, France was in limbo: The German *blitzkrieg* (lightning war) raged against Poland but the General Staff sent 750,000 men on leave; only one clearly anti-Nazi film (Anatole Litvak's *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*) was shown in Paris; and no preparations were made for evacuating the population in the event of a German attack. The nation appeared to be waiting for its destiny to be decided by forces outside its control. Immobilized by fear and desperate to escape its fate, the French psychological climate resembled the doom of the last Gabin films of the period: Jacques Lantier, the engine driver, in the grip of desperation before cutting Séverine's throat, before leaping to his death and nothingness; Jean, the deserter, running from the scene of his crime, escaping from himself into the bullets to end his existence; or François, the foundry worker, trapped and helpless in his room, oblivious of the crowd below and the police coming closer, dazed, mechanically picking up the revolver of his "liberation."

French audiences flocked to see Gabin the star in his various worker disguises, who from *Bandera* onwards recapitulated the fate of everyman driven by forces beyond his control. Gabin's last three films of 1938–39 narrowed the distance between a character driven by despair to murder and suicide, clutching at distant memories of better and calmer times, and his audience, psychologically weakened by the societal crisis described above, gripped by fear and uncertainty about where events would now lead. We can only hazard some guesses at why audiences continued to relish Gabin's films considering their bleak messages. It might have been Gabin's superb stylized acting blending Frenchness with alienation and especially the explosions of temper like the outbursts of a trapped animal against its tormentors. Gabin might have appealed to his audiences as a sacrificial figure who, in acting out and encapsulating that which terrorized them, safeguarded them from the destinies depicted (much like the role of Roman gladiators). Or Gabin's magnetism may have drawn audiences to his films knowing full well that glimpses of their own fate were in store for them (as self-fulfilling prophecies).

EPILOGUE: Pépé le moko, hands manacled, clutches the metal grille barring the way to the dockside at which the ship of his salvation is about to depart with Gaby, whom he desires. Slowly the foghorn sounds its sorrowful note of departure, signaling Pépé's doom. He takes a knife from his pocket, opens it, directs it, and drives it home. His eyes glaze over and his body slumps as he meets his fate. The circle between image symbols and reality is thereby closed.

NOTES

1. By 1938 there were 4,250 cinemas in France, most equipped for sound, some 300 in Paris alone. In the capital there were movie palaces along the popular *grands boulevards* (large

boulevards) seating up to 1,000, with the Rex seating 3,000 and the Gaumont-Palace 6,000. Annual attendance in France of thirty-nine million by the end of the 1930s was considerably behind that in Britain and Germany. Ticket prices ranged from 3.5 to 10 francs; double features and continuous showing became the norm, with greatly reduced prices in depressed areas of 2.5 francs for two films, a sandwich, and a beer. See Geneviève Guillaume-Grimaud, *Le cinéma du front populaire* (Paris, 1986), 9, 38; Colin Crisp, *Classic French Cinema, 1930–1960* (Bloomington, 1993), 213, 221; Jean Chaput, *A la Recherche des cinémas disparus* (Paris, 1995), 1–7; and François Garçon, *De Blum à Pétain: Cinéma et société française (1936–1944)* (Paris, 1984), 17–18.

2. I believe that the film reviewers of the *American Historical Review* are fixated on the primacy of historical accuracy. Much more attuned to the broader vision of French cinema historians like Pierre Sorlin and Marc Ferro and to the psycho-social-historical dimension and role of images is Louis Menashe. See his review in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 16 (1996):445–447.

3. It must be borne in mind that the great subjects of the 1930s—the "night of the leagues," the Stavisky affair, the general strike of 1936, the Spanish Civil War, etc.—were avoided by directors required to submit their films to the public censor. One fifth of all films produced were required to make cuts to win certification. See Françis Courtade, *Les malédictions du cinéma français: Une histoire du cinéma français parlant* (Paris, 1978). "Supposing [said Jacques Feyder] that I wanted to make a film about a conflict between owners and workers. I won't be able to and you know why." *L'Humanité*, December 20, 1935. Self-censorship at the behest of the producer was another obstacle to dealing with the large issues. Carné's *Quai des brumes* was subjected to cuts demanded by the military and by the producer. See Edward B. Turk, *Child of Paradise: Marcel Carné and the Golden Age of French Cinema* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 111–12.

4. For this conception of the limits and possibilities of studying a period through its films, I am greatly indebted to Marc Fero, *Cinema and History*, trans. Naomi Greene (Detroit, 1988), chapter 1; and Pierre Sorlin, *European Cinemas, European Societies 1939–1990* (London, 1991), 1–23. See also "How to Look at 'Historical' Film," in *The Film in History*, idem (Totawa, NJ, 1981). On audiences as creative actors rather than passive consumers of leisure entertainment, see Michel Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley, 1984); and Pierre Sorlin, "Le spectateur face aux films: reconnaissance, identification, projection," in *Sociologie du cinéma* (Paris, 1977).

5. See Raymond Chriat, *Le cinéma français des années 30* (Rennes, 1983), 108ff. NB: Video versions can be rented or purchased from Facets Video in Chicago, the telephone number of which is (773) 281–9075.

6. For the following, see Claude Gauteur and Ginette Vincendeau, *Jean Gabin anatomie d'un mythe* (Paris, 1993), chapters 1 and 5; and Ginette Vincendeau, *Pépé le moko* (London, 1998), 27ff.

7. See André Brunelin, *Gabin* (Paris, 1987), 194.

8. This attachment to *le temps passé* (times past) is all the more remarkable considering the phenomenal growth of the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) after the general strike of 1936 from 785,000 members to over four million. The CGT was transformed from an organization of predominantly civil servants and white-collar workers into one in which industrial workers constituted the majority. See Helmut Gruber, *Léon Blum, French Socialism, and the Popular Front: A Case of Internal Contradiction* (Ithaca, NY, 1986), 28–29.

9. Dudley Andrews observes that "what Gabin's immense appeal reflects is less the sociology of the marginal than the very attraction of marginality." *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton, 1995), 226–27.

10. Antoine Prost, "Changing Workers and Workplaces," in *A History of Private Life: Riddles of Identity in Modern Times*, ed. Antoine Prost and Gérard Vincent (Cambridge, MA, 1991). The time of the mosaic of workshops, Prost observes, was largely over.

11. See Gérard Conte, "Les Industries," in *Treizième Arrondissement: Une ville dans Paris*, ed. Gilles-Antoine Lauglois (Paris, 1994), 170–177.

12. Workers in films were extremely rare beyond the characters assumed by Gabin. In *Le choc en retour*, directed by Georges Monca and Maurice Kéroul in 1937, there are very good shots of the interior of a medium-sized sugar refining plant with workers at their stations. In René Clair's *A nous la liberté* (1931), there are excellent sequences of a mass production assembly line demanding a robot-like discipline. Beyond these two films, workers appear sporadically and peripherally in the entire corpus of French films between the wars. One could add the printers in Jean Renoir's *Le crime de Monsieur Lange* (1936) and the quarry workers of

Renoir's *Tony* (1935), but these were the same kind of artisanal workers as those portrayed by Gabin. See Pascal Ory, *La Belle Illusion: Culture et Politique sous le signe du Front populaire 1935–1938* (Paris, 1994).

13. The refrain of the song is poignant with memories of the popular classes:

"Où est il mon moulin de la Place Blanche,
Mon tabac, mon bistrot du coin,
Tous les jours pour nous c'était dimanche,
Où sont-ils les amis, les copains,
Où sont-ils tous nos vieux bals musettes,
Leur java au son de l'accordéon,
Où sont-ils tous mes repas aux galettes
Qu'on se bouffait même sens avoir un rond
Où sont-ils donc? . . ."

See "Pépé le Moko," *L'Avant scène: Cinéma*, June 1, 1981, 40.

14. The reception of the film was curious. It was the most popular box office film of 1938 and won three prizes, but the critics were divided. Renoir thought the film had fascist aspects (he called it "the whore's ass"); the right-wing critic Emile Vuillermoz denounced it for depicting Frenchmen as derelicts and degenerates. See Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology, 1907–1939* (Princeton, 1988), II, 158–60.

15. Renoir was personally in despair: Munich made him ashamed of France; the Moscow Trials and the Spanish Civil War contributed to his growing distance from the Left. *Bête humaine* reflects Renoir's pessimism and fatalism at the end of 1938. See Alexander Sesonke, *Jean Renoir: The French Films* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), 352–54.

16. The film was banned by the Daladier government in December 1939 and again by the Germans during the occupation. Turk, *Child of Paradise*, 175.

17. The native enemies are never identified other than as *salopards* (sons of bitches). Racism and chauvinism in this film as well as in *Pépé* will be discussed later. See Pierre Boulanger, *Le Cinéma Colonial* (Paris, 1975), 106ff and 128ff.

18. Turk concludes: "In 'Quai des brumes', characters are reduced to silent acquiescence vis-à-vis fate that controls them entirely." *Child of Paradise*, 105.

19. The film was premiered on December 23, 1938, before a distinguished audience of statesmen and stars of Paris. It had an unusually long first run of four months. See Christopher Faulkner, *The Social Cinema of Jean Renoir* (Princeton, 1986), 102.

20. For that powerful monologue, see Marcel Carné and Jacques Prévert, *Le jour se lève* (film script) (London, 1970), 110–13.

21. "In 1914, Hitler had not yet appeared. Nor had the Nazis, who almost succeeded in making people forget that the Germans are also human beings. In 1914, men's spirits had not yet been warped by totalitarian religions and racism. In certain ways, that world war was still a war of normal people, of educated people—I would almost dare say, a gentlemen's war. That does not excuse it. Politeness, even chivalry, does not excuse massacre." Jean Renoir, *La grande illusion* (film script), trans. Marianne Alexander and Andrew Sinclair (London, 1968), 8.

22. Unlike the highly industrialized and concentrated film industry in the United States, where stars were the symbols of the product and fan magazines kept audience interest centered on them, in France star merchandizing was only beginning. That makes Gabin's widespread following all the more remarkable. See Victoria de Grazia, "Mass Culture and Sovereignty: The American Challenge to European Cinema, 1920–1960," *Journal of Modern History* 61 (1989):53–87.

23. Louis Chevalier pointed out how the blending of criminal/worker and their combined milieus originated in French literature in the nineteenth century and became a permanent conception. See *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIX siècle* (Paris, 1958), 453, cited in Vincendeau, *Gabin*, 147.

24. See Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, "Cinéma des années trente: la crise et l'image de la crise," *Le Mouvement Social* 154 (1991):194–95.

25. See Anthony Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery: France's Bid for Power in Europe 1914–1940* (New York, 1995), 146–48. In demystifying this triumphalism Adamthwaite points out that by 1932 ten thousand Vietnamese nationalists were in jail and that thousands of black African subjects were escaping into British territory to escape harsh taxes and forced labor.

26. See Benjamin Stora, *Histoire de l'Algérie coloniale, 1830–1945* (Paris, 1991), 70–71; and Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York, 1994), 179–80.

27. Stora, *Histoire d'Algerie*, 79–80.
28. Weber, *Hollow Years*, 180.
29. For the following, see Guy Hennebelle, "Preface," in *Cinéma colonial*, by Boulanger, 5–14.
30. I am much indebted to the excellent analysis of racism in French film and life by Vincendeau in *Pépé le moko*. Piaf's "Mon Légionnaire" goes:
"Il était fort
Il était beau
Il sentait bon le sable chaud
Mon légionnaire."
Vincendeau points out that while the boys of Pantin and Belleville were dying they were singing: "*Pan-pan L'Arbi!*" (Kill the Arabs), 63–64.
31. Gilieth also refers to the *salopards* as *bandes de cochons* (bunches of pigs). See Michel Marie, "Sous l'uniforme, les nerfs et le muscle," in *L'Avant scene*, April 1982, 22–25; film script, 66–67.
32. A recent study questions whether the taboo of virginity can be attributed to male workers of the period. It admits, however, that given the double standard that dominates all of French society the taboo so violently defended by Gabin should be applied to the whole society. Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier, *La drôle de guerre des sexes du cinéma français* (Paris, 1996), 69–70.
33. Although the women in the Gabin films drew their personas from men, there were a few exceptions in other important films of the 1930s. Juliette, the young bride of Jean Vigo's *L'Atalante* is not content with being just a wife and sets out to find herself. Valentine in *Le crime de Monsieur Lange* projects the image of a mature woman: She has created a successful business in which workers share good human relations; she is resistant to sexually exploiting males and chooses her lover. The mayor's wife in *Kermesse héroïque* in the face of her husband's cowardice saves her town by leading its women in welcoming putative invaders.
34. For what follows, see Helmut Gruber, "French Women in the Crossfire of Class, Sex, Maternity and Citizenship," in *Women and Socialism/Socialism and Women: Europe between the Two World Wars*, ed. Helmut Gruber and Pamela Graves (New York, 1998), 279–320.
35. See Alfred Sauvy with Anita Hirsch, *Histoire économique de la France entre les deux guerres* (Paris, 1984), II, 14–15.
36. For older versions of this view, see Robert A. Doughty: "More than being a victim of German military excellence, France was a victim of her own historical experience, geography, and political and military institutions. . . . Her military leaders chose . . . to rely on an inadequate tactical doctrine and to follow a weak and vulnerable strategy." *The Seeds of Disaster: The Developement of French Army Doctrine 1919–1939* (New York, 1985), 190. See also Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *Les Français de l'an 40* (Paris, 1990), vol. II: "Ouvriers et soldats," part 2: "Sur le front des armées"; and Henri Michel, *La défaite de la France, septembre 1939 à juin 1940* (Paris, 1980). For the most recent examples of this interpretation, see Nicole Jordan, "Strategy and Scapegoatism: Reflections on the French National Catastrophe, 1940," 13–38; William Irvine, "Domestic Politics and the Fall of France in 1940," 85–99; Elisabeth du Réau, "Edouard Daladier: The Conduct of the War and the Beginnings of Defeat," 100–125; all in *The French Defeat of 1940: Reassessments*, ed. Joel Blatt (Providence, RI, 1998).
37. *France under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York, 1996), 32–33.
38. See "A Frenchman Examines His Conscience," in *Strange Defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940*, trans. Gerard Hopkins (New York, 1968), 126–76. Jean-Baptiste Durocelle entitled his book of the period *Politique étrangère de la France: La Décadence 1932–1939* (Paris, 1979). He agreed with Marc Bloch that the bourgeoisie and particularly the ruling classes bore the main responsibility for what he called the "decadence of the period" leading to the debacle of June 1940 (20).
39. See Stanley Hoffmann, "Paradoxes of the French Political Community," in *In Search of France*, ed. by Stanley Hoffmann et al. (Cambridge, MA, 1963), 2–25.
40. See "The Trauma of 1940: A Disaster and its Traces," in *French Defeat of 1940*, by Blatt, 354–55. Collective memory among the French, he points out, consists of a very strong sense of catastrophe and of humiliation. Stronger still is the dogged avoidance of facing the past, made evident by the lack of commemoration save for DeGaulle's June 18 speech (357–59).
41. France lost 10.5 percent of its male working population; Germany lost 9.8 percent.

42. See Françoise Thébaud, "Le mouvement nataliste dans la France de l'entre-deux-guerres: L'Alliance Nationale pour l'Accroissement de la Population Française," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 32 (1985); Angus McLaren, *Sexuality and Social Order: The Debate over the Fertility of Women and Workers in France* (New York, 1983); Joseph Spengler, *France Faces Depopulation* (Durham, 1979); and Karen Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism and Feminism in Fin-de-siècle France," *American Historical Review* 89 (1984).

43. For the role of politicians on behalf of pronatalism, see Marie-Monique Huss, "Pronatalism in the Inter-War Period in France," *Journal of Contemporary History* 25 (1990). For a brilliant exposé of how France has suffered from an obsession with demography, which has been used by both social scientists and the political class to explain all the problems and shortcomings of French society, see Hervé Le Bras, *Marianne et les lapins: L'obsession démographique* (Paris, 1991).

44. Hoffmann, "Paradoxes of the French," 2–5.

45. For protofascist groups and activities, see Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave 1933–1939* (New Haven, 1995). For official xenophobic treatment of workers, see Gérard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship, and National Identity*, trans. Geoffrey de Laforcade (Minneapolis, 1996), 61–65.

46. For the following, see Sauvy and Hirsch, *Histoire économique*, II, chapter 3: "Agriculture et alimentation"; chapter 4: "L'industrie"; III, chapter 10: "Les paysans"; and Maurice Lévy-Leboyer and Jean-Claude Casanova, eds., *Entre l'Etat et le marché: l'économie française des années 1880 à nos jours* (Paris, 1991), chapter 4: "L'inégalité des revenus," and chapter 6: "La stagnation économique."

47. Sauvy and Hirsch, *Histoire économique*, III, 163–64; and Maurice Larkin, *France Since the Popular Front: Government and People 1936–1986* (New York, 1991), 8–12.

48. Britain was predominantly urban by 1850, Italy by the 1870s, Germany by the turn of the century, and the United States by 1919.

49. Hoffmann, "Paradoxes," 4–7.

50. For very different readings of the Popular Front, see Irwin Wall, "The French Popular Front: A Reconsideration," in *Chance und Illusion: Labor in Retreat*, eds. Wolfgang Maderthaner and Helmut Gruber (Vienna, 1988), 325–341; Gruber, *Léon Blum*, 49–55; and Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy 1934–1938* (New York, 1988), 277–87.

51. See Eugen Weber, "Un demi-siècle de glissement à droite," *International Review of Social History* 5 (1960); and the detailed study of election results in Nathanael Greene, *Crisis and Decline: The French Socialist Party in the Popular Front Era* (Ithaca, NY, 1969), 283–333.

52. See Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bedarida, *Années noires: De la défaite à Vichy* (Paris, 1993), 15–16. They argue that the public reaction to Munich was far greater than the diplomatic event, because it expressed the endemic visceral fear of a new armed conflict that was contagious.

53. See Alexander Werth, *France and Munich: Before and After the Surrender* (New York, 1969), 218–19, 343.

54. Azéma and Bedarida, *Années noires*, 26.

55. "Formal pacifist organizations such as the Ligue internationale des combattants de la paix concluded that peace had failed and blamed it on "the complete rottenness of society." Norman Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France 1919–1939* (Oxford, 1991), 316–17.

56. Nearly twenty percent of Parisian workers' domiciles were classified as slums. Only 61,500 public housing units affordable by workers were built in Paris between the wars. By contrast the municipality of Vienna built 63,000 housing units for workers in ten years. The best analysis of the housing crisis can be found in Françoise Cribier, "Le logement d'un génération de jeunes Parisiens à l'époque du front populaire," in *Villes ouvrières*, eds. Suzanne Magri and Christian Topolov (Paris, 1988), 112–119.

57. For the following, see Préfecture de la Seine, *Annuaire Statistique de la Ville de Paris: 1923–25* (Paris, 1927); *1929–31* (Paris, 1933); *1932–34* (Paris, 1937); and *1935–37* (Paris, 1942). The topics studied in great detail include: housing, health, birth/death, mortality causes, population in Paris/*banlieue* (suburbs), welfare, and homelessness.

58. The death rate from 1931–35 was 15.7/1000; in 1936–38, it was still 15.2/1000, compared to considerably lower rates in Britain and Germany. See Colin Dyer, *Population and Society in Twentieth Century France* (New York, 1978), 83.

59. Alcohol consumption per adult in Italy was ten to twelve liters per year; in Holland it

was five. Far from combating the sale of alcohol the government did its best to promote production and consumption. See Sauvy and Hirsch, *Histoire économique*, III, 232–38; and Weber, *Hollow Years*, 71.

60. The irony of or perhaps the explanation for this hostility lies in the fact that France was shoring up its economy in between 1935 and 1937 with short-term British loans and long-term American ones. Moreover, France's dependence on Britain was not only financial but also economic and military: Vital material like coal (thirty percent), copper, oil, and rubber came from the British Empire and was carried on British ships. See Adamthwaite, *Grandeur*, 144–46.

61. See Gérard Noiriel, *Population, immigration et identité nationale en France XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris, 1992), 146–151.

62. See Pierre Birnbaum, *Un mythe politique: La "République juive" de Léon Blum à Pierre Mendès-France* (Paris, 1988), 61–85.

63. Hoffmann points out that France's pretension to be the model of the world—its delusion of grandeur—can be found across the historical spectrum from Jules Michelet to Jean Jaurès and Charles Maurras. Hoffman, "Paradoxes," 19.

64. See Antoine Prost, "Le climat social," in *Edouard Daladier, chef de gouvernement, avril 1938-septembre 1939*, eds. René Rémond and Janine Bourdin (Paris, 1977).

65. Philippe Burin concludes: "Underlying everything was the exhaustion of a great power conscious of its decline, both demographic and economic, and fearful of a loss of status. . . . France was decrepit, its message outdated or inappropriate, [and] modernity lay elsewhere." Burin, *France under the Germans*, 37–38.