



ONLY ONE HERO, THE PEOPLE

A FILM BY MATHIEU RIGOUSTE



On December 11th, 1960, after 130 years of French colonialism, the Algerian people defeated the military counter-revolution and invaded the forbidden neighborhoods of Algeria's large cities. With women, elders and children on the front line, the demonstrators took over the streets in thousands of places, and organized soup kitchens, clandestine hospitals... While the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) had been deeply weakened by the French counterinsurgency, it's the people who took over the war of independence and snatched its political side.

This film is built around dialogues with the last witnesses of this massive uprising. In the intimacy of their living places or walking back the streets of the uprising, their words, memories and emotions encounter the analyses of historians and friends from different generations. It's the story of a forgotten victory of the people. It's entangled with our disillusion and dreams, discusses the "Arab Spring" and addresses the diversity of contemporary world's uprisings.





Le cri
de la
Liberté

enfants de
décembre

I'VE BEEN INVESTIGATING THE ALGERIAN POPULAR UPRISING FOR 7 YEARS.

My research in social sciences revolves around counterinsurgency, this form of "war in the population", modernized and industrialized by the French State in Indochina and Algeria, then marketed to many countries to eventually form a global market.

After the "Battle of Algiers" in 1957, France claimed to have wiped out all resistance in colonized Algeria. But, on Sunday December 11th, 1960, and during three weeks, extensive massive demonstrations were organized by the Algerians to wrest away their independence.

Often including elders and, on the frontline, women and children, who came from thousands of shantytowns and segregated neighborhoods, the Algerian people was popping up in the heart of the colonial downtown areas. Flags, banners and bodies were front and center in the face of far right militia, French police and army, regularly opened fire.

The repression made a slaughter, with more than 250 dead Algerian people, but it still didn't manage to subdue the uprising.

This historical episode has been covered up.

It radically contradicts the founding narrative of the counterinsurgency and the myth of « French excellence » on the globalized « defense & security » market. According to the doctrine of "war in and against the population", the "Battle of Algiers" supposedly "pacified" Algeria. But three years later, in December 1960, the multiplicity of the unarmed colonized people succeeded to merge and overwhelm the imperial order.

This is the "political Dien Bien Phu" of the Algeria war, an indispensable key to understand the end of the Algerian Revolution, as well as to think about the role of "people" and violence in contemporary societies.

I decided to travel through Algeria to trace this history. It was also a kind of personal genealogical quest, in the footsteps of my grandparents who were Algerian Jews.

Looking for historians and witnesses, I met with young people, women, old people who always welcomed me as a son, brother, cousin, or friend. We talked about December 1960, about colonialism, and the war of liberation, but also about the present. It seems that this story sutures wounds on both sides of the sea and the war.

First, I wanted to make a film to transmit the the words and gestures of the lesser known characters of the Algerian war. Telling the story of the multitude of small stones brought in by each and everyone to the building of the great history. The way a people recognized itself at the same time that it is defeating a powerful system of oppression. I wanted to share the words and practices of the latest witnesses to these massive uprisings.

In the intimacy of their current neighborhoods or walking back the streets of the uprising, their bodies remember. The memory of this people's victory is written in the flesh of its witnesses. As this colonial violence that was stitched into their muscles, their memories seem to emerge at new.

THROUGH AGES AND THROUGH STRUGGLES, THESE WITNESSES SEND US TOOLS.

Yesterday's insurgents are sharing with us escape plans, sabotage techniques, body tricks. A woman explains how she made flags secretly and for so long, how the people were preparing to emerge. Other witnesses reveal what, according to them, has made possible to trigger the insurrection of the Casbah of Algiers. We learn by where escaped those who burned a supermarket and how some processions of women have broken through military roadblocks.

We're taught not to give up hope, how to contain the fear, and from where did the children came when they invaded the colonial city center of Algiers.

To reconstruct the investigation, the film also relays the words of Algerian historians who where themselves heirs of this sequence. They remind us of the roots of oppressions and the paths of rupture.

AND THEN THERE'S DANCE.

I proposed to dancers personally related to Algeria, to interpret this story through a performance in three phases : expressing colonial oppression in the flesh, then the uprising of the muscles, and finally the release of a collective body. Telling stories of the reappropriation of oneself, of one's territory and history.

Largely ignored by historiography, the uprisings of December 1960 fascinate and disconcert people. Those who have lived through them, usually only aspire to pass on their memories. The "December 11th" memory challenges the Algerian youth that came in the streets from February 2019. This sequence also fascinates in France, in the most of the places where I tell it.

Staging the determination of the humblest in the face of arbitrariness, injustice, and feroce repression, this sequence speaks to today's people resistance. This is the story of a victory of the oppressed themselves. It has many things to share with the social movements and liberation struggles all over the world.

Mathieu Rigouste





At some point, we realized that we were
ont the way to independence and, at this
time, people didn't wait any longer.

It's spontaneous and it's not spontaneous in the
same time.

Because it still took a few people, the first ones that
came out, to drag everyone else behind. »







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In trance rituals, people don't get up to dance. They dance because they can't help themselves. »



MATHIEU RIGOUSTE IS AN INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

His research on colonial history and the genesis of the security era intersects with investigative journalism. He sees his work as that of a craftsman making analytical tools in order to make them available to those who live historical situations on a daily basis. One of the story arc of his journey of research is counterinsurgency. This model of "warfare inside the population", modernized and industrialized by the French State during the Indochina and Algeria wars has been marketed in many countries, to the point of becoming a globalized market.

Only one Hero, the People is his first film.

He has published five books :

- *L'ennemi intérieur. La généalogie coloniale et militaire de l'ordre sécuritaire dans la France contemporaine*, La Découverte, 2009. (Réédition 2011)
- *Les marchands de peur. La bande à Bauer et l'idéologie sécuritaire*, Libertalia, 2010.
- *La domination policière. Une violence industrielle*, La Fabrique, 2013.
- *Etat d'urgence et business de la sécurité*, Niet Editions, 2016.
- *Un seul héros le peuple. La contre-insurrection mise en échec par les soulèvements algériens de décembre 1960*, PMN Editions, 2020.



ONLY ONE HERO, THE PEOPLE

A DOCUMENTARY BY MATHIEU RIGOUSTE

France / Algeria - 2020 - 81 min

WITH

Lounes Ait Aoudia, Fadila Amrane, Djamilia Amrane, Sofiane Baroudi, Hocine Belkacemi, Saddek Benkadda, Zoulikha Benkaddour, Safia Braik, Larbi de la Casbah, Messaouda Chader, Charif Chafik, Daho Djerbal, Fouzia Foukroun, Hocine Hamouma, Baya Hachid, Karima Lazali, Aïssa Nedjari, Mustapha Saadi, Ouanassa Siari Tengour.

CHOREGRAPHIC PERFORMANCES

Karima Aktuel Force
Ari de B aka Habibitch
Saïda Naït-Bouda
Elio

DIRECTED BY

Mathieu Rigouste

IMAGES, SOUND & EDITING

Mathieu Rigouste

SOUND MIXING

Houss Ine / Theo Serror

CLIP SPECIAL EFFECTS

Leo KS

POST-PRODUCTION

Fred Piet

CALIBRATION

Catherine Libert

PRODUCTION

AAEFP

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Victor Gresard

CONTACTS

unseulheroslepeuple@riseup.net
messengeriedelatelierautonome@gmail.com



