

## **Processing Problematic Pasts: Recent Works on the Legacies of the Algerian War of Independence**

**Review Number:** 957

**Publish date:** Wednesday, 1 September, 2010

**Editor:** Pascal Blanchard

Isabelle Veyrat-Masson

**ISBN:** 9782707154637

**Date of Publication:** 2008

**Price:** £10.00

**Pages:** 334pp.

**Publisher:** La Découverte

**Place of Publication:** Paris

**Author:** Jo McCormack

**ISBN:** 9780739109212

**Date of Publication:** 2007

**Price:** £43.00

**Pages:** 236pp.

**Publisher:** Rowman & Littlefield

**Place of Publication:** Lanham, MD

**Author:** Eric Savarese

**ISBN:** 9782352700166

**Date of Publication:** 2007

**Price:** £15.00

**Pages:** 174pp.

**Publisher:** Non Lieu

**Place of Publication:** Paris

**Author:** Valérie Esclangon-Morin

**ISBN:** 9782296028340

**Date of Publication:** 2007

**Price:** £30.00

**Pages:** 416pp.

**Publisher:** L'Harmattan

**Place of Publication:** Paris

**Author:** Dominique Fargues

**ISBN:** 9782081205161

**Date of Publication:** 2008

**Price:** £16.59

**Pages:** 281pp.

**Publisher:** Flammarion

**Place of Publication:** Paris

**Editor:** Fatima Besnaci-Lancou

Gilles Manceron

**ISBN:** 9782708239906

**Date of Publication:** 2008

**Price:** £0.00

**Pages:** 223pp.

**Publisher:** Éditions de l'Atelier

**Place of Publication:** Ivry-sur-Seine

**Author:** Martin Evans

John Phillips

**ISBN:** 978-0300108811

**Date of Publication:** 2007

**Price:** £25.00

**Pages:** 352pp.

**Publisher:** Yale University Press

**Place of Publication:** New Haven, CT

**Author:** James D. Le Sueur

**ISBN:** 9781842777251

**Date of Publication:** 2010

**Price:** £14.99

**Pages:** 224pp.

**Publisher:** Zed Books

**Place of Publication:** New York, NY

**Reviewer:** Claire Eldridge

As the title of the first volume under consideration asserts, France is currently in the grip of a divisive and destabilising phenomenon. *Guerres de Mémoires*, or wars of memories, are currently wracking the land, calling into question national identity and even challenging the hallowed Republican model. Writing in the preface to this edited collection, Benjamin Stora explains the gestation of these memory wars in the following terms:

After periods of great fever – uprisings, wars, revolutions, massacres, genocides – societies accumulate silences so that all citizens can pursue their life together. It is only after that painful memories return to the surface of societies. And then sometimes conflicts begin (p.7).

These conflicts relate to events as temporally varied as the French Revolution, the Great War, and May '68. However, they have a particular applicability to the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62), which pitted the incumbent colonial power, France, against a small and poorly armed band of nationalist rebels known as the Front de Libération National (FLN). The almost eight years of warfare that preceded the declaration of Algerian independence in July 1962 form one of the bloodiest and most iconic wars of decolonisation. Always contentious, the War of Independence, according to conventional periodisation, disappeared from the public consciousness almost as soon as it was officially concluded. This apparent case of national amnesia persisted until the 1990s when changes in the social, political, and academic environment brought the war back to public attention. Since then the conflict has rarely been out of the spotlight with commentaries, controversies, and commemorations accelerating into what Henry Rousso has deemed a state of 'hyperamnesia', characterised by 'a continual and almost obsessive presence in contemporary public space'.<sup>(1)</sup> This absence-return-saturation paradigm was essentially replicated historiographically with few academic treatments of the war appearing before the 1990s (although there had been a steady stream of autobiographical memoirs and fictional offerings since 1962, produced primarily by those with a pro-French Algeria persuasion). The early predominance of edited collections in the 1990s, often stemming from conferences, undertook the valuable task of dissemination and explication for a subject that remained

relatively unknown and for which access to archives was extremely limited. As archival access has gradually improved since the very public debates engendered by the 30th anniversary of the conflict in 1992, so a series of more specialised monographs have appeared that add depth and clarity to scholarly understandings of this highly complex war. The new millennium ushered in a particularly productive period for such works, creating an impressive canon that includes the groundbreaking work of Raphaëlle Branche on the use of torture by the French Army and Sylvie Thénault's detailed investigation of the working of the French legal system during the war.<sup>(2)</sup> These works have been complemented by equally substantive contributions from Anglophone scholars, notably Jim House and Neil MacMaster's study of 17 October 1961 and Todd Shepard's fascinating meditation on the impact of the War of Independence on the question of who could be French and under what circumstances.<sup>(3)</sup> Although all these texts are based on detailed consultation of previously restricted archival material, the legacy of the problems associated with this kind of access has been a focus on aspects of the war that did not require research conducted through 'traditional' archival channels, but that could be based on more readily available cultural and personal sources. The result is a longstanding engagement with the ways in which the War of Independence was experienced and subsequently remembered and commemorated, or not as the case was for a long time. Beginning with Benjamin Stora's *La Gangrène et l'Oubli* which appeared in 1991, this has proven a popular and fruitful strand of scholarship, although there are some, such as the late Charles Robert Ageron, who have expressed reservations about history built not on written documentation, but rather on retrospective justifications procured through testimony.<sup>(4)</sup> The rhythm and content of such publications has matched the increasing prominence given to issues of memory and commemoration in public discussions of the war over the past two decades. However, the antagonistic edge that characterises these debates stems from the controversial and deeply divisive nature of the War of Independence itself. Unlike previous episodes in France's past, including 'dark' ones such as the Vichy Years, which were 'virtually unanimous experiences', the Algerian War replaced universality with 'a multitude of solitudes ... every man for himself'.<sup>(5)</sup> This fragmentation is reflected in the multiple groups currently resident in France with a connection to the war, each of which possesses their own particular recollections and interpretation of those years. These range from veterans who resented the fall of another supposedly communist domino after the shame of Vietnam, to the *porteurs de valise* (suitcase carriers) who had actively aided the independence struggle, to the *harkis* who fought with the French against their fellow countrymen, and the *pieds-noirs* who generally viewed the colonial period as a blessing for all concerned and independence as the tragic sacrifice of a priceless piece of France. As the profile of the War of Independence has risen, this 'kaleidoscope of fragmented memories' have increasingly come into open conflict, particularly over the issue of when and how to commemorate the war, with each group seeking to see their version of the past enshrined in official rituals and monuments.<sup>(6)</sup> So intense has this competition become that it has acquired the epithet *guerres de mémoires*.

It is thus no surprise that as public contemplation of the War of Independence has reached a competitive and conflictual apogee Pascal Blanchard and Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, both researchers at the prestigious Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), felt that the time was ripe for an academic discussion of the *guerres de mémoires* phenomenon. Claiming that their book is intended not as a 'bible' but rather as a 'work of comprehension' (p. 27), the editors have amassed an impressive list of heavyweight intellectual contributors to assist them in this endeavour. These include Blanchard's long time collaborator Nicolas Bancel, but also Benjamin Stora, Gilles Manceron, Ahmed Boubeker and siblings Olivier and Annette Wieviorka. Following Pierre Nora's idea of a 'history of the second degree', this is a book not about the past itself, but about its effects in the present.<sup>(7)</sup> While it is careful to place the *guerres de mémoires* in their wider global context by mentioning similar debates that have raged with equal intensity in countries such as South Africa, Japan, and Argentina, the focus of the book is resolutely on the French experience of this condition.

Although Franco-centric in perspective, the view offered is nonetheless panoramic. Divided into two halves, the first part deals with 'the territories', or the events around which commemorative conflicts have gravitated. All the usual suspects are present from the French Revolution, via Dreyfus and the Great War, through Vichy and May '68, to debates revolving around slavery and immigration. What connects these

varied events is their foundational status with the collective psyche of a country where history has always played a particularly important role in the formation of national identity. The analysis of the taking up of positions with respect to key historical moments and movements is then juxtaposed with a second half that considers the vectors through which the controversies surrounding these events are transmitted.

Conceptualised as ‘the arms’ of the *guerres de mémoires*, this section is equally broad in scope, ranging, as its subtitle indicates, from the school to the internet, and covering much in between, including the state, the law, monuments, museums, and television. Algeria occupies a central place in the collection both in terms of explicitly devoted chapters such as Stora’s ‘La guerre d’Algérie: la mémoire, par le cinéma’, and also implicitly within chapters focusing primarily on other events and vectors, highlighting the pivotal place this conflict has assumed both in academia and in the public consciousness.

Foreshadowing the two halves is a 50 page introduction written by Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson which sets out to contextualise and historicise the ‘political issues, historical controversies, media strategies’ that make up both the strap line and the main body of the volume. This is where the theoretical weight of the collection is concentrated. The individual chapters are too short to sustain in-depth meditations of the conceptual underpinnings of their central subject, so this is covered in the introduction, presumably to allow the other authors to maximise the elucidatory potential of their case studies within the limited space they have been allotted. Although in many respects a sensible decision in light of the number of chapters, in practice the structure does not quite gel. This is partly because many authors still provide brief theoretical or historiographical overviews of the *guerres de mémoires* phenomenon as it applies to their chosen subject, which unfortunately come across as largely ineffectual because repetitive and insubstantial in comparison to the introduction. However, the larger problem stems from the approach adopted by the editors. Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson chart the chronology of the *guerres de mémoires* in considerable detail, dating the appearance of the idea of a ‘war’ within commemorative debates to the first issue of *Vingtième Siècle* in 1985 entitled ‘Les guerres franco-françaises’ and crediting Daniel Lindenberg’s special edition of the same journal in 1994, which spoke of ‘conflicts of memory in formation’ (p. 29), as a key turning point. Establishing this historical framework is necessary to ground the ensuing discussion, which seeks to highlight the central issues and tensions upon which the *guerres de mémoires* phenomenon turns. These can be summarised as the relationships that do and should exist between history and memory; between historians and the media (although the contributors, especially to the second half, come from a range of disciplines); between historians and society, and between individual or communal (some would say communitarian) needs and those of the nation as this pertains to the future of the Republican project. All of these are complicated issues that have provoked lengthy debates and even controversy in their own right. While it is important to raise and explore them in their full complexity, there also needs to be some sense of where the editors stand on these matters, especially as this is effectively the first attempt to treat *guerres de mémoires* from such a holistic and interdisciplinary perspective. However, the editorial position remains vague throughout, almost as if they are determined not to offend any of the contributors whose divergent views are symbolised by the fact that they were apparently unable to even agree on the title of the collection (p. 16). This sense of diffuseness is further exacerbated by the absence of a conclusion drawing together the plethora of case studies, many of which are strong and thought provoking in their own right.

The great merit of this collection is its breadth and its ability to expose the many ‘territories’ on which, and ‘arms’ through which, the present *guerres de mémoires* are being fought. Its weakness lies in its lack of coherence, which undermines the commendable and necessary attempt to historicise and theorise a subject that had been bandied around in popular parlance for several years, but not treated in a rigorous scholarly manner in the same way that related concepts such as collective memory have now been. As Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson themselves point out, *guerres de mémoires* are ‘a reality of our times’ and as such they need to be engaged with at an academic as well as popular level (p. 24). This requires not just a statement of the parameters of the debate as set out here, but also an attempt to process or work through of these issues, however tentative.

Related to the question of coherence is that of connection. In *Guerres de Mémoires*, events and vectors are kept separate, even though their interrelated nature is acknowledged in the main introduction. This

admittedly logical, if artificial, division is avoided by Jo McCormack whose book, *Collective Memory: France and the Algerian War*, uses a single historical case study to consider the transmission of the past through three vectors of memory: education, the family, and the media. These three vectors, conceptualised after Rousso as 'any source that proposes a deliberate reconstruction of an event for a social purpose' (p. 4), are deemed crucial because of their contributions to long term identity formation and public opinion in France. Unlike Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson, McCormack is clear from the outset about the relationship he sees between history and memory, in which memory consists of 'one representation of the past amongst others' that historians can use (p. 4). His definition of collective memory is a self-consciously *bricolage* notion that combines Halbwachs' notion of a present-orientated reconstruction of the past with Freudian elements of repression and mourning, alongside Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan's pluralistic and agent-focused paradigm (p. 4). This broad church concept is then used to analyse the 'memory battles' that McCormack sees plaguing France as a result of the failure of the War of Independence to be integrated into French history. For McCormack this is because insufficient 'memory work' has been undertaken, meaning that unlike the Vichy years, which McCormack consistently holds up as a model for processing problematic pasts, the Algerian War remains a matter of 'general ignorance' with key issues 'swept under the carpet' for too long (pp. 2–3). As well as perpetuating wartime divisions within society, this defect of transmission also feeds into contemporary racism and exclusion directed at Algerians and their descendants in France. This is endangering the unitary Republican model, which McCormack feels is:

...no longer able to effectively draw together the various histories and memories within France with contemporary French society consequently split by a 'social fracture' that operates largely along ethnic and generational lines (p. 167).

To understand why this is the case and to establish where precisely France is up to in the process of mourning the Algerian War, McCormack focuses firstly on schools because of their formative role in the creation of national identity. However, in addition to the usual strategy of studying the content of textbooks, McCormack interviewed two educational administrators, as well as 18 teachers and 12 pupils in Lyon in order to establish how, beyond curriculum stipulations, the Algerian War is actually taught and received. This is juxtaposed to the pasts that are transmitted privately within the family, a realm McCormack accessed partly through a small sample of interviews, but primarily through secondary literature, memoirs, and novels. (8) The third case study revolves around the media. A quantitative assessment of coverage of the War of Independence in a selection of years is conducted through the Index Analytique du Monde, an annually published printed index of all articles that appeared in the paper, and the *Le Monde* CD-ROM which comprises a searchable database of articles published since 1987. This is combined with a qualitative examination of the 2000 torture controversy ignited by the publication in *Le Monde* of testimony from Louisette Ighilahriz revealing the abuse she was subjected to by French paratroopers following her arrest in September 1957, although this section also includes reporting of this event by other national newspapers such as *Le Figaro* and *Libération*. Designed to demonstrate how memories 'enter and are negotiated in the public sphere' (p. 6), this section combines an awareness of the potential of the media to provide an important arena for debate, but also the limitations imposed by the entertainment imperative and the desire of most audiences to have their views reinforced rather than challenged.

While all three chapters make important points concerning the mechanics of collective memory formation, enhancing our understanding of specific elements that make up the larger and rather more nebulous *guerres de mémoires* phenomenon, the section on education contains the most original research. Through the painstaking study of textbooks, McCormack is able to demonstrate that in terms of classroom time, page allocations, and even word counts, less attention is being devoted to the Algerian War by *terminale* (final) year pupils, particularly in comparison to treatments of the Second World War, leaving these students with a lack of both knowledge and understanding. Yet he also interestingly reveals that those teachers with a personal connection to the war, overwhelmingly *pieds-noirs* in his sample, are willing to sacrifice coverage of other subjects in order to expand that given to the Algerian War. Furthermore, McCormack points out that the war is a subject that is not studied in and of itself, but rather as part of broader eras, such as the Fourth

and Fifth Republics, the presidency of Charles de Gaulle, or historical movements such as decolonisation. For the historian Jean-Pierre Rioux, interviewed by McCormack in his capacity as an Inspector General of schools, this is not an example of dissimulation or occlusion, but rather a question of perspective and context (p. 61). And indeed, McCormack acknowledges that the Algerian War is a difficult subject for schools to teach because of the heavily emphasised civic component of the centrally set curriculum, which aims to translate individual and group memories into a common national memory. These aims are not compatible with a conflict that still consists effectively of a series of group memories (p. 73). This echoes the challenges set out in Benoît Falaize and Françoise Lantheaume's chapter on school textbooks in *Guerres de Mémoires* which stresses that France's colonial past, specifically Algeria, is only the latest in a long line of controversial, or 'hot', subjects that schools have had to find a way to transmit in a 'cool' and serene manner (p. 182). For the authors, each group with a personal stake in the War of Independence wants a place for their experiences and memories in textbooks that are 'perceived as objects of legitimation and patrimonial transmission' (p. 182). However, this contradicts the role of education as a 'vector of public memory' and raises the danger of 'an atomised history curriculum which would be little more than a juxtaposition of individual histories' (p. 186), something anathema to the values of the Republic.

'It's all a question of balance' Serge Berstein, former co-chairman of curriculum design, tells McCormack, not only between the various groups seeking representation within the nation's pedagogic narrative, but also between knowledge and civic lessons (p. 76). Yet in spite of his evident awareness of these competing pressures and complicating factors, ultimately McCormack feels that there is sufficient interest among pupils, 80 percent of which feel too little is said about the Algerian War, to justify a greater place for the conflict within the curriculum. 'If more of an effort were made', he asserts, 'perhaps values and lessons could be found that are to be transmitted' and which speak to the civic imperatives of education in the same way that resistance and deportation currently do in relation to the Second World War (p. 88). The prescription for more effort and a stronger 'will' are also evoked by McCormack as necessary, not just in the classroom but across society as a whole, if France is to move beyond a situation whereby the Algerian War falls within 'the protected domain of competing groups' (p. 182). This is of course easier said than done, and although McCormack makes some sensible suggestions for new forums of discussions, such as interactive museums, that could potentially facilitate this, the overall sense is that this is a problem to which there are no simple solutions. While his case studies are too limited support the weight of the ambitions of the book, as McCormack himself admits (p. 110), they nonetheless represent a welcome attempt to investigate the processes and institutions that underpin the *guerres de mémoires*, rather than simply offering another enumeration of the various manifestations of the phenomenon. Furthermore, in stressing the need to find points of commonality, particularly with respect to suffering, rather than continuing to focus on what divides McCormack offers an interesting way to continue the 'long, arduous, never complete working through' of this complex past (p. 170).

Wars, Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson inform us, need three things: battlefields, men, and arms (p. 21). It is only, however, when we come to Éric Savarese's *Algérie, la Guerre des Mémoires* that the second of these elements makes an appearance. In contrast to the event- and vector-orientated approaches of the previous books, political scientist Savarese chooses to focus on the strategies pursued by the actors themselves as they seek to establish a place for their voices within the collective narrative. His group of choice are the *pièdes-noirs*, the former settlers of French Algeria. At the end of the War of Independence over 90 per cent of the settler population felt unable to remain in Algeria, producing a migratory wave of close to one million people in a very short space of time, most of which washed up on French shores. Once in France, the settlers reclaimed the previously pejorative label 'pied-noir'. They also mobilised rapidly and effectively, forming associations in order to obtain redress for their grievances relating to the end of French Algeria. Although initially concentrated on material issues such as accommodation, employment, and compensation, over time *pied-noir* associations added more cultural and commemorative imperatives to their agendas. They came to see themselves as a group with an important historical patrimony that official discourses were seeking to suppress or deny and that consequently needed to be protected and promoted by them instead. The result has been a highly active and increasingly militant presentation of the Franco-Algerian past which stresses the

positive impact of French colonisation; seeks to valorise the role of the settlers within that process; and casts these men and women as sacrificial victims of a politically motivated decolonisation orchestrated by de Gaulle for his own selfish ends. This is Savarese's second treatment of this community following *L'Invention des Pieds-Noirs* (9), placing him amongst the small but growing body of academics focusing on this previously neglected group

Savarese makes a reasoned defence of the importance of studying both *pieds-noirs* and associations, writing:

... marked at once by the tumult of Algerian memories and by a sort of commemorative ghetto, the work of promoting 'legitimate' memories realised within multiple associative structures should not be treated with condescension: it is fully part of a renewal of militant activities deployed in the course of what seems like a new age of participation (p. 66).

Beyond what these organisation can reveal about a 'new age of participation' in a nation famed for its grassroots activism and associative structures, Savarese makes the vital point that scholars need to take seriously the actors themselves since, irrespective of the conflict in question or the vector of transmission utilised, these are the people who are driving the *guerres de mémoires* phenomenon. They are doing so on the basis of their personal connection to the event in question and they have been doing so for a long time, well before the state, the media and the academic community noticed. What they are seeking, according to Savarese, is 'the solemn recognition of suffering endured' (p. 69). By participating in collective activities centred around commemorating their version of the past, *pieds-noirs* are able to signify their belonging to a collective, something rendered particularly important by the loss of their homeland in 1962. They are furthermore able to validate the existence of their collective, to recall the identity choices they have made, and to bear witness to their engagement in the larger struggle to see their history acknowledged by society. All of which compensates, at least temporarily, for the lack of official recognition they feel they have received (p. 71). In addition to highlighting what the *pieds-noirs* are searching for, Savarese is particularly good at demonstrating how associations successfully unified a heterogeneous population around a consciously created, homogeneous vision of the past. He identifies two 'identity strategies' in particular: the inscription within predefined categories, which refers to the reappropriation by the community of the label *piéd-noir* which they then reinvested with a new set of positive connotations; and the construction of an identity in opposition to definitions imposed upon them externally, such as the stereotype that all *pieds-noirs* were wealthy and exploitative colonists who 'made the natives sweat'. Both these strategies support a Halbwachsian view of collective memory as a reconstruction of the past in line with present-day objectives.

Alongside his extended discussion of the *pieds-noirs*, Savarese offers a critical assessment of the broader *guerres de mémoires* with respect to the Algerian War. In particular, he advances the argument that this is an exclusive phenomenon predicated on competition between groups to achieve dominance for their specific memories at the expense of the memories of other groups. This is especially apparent in relation to the question of suffering where the elevation of the status of the victim more generally within commemorative culture pushes each group to stake a claim as the 'best' or most deserving victim in the hope that their suffering will be made sacrosanct through official channels. Thus unlike McCormack's hopeful prescription for moving forward by concentrating on points of commonality, Savarese presents a veritable dialogue of the deaf when it comes to recognising the experiences, particularly painful ones, of other parties. To Savarese this effectively represents the continuation of the War of Independence by other means. '[T]he wars of memories', he writes, 'prolong the armed struggles [of the War of Independence] on the political terrain', severely retarding scholarship in the process by promoting the 'duty to memory' over and above critical engagement with archival material which Savarese (echoing Ageron) sees as the best hope for the emergence of a 'unified and reconciliatory memory' (pp. 57, 52).

*Algérie, la Guerre des Mémoires* offers quite a selective view of the most high profile strategies and targets of *piéd-noir* collective memory, a function both of the limited space and Savarese's choice to divide the content between an overview of the *guerres de mémoires* and a specific case study. Most of the testimony

that provides such a valuable insights into the mindset of the actors themselves comes from interviews conducted for *L'Invention des Pieds-Noirs*, while texts by other excellent *pied-noir* scholars such as Michèle Baussant and Jean-Jacques Jordi are frequently referenced. As an introduction to the role of agents and collectives within the *guerres de mémoires*, this is an accessible, especially from a theoretical perspective, text that contains much sharp analysis. It is thus a very different beast to *Les Rapatriés d'Afrique du Nord de 1956 à Nos Jours* which is more than double its length. Based on her thesis, which she completed under the supervision of the late Claude Liauzu, Valérie Esclangon-Morin has produced a substantial work of impressive detail that charts the evolution of the relationship between the French state and the *pieds-noirs* from 1956, in the midst of the War of Independence, to the present day. Seeing this as a two-way relationship, Esclangon-Morin is interested in the measures put in place by the French authorities with respect to the *pieds-noirs*, whom she refers to using the official designation of *rapatriés* (repatriates), and their reception, but also in the forms of influence that the *rapatrié* community have been able to exert over the state. Like Savarese, she is critical of the negative impact on scholarship of the present-day commemorative culture which 'fixes memory without offering explanation' (p. 16). Her book is thus presented as a corrective to this imbalance, providing a meticulous historicisation of interactions between the state and the *rapatriés* as France moved from the colonial into the postcolonial period. The over-arching theme of the history traced by Esclangon-Morin is a growing determination within the *rapatrié* community to take control of their own identity and trajectory and the various means through which they have attempted to achieve this. Esclangon-Morin therefore joins Savarese in restoring agency to participants within the *guerres de mémoires*, but treats this process in a more systematic manner and gives it a longer gestation period.

Esclangon-Morin's justification for choosing to focus in particular on *rapatrié* associations is that they represent 'the organisms capable of bringing together [people] around themes that reflect the priorities of the largest number', even though she acknowledges that this number does not include all *rapatriés* at all times (p. 19). In evaluating the significance of these associations, she eschews the idea that their importance is a function of their numerical strength (something that is notoriously difficult to establish with any reliability) and chooses instead to base her assessment on the influence these groups are able to exert on the public powers. Her definitions of the motivations underpinning mobilisation are similar to those advanced by Savarese, comprising the need to recover the self-esteem lost amidst the traumas of 1962; the need to avoid the disappearance of the community through its dilution within French society, hence the importance attached to preserving the identity and patrimony; and the need to find ways to express this communal identity and to put forward demands in its name (p. 327). In contrast to other scholars, Esclangon-Morin devotes considerable attention to the early and more practically-orientated mobilisation, rather than skimming over this in order to reach the commemoratively focused activism that is such a prominent feature of *rapatrié* associations today. There is thus much revealing information provided about the electoral impact of the community, or rather their ability to exploit their perceived electoral weight through highly effective lobbying. Particularly interesting is the discussion of the impact of the Rassemblement et Coordination Unitaires des Rapatriés et Spoilés (RECOURS). Founded in 1976 with the charismatic Jacques Roseau as its spokesperson, the association's strategy consisted of mobilising *pieds-noirs* to vote tactically in areas where they were numerically significant in order to pressure incumbent governments into acceding to their demands. This concept, known as the 'elastic line', reaped rewards in the form of a range of favourable measures, most notably the substantial 1987 indemnification law following Jacques Chirac's election as Prime Minister that same year. Achievements such as these greatly raised the profile of RECOURS and of Roseau who became a key interlocutor between the state and the *pieds-noirs*, leading the press to bestow upon him the accolade 'voice of the *pieds-noirs*'. However, this success also tragically led to Roseau's assassination in 1993 by members of his own community in an unexpected manifestation of the intra-community dimension of the *guerres de mémoires*. With the RECOURS and Roseau case study Esclangon-Morin demonstrates that the *guerres de mémoires* are not merely an abstract problem, but a phenomenon with tangible and very real consequences for those directly involved in them, but also for wider French society.

As adept as she is at tracing the development of *rapatrié* lobbying strategies, Esclangon-Morin is also able to appreciate and historically situate the importance of culture and identity to the *rapatriés*. The shift in priorities away from concrete concessions designed to alleviate material hardship and towards the construction of a unifying collective discourse based on a mythified reconstruction of history is thus chronicled with equal care. The stages of this process, self-definition, then self-promotion to make their existence known, before finally inscribing themselves in what she refers to as ‘memory struggles’, are all discussed (p. 332). Esclangon-Morin is able to argue convincingly that the *rapatrié* community as it exists today did not simply fall fully formed from the sky during the late 1990s as much analysis of the *guerres de mémoires* implies. This supports her related assertion that the full range of roles played by the *rapatrié* community over the past five decades is ‘primordial’ to any understanding of the present *guerres de mémoires* phenomenon (p. 19).

Although very much focused on the associations as entities, Esclangon-Morin never loses sight of the people who animate these collectives, yet at the same time her perspective is one of critical detachment. This is unfortunately still relatively rare in a field where studies of the *pieds-noirs* have been overwhelmingly undertaken by figures who possess a personal connection to, or investment in, the community. Esclangon-Morin also avoids oral history, which again makes up a substantial portion of the available material on the *pieds-noirs*, preferring the route of written documentation, which may help to account for the distance she maintains from her subjects. This is the almost the exact opposite of the approach taken by Dominique Fargues in her book *Mémoires des Pieds-Noirs*. Explaining in her introduction that she is the grandchild of *pieds-noirs*, albeit ones who came to France in 1948, several years before the War of Independence broke out, Fargues sets herself up as someone who understands the mentality of her objects of study. However, she simultaneously stands slightly apart from them, the fact that her family did not experience the trauma of exile in 1962 leaving them ‘a little outside’ the *piéd-noir* milieu in France. This insider/outsider tension plays itself out within the book itself in some rather interesting ways. In the ‘Introduction’, Fargues describes her work as an opportunity to move away from the caricatured portraits to which the *pieds-noirs* are frequently subjected by allowing members of the community to speak for themselves and encouraging her audience to listen ‘calmly’ to their stories (p. 13). This is something Fargues feels is otherwise denied to the *pieds-noirs* by the context in which empire and Algeria are discussed within France. Although this statement reflects the rationale for the ‘Mémoires de ...’ series of which this work is a part, which aims to give a voice to those who are rarely heard within France, it also repeats the longstanding argument made by *piéd-noir* associations that their history is being actively suppressed. In reiterating this idea, Fargues somewhat problematically ignores the many forums generated within the community itself through its vibrant associational culture, but also within more mainstream vectors, such as the media, that have been regularly afforded to the *pieds-noirs* over the years.

Divided into a standard three-part chronology of life in colonial Algeria, memories of the war, and life in France after 1962, each section contains chapters organised thematically around key events, relationships, and facets of the *piéd-noir* identity. In keeping with the ‘speaking for themselves’ mandate, only brief historical contextualisation is provided by Fargues at the beginning of each chapter and so the vast majority of the book is composed of direct testimony. Many of the tropes of the reconstructed collective narrative found within *piéd-noir* associational literature and publications are also present here including ‘the happy life’ of French Algeria, the ‘treason’ of de Gaulle who is widely reviled by the *pieds-noirs* for what they see as his betrayal in sacrificing Algeria to the FLN, as well as the 1962 exile and the welcome (or lack thereof) afforded to the displaced settlers upon arrival in France. The fate of the *harkis*, those Algerians who served under the French flag during the war, is also accorded its usual token presence within *piéd-noir* dedicated texts. The considerable overlap between the key elements of the association-driven collective lexicon and the ostensibly individual life stories offered here may, at least in part, be a product of the fact that several of the contributors occupy or have occupied prominent places within the associational movement. This includes the husband and wife team behind Jeune Pied-Noir, Bernard Coll and his *filie de harki* spouse Taouès Titraoui, former Cercle Algérieniste president Andrée Montero, as well as long serving activists such as Melchior Calandra, and Guy Forzy. While Fargues is very conscious of the extent to which the *piéd-noir* community

has been stereotyped by a society seeking to present a particular view of colonialism, she seems less able to appreciate that there may equally be an agenda behind the memories offered by her contributors, especially given the power of the collective memory created and embedded by the associational movement with which so many of her interviewees are intimately connected. She thus makes statements, particularly in the introduction, that appear to uncritically promote what is in reality an ideologically driven and artificially sanitised version of history: 'These testimonies all recount the same story, that of a simple and happy life, interrupted by a common tragedy' (p. 14). This is not to deny the integrity of the contributors, nor the profoundly moving nature of some of their stories. However, in a text dedicated to the memories of a population who are now distanced by many decades and many miles from the events they are describing, not to highlight the potential issues with such testimony is a little problematic. Furthermore, although the line between individual and collective memories is notoriously blurred, this is exacerbated here by the lack of an appendix giving brief biographical details for the interviewees and any affiliations. This would also be helpful in establishing the connections that exist between people who are presented as individuals but who, it frequently transpires, are related to each other by blood or marriage, and, in the case of one, turns out to be Fargues' mother.

Yet in spite of this, there are elements to Fargues' book that mean it cannot simply be consigned to the pile of overtly sympathetic and uncritical portrayals of the *pieds-noirs* produced by those with personal connections to their subjects. There is a conscious attempt, for example, to broaden the traditional canon of *piéd-noir* topics to include subjects usually avoided by associations and which are therefore conspicuous by their absence from the collective memory of the community. In some respects this is quite a perfunctory effort. For example, the chapter entitled 'Les relations entre Européens et musulmans' does contain some references to the racially-based inequalities that fundamentally structured life in colonial Algeria, but these tend to take the form of admitting that other *pieds-noirs* were racist, unlike the person recounting the situation. They are also the exception, heavily outweighed by overwhelmingly positive depictions of inter-ethnic interactions such as that provided by Anne-Marie Bouillet who asserts that 'The mix between the Jewish, Arab and European communities, it was totally harmonious' (p. 57). However, there is a whole chapter on the underground paramilitary Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS), which is equally split between those who supported and opposed the group. There are also several chapters devoted to the recollections of people who supported Algerian independence, primarily through their membership of the Algerian Communist Party rather than by actively aiding the FLN, as well as to the minority of *pieds-noirs* who tried to remain in Algeria after independence. The inclusion of such dissonant voices provides important nuances to a community that is frequently presented in only one dimension, not only by French society but also by its own members. It also represents a genuinely new contribution to available *piéd-noir* testimony that, by giving voice to aspects of the *piéd-noir* experience frequently squeezed out or occluded by the homogenising potency of the collective *piéd-noir* memory championed by associations, at least partially fulfils Fargues' self-professed aspirations for the book. Although perhaps the most interesting chapter in the collection remains the one entitled 'Cela aurait dû se passer autrement' in which the contributors are encouraged to consider counterfactual scenarios, the most popular of which is clearly that Algeria remained French. 'Today, we reject colonialism', the *piéd-noir* performer Jean Paul Gavino tells Fargues, 'but Algeria was a French *département*, not a colony, it was like Alsace or Brittany ... I think that with ameliorations, like in Corsica, it should have been able to remain French' (p. 186). Such comments provide intriguing insights into the present-day mentalities of a group of people who, as Savarese and Esclangon-Morin have shown, exert a considerable degree of influence within the *guerres de mémoires*.

Another author with a close connection to the subject she is writing about is Fatima Besnaci-Lancou. As the daughter of a *harki*, an Algerian who served under the French flag during the War of Independence, she first wrote a memoir of her own experiences, *Fille de Harki* in 2005, before going on to produce two collections of *harki* testimony in 2006. The first of these, *Treize Chibanis Harkis*, allowed *harkis* an opportunity to speak out, while the second, *Nos Mères, Paroles Blessées* focused explicitly on the rarely accessed memories of wives of *harkis*, including her own mother.<sup>(10)</sup> Besnaci-Lancou is also the head of the association Harkis et Droits de l'Homme which seeks to disseminate information concerning the history of

the *harkis*, particularly from a human rights perspective. It is the issue of human rights that connects Besnaci-Lancou to her co-author of *Les Harkis dans la Colonisation et ses Suites*, Gilles Manceron, who is a member of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme's central committee. Their book arose from a conference held in March 2006 at the Assemblée Nationale to mark the 50th anniversary of the creation of *harki* units, but which also coincided with the controversial comments of Georges Frêche, President of the Languedoc-Roussillon region, in which he referred to *harkis* as 'sub humans'. The intention of Besnaci-Lancou and Manceron's collection is to challenge precisely such stereotypes and other 'false ideas' that they feel continue to circulate in both France and Algeria and which have 'harmful consequences in the social life of both countries' (p. 9). In addition to echoing Fargues' preferred solution of allowing such clichés to be confronted through personal testimony, Besnaci-Lancou and Manceron have also chosen to include a series of contributions from academics across a range of disciplines from history and political science, to sociology and psychology. The overall aim of the book is thus to bring 'as calm as possible a historical gaze' to what remains a highly emotive subject (p. 13).

*Les Harkis* adopts a chronological framework with sections on the activities of the *harkis* during the War of Independence; the massacres of 1962; life in the camps into which were placed those *harkis* and their families lucky enough to escape the violence of the end of the war; and an unfortunately short section on the post-1975 period charting the rise of activism undertaken by descendants of the *harkis*. Each section is then divided into smaller chapters, which take a variety of forms. There are several academic chapters that set out to complement the pioneering work done on the *harki* community by figures like Charles Robert Ageron, Guy Pervillé and Mohand Hamoumou on the basis of access to previously unavailable archives. François-Xavier Hautreux, for example, takes the now widely known fact that *harkis* performed a variety of tasks during the War of Independence, very few of which involved active combat, and fleshes this out with highly detailed documentary evidence of exactly which units did what, how many *harkis* were enrolled at particular times, and what motivated them to engage with the French. Although this particular chapter could have drawn this information together within a more analytical frame, this is the kind of nuanced and well-evidenced commentary that will help to dispel the myths surrounding the *harkis* that the editors feel persist. There are also some new areas of research foregrounded, such as the work of Giulia Fabbiano on the Bachaga Boualem. Given the significance of this elite and well-connected Muslim interlocutor during both the colonial and postcolonial periods it is time that he became the focus of real scholarly attention, rather than left to the myths and manipulations of the  *pied-noir* community who have always sought to use him to prove their 'harkis as French patriots' thesis. These academic offerings are interspersed with testimony, some from *harkis* themselves, which take the form of paragraph length excerpts grouped together often at the end of sections, and others from those who had contact with the *harkis* such as Patrick Jammes, a doctor who worked at the Bias Camp who is given his own chapter to recount his experiences. There are also a lot of photographs which are well annotated and make a striking and effective accompaniment, particularly to the section on the post-1975 mobilisation of the children of the *harkis*.

Two contributions in particular stand out from the collection as a whole: The first is by Sylvie Thénault who makes a strong case for a paradigm shift within scholarship on the *harkis* that moves beyond the binary of 'massacred in Algeria or saved in France' (p. 91) by recognising that not only were many men *harkis* for only brief periods of time, but that 80 per cent of those who served, in whatever capacity, returned to civilian life. Thénault thus advocates following personal trajectories to gain a sense of the fluidity of the *harki* experience and to escape from the trap of considering it to be a fixed and definitive identity, which is the way it is presently treated by too many academics and activists. The other fascinating contribution comes from ex-FLN militant and former Algerian government minister, Ali Haroun. Haroun spoke at the conference which, given the official line in Algeria remains unequivocally hostile to the *harkis* who are considered 'traitors' and forbidden from returning to their homeland, is quite unusual. Although he is chided in the introduction for the 'more cautious' written version included in this collection, the Algerian perspective is welcomed by Besnaci-Lancou and Manceron (p. 26). This does not however stop them from framing Haroun's text with a list of the things they feel that it should have condemned such as the 'incoherence' (p. 26) of Bouteflika's declarations regarding the *harkis* and the discriminatory treatment to

which *harkis* are subjected in Algeria. In fact, Haroun's text deviates quite substantially from the official line by acknowledging the complex motivations that underpinned *harki* enrolment, admitting that perhaps 90 per cent of *harkis* never took part in active combat and attesting to the 'reality' of the massacres that took place in 1962 (p. 201). However, he also states that in order not to 'distort history' it is important to recognise that some *harkis* did carry arms and did commit acts against Algerians and it is therefore not possible to maintain that 'everyone has pure and unstained hands' (p. 204).

Haroun clearly has his own reasons for making such claims, but it is nevertheless the case that there is virtually no research into the small minority of *harkis* who were called upon to undertake active combat duties as part, for example, of the Commandos de Chasse that operated in the Algerian *bled* (countryside) or the Force de Police Auxiliaire (FPA) tasked with breaking up FLN cells in metropolitan France. If we are to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the full complexity of the *harki* experience then these are facets of that experience that need to be illuminated, with Thénault's personal trajectory approach suggesting one way in which this could be achieved. However, this would be a highly sensitive area into which to venture, particularly as it would challenge certain elements of the image of *harkis* portrayed by activists. In her previous book, *Treize Chibanis Harkis*, Besnaci-Lancou included testimony from *harkis* who admitted perpetrating acts against their fellow Algerians such as Tayeb, and who regretted the War of Independence because 'it was violent and I assisted in all sorts of horrors'.<sup>(11)</sup> At the time Besnaci-Lancou justified the inclusion of such stories on the grounds that '[t]his history belongs to us but it is not our property'.<sup>(12)</sup> Such an approach is not, however, possible in *Les Harkis* because for all the editors' claims to historical distance, this is in fact a project with a quite explicit *engagé* agenda behind it. As Thénault comments, 'studies of such a red-hot subject are rarely free of a political basis' (p. 81), something that can most clearly be seen in the final two sections of *Les Harkis*. The first of these is entitled 'Un engagement citoyen' and, alongside Haroun's text, includes a statement of support for the *harki* cause from the Mouvement Contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les Peuples (MRAP); a proposal for a legal response to made to Georges Frêche's 'sub humans' comment; a denunciation of the accusation that *harkis* vote for Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National; and two anonymous 'appeals for aid'. This is then followed by the declaration adopted at the end of the conference which expresses the desire that the French state recognise 'the tragedy that it made these men and their families live through', and calls on the Algerian government to similarly express its regrets and to allow *harkis* to come and go freely from their homeland, as well as affording them the right to be buried there (p. 204). Such elements jar with the ostensible purpose of the book and make for quite a muddled collection overall. They also highlight the kinds of tensions between activism and academia that the *guerres de mémoires* climate only seems to exacerbate.

Although the root of the *guerres de mémoire* discussed so far lie in the events that took place on Algerian soil between 1954 and 1962, works actually focusing on the nation of Algeria, particularly its painful postcolonial trajectory, are thin on the ground. Yet it is here, as the final two works of this review show, that the battle for control of the past and thus the ability shape the future has been at its most intense and where the stakes of the fight revolve not just around the politics of commemoration, but the politics of life and death. The two books in question have different premises and are aimed at quite different audiences, but work most effectively if read together. Their areas of overlap reinforce for the reader the most important events and actors of the post-independence era, while the particular themes highlighted by each book give a sense of the multidimensional nature of this period and the number of perspectives from which it can be productively be examined.

In *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed* historian Martin Evans, who specialises in Algerian history, and the journalist John Phillips, who has reported extensively from the country for various newspapers, make a great team. Their academic and on the ground expertise is effectively combined in service of their mission to 'scrape away the layers of confusion and obfuscation' that have long surrounded the bitter violence that has plagued Algeria, most notoriously during the 1990s. They argue that there is 'nothing inevitable or predetermined' about Algeria and that instead the country must be seen as the product of 'a specific and complex historical context' (p. xv). This historical context is conveyed through an essentially chronological structure that begins in the 12th century and continues up to 2007. By spending time on the pre-colonial

period, Evans and Phillips avoid the pitfall of implicitly rehashing the colonial-era argument that Algerian history only really began with the French invasion of 1830. A highly appropriate decision given that a key theme running through their work is the damage caused to Algeria by the repeated confiscation of the history of its people by various parties. This is followed by an excellent overview of the colonial period and the War of Independence that manages to cover all the main elements substantively but also concisely, conveying, amongst other things the complexity and ambiguity of the relationship between France and Algeria. However, the heart of the book lies in the analysis of the post-1962 events that comprise the bulk of the chapters. Here the authors offer a deeply compelling narrative that traces how the revolutionary legitimacy and potential of the post-war leadership, seen as a 'torch bearer' for Third World revolutionaries and the Non-Aligned Movement during the 1960s and 1970s, progressively drained away. The strong man façade of the Boumedienne regime (1965–78) appeared to offer educational and employment opportunities, rising levels of prosperity, but, most importantly, a strong sense of national pride and international standing. Yet his death in 1978 did not so much bring to an end Algeria's 'golden years', as make publicly manifest the conflicts, corruption, and confiscation of meaningful democratic choice by *le pouvoir* that had been building since the War of Independence itself. As this shady cabal of backroom figures, many of them generals, strengthened their grip on the levers of power and lined their pockets with wealth from Algeria's natural resources, frustration mounted among the ordinary people. In October 1988 this anger erupted into the violent protests of 'Black October', which signalled the overt rupture between state and society. For Evans and Phillips, these riots were about young male Algerians trying 'to recover a sense of honour, dignity and manhood' (p. 103), impulses that would continue to govern their actions and allegiances as political Islam made its way into the centre of Algerian life through the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS). With widespread anger and alienation as their most effective recruiting tools, the threat posed by the FIS to *le pouvoir* finally prompted drastic action from the military in the form of the 1991 'sofa coup d'état' that removed President Chadli and, according to Evans and Phillips, took Algeria 'beyond the brink' and into the 'abyss' of almost a decade of truly horrific violence (pp. 166, 183). In clawing its way back from this vortex of destruction, one of the biggest boosts Algeria received was the terrorist attacks of 9/11 which convinced Bush and Blair of the need to find friendly states in North Africa and the Middle East to act as a bulwark against Islamic extremism. Bouteflika was only too happy to oblige, exploiting the naivety of the CIA, who took his pronouncements at face value, to pursue his enemies. At the same time he played on western fears to secure international backing, not least financial, for his regime which, following a re-writing of the constitution and a third-term electoral 'victory', seems set to continue for several more years.

In contrast, James Le Sueur's structure in *Algeria Since 1989: Between Terror and Democracy* is shaped by the fact that his book forms part of a series addressing 'upheavals in world history since 1989'. Algeria is thus situated as part of a 'broad geo-political canvas' that has witnessed the progression from Cold War to the War on Terror (p. 9). This logic dictates that although the international dimension features in *Anger of the Dispossessed*, it is emphasised far more by Le Sueur who continually seeks to show how Algeria both 'mirrored' and yet diverged from the ways in which other countries exited from the Cold War. The most obvious problem with the 'since 1989' rubric is that October 1988 was arguably a far more significant historical milestone in Algeria, representing, as Le Sueur acknowledges, a 'definitive and historic turning point' (p. 31). Le Sueur's solution to this chronological constraint is to devote the first four chapters of his book to the establishment of a broad historical timeline that briefly covers colonialism and the War of Independence, but that places most stress on the post-1989 period. This is followed by four thematically focused chapters that explore the subject of 'terror' from economic, political, international, and cultural angles. By zeroing in on this central strand of the post-colonial Algerian narrative, Le Sueur is able to layer complexity over the reasonably straightforward story presented in the first half. Using the historical knowledge base established in the first four chapters, he is able to raise the discussion to a more analytically sophisticated level that necessitates moving back and forwards in time and that therefore allows him to escape from the confines of the post-1989 paradigm.

In certain respects this strategy works very well. The highly complex subject of Islamist movements in Algeria and their connections to broader jihadist groups, namely al-Qaeda, benefits from being the sole focus

of a separated discussion strand. Although the presentation of the fragmented and constantly evolving entities such as the GIA, GSPC and AQMI is conveyed with clarity by Evans and Phillips, isolating this particular historical aspect allows Le Sueur to really emphasise the distinctions within, as well as between, Islamist camps and ensures that it is always possible to see the wood in spite of the trees. This allows Le Sueur to put into sharp relief how Algeria 'dramatizes the tensions that emerged between the development of an Islamic radicalism intended to serve national political objectives, and a pan-Islamic radicalism that rejected conventional politics altogether' (p. 122). However, for other facets of Algerian history, separation from the dense context does not create quite such an effective narrative. This is particularly true of the way Le Sueur deals with the subject of violence. Although mention is made throughout his text of incidents of violence, such as bombings and assassinations, it is only in Chapter 8, 'Killing the Messengers: Algeria's Rushdie Syndrome', that this defining feature of so much of Algeria's recent past is explored in detail. In contrast, for me the strongest and most affecting element of Evans and Phillips' book is their ability convey, without being gratuitous, the full and unrelenting horror that comprised life in Algeria for so many years. This is achieved through the integration and thus consistent reiteration of the violence that engulfed the country, especially after 1993. Because it is constantly present in their narrative, the reader is given a real sense of how wearying this 'permanent state of terror' (p. 224) was for Algerians, particularly as it surrounded them on all sides:

...the violence had an elusive, intangible, unknowable quality about it. It had no moral compass, no rules, no boundaries. It could happen anywhere and at any time. Moreover, it was a violence that became normal very quickly (p. 203).

What made this violence especially traumatic was uncertainly regarding who was actually perpetrating it. While the Algerian state was very keen to blame Islamic extremists, Evans and Phillips continually cast doubt on these assertions. Through meticulous research they are able to highlight procedural irregularities and inconsistencies in evidence that strongly implicate *le pouvoir* in atrocities committed against their own people in a bid to win sympathy and support both domestically and internationally. As they frequently note, 'nothing was as obvious as it seemed', something they attribute to the 'smoke and mirrors' legacy of guerrilla-style combat during the war of independence (p. 213, 73).

The way that Evans and Phillips deal with violence is related to two other major merits that their work possesses. The first of these is that for all the intricate discussion of the political dimensions, this is at heart a people's history of Algeria. As the authors write with respect to the magnitude of the violence Algeria has been subjected to, 'It was all too easy to think of Algeria as one amorphous mass, to forget that each death was a personal trauma with a lasting impact' (p. 243). The imprint of events since 1962 on ordinary Algerians is never far from the authors' thoughts as they ground their historical explanations in the emotional responses – humiliation, frustration, anger, fear – of a people who have continually been dispossessed from above of everything from power, wealth, and security, to identity and even their own history. One of the strongest sentiments to emerge is cynicism, but this comes not from the authors themselves, but rather from the general atmosphere and mentality in Algeria that they convey so effectively.

Algeria is clearly a country in which Evans and Phillips have spent considerable time and there is a lot of excellent oral history subtly interwoven into their narrative. This is the second key strength of this book; the ability to recreate in print the intangible sense of period and place that adds so much to history. Much of this atmosphere comes from the Algerian jokes that Evans and Phillips include. When discussing the Bouteflika era and the 'War on Terror' they relate the following:

A young Algerian asks his father about the colours of the Algerian flag. He knows that the green stands for Islam and the red for the blood of our glorious martyrs but what does the white stand for? 'The blank pages of our history', replies the father (p. 265).

This is a reference to what Bouteflika called the two-step 'vaccination' of civil concord and national

reconciliation necessary to allow Algeria to heal the wounds of her recent past and move forward. This inoculation consisted not only of providing a referendum-approved amnesty for all sides (although the authenticity of the results is highly questionable) which Le Sueur sees as bid by Bouteflika to 'to remove the cultural and political debris of history itself', but also imposing a 'kind of secular fatwa' by prohibiting any historical enquiry into the recent past (p. 195). In both books the role of the past in shaping the present is emphasised, particularly in the context of the officially imposed policy of forgetting which reflects a longstanding refusal of the Algeria state to engage with its own history. For Evans and Phillips, 'reverence replaced understanding' in 1962, sowing many problematic seeds that would be harvested in the future in the form of a regime whose inability to deviate from an increasingly hollow and delegitimated official history left it unable to relate to its own people and perpetuated the policy of historical dispossession instigated with the French conquest (p. 5). Le Sueur also highlights the deep roots of the present 'blank page' philosophy' in his conclusion where he brings together the views of leading commentators such as Hugh Roberts (frequently referenced in both books) and Benjamin Stora to stress the way in which Algeria has 'continued moving forward in history without ever looking back' (p. 199).

Although attuned to the dangers this policy of enforced forgetting poses, one of the most thought provoking aspects of this chapter is Le Sueur's consideration of the constraints imposed by Algeria's very specific circumstances as an explanation for Bouteflika's decision to buck the global trend with respect processing troubled pasts. As he notes, those countries who instituted truth commissions in combination with amnesties were 'transitional democracies considered stable enough to endure a period of painful honesty, with the possibility of forgiveness' (p. 198); attributes that Algeria distinctly did not possess. Le Sueur also cautions western readers to be aware of how our own societal expectations may influence our reading of the motives of countries who do not choose to follow what we perceive as the 'normal' confessional model. Yet in spite of these caveats, Le Sueur ultimately cannot conceal his deep-seated concerns regarding 'a policy that attempts to inoculate a population from violence and retribution by giving it a historical lobotomy' (p. 206). His anxieties are echoed by Evans and Phillips in their 'Afterword' in which they speak of the 'anger that will not go away' because no attempt is being made to address its root causes, namely the political, economic, and now historical exclusion of the people by the state (p. 293). All of which suggests that although it may take a different form to the *guerres de mémoires* being waged across the Mediterranean in France, Algeria's processing of its recent historical traumas is equally problematic and far from over.

## Notes

1. Henry Rousso, 'Les raisins verts de la guerre d'Algérie', in *La Guerre d'Algérie (1954-1962)*, ed. in Yves Michaud (Paris, 2004), p.139.[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. Raphaëlle Branche, *La Torture et l'Armée pendant la Guerre d'Algérie*, (Paris, 2001); Sylvie Thénault, *Une Drôle de Justice: les Magistrats dans la Guerre d'Algérie*, (Paris, 2004).[Back to \(2\)](#)
3. Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror and Memory*, (Oxford, 2006); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*, (Ithaca, NY, 2006).[Back to \(3\)](#)
4. Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et l'Oubli: la Mémoire de la Guerre d'Algérie*, (Paris, 1991). Charles Robert Ageron, *La Guerre d'Algérie dans l'Enseignement en France et en Algérie*, (Paris, 1993), p. 155.[Back to \(4\)](#)
5. Philippe Labro, *Des Feux Mal Étiés*, (Paris, 1980), p. 354.[Back to \(5\)](#)
6. Charles-Robert Ageron, 'Conclusion', in *La Guerre d'Algérie et les Français*, ed. Jean-Pierre Rioux (Paris, 1990), p. 623.[Back to \(6\)](#)
7. Pierre Nora, 'Preface', in *Realms of Memory: the Construction of the French Past*, (3 vols, New York, NY, 1998) i, p. xvii.[Back to \(7\)](#)
8. This selection includes Dalila Kerchouche's history-cum-memoir *Mon Père, ce Harki* (Paris, 2003) which McCormack incorrectly describes (on page 124) as containing the suicide of Kerchouche's father. In fact it was her older brother who took his own life.[Back to \(8\)](#)
9. 9 Éric Savarese, *L'Invention des Pieds-Noirs* (Paris, 2002).[Back to \(9\)](#)
10. Fatima Besnaci-Lancou, *Fille de Harki* (Paris, 2005); *Treize Chibanis Harkis*, (Paris, 2006); *Nos Mères, Paroles Blessées: Une Autre Histoire de Harkis*

(Léchelle, 2006).[Back to \(10\)](#)

11. Besnaci-Lancou, *Treize Chibanis Harkis*, pp. 18, 61.[Back to \(11\)](#)

12. *ibid.* p. 85.[Back to \(12\)](#)

### Other reviews:

Algeria since 1989 (The Moor Next Door)

<http://themoornextdoor.wordpress.com/2010/04/27/book-review-algeria-since-1989/> [9]

Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed (Foreign Affairs)

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63174/1-carl-brown/algeria-anger-of-the-dispossessed> [10]

Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed (Sunday Times)

[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/books/non-fiction/article3099882.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/non-fiction/article3099882.ece) [11]

Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed (ASMEA)

<http://www.asmeascholars.org/index.php> [12]

Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed (Carnegie Council)

<http://www.cceia.org/resources/transcripts/0024.html> [13]

Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed (Illinois Public Media)

<http://will.illinois.edu/focus/interview/focus090202a/> [14]

Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed (The Spectator)

[http://www.spectator.co.uk/books/427711/part\\_2/from-one-extreme-to-the-other.shtml](http://www.spectator.co.uk/books/427711/part_2/from-one-extreme-to-the-other.shtml) [15]

Collective Memory (H-Net)

<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php> [16]

---

**Source URL:** <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/957#comment-0>

### Links

[1] <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/item/4958>

[2] <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/item/4959>

[3] <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/item/4960>

[4] <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/item/4961>

[5] <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/item/4962>

[6] <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/item/4963>

[7] <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/item/4964>

[8] <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/item/4965>

[9] <http://themoornextdoor.wordpress.com/2010/04/27/book-review-algeria-since-1989/>

[10] <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63174/1-carl-brown/algeria-anger-of-the-dispossessed>

[11] [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/books/non-fiction/article3099882.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/non-fiction/article3099882.ece)

[12]

[http://www.asmeascholars.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1271&catid=9&am](http://www.asmeascholars.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1271&catid=9&am)

[13] <http://www.cceia.org/resources/transcripts/0024.html>

[14] <http://will.illinois.edu/focus/interview/focus090202a/>

[15] [http://www.spectator.co.uk/books/427711/part\\_2/from-one-extreme-to-the-other.shtml](http://www.spectator.co.uk/books/427711/part_2/from-one-extreme-to-the-other.shtml)

[16] <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=24437>