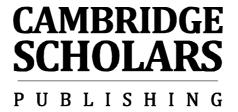# Coming Home? Vol. 2

Coming Home? Vol. 2:
Conflict and Postcolonial Return Migration in the Context of France and North Africa, 1962–2009

Edited by

Sharif Gemie and Scott Soo

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EDITORS' PREFACE

The complex inter-relationship of conflict, return migration and the nebulous, sometimes chimerical, but still compelling search for a sense of home is the central preoccupation of the essays in the two volumes of the "Coming Home?" series. The contributors participated in an interdisciplinary conference organised by "The Exilio Network" at the University of Southampton to explore the impact and legacies of the mass displacements that accompanied some of the most brutal conflicts of the twentieth century. Both volumes offer a selection of papers from the conference which have been revised, expanded and edited for publication.

Whether in relation to Spanish Civil War, the aftermath of the Second World War or the violence surrounding decolonisation, population displacement has demanded solutions that have habitually raised the issue of return migration. From this perspective, the contributors have tackled a series of overlapping questions: what were the motivations for returning? How did institutions and other political or social groups influence return? How was it organised? What strategies were created by migrants to deal with the impossibility of return? How were refugees received, perceived and represented by the authorities and communities upon their return? In what ways, if at all, did migrants re-construct a sense of home and homeland back in their countries of origin? To what extent did return signify the end of exile, diaspora, and the closure of the migration cycle? How has return been remembered at an individual and group level? How has return been represented through architecture, literature and film?

The multiple themes and diverse empirical contexts have been organised into two volumes. *Coming Home? Vol. 1: Conflict and Return Migration in the Aftermath of Europe's Twentieth-Century Civil Wars* considers the Spanish Civil War and the overlapping Second World War. What soon becomes clear in reading these chapters is the considerable dissonance between the agendas of refugees and those of national authorities. Although representing a different empirical context, the chapters in this (second) volume point towards similar tensions between migrants and the authorities in France and Algeria. The first part of this book considers the experiences of the European settlers or *pieds-noirs* who left Algeria for France during the war for independence and, more specifically, how different interpretations of return migration have

influenced their lives over the long duration. The second part looks predominantly at how Algerians and their descendants in France have negotiated some of the dilemmas and challenges associated with the idea of returning to either one's own country of origin or that of one's parents.

The "Coming Home?" series has been a collective venture and accordingly we would like to thank the authors for the time, effort and patience in preparing and revising their contributions, as well as Carol and Emily from Cambridge Scholars Press. Nick James also deserves a special mention for the excellent and efficient work in formatting the texts for publication. Our deep gratitude is also directed at our close colleagues and friends from the steering committee of the Exilio Network for the enriching and enjoyable series of meetings which led up to the 2009 conference: Alicia Mira Abad, Laure Humbert, Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez, Fiona Reid, Mónica Moreno Seco, Laure Teulières, Bruno Vargas, and Alicia Alted Vigil. For ensuring the conference was seamlessly organised and a manifest success we thank Natacha Borrel, Padmini Broomfield, Marie-Pierre Gibert, Chris Letteriello, Vanessa Mar-Molinero, Nicky Robbins, and Deborah Worton. Neither the Exilio Network nor the conference would have seen the light of day without the generous seed funding provided by the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Southampton and the subsequent grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council for which we are grateful. Our thanks go also to the Centre of Transnational Studies for hosting the conference and to the University of Southampton for financing the formatting of the two volumes.

Both editors were fortunate to have received the support of family and friends who contributed more than they know. Many have been acknowledged in other publications that have appeared in tandem with these volumes. However, Scott would especially like to thank his sister Kate and her partner Dan, as well as the adorable Paris and Ava for their generous hospitality and kindness in ensuring a homecoming for every visit. Sharif would like to record his memories of the wonderful years he shared with Patricia Clark (1957–2010), and of the friendship and support he found in the Exilio network.

We can see now that the papers presented at the "Coming Home" conference unwittingly provided a type of forecast of the tensions produced in the Syrian conflict, which continues unabated as this book goes to press, and of the challenges of mass displacement accompanying climate change. Therefore, both volumes of this series are dedicated to all refugees of the twenty-first century.

INTRODUCTION

ALGERIA AND FRANCE: IMPOSSIBLE HOMECOMINGS?

SHARIF GEMIE AND SCOTT SOO*

Looking back, one can now see that the conflict between the Algerian nationalists of the National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale/FLN) and the French state which developed in the 1950s was a type of ultimate collision between the dominant political principles that came to define the late twentieth century. It was a clash which involved ruthless military violence, para-military brutality, the manipulation and policing of civilians, religious stigmatisation, the application of interpretations of ethnic difference which were based on decades, even centuries, of cultural and social tensions, and the intense confrontation of two rival senses of nationhood. Atrocities were an intrinsic part of the conflict, whether through the organised use of torture, terrorist outrages, the violence of imposed identities, or merely the simple assault on common sense and ordinary ideas about decency and morality.

Even before the conflict began, French opinion polls revealed that Algerians were the second most hated group of foreigners in France, beaten in unpopularity only by Germans.[1] Given this depth of emotion, it is no surprise that this complex, multi-dimensional conflict has been difficult to analyse and still more difficult to remember in a coherent fashion. No single master narrative has come to dominate the contesting interpretations: following the decisive defeat of French colonialism, French historians still find it hard to explain why one hundred and thirty years of apparently shared history ended in such ignominy, while Algerian assertions of a unified nation now sound hollow. The themes awoken by this conflict have not stayed hermetically sealed in the box of history; instead they have circulated and resonated through the major crises of the late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century world.

The essentially political problem of the French incomprehension of the conflict was clear from the start. "Facing the Algerian people, French

strategists no longer understand anything", noted Franz Fanon in 1957[2]: a valid point, if not for the fact that history now suggests that Fanon's image of a single Algerian people, united in struggle, may have been as mythical as the colonists' image of the friendly, grateful Arab cited by estranged *pieds-noirs*. Struggling to understand an unprecedented situation, some inevitably reached for metaphors drawn from their wartime experience. Gaullists compared the pro-French ultra-nationalists of the Secret Army Organisation (Organisation d'Armée Secrète/OAS) with the traitors who rallied to Vichy France.[3] The handful of French activists who supported the FLN cause identified themselves as the inheritors of the Resistance tradition, and took the then-extraordinary step of comparing the authorities of their own country with the still-fresh memory of Nazi occupation: an astonishing assertion which, years later, acquired a historiographical importance of its own.[4] But such pro-FLN activists were clearly a minority: the vast majority of French public opinion refused to consider the issues raised by the FLN drive to achieve national independence for Algeria in terms of imperialism and anti-colonialism. The far left were confused by the debates within Algerian nationalism and worried about the potential significance of Algerian independence.[5] Members of France's socialist party, the French Section of the Workers' International (Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière/SFIO), had always been reluctant to consider the political implications of France's imperialism, while the French Communist Party (Parti Communiste Français/PCF) had refused to discuss colonialism since its adoption of a Popular Front strategy in 1935: it campaigned for "peace" in Algeria but not for "independence".[6] The old colonial myths of humanitarian, beneficial effects of colonial rule were dominant on the political right as they were accepted amongst many on the left, and that pernicious idealisation is still current in some elements of French political culture today.[7] The consequence of these putative historiographies and reactive myths has been a clear inability to think through and analyse both the nature of the political-military crises of 1954–1962 and their significance.

In the first chapter of this book, Claire Eldridge cites the dilemma faced by the French and European citizens of Algeria in 1962: they were considering "the impossibility of fitting 132 years into a single suitcase." One could equally note that it is impossible to contain those same years in a single volume. Many people who emerged from that conflict could feel, even decades afterwards, that they had lost "their" home, whether the idealistic Algerians who believed that they were creating a new Republic, Muslim reformers who hoped that they were fashioning a new, modern Islamic culture, the Algerian troops or *harkis* who served with the French

army, *pieds-noirs* who left the homes in which their family had sometimes
lived for decades or the French colonial powers who had believed that
their achievements in Algeria had constituted the living proof of the
French ability to act on a world stage.[8]

The chapters in this volume invariably signal the postcolonial legacy in
contemporary France and Algeria but also draw attention to the themes
evoked in the first volume of the "Coming Home?" series. The dilemmas
and issues surrounding the return or non-return of refugees from the
European civil wars of the first half of the twentieth century can also be
found within the context of the Algerian war and postcolonial France. The
discussion of "suitcase politics" in the introduction to the first volume, in
which we highlighted the suitcase as a symbol of fear, hope, loss and
reconstruction is just as pertinent in the chapters which follow.[9] But
perhaps even more striking is that the processes we outlined in the
"politics of return" seem to take on a paradoxical turn in the context of
postcolonial France. The *pieds-noirs* envisaged their departure from
Algeria as a form of exile and yet, instead of "arriving" and seeking refuge
in France, political discourse portrayed them as having been repatriated to
their country of origin. *Pied-noir* subjectivities were thus cast aside by the
French national authorities in favour of a strategy aimed more at enforcing
rather than facilitating the process of incorporation into French society.
Returning to a country of origin was not an option, it had already
happened.

The essays which constitute Part I, "Trajectories and Legacies", make
no attempt to provide total explanations or global narratives of either the
conflict or its legacy in contemporary France and Algeria. They are,
unashamedly and prudently, small-scale studies of historical experience
that provide glimpses of the memory-fragments from this most intense of
conflicts. At the same time, the contributors all point towards the same
phenomenon: the precipitated and obligatory emphasis on the socio-
economic incorporation of the *pieds-noirs* did not engender any profound
sense of belonging in metropolitan France or lead to the negation of their
desires to return to the time and space of colonial Algeria.

Claire Eldridge's sophisticated analysis of the literature produced by
pied-noir associations in France is revealing of the ambivalences
surrounding the settlement process. Individuals, groups, societies and
nation states often retreat to comforting images of the past during periods
of uncertainty, change and crisis. This undoubtedly explains the prolific
production of literature by the *pieds-noirs* on arriving in France as they
reacted to the liminality of displacement by returning figuratively to an
Algeria of the mind. The highly selective and romanticised depictions of

colonial life and relations in Algeria that have structured the associations'
collective memory are carefully problematized in this chapter. What is
perhaps most striking is not so much the content of these narratives but the
considerable degree of continuity with which associations have anchored
their vision of the past. The recent phenomenon of return visits to Algeria
organised by the *pied-noir* associations has involved a confrontation
between an imagined Algeria and a manifestly different present-day
reality. But as Eldridge demonstrates, this has not necessarily resulted in a
change to collective memory.

A refusal or inability to move on from the past is evoked in the title of
William Kidd's intricate study with the notion of "the long goodbye". The
focus on the southern *département* of the *Pyrénées-Orientales* is a
reminder of the central role that France has played in hosting displaced
populations,[10] but also allows for a nuanced account of *pied-noir*
trajectories. Drawing from archival documents, the press and life-story
narratives, Kidd presents the geographical and socio-economic profile of
the migrants as they adapted to France. More specifically, the
compensation clams dating from the 1970s and 1980s are indicative of the
drawn-out adjustment process and the fact that the financial help from the
French state did not always alleviate the material hardships felt by
individuals who had left Algeria with minimal possessions. Material
difficulties cannot, however, satisfactorily account for a sense of
pathological grieving for the loss of former lives and the corresponding
idealisation of the past. The close analysis of the *Pyrénées-Orientales* also
affords insight into the duality of home that has sometimes been
experienced by these migrants. While the climate, landscape and culture of
Mediterranean France conjures allusions to Algeria and has consequently
acted as a "pull factor", Algeria as the imagined place of no return
continues to prevail with some surprising consequences for the region's
memorial topography.

The final chapter to Part I adds further nuance to our understanding of
both the *pieds-noirs*' experiences of arriving in France and the impact of
the return or memory-tourist trips to Algeria. Using the concept of
"migratory project", Yann Scioldo-Zürcher examines the various ways in
which *pieds-noirs* or *Français d'Algérie* prepared for the eventual
prospect of leaving Algeria. In this way, he draws attention to the
significant population movements which occurred before the summer of
1962. In some rural areas, inhabitants began moving towards the urban
coastal settlements whilst families with the financial means began
investing in property in metropolitan France and/or sending children to be
educated in the metropole. Many civil servants were also keen to arrange

transfers to France but had to contend with a bureaucratic system which more frequently hindered than facilitated this process. Other people also faced constraints which impinged on their ability to leave Algeria. As a result, some *pieds-noirs*, amongst whom could be found ardent supporters of a French-controlled Algeria, tried to solicit the intervention of influential figures. As well as emphasising individual agency in the migration process, Scioldo-Zürcher explains the complexity of issues surrounding the discourse of return. In contrast to the French government's discourse of return and repatriation, the *Français d'Algérie* understood their journey from Algeria as a process of expatriation. The subsequent actions of the nascent Algerian authorities certainly rendered any return project a difficult if not untenable prospect. If this lack of agency regarding return has weighed heavily on how the *Français d'Algérie* have related to both France and Algeria, this chapter suggests that the recent rise of memory-related tourism can, though not always, bring a sense of closure for some individuals.

The problem of French society coming to terms with the harrowing memory of the War in Algeria was starkly demonstrated by the public uproar which greeted the law of 23 February 2005. The centre-right government's legislation legally bound teachers to introduce the "positive role" of French colonialism, notably in North Africa, to classrooms across the country and was aimed at addressing the *pied-noir and harki* populations in France.[11] As well as reflecting concerns about the state imposition of an official and highly questionable reading of the colonial past, the polemic exemplified the impossibility of recalling a highly divisive conflict within a framework of unitary national memory. It is misleading to regard any nation as a homogenous group and especially so when a country's population encompasses opposing sides from a savage conflict. By the time the War in Algeria ended, members from all of the rival groups could be found in France: French military personnel, colonial administrators, *pieds-noirs*, *harkis*, and pro-independence Algerians.

One of the paradoxes arising from the war was the dramatic increase of Algerians in France (including people sympathetic to the FLN) who were recruited by French industry to shore up the labour shortages caused by conscription. As with the *pieds-noirs*, these labour migrants (as well as the *harkis*) have experienced numerous material and existential challenges in adapting to life in France albeit under different circumstances. Although families linked to labour migration have experienced a greater degree of choice in visiting Algeria, they have endured sustained socio-economic discrimination throughout the postcolonial era due to their ethnic and/or

religious backgrounds. These factors are considered in the second part of
this volume.

Part II, "Journeys of Vacation, Journeys of Necessity, and Journeys of
Punishment", explores the experiences and representations of return
voyages before ending with a general reflection about rights and the
(im)possibilities of constructing a sense of home in the twenty-first
century. Jennifer Bidet draws on quantitative and qualitative sources to
present an intriguing analysis of the opportunities and dilemmas for
"French-Algerians" who have travelled between France and Algeria since
the 1970s.[12] In the decades following the War of Independence, both the
Algerian and French governments targeted Algerians living in France. The
Algerian government presented emigration to France as a colonial practice
that would disappear as a result of decolonisation. It therefore encouraged
its nationals in France to return to Algeria and presented holidays as the
first step towards permanent resettlement. Meanwhile, the French
government under Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's presidency reacted to the oil
crisis and mounting unemployment of the mid-1970s with a range of
strategies designed to secure the departure of as many Algerian and other
North African immigrants as possible. These strategies ultimately failed
and Bidet charts the evolving function of short and temporary return trips
to Algeria in relation to both the wider context of developing tourism and
the changing symbolism of this country in the lives of first-generation
immigrants and their descendants.

The question of why so few North African, or Maghrebi, migrants
actually return permanently to their countries of origin is further explored
by Isabel Hollis through a consideration of two documentary films and a
novel.[13] The symbiotic relationship between the experiences of returning
and its representation is analysed in the context of the Mediterranean Sea.
It features widely and serves as background to the idea that resettlement in
the Maghreb manifests itself as a "far-off dream" that is impossible to
achieve. In this way, the protagonists' aspirations for the future can often
be anchored elsewhere, changing as the individual moves from one
country to another. Thus while migrants might have idealised France
before migrating, this image can be overturned and replaced by a
mythologised account of Algeria once they have arrived and attempted to
adapt to French society. At the same time, Hollis is careful to reject any
view of a universal migrant experience and points to gender as one factor
which may impact on the relationship between return migration and
constructing a sense of home: at least some of the women in *Mémoires
d'immigrés* have associated France with opportunity. Whether or not
migration and the reconstruction of home have been experienced in

relation to new possibilities or as an impossible aspiration–reality more frequently blurs the two–a real sense of the dilemmas associated with returning emerges from the different narratives explored.

Unfortunately, constraint is the most prevalent feature of migration in relation to the so-called *double peine* or "double penalty" law which lies at the heart of Jonathan Ervine's study of cinematic representations of enforced return migration. The controversial law has enabled the French judiciary to essentially deport any non-French national to his/her so-called country of origin upon completion of a prison sentence. There is no need to explain this further here as Ervine succinctly presents the issues surrounding this legislation at the start of his chapter before critically engaging with two "documentaries" and two "fictional" films about the impact of the law on people with North African origins. The films adopt various approaches and use different localities ranging from *banlieue* housing estates in Paris and Lyon to rural Algeria. In addition to raising public awareness of the law, the four films demonstrate how individuals classified as foreign by the French state feel a deep sense of attachment to living in France. This can be in relation to the presence of their families, to a sense of belonging to a city such as Lyon, or more locally to a specific housing estate. But there is also disjuncture between individuals' subjectivities and the way these people are categorised by the French authorities. Accordingly whether an individual has grown up in, or actually identifies with France is irrelevant to how the *double peine* is applied given that the law operates by singling out individuals from the citizenship rights enjoyed by French nationals. Not only can this entail deporting someone to a so-called "country of origin" that is actually experienced as a foreign land, it can also cause problems once the person has served the deportation order. Returning to France does not always result in a happy resolution owing to the difficulties in obtaining the necessary authorisations to work and lead a normal life. Whether or not the four films succeed in really challenging the double penalty law is a moot question, but they are a very effective medium for highlighting the limits of universalism in France as well as the tension between lived and legal identities.

Clearly not everyone is able to enjoy the right to choose where they would like to construct a sense of home. And yet, why should this basic need be determined by where an individual was born and how he or she is classified by a nation-state? This is one of the questions asked by a migrant in Ada Giusti's discussion about migration and return in contemporary France. According to Giusti, the repressive immigration policies outlined under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy never stood a

realistic chance of success. Indeed, there can never be a satisfactory resolution of government concerns without serious attention to migrants' voices. Giusti introduces us first to the migrant trajectories of her family and what motivated them to both leave and return to their homes. Not only does this self-reflection highlight how circular migration encourages individuals to return to their countries of origin, it also historicises labour migration and thereby demonstrates how attitudes towards immigrants are highly dependent on space and time. The second part of Giusti's chapter presents the wide-ranging motivations of migrants who have travelled to France from a range of countries in order to improve or safeguard their lives. The reasons are as complex as they are compelling but essential to understand if nation states such as France sincerely wish to develop a policy for migration that is as effective as it is ethical.

The various contributions to this book evidently consider journeys between political states, but also between emotional states that range from security to anxiety. The journeys imply, without necessarily achieving, a renegotiation of the past through pilgrimages to *lieux de mémoire* and overlapping imagined forays to places which no longer exist (and which perhaps never did exist...). Other journeys involve leisure, are necessary, or can even take the form of a punishment. The power structures sketched out by these essays are often asymmetrical: migrants from the War in Algeria were treated in very different ways on their arrival in France according to how they were classified by the French authorities. In contemporary France, deportees have to face the police services, and illegal immigrants pay to obtain their clandestine journey while established citizens have the luxury of choosing a journey to an imagined place of origin. These are journeys through authority structures.

The common research theme of travel is central to these interwoven stories of displacement and change, in which each journey produces its own sense of meaning. Significantly, the travellers evoked in this volume of essays rarely, if ever, reach "home": the politicisation and ethnicisation of migration almost, and in some cases actually, eradicates all possibility of this ending. Taken as a block, these essays contribute to an emerging political history of travel, in which movement is analysed as a form of meaning.[14] By pointing out the contradictions in the return projects associated with twentieth-century conflicts and their legacies in this century, the collection of chapters suggests a degree of dislocation to the point where it is tempting to question whether there ever was a "home" in the form that it has been imagined.[15] Much, if not everything, depends on context. A sense of home may well develop at precisely those junctures when it appears most threatened. It might represent a future solution or an

imagined past which allows an individual or a group to live with an uncertain present. In other cases migrants have longed for one form of home while simultaneously experiencing another. The concept is as vague as it is enthralling but it has nevertheless raised dilemmas, shaped, and sometimes even defined migrants' lives.

Notes

* The editors' names appear in alphabetical order for both this introduction and the book.

[1] See Alec G. Hargreaves, "Algerians in Contemporary France: Incorporation or Exclusion?" *Journal of Algerian Studies* 3 (1998): 33.

[2] Frantz Fanon, *Pour la révolution africaine; écrits politiques* (Paris: Maspero, 1978), 58.

[3] See Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 93–100.

[4] Martin Evans, *The Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War (1954–1962)* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 40–2.

[5] Sylvain Pattieu, *Les camarades des frères: trotskistes et libertaires dans la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Syllepsie, 2002), 56–7.

[6] Akli Dahmani, "Le Parti communiste français face à la Guerre d'Algérie," *Cahiers d'histoire immédiate* 20 (2001): 27–68.

[7] The last brief flourishing of these myths is analysed in Neil MacMaster, *Burning the Veil: the Algerian War and the "emancipation" of Muslim women, 1954–62* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

[8] On French pride in colonial achievements, see Charles-Robert Ageron, "L'Exposition coloniale de 1931," in *Les Lieux de Mémoire Vol I*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Quarto/Gallimard, 1997), 493–517.

[9] Sharif Gemie and Scott Soo, "Introduction: On Displacement: Narratives of Home, Conflict and Return in Twentieth-Century Europe," in *Coming Home? Vol. 1: Conflict and Return Migration in the Aftermath of Europe's Twentieth-Century Civil Wars*, eds. Sharif Gemie and Scott Soo with Norry LaPorte (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 1–14.

[10] The *Pyrénées-Orientales* received close to 500,000 refugees seeking refuge from the Spanish Civil War in early 1939. For information about the issue of return and the Spanish Republican exiles in France see Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand, "From Exodus to Exile: The Diversity of Returns and the Spanish Civil War Refugees," in *Coming Home? Vol. 1*, 35–50.

[11] For further discussion on the February 2005 law, see Peter Dunwoodie, "Postface: history, memory and identity–today's crisis, yesterday's issue," *French History* 20, no.3 (2006): 318–32.

[12] Bidet employs the term "French-Algerians" in reference to indigenous Algerians as well as their children born in France. This should not be conflated with Scioldo-Zürcher's usage of "*Français d'Algérie*" in reference to the *pieds-noirs*.

[13] *Mémoires d'immigrés: l'héritage maghrébin*, directed by Yamina Benguigui (1997; Suresnes: Bandits Productions, 1998), DVD; *La Traversée*, directed by Elisabeth Leuvrey (2006; Paris: Alice Films Distribution); Mahi Binebine, *Cannibales: traverse dans l'enfer de Gibraltar*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Éditions de l'Aube).

[14] On these themes, see the conclusion to Sharif Gemie, Fiona Reid, Laure Humbert with Louise Ingram, *Outcast Europe: Refugees and Relief Workers in an Era of Total War, 1936–48* (London: Continuum, 2011).

[15] The classic essay on this theme is Liisa Malkki, "National Geographic: the Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialisation of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees," *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1992): 24–44. See also the reply from Gaim Kibreab, "Revisiting the Debate on People, Place, Identity and Displacement," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 12, no. 4 (1999): 384–428. See also Sharif Gemie, "Re-defining Refugees: Nations, Borders and Globalization," *Eurolimes* 9 (2010): 28–36.

PART I

TRAJECTORIES AND LEGACIES

CHAPTER ONE

THE *PIED-NOIR* COMMUNITY
AND THE COMPLEXITY
OF "COMING HOME" TO ALGERIA

CLAIRE ELDRIDGE*

In June 2002, a documentary entitled *Passé recomposé* aired on the television channel France 2. It featured Adrienne, a small but sprightly eighty year old who was filmed undergoing a daily round of intense physiotherapy, her face a mask of fierce concentration. Despite having recently undergone a hip replacement operation, Adrienne was determined not to let this prevent her from journeying to Algeria, her country of birth and a place she last saw more than forty years ago. Adrienne and the other pensioners accompanying her on the trip being documented by *Passé recomposé* were all *pieds-noirs*.[1] The term *pied-noir* refers to the settler community of French Algeria, which was composed of men and women who initially came to the colony from a range of European countries from the 1840s onwards, but who were made into French citizens in the wake of naturalisation laws passed in 1889 and 1893. The settlers quickly developed a strong identification with French Algeria and with the colonial project being undertaken there. At the top of the colonial hierarchy, the settlers were resistant to any policies or reforms they felt jeopardised their privileged position. Consequently, although numerically in the minority, constituting ten per cent of the overall population by the mid-twentieth century, the settlers wielded considerable political power which they used to help ensure the continuation of the colonial system.

On 1 November 1954, Algerian nationalist frustrations exploded into a War of Independence, spearheaded by the National Liberation Front (FLN). Aware of the increasingly unsustainable nature of the colonial system, especially given the evolving international situation, some settlers had seen the writing on the wall and accepted both the legitimacy and the inevitability of Algerian independence. In a very small number of cases,

this acceptance translated into actively assisting the FLN.[2] However, most settlers were not prepared to accede to the demands of the FLN and fought passionately and tenaciously to ensure that Algeria remained French, believing until the very end that France would somehow prevail. In July 1962, after almost eight years of bitter warfare these hopes were definitively dashed and Algeria achieved its independence. As the Algerian people celebrated, the *pieds-noirs* hastened to pack their bags. Convinced that their lives would be untenable in an independent Algeria, the majority of the one million strong population migrated over the course of that summer leaving behind a land they considered their home. Attempting to assuage the pain of this sudden and traumatic separation, the majority headed for France, a country they had been brought up to identify with and idealise, and which they now hoped would welcome them with open arms.

Although their reception fell far short of expectations, France is where the majority of *pieds-noirs* have remained. A key part of rebuilding their lives has involved the formation of associations dedicated not just to obtaining material compensation, but also to the preservation and transmission of the history and memory of French Algeria.[3] Based overwhelmingly on personal testimony and recollections, the presentation of the *pied-noir* past by and through associations has been intrinsic to this endeavour. Both highly selective and increasingly idealised, claims regarding positive attributes of French colonialism in Algeria are very much to the fore of these collective representations. The partiality and romaticisation of this collective memory has been seldom challenged as few *pieds-noirs* ventured back across the Mediterranean to visit their former country. Although never officially prevented from returning by the Algerian government, the *pied-noir* community were fearful of the reception that potentially awaited them, particularly since, unlike their own associations, Algerian leaders have always been unequivocal in their condemnation of French colonial rule. On 11 March 2000, however, the situation changed significantly when the current Algerian president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, told the French newspaper *Le Figaro*:

> If [the *pieds-noirs*] wish to contribute through their investments to the development of their country of birth, I can only encourage them. If they desire to go there as tourists then they will be welcome…I am not unaware of the emotional dimension that links *pieds-noirs* to this country.

Bouteflika repeated his invitation a few months later during the first state visit by an Algerian president to France since the end of the War of Independence. However, he also controversially made it clear that the *harkis,* those Algerians who ended up fighting for the French as

auxiliaries, were not similarly welcome on Algerian soil, memorably stating: "It is not yet time for visits from the *harkis,* it is exactly like asking a Frenchman of the *résistance* to shake the hand of a *collabo*".[4] Although outraged on behalf of the *harkis,* the *pied-noir* community were nonetheless intrigued by Bouteflika's apparent olive branch to them. In the wake of his comments, thousands of *pieds-noirs* have made the trip back to Algeria, often as part of organised excursions run by *pied-noir* associations.[5] Widely recorded in association journals and literature, these self-styled "pilgrimages" have also captured the attention of the French media who have made several programmes about the subject, including the one featuring Adrienne.[6]

The popular and media attention devoted to this phenomenon has not, however, been matched within academic circles, paralleling a general neglect of the *pieds-noirs* by the scholarly community, certainly until very recently.[7] Offered as a contribution to redressing this balance, this chapter seeks to examine the extent to which the quantitative change in the numbers returning for visits to Algeria has produced any qualitative shift in collective perceptions of the past within the *pied-noir* community. For the individual *pieds-noirs* involved, these undertakings are unquestionably intense and often profoundly moving personal experiences as the French Algeria of their memories comes face to face with the reality of contemporary, independent Algeria. However, the impact of this collision of past and present upon the collective memory of the *pied-noir* community is rather less pronounced. In fact, what this chapter will argue is that rather than producing a reappraisal of the past, accounts of these pilgrimages instead conform to and thus confirm pre-existing historical understandings as expressed through the lexicon of *pied-noir* associations. This is indicative of a wider pattern that has witnessed the consistent filtering out or discrediting of images and narratives that challenge the past as understood and promoted by *pied-noir* associations. Stemming from a belief that constancy is proof of veracity, the result is a collective memory whose content has undergone very little evolution in the decades since Algerian independence. This chapter will therefore explore some of the mechanisms through which *pied-noir* associations have ultimately extracted continuity and reassurance from the potentially destabilising experience of "coming home" to Algeria and place these within the broader context of collective memory strategies within the *pied-noir* community.

The "Problem" of Coming Home

The issue of returning to Algeria has always been contentious within the *pied-noir* community largely because it forms part of much wider debates relating to the complex notion of "home". The desire to revisit Algeria occupies a prominent place in individual and collective discourses, while nostalgia, or *nostalgérie,* for their former home, is considered a quintessential *pied-noir* characteristic.[8] As Georges-Pierre Hourant asked, "What Algerian [meaning *pied-noir*], withdrawn to the metropole since 1962 has not dreamed of seeing their native town again?".[9] Yet in practice it was frequently difficult for *pieds-noirs* to translate their longing into practical action. This was partly because of the traumatic nature of their departure in 1962, which itself represented the culmination of nearly eight years of violent conflict. As the one experience common to all *pieds-noirs*, exile represents a foundational moment; the summer of 1962 therefore emerges in the collective memory as a clear demarcation between a happy, carefree life in Algeria, and a difficult metropolitan trajectory marked by misery and suffering. It also signals the transition from settler to *pied-noir,* a shift whose significance is more than merely semantic. Construed as a wholly negative experience from departure through arrival, these few weeks would, as the historian Jean-Jacques Jordi noted, "structure a memory and forge a collective mentality that persists to this day".[10]

Pied-noir publications are replete with accounts of the 1962 "exile" that emphasise the shock and the distress caused by this event. Recollections tend to focus on the "final morning", with the decision to leave presented as a deeply reluctant but necessary one encapsulated by the prominent 1962 slogan "the suitcase or the coffin". Violence, whether the specific death of someone close, or the general sense of insecurity that stemmed from the escalation of the conflict in its final months, is often cited as the crucial factor prompting the realisation that staying was no longer a viable option. This was the case for Maurice Fedida who explained:

> I was sure of remaining, I had done up an apartment for us. Militarily, the Algerian War had been won by France, even the FLN didn't deny it. But we left in 1962, under duress. A member of my family had been killed practically in front of me… We left at the end of March, with our children and our cases, leaving everything.[11]

Retrospective articles published in *pied-noir* journals with titles such as "The Goodbye", "A Child Leaves Oran", and "On the Boat" indicate the key stages of the leaving process. Their contents stress the chaos of the

roads, airports, and ports; the queuing, often over several days, without food or water; the constant fear of FLN attacks; and the pitiful sight of families trying to carry entire lives in a suitcase. When asked as part of the documentary *Pieds-Noirs: Histoire d'une blessure* what they took with them, one man recalled his younger brother carefully placing his electric train set in his suitcase. However, the most common response to this question is "not much", alluding to the impossibility of fitting 132 years into a single suitcase.[12] All accounts feature, and indeed often end with, one last lingering look at Algeria and a contemplation of the magnitude of what was occurring: "When the boat put to sea, for a long time I watched the coast fade until it became only a narrow blue border, thinking we won't see this country again in a hurry, if ever."[13] Many *pieds-noirs* were acutely aware of and deeply affected by the finality of their departure. Others, however, failed to appreciate that this moment represented a definitive break with their past. This number included Maurice Fedida who recalled: "When leaving we thought it was temporary, we were persuaded that we would be able to go back."[14] These men and women were thus as unprepared emotionally as they were materially for the transition that awaited them in France.

The hope among *pieds-noirs* following this painful separation from Algeria, was for a sympathetic welcome in France. "[W]e searched for something," recalled one, "we found nothing".[15] The coldness of the reception provided by their imagined national community left a profound impression and has remained a source of considerable bitterness among *pieds-noirs*. Exile thus proved a double rupture, irrevocably separating the community both from Algeria and from the metropolitan French. "I feel myself a foreigner," Madame Pitard commented, ten years after arriving in France, "I do not feel at home".[16] Her sentiments are echoed by many of her fellow *pieds-noirs,* including the successful performer Jean-Paul Gavino who confessed, "I have succeeded in life, I earn lots, but I always feel uncomfortable in myself. Here, it's not home, I don't feel at home anywhere".[17] Insult was furthermore added to injury for certain *pied-noirs* by the fact that the government labelled them *rapatriés* implying that they were returning to a land they already knew. In truth, although France had technically always been their country of citizenship, many *pieds-noirs* were unfamiliar with metropolitan France, while others had never spent more than short periods of time there on holiday, at summer camp, or while completing their military service. The idea of being simply a "repatriate" also angered the *pieds-noirs* who felt that it downplayed the enormity of their losses and the depth of their attachment to Algeria. "I don't use the term 'repatriates'" Nicole Giraud declared, "because we are

not repatriates, we are the de-patriated [des dépatriés] and refugees".[18] The end result was a population who were at home on neither shore of the Mediterranean. Consequently, in spite of the socio-economic integration attested to on paper by government statistics and the material aspects of their lives, the *pieds-noirs* still feel that they do not fully belong in France.

The question of being a foreigner is thus a delicate one, as is the notion of home, which in turn complicates the issue of returning to Algeria. On top of the psychologically difficult task of confronting the trauma of departure, or overcoming the fear of encountering a reception as hostile as the climate they left behind in 1962, which many *pieds-noirs* have been simply unable to do, there is the question of what the status of the returning *pied-noir* would be in relation to their former home. This is especially true given that that country they lived in, French Algeria, no longer exists. Many *pieds-noirs* therefore sympathise with the view of the author Jeanine de la Hogue who explained that having been born in "a French province", she had "no desire to return to my native country as a foreigner".[19]

One solution to the liminality *pieds-noirs* experience in the present has been to return to Algeria figuratively through imagination, rather than in person. Literary evocations of French Algeria have always been a striking feature of the *pied-noir* community, producing a wealth of memoirs, autobiographies and fiction that began appearing almost as soon as the *pieds-noirs* arrived in France.[20] Associations have contributed to this trend both by printing extracts from these works in their journals and even producing whole texts through their own publishing houses, but also by running regular features on subjects such as "Towns and Villages" of Algeria which combine photographs of places from Alger to Zéralda with personal accounts of life there. A further key function of associations stems from their social calendar which affords displaced and dispersed *pieds-noirs* opportunities to gather together in order to recreate a little piece of Algeria in France and thus to return in sprit to their home. What facilitates these gatherings is the prevalent notion that the *pied-noir* past and culture is, by necessity, portable. Although French Algeria was physically left behind in 1962, mentally and emotionally it has continued because it is embodied in the *pieds-noirs* themselves and was transported with them across the Mediterranean. Algeria thus remained in André d'Apreval's "guts", prompting him to write "I will carry it with me. The land of Algeria is impregnated in memory, in my ancestors who fertilised this land. It was my home."[21]

Building on the *pied-noir* idea that "each one of us has to some extent the roots of the others," the sociologist Clarisse Buono believes upon

arrival in France "the geographic space of the *pieds-noirs* transform[ed] itself into a mental construction around which one-by-one the pieces of an artificial culture amalgamate."[22] Crucial to this mental construction were the activities of associations, who were largely motivated by impulses concerning security and sanctuary. As Andrea Smith noted with respect to the *pied-noir* association she studied, "[in] the context of a generalised hostility many feel from the metropolitan French, these organisations provide them with a 'safe' place where they can feel accepted".[23] Smith refers to remembered places as "symbolic anchors" and, whether remembered in words, through images, or mentally recreated at *pied-noir* gatherings, their attraction lies in the stability and thus the security they offer. Home in these spaces is very carefully that of colonial Algeria prior to the War of Independence. It is a place that exists in a clearly defined time that is consciously placed out of the reach of the potentially disruptive present. "What the reconstructed Algeria loses in reality, it gains in stability. No status modification, no claim of independence can affect it anymore."[24]

The implications of leaving this protected and idealised mental home in order to return to their actual home are therefore profound for *pieds-noirs*. As many are aware, the problem is that the reality may fall short of their memories:

> At the idea of returning to Algeria we are seized with fears and shudders … And what if, in returning to our native towns, to…the houses where we came into this world, where we grew up and that we want so much to see again in order to renew the thread of broken time, we find only erasure and emptiness?[25]

Faced with the choice between memory or reality, many *pieds-noirs* prefer to remain within the imaginative realm and to preserve a rather different type of Algerian exile, which Hélène Cixous referred to as "a virginity of memory".[26]

Some, however, have braved the real world. Prior to Bouteflika's announcement, there had been a small but steady trickle of *pieds-noirs* returning to Algeria for visits. These trips were often reported in association journals and at meetings, or, less frequently, broadcast as inserts within television programmes dedicated to the War of Independence or the *pied-noir* community.[27] Those who go back recount what they saw in great detail, commenting endlessly on minutiae such as the colour the local bakery is now painted. One of the principal functions of these publicly circulated descriptions is clearly to allow those who cannot, for whatever reasons, make the trip themselves to vicariously

return home through a third party. Prior to 2000, however, such trips were individual or small-scale endeavours that accounted for a minority of the overall *pied-noir* population. It was not until Bouteflika's official blessing that the *pied-noir* community felt sufficiently emboldened in large numbers to move beyond the comfort of their reconstructed mental universe and go back.

Yet even today opinion remains divided and it is important to note that there has been strong opposition in certain quarters to the idea of returning. The reasons for this are various. Some *pieds-noirs,* for example, refuse to accept Bouteflika's offer until it is also extended to the *harkis.* For Melchior Calandra, a long-standing and prominent *pied-noir* activist, there is "no question" of returning to Algeria: "The *harkis* do not have the right to go there and me, should I have the right to go there? It is not decent, not responsible."[28] Similar sentiments were also expressed by Francette Mendosa who cautioned her *Aux échos d'Alger* readers not to forget "our *harki* brothers, forbidden from visiting for having chosen France."[29] Mendosa also used this editorial to justify her rejection of Bouteflika's overtures. While sympathising with her readers' desire to "'see' one last time this country that remains so dear to us," she ultimately felt that Bouteflika was not sincere, but simply seeking to make political (and financial) capital. Therefore, to submit to such desires in the present climate would only make the *pieds-noirs* pawns in someone else's game.[30]

Yet in spite of these reservations, many more *pieds-noirs* are now crossing the Mediterranean than ever before. The remainder of this chapter will therefore explore the impact of this escalation on representations of the Franco-Algerian past, focusing in particular on the interaction between individual reactions and collective presentations by associations. The preceding discussion has hopefully provided a sense of the complexity of the issue of "coming home" for the *pied-noir* community, yet it is precisely complexity that their associations have sought to erase. Deliberately positioning themselves as mediators between the mental and the material Algeria, they have tried to ensure that the messy reality of the present does not disrupt the safe haven of the imagined home they have spent the past five decades creating and embedding within the *pied-noir* community. Considering their mechanisms with respect to the issues of readings of decolonisation, interactions with Algerians and the war of Independence, the extent to which they have succeeded in minimising the shock of the collision between past and present represented by the act of coming home will be assessed, as well as the implications of this for the collective memory of the *pieds-noirs.*

Readings of Decolonisation

One of the reasons the *pieds-noirs* were so devastated by their exile from Algeria was that they felt as entitled as the indigenous inhabitants to be there based on the hard work their ancestors had put into establishing themselves in the colony over the course of the nineteenth century. Deeply ingrained in *pied-noir* association literature, the myth of pioneering ancestors challenges the *gros colon* stereotype by offering tales of humble people fleeing poverty and persecution in search of a better future; people who arrived in Algeria with nothing and who, through hard work and tenacity, succeeded in establishing modest but happy lives. "Over generations," Jacques Roseau explained, "the sense of our permanence in this French land installed itself in the spirit and in the heart of all the French of Algeria. Our attachment to what could only be our native land was obviously passionate."[31]

These pioneers then embarked upon a glorious adventure in cooperation with colonial officials and the French army that "brought Algeria out of chaos and into the light!"[32] The idea that colonial Algeria was "a totally French creation" is something all *pied-noir* associations agree on. The lack of an innate sense of national identity on the part of the native Algerians, due to centuries spent under foreign rule, is deemed to have rendered the country a blank canvas onto which the French could project their own values and systems of government.[33] Within this narrative, the landing of French troops in 1830 serves as the foundational moment, signalling the beginning of a radical transformation accomplished in co-operation with rather than in opposition to the wishes of the indigenous Algerians. The nationalist insurrection that broke out in 1954 is thus denied legitimacy by the *pieds-noirs* who argue that Algeria had no identity separate from that of France and that the country the FLN were claiming as their own had in fact never existed. As Maurice Calmein of the Cercle Algérianiste boasted, "it was not a question of occupying a country, but rather of fabricating all the pieces."[34]

For *pied-noir* associations*,* the French presence was justified by the material benefits of their rule. From the moment they set foot on Algerian soil, the French are regarded as having vastly improved all aspects of life by building roads and railways; establishing extensive commercial enterprises, including vineyards; and providing services such as sanitation, health care, education, and democratic government. Therefore, according to *pieds-noirs*, in 1962 the French left behind an "enormous gift" for the FLN in the form of a modern country, an accomplishment that they believe "merits more than a simple 'thank you.'"[35]

Given that *pied-noir* associations view colonialism as "a great adventure" and "a glorious page of our history," it is unsurprising that decolonisation is regarded in similarly black and white terms as a terrible mistake, not just in Algeria but in general.[36] As the *pied-noir* journal *L'Algérianiste* bluntly put it, Algeria "was 'made better' and thus 'legitimated' only through the work of everyone. Mishandled, it has become sterile and dismal once more."[37] These sentiments are echoed in other *pied-noir* publications which speak of Algeria as "a country frozen in time", possessing an economy "transfixed on its 1962 starting block", with the nation as whole condemned as "the typical example of a botched decolonisation" that "presents the spectacle of a human, cultural and material waste."[38] Furthermore, events specific to Algeria, namely the rise of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and the extreme instability of the late 1990s, as well as the significant numbers of Algerians who continue to cross the Mediterranean to France in search of better prospects, have only increased the *pieds-noirs'* certainty that their beloved country should never have been delivered into the incapable and extremist hands of the FLN.

All of these attitudes are given further succour by the experience of returning to Algeria. Indeed, one of the most immediately striking things about returning *pieds-noirs* is the persistence of a sense of propriety over the country and, occasionally, over its inhabitants. Stepping off the plane or the boat, not only do certain *pieds-noirs* display a distinct lack of grace when submitting to passport control, but one returnee cannot resist responding to the greeting "welcome to our country" with the rejoinder "and ours."[39] Further affront is taken over the fact that streets and buildings have had their French names replaced with designations in Arabic that frequently make reference to key events and figures of the War of Independence. This echoes broader *pied-noir* denials of Algerian agency, indicated by the way in which Algeria is usually portrayed as having been lost by France rather than won by its own people. One *pied-noir* observes that Notre Dame de l'Afrique is the only Christian Church left in Algiers, the rest having been converted into mosques. His subsequent comment that "At prayer hour, the voice of the muezzin spreads among the streets, and Friday has replaced Sunday," presents this as an alien imposition.[40] This ignores the fact that Islam has been the majority religion in Algeria since the fifth-century conquests, but fits into the broader *pied-noir* claim that the real history of Algeria only began with the French arrival in 1830.

In addition to the new street names, the disorientation of returning *pieds-noirs* is compounded by the many physical changes that have taken place since independence. "After so many years," reported one returnee,

"it is impossible to recognise the environs of Algiers…We could lose
ourselves there, strangers in our own town."[41] The *pieds-noirs* are thus
confronted with the truth that this is not the same country they left behind,
nor is it "their" country anymore. They are simply tourists passing
through, looking with unfamiliar eyes and relying on others to direct them
to key sites from their past. Even then, the changes can sometimes be so
profound as to erase even the most personal of landmarks. Antoine, one of
Adrienne's *Passé recomposé* companions, is unable to locate the house
where he spent his childhood, something that causes him considerable
distress.[42]

     However, this confusion and discomfort on the ground is offset at the
collective level by associations who have always sought to repackage
these experiences in order to emphasise the negative nature of the changes.
"In walking around town, the former inhabitant will be struck by the
physical degradation," one association remarked, reflecting a long-
standing template of unfavourably contrasting contemporary Algeria with
the superior state of French Algeria. This has only accelerated with the rise
in return trips. Thus we learn of the multiple buildings with their letter
boxes ripped out and with disused staircases, or the numerous small shops
that once bought "cheer" and "convenience", but which have now either
disappeared or "remain shuttered".[43] Such examples are seized upon by
pied-noir associations who wilfully ignore the fact that poverty and shanty
towns (bidonvilles) were also a feature of French Algeria. Furthermore,
instead of accepting contemporary problems as the result of a complex
mix of factors, including the legacies of colonialism, they simply attribute
the present-day state of Algeria to the incompetent leadership of the FLN
who squandered the "enormous gift" left to them by the French.
Confirming the *pied-noir* belief that things were better before they left,
these attitudes are also connected to the inability of the *pied-noir*
community to imagine Algeria without them. Unable to integrate the
history of the past five decades into their world view, for many *pieds-noirs*
there is only the stark juxtaposition of then and now. Lacking a historical
appreciation of the intervening years they have nothing to bridge the gap
between past and present, thus their gaze is decontextualised and
unbalanced. Hence returning *pieds-noirs* are unsettled to find Algerians
living in what they still regard as "their" houses. It is almost as if they
expected Algeria to have remained frozen in time until they were able to
return, at which point history could resume. What associations do is to
provide a comforting explanation for this sense of dislocation, not by
filling in the gap between past and present with context, but by
emphasising the idealised reconstruction as the standard upon which to