

Remembering French Algeria: pieds-noirs, identity, and exile

Natalya Vince

To cite this article: Natalya Vince (2016) Remembering French Algeria: pieds-noirs, identity, and exile, *Modern & Contemporary France*, 24:3, 339-340, DOI: [10.1080/09639489.2016.1188795](https://doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2016.1188795)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2016.1188795>



Published online: 21 Jun 2016.



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focus on memory in the programmes (which can lead to a case study of France's relationship to its past relating to World War Two or to the Algerian War).

The detailed focus on comics examines issues such as the role of extra-diegetic material and paratextual elements in providing legitimacy for comic narratives, the place of colonial iconography and Orientalist tropes in comics and how the authors negotiate the 'postcolonial paradox' ('The ambiguous relationship established between postcolonial cartoonists and colonialist aesthetics results in irreconcilable narrative tensions', 149), and the representation and place of landscapes in the comics. Howell conducts detailed literary analysis of the books, and also draws on a number of interviews with authors (and a few teachers). As the author states herself, her background is as a literary scholar, so there is not much discussion of the visual style of the comics. It would also have been interesting to hear more about the reception of these comics—how they have been reviewed, and how many copies have been sold.

Within the corpus—which is wide-ranging, but could do with being discussed and presented early on so that the reader can better grasp its scope—there is a particularly strong representation from writers that can be referred to as 'frontaliers', and also from writers engaged in 'postmemory'. This is because a number of the authors have family ties to Algeria—as children of soldiers who fought in the war, or children of settlers etc. They are able to negotiate the boundaries between France and Algeria. And what often motivates them to research their comics and write or draw about this period is a desire to learn more about this aspect of their family history.

This book will be of interest to students of literature in particular who are interested in this genre, which traditionally has had a 'marginal/paraliterary status', and who are interested in French representations of Algeria in contemporary France.

Jo McCormack
Nottingham Trent University
 jo.mccormack@ntu.ac.uk

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2016.1162145>

Remembering French Algeria: pieds-noirs, identity, and exile, by Amy L. Hubbell, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2015, 296 pp., \$55.00 (hardback), ISBN: 978-0-80-326490-8.

Remembering French Algeria is about the Algeria of a certain colonial memory. This memory ended in 1962 with the 'repatriation' of almost a million French citizens to metropolitan France, where this diverse group came to be known under the homogenising epithet *pied-noir*. In subsequent years, the construction and articulation of *pied-noir* memory has generated a plethora of testimonies, websites, associations, political campaigns, films, works of literature and art, alongside a number of important academic works. Amongst the latter, Yann Scioldo-Zürcher (2010) and Claire Eldridge (2016) are particularly noteworthy for deconstructing many of the myths which the '*pied-noir* community' created about themselves. Scioldo-Zürcher counters the narrative of state betrayal and abandonment with a story of successful integration, whilst Eldridge challenges the received idea that the Algerian War was 'forgotten' 1962–1991, instead paying close attention to the political contexts which shaped the local preservation—and later national re-emergence—of *pied-noir* memory.

Amy L. Hubbell's book is first and foremost about the *pied-noir* narrative itself, as told by *pieds-noirs*. She locates this narrative within various frameworks, notably that of psychoanalysis and the concepts of trauma and nostalgia. Hubbell outlines its key features: we were not all rich landowners, our relations with Algerians were fraternal, we loved the land, through our efforts we made Algeria, we were victims of decolonisation. She describes this narrative as both legitimising the *pieds-noirs*' place in Algeria and sustaining their sense of identity. She makes the interesting observation that the act of repeating the same structures and tropes in writing about 'French Algeria' is a way to create stability, but at the same time, this 'perpetual return' (5) also creates movement which threatens to destabilise attachment to the past.

Hubbell focuses on those who 'are not generally identified as Pieds-Noirs' (8) to demonstrate how even those who are in many ways outsiders to the dominant *pied-noir* narrative are fated to reproduce its key elements. The case for studying those who sit both on the inside and the outside of a dominant narrative is persuasively made. However, the demonstration is somewhat undermined by the selection of authors. Whilst one can see how Marie Cardinal, Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous might be positioned on the awkward edges of a *pied-noir* identity (because of their feminism and/or Jewishness), it is hard to see how Leïla Sebbar (born in 1941 to a French mother and an Algerian father) can be considered a *pied-noir*. Right up until 1958, there were two categories of citizen in colonial Algeria. On the one hand, there were the 'Europeans', a category which after 1870 (and not including the period 1940–1943 under the anti-Semitic Vichy regime) included the majority of the Jewish population. On the other hand, there were the 'Muslims'. The former benefitted from full French citizenship, the latter were second-class citizens with a separate civil code. This was an ethnicised legal distinction whose confines it was very difficult to escape, even through naturalisation. However much we might seek to underline the political, socio-economic and cultural diversity of the *pieds-noirs*, what they had in common was their privileged legal status – which goes some way to explaining the very different treatment which the *harkis* received in France from 1962 onwards. Somewhat disconcertingly, there are a few places in *Remembering French Algeria* where 'pied-noir' and 'Franco-Algerian' examples seem to be used interchangeably.

There are also some repetitions in the book: for example, the origins of the term *Nostalgie* is described twice (27 and 155) and there is much more on Cardinal, who is closest to the 'classic' *pied-noir* narrative, than on Derrida, Cixous and Sebbar. The book nevertheless provides an interesting compilation of *pied-noir* narratives, and the fact that the author has made them available in English makes this book particularly useful on undergraduate courses for non-French speakers.

References

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Natalya Vince
University of Portsmouth
 Natalya.Vince@port.ac.uk

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2016.1188795>