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Christophe Campos, *Fleurus en Oranie 1848-1962. Monographie communale*. Paris: Riveneuve Éditions, 2016. 659 pp. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, and index. 29.00€ (pb). ISBN 978-2-3601-3378-9.

Review by Owen White, University of Delaware.

It is well known that former inhabitants of colonial Algeria have devoted considerable energy to commemorating their past. Research collections like the Centre de Documentation Historique sur l'Algérie in Aix-en-Provence house an ever-expanding catalog of efforts to capture *l'Algérie française* as a lived experience, either issued by specialist publishers like Éditions Jacques Gandini or self-produced (and often posted online). For historians of colonial Algeria this would appear to represent a rich body of potential evidence. Yet the task of working through this material often seems to be left to scholars of post-colonial memory.

It is not difficult to see why this is so. To the untrained eye, a book like *Aïn-Témouchent de ma jeunesse* may not seem very different from *Sidi-bel-Abbès de ma jeunesse*.<sup>[1]</sup> Histories of individual communities and personal memoirs often present familiar-sounding narratives laced with a well-honed sense of grievance (I recently read a publication that took great trouble to avoid sullyng the page with the name “Charles de Gaulle”). For professional historians, there is also the problem of sources. Books that lack footnotes are much easier to read as examples of a type of narrative than they are to mine for solid evidence of colonial reality.<sup>[2]</sup>

Just as historians of missionary activity can benefit from the sources produced by missionaries themselves, however, so too can historians of colonial Algeria find value in acts of recuperation like Christophe Campos's book about the colonial village of Fleurus. Bracketing Campos alongside amateur memoirists may do a disservice to a career academic with a strong record of publication. Nevertheless, his paternal family's century-long connection to Fleurus and his stated goal of retrieving its inhabitants from anonymity (p. 634) do not distinguish Campos greatly from other authors with strong ties to disappeared colonial communities. What differentiates his book from comparable volumes—aside from the fact that it is well written and judiciously assembled—is that it offers so much that historians, and not just *Fleurusiens*, might be able to use.

This is a big book about a small place, whose population barely exceeded 1,500 even at its peak. In the story of its creation and development, Fleurus conforms to a pattern that applies to many other colonial settlements in Algeria, particularly in the department of Oran. The village was founded in 1848 under the special influence of the Minister of War, General Louis de Lamoricière, who had recently played an important role in the “pacification” of western Algeria with the capture of Abd el-Kader. The first settlers were the intended beneficiaries of one of the social engineering schemes of that revolutionary year. Unlike earlier convoys made up of prisoners, the emigrants in late 1848 were unemployed men like the blacksmith and carpenter Nicolas Augustin Rabisse, who embarked on a boat at Bercy in October with his wife, six children, two daughters-in-law, and an infant grandson. The Rabisse family would turn out to provide a unique point of continuity in the development of Fleurus from its founding until

independence in 1962. One of the younger Rabisses in the first convoy, twelve-year-old Gustave, later wrote an idiosyncratically vivid memoir of the village's early years—one of a number of documents and supporting materials that Campos makes available in full on the book's associated website.[3]

Though the burgeoning town of Oran lay barely ten miles to its west, Fleurus was first and foremost an agricultural settlement and, compared to some other colonial villages, a rather cramped one that offered relatively small parcels of land. The first arrivals, generally coming from non-agricultural professions, were not always well equipped to cope, though before long fresh migrants from regions like Alsace or southeastern Spain brought new skills into the community. Population growth in the early decades remained painfully slow nonetheless, undercut by disease—including an outbreak of cholera that hit the first wave of settlers almost as soon as they had arrived—and by the temptations of Oran or a return ticket to France. As settlers experimented with crops that might allow their lands to deliver something more remunerative than cereal cultivation, significant gypsum deposits, identified in the early 1850s, offered an alternative source of income for village entrepreneurs and eventually attracted migrants from Andalusia who had experience with quarrying. As with so many other communities in the department of Oran, however, it was the rapid expansion of viticulture from the late 1870s—a consequence in part of metropolitan France's battle with phylloxera—that did the most to generate prosperity and solid population growth. Though Fleurus hardly stood out in terms of the size of its vineyards or the quality of the wine it produced, viticulture became the single most important contributor to the village economy right through to 1962. (Campos, who makes clear from the outset that what happened in Fleurus after independence “n'est pas de mon propos” (p. 5), provides no indication as to whether it remained important once the village was renamed Hassiane Ettoual.) The vineyards drew Spanish migrants to Fleurus and help explain why, by the 1890s, the majority of the village's population was of Spanish birth. With the economy largely fixed in place, the last few decades of the story of Fleurus are of most interest for their ability to illustrate political trends in western Algeria, the impact of the two world wars, and late-colonial demographics and land use.

The French colonial scholars Emmanuel Blanchard and Sylvie Thénault have called for a more fully developed social history of colonial Algeria, with a particular focus on what they term the “monde du contact.”[4] Contact between the European population and the Algerians who, over time, began living around and eventually within Fleurus is not Campos's primary concern, but nor is that the only kind of “contact” that might be of interest to colonial historians. Outlined below are five themes on which *Fleurus en Oranie* might help social historians of colonial Algeria.

*Interethnic or intercommunal relations.* Campos is strongest on relations between the French “de souche” and those who migrated from Spain, on whom he provides a good deal of precise detail. His material on relations between Europeans and those he refers to as “indigènes” is much patchier but is occasionally intriguing, as in a chapter on religion that describes examples of interfaith contact. Some of his most evocative evidence, however, concerns the contact between villagers and the American troops based in Fleurus after November 1942.

*Disease and public health.* Accounts of outbreaks of cholera or the toll taken by malaria are common elements in narratives of early colonization, but a section on the traditional or alternative remedies supplied by Spanish women in the community is less familiar. This example also provides some insight into women's roles in the colonial village, a theme little emphasized in Campos's narrative yet present for those who wish to look.

*Water and its management.* As could be said of countless other communities in Algeria, many of the most difficult problems Fleurus faced related to water. To some degree, of course, this topic intersects with the preceding one, since water carried cholera and provided extensive breeding grounds for malaria-carrying mosquitos. As Algerians increasingly built homes around the original village after the Second World War, water supply became a pressing challenge for municipal authority. In this book, we

encounter Gabriel Lambert not so much as the notorious anti-Semite who became mayor of Oran in the 1930s, but rather in his less-remembered guise as a water diviner, theatrically seeking a new source for Fleurus with pendulum in hand.

*Housing and construction.* The construction industry in colonial Algeria is a topic rich in unexplored potential, and Fleurus, with its gypsum quarries that supplied materials used in the building of Oran's municipal theater in the early 1900s, is as good a place to look for examples as any. Though colonial urbanism and architecture are by now well-worn topics, settler housing and its place in the material culture of colonization is much less studied.

*Landownership and inheritance.* The transfer of land from one generation to the next represents an important if perhaps underappreciated factor in the evolution of colonial settlements. For a topic such as this, a small-scale study like the one discussed here is invaluable, not least in illustrating the gradual etiolation of colonial society as absenteeism became more common in French Algeria's final decades.

Campos refers to his book as a "micro-Histoire," but despite its village setting, *Fleurus en Oranie* is in no sense either a *Montaillou* or a *Village des "Cannibales."*<sup>[5]</sup> Nor does it generalize from the particular in the manner that made David Prochaska's study of colonial Bône (Annaba) so effective.<sup>[6]</sup> But as a coherently presented compendium of material, much of it difficult to find, this is the kind of book for which historians of colonial Algeria can be grateful.

#### NOTES

[1] Louis Abadie, *Aïn-Témouchent de ma jeunesse* (Nice: Éditions Jacques Gandini, 2004); Louis Abadie, *Sidi-bel-Abbès de ma jeunesse* (Nice: Éditions Jacques Gandini, 2006). Abadie covers several other towns in the same series.

[2] For one example, about a family in a village founded at the same time as Fleurus, see Roland Pringuey, *La saga des Vincent, tome 1: Saint-Cloud d'Algérie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001).

[3] Accessible at <http://www.fleurusalgerie.fr/Archive.html>.

[4] Emmanuel Blanchard and Sylvie Thénault, "Quel 'monde du contact'? Pour une histoire sociale de l'Algérie pendant la période coloniale," *Le mouvement social* 236 (2011): 3-7.

[5] Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); Alain Corbin, *Le village des "cannibales"* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1990).

[6] David Prochaska, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

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