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Claire Eldridge, *From empire to exile: History and memory within the pied-noir and harki communities, 1962-2012*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016. xiv + 337 pp. Bibliography and index. \$110.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-7190-8723-3.

Review by Darcie Fontaine, University of South Florida.

Anyone who has spent any time in France in the past few decades, or who follows current events and intellectual debates in the French public sphere, could not have helped but notice the seeming omnipresence of narratives that make connections between the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) and contemporary crises of French national identity and politics. These narratives have been especially prevalent in debates relating to immigration, the rise of the National Front, the relationship between religion (especially Islam) and *laïcité*, and, more recently, terrorism. As Claire Eldridge's book notes in its opening pages, the French-Algerian relationship was also front-and-center in debates around the 2005 law that sought to impose a mandate on French public education curricula to recognize the "positive" role of French colonization, particularly in North Africa. These political mobilizations of the past--and of the Algerian War, in particular--have been described as "memory wars," as they involve different groups competing for the right to use the past to justify their present actions or to obtain a political end. Until recently, the hyper-visibility of the history and memory of the Algerian War in the French public sphere since the 1990s has been depicted as a distinct shift from the period between 1962 and the 1990s, which has typically been described as "amnesiac" with regards to public memory and commemoration of the war in France.[1] However, historians are now beginning to give a more nuanced picture of how French society dealt with the legacy of the Algerian War in the decades following Algerian independence. Claire Eldridge's excellent study of two key repatriate communities that arrived in France in the wake of Algerian independence--the *pieds-noirs* and the *harkis*--and, specifically their role in cultivating and contesting the memory of the Algerian War from 1962 until the present, is a welcome intervention on the topic.[2]

Eldridge argues that the current memory wars are the "culmination of protracted processes of negotiation and contestation conducted, for a long time, beneath the radar of public attention by those with a personal investment in the empire and its legacies" (p. 4). In other words, she writes, the attempt to control the past, as epitomized by the debates over whether French imperialism was positive or negative and how it should be taught in schools, as well as over the postcolonial effects of empire are not new, but "merely the public culmination of long-running processes" (p. 4). While this is an important intervention into a variety of historiographies, including memory studies, migration history, and the history of postcolonial France, Eldridge's book is innovative on two different levels. The first is her choice to study these two repatriate communities together, in a comparative framework. While there are a number of excellent, and well-known studies of the *pieds-noirs* and of the *harkis* that treat them as individual communities, this is the first major work of scholarship in my awareness that examines them together.[3] This was a substantial undertaking, but Eldridge's elegantly developed argument illustrates just how intertwined these two communities became in France, particularly with regard to issues of memory and their parallel attempts to achieve state recognition for their perceived suffering.

This narrative is drawn out over the eight chapters, which span forty years, and it is this examination of the evolution of these communities' engagement in cultivating and contesting the public memory of the Algerian War in France over the entirety of this period that, in my mind, is its second impressive achievement.

In the introduction, Eldridge sets her argument into the context of the contemporary memory wars in France, but also the history of memory and memory studies more generally. She writes, "in line with the majority of theoretical scholarship, the memories traced and analysed here are understood as socially framed, present-orientated, relational and driven by specific agents" (p. 11). In essence, this book is as much about the role of memory in the identity formation of these two groups within French society as it is an analysis of their role in memory formation in post-1962 French society as a whole. And while Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de mémoire* is always lingering in the background, it is Michael Rothberg's framework of "multidirectional memory" that more directly shapes Eldridge's approach to the complexities of memory formation and its effects across time and space.[4] Although many scholars have dismissed the active memorializing work that the *pieds-noirs* have engaged with as "nothing more than expressions of unassuaged colonial nostalgia" (p. 14), commonly described as *nostalgérie*, Eldridge engages directly with this work, and particularly with the political and cultural meaning it creates for these communities. Her main body of sources comes from the wide range of associations that both *piéd-noir* and *harki* communities formed in France to facilitate their projects of memorialization and political engagement, as well as from the actors themselves, who have written numerous memoirs and sought to promote their cause in the public sphere in multiple forms.

The body of the book is divided into two sections. The first section, titled "The Era of 'Absence,' 1962-91," examines, in alternating chapters, how and why the *pieds-noirs* and the *harkis* became distinct repatriate communities in France in the aftermath of the Algerian War, and what role memory came to serve in their process of collective identity formation. Chapters one and three focus on the *pieds-noirs*, the term currently used to describe former European settlers of Algeria who left at independence for a variety of reasons, and subsequently were "repatriated" to France, a country that many had never even visited, much less one they saw as their country of origin. Nevertheless, under the complex laws of French colonial rule in Algeria, European settlers (including Jews in the northern departments since the Crémieux Decree of 1870) had French citizenship, and thus their "repatriation" to France meant that they were not immigrants, but rather full citizens. As Eldridge lays out quite nicely, however, their integration into French society did not go smoothly, in large part because their numbers completely overwhelmed the French state, which had expected many hundreds of thousands fewer settlers than those who actually arrived.

From the beginning of the repatriation process, many *pieds-noirs* developed a sense of victimization by the French state, in part based on what they perceived as the French state's responsibility for the violence directed at settlers at the end of the Algerian War (even if much of that responsibility belonged to the OAS), and in part due to the conditions of their repatriation. Eldridge argues that these grievances would enable the *pieds-noirs* to rally around a collective sense of victimization and begin to form associations to make claims against the state, demanding compensation for their losses in Algeria and their suffering. "With associations serving as a 'unifying link,'" she writes, "the disparate lives and recollections of individual settlers were thus amalgamated into a collective vision of the *piéd-noir* community and its past" (p. 104). This then enabled individual *pieds-noirs* to fit their own experiences into larger narratives and allowed the associations to craft and reinforce unified narratives of a singular settler experience.

By contrast, the *harkis*, whose resettlement in France is the focus of chapters two and four, faced a much more hostile and complicated situation upon their arrival. As with the *pieds-noirs*, the French government had not anticipated the arrival of the *harkis* or their families in France in the summer of 1962, assuming they would stay in Algeria. Although the *harkis* were technically still French citizens if

they wished to be, the *harkis* were not considered “repatriates” or “refugees” like the European settlers of Algeria, and their French citizenship was consistently questioned, despite their service to the French state as auxiliaries during the war. And as the French champions of their cause (notably their former French military commanders, and later *piéd-noir* associations) repeatedly pointed out, it was, in fact, their service to France that put them in mortal danger in Algeria. Yet their “otherness” trumped this service and, instead of being compensated and integrated into French society, they were housed in former internment camps such as Larzac and Rivesaltes, and later, forest hamlets, purposely isolated from mainstream French society.

During the early decades after their arrival, only a handful of *harkis*, such as the Bachaga Boualem, had any sort of public presence or were able to make claims on behalf of the community. Instead, others spoke for them, including French soldiers and *piéd-noir* associations. As Eldridge demonstrates in chapter four, it was not until the mid-1970s that the *harki* community began to mobilize from within, as the discontent within the community with their terrible living conditions, their social marginalization, and the discrimination they faced within French society led to widespread protests. This mobilization led to the creation of new *harki* associations, new relationships with *piéd-noirs*, and new and complex relationships between the French-born children of *harkis* and those of Algerian immigrants (*beurs*) who were organizing their own protests against discrimination at the same time. Beginning in the 1990s, it was the children of the *harkis*, Eldridge argues, who actively sought to reclaim the narrative of the *harkis* from the various other groups who had been speaking for the community up until this point.

The 1990s to the present is the focus of the second section of the book, “The ‘Return’ of the War of Independence, 1991-2012.” Chapters five through eight examine the ways in which *piéd-noir* and *harki* activism helped to shape the public re-engagement with the Algerian War that began in the 1990s in France and has continued to the present day, as well as the ways in which this activism evolved as a new generation of activists like the children of the *harkis* took the helm of the repatriate associations. The 1990s brought numerous challenges for older *piéd-noir* associations, including a much more visible public awareness of the history of the Algerian War within French society, which meant a more diverse array of voices shaping the narrative, and the emergence of more radical *piéd-noir* activism that led to divisions within the community. For *harkis*, by contrast, mobilization within the community during the 1990s brought their history into the spotlight of mainstream France for the first time, which led to official recognition from the state.

The final two chapters of the book examine the memory wars of the early 2000s and the ways in which both the *piéd-noir* and *harki* communities have engaged in active attempts to shape historical memory of French Algeria and of postcolonial France. As Eldridge notes in chapter eight, the battlefield has shifted significantly in the twenty-first century, as repatriate associations seek to control the narrative of their history in a contentious public sphere that has become significantly more open to a diverse array of voices and perspectives on the history of the Algerian War and its aftermath. Now it is to the media and the courtroom where associations go to seek legitimacy, although it is clear that the ultimate victory is still recognition from the state, which allows them to put up memorials or enshrines their version of history in public school curricula.

This book overall provides an illuminating glimpse into the genealogy of the contemporary French memory wars, but it also does much more. Moving beyond oversimplified narratives about *piéd-noirs* and their nostalgic obsession with the “paradise lost” of colonial Algeria or their natural affinities for the far-right politics of the National Front, Eldridge demonstrates how the associational culture of these repatriate communities came to shape their political engagements and their specific memorializing projects in post-1962 France. Similarly, with the *harkis*, by placing their story in dialogue with that of the *piéd-noirs* and other actors from the Algerian War, we see the ways in which they were both tools of these actors, who were then able to use these same structures to build their own political and associational culture. This is a fascinating story and one that has relevance for any historian of

contemporary France and Algeria, and one that I imagine will gain a much wider readership. For, as Eldridge notes in her introduction and conclusion, this massive postcolonial migration was not limited to France, and has important international and comparative resonances that are only now beginning to be explored. Eldridge's book provides an outstanding model to build on.

NOTES

[1] This is the predominant theme, for example, in Benjamin Stora's *La Gangrène et l'oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991). See also Mike Mason, "Batailles pour la mémoire," *Journal of African History* 35(1994): 305.

[2] *Pieds-noirs* is the term used to describe European settlers of Algeria, the vast majority of whom departed Algeria at its independence in 1962. *Harkis* (plural of the Arabic word *harka*) were Algerian auxiliaries who were employed on short-term contracts to assist the French both militarily and in civilian capacities. At the peak of the Algerian War, there were over 210,000 *harkis*, and at the end of the war, many thousands were killed in waves of violence (academic estimates range from 10,000-75,000) that may have sought to punish them as "traitors." The French army and individual officers attempted to transport tens of thousands of *harkis* and their families to France.

[3] Some of the influential studies of the *pied-noir* community include Andrea Smith, *Colonial memory and postcolonial Europe: Maltese settlers in Algeria and France* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Michèle Baussant, *Pieds-noirs: Mémoires d'exils* (Paris, Stock, 2002); Valérie Esclangon-Morin, *Les Rapatriés d'Afrique du Nord de 1956 à nos jours* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007); Yann Scioldo-Zürcher, *Devenir métropolitain: politique d'intégration et parcours de rapatriés d'Algérie en métropole* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'ÉHESS, 2011). Those of the *harkis* include Vincent Crapanzano, *The Harkis: The Wound that Never Heals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Giulia Fabbiano, *Héritier 1962: Harkis et immigrés algériens à l'épreuve des appartenances nationales* (Paris: Presses universitaires de Paris ouest, 2016); Stéphanie Abrial, *Les Enfants de harkis: de la révolte à l'intégration* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002); Jeannette E. Miller, "A Camp for Foreigners and 'Aliens': The Harkis' Exile at the Rivesaltes Camp (1962- 1964)," *French Politics, Culture and Society* 31(2013): 21-44.

[4] Cited in Eldridge's bibliography as Pierre Nora, ed. *Realms of Memory*, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996-98), and Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

Darcie Fontaine
University of South Florida
dfontaine@usf.edu

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