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**James D. Le Sueur**, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001. ix + 342 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$46.50 US (cl.). ISBN 0-8122-3588-6.

Review by Jonathan Judaken, University of Memphis.

James D. Le Sueur's *Uncivil War* is an important contribution not only because it broadens our understanding of the perception and reception of the French-Algerian War, but also because it provides a historical perspective to contemporary debates about identity politics, postcolonialism, cultural and ethnic differences, and the universalism of modern European liberal and democratic politics. *Uncivil War* maps out the array of intellectual responses to the evolving Franco-Algerian conflict. It examines the widespread divisions across the intellectual spectrum from Albert Camus to Franz Fanon without neglecting lesser-known figures such as the Algerian intellectuals Mouloud Feraoun and Jean Amrouche and situates their disagreements within the key moments in the debate about the war from 1954-1962. Le Sueur, who recently moved to the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, has already published introductions to Mouloud Feraoun's newly translated *Journal, 1955-1962* and to the new edition of Ben Abro's *Assassination! July 14*, a satirical account of the machinations of the *Organisation Armée Secrète*.

Le Sueur's first book demonstrates extensive research into previously untapped sources, such as recently declassified material in public archives as well as the private papers of many of the intellectuals that he discusses. The work is textured by personal interviews as well as broad reading in the requisite primary and secondary sources. A poignant and flattering brief "Foreword" by Pierre Bourdieu correctly suggests that the merit of Le Sueur's work is his effort to revive some of the failed attempts by intellectuals who posited alternatives to the violent paths taken by both sides during the French-Algerian war.

*Uncivil War* comprises two parts, divided into seven chapters, with an introduction and conclusion that discuss the intertwined notions of Franco-Muslim reconciliation, intellectual legitimacy, and the turns in French politics and conceptions of Otherness as they unfolded through the war. Le Sueur's contribution is not a history of the war or even of intellectuals' stances on decolonization, but to narrate the progressive eclipse of the possibility for "reconciliation" between France and Algeria, which constitutes the leitmotif of the book. Through a nuanced presentation of the shifts in the debate, he shows that there was widespread ambivalence over Algerian independence even within the anticolonialist movement in the early years of the war. He reveals the force of the ideal of reconciliation on liberals and leftists and documents the Algerian nationalist critique of reconciliation, which was intimately tied to representations of Algeria, Algerians, and the Algerian nationalist intellectuals' own reception in France. He shows that Franco-Muslim reconciliation reached a point of rupture as early as

1957 with the advent of the Battle of Algiers and was a shattered hope by 1960. The role of violence and the debates about its legitimacy among French intellectuals was the central element in this slow process.

Always careful to situate the debate about Algeria within its specific contextual parameters, each chapter presents a crucial moment in the controversy. In a book that grows stronger as it progresses, Le Sueur opens by tracing the evolving notion of “reconciliation,” which he argues “grew out of French colonial history, was a theoretical cousin of the mid-nineteenth and twentieth century debates over ‘assimilation’ and ‘association’, and fed directly into the twentieth-century debates and the French government’s policy of ‘integration’” (p. 17). The great theorist of integration was the last governor of Algeria, Jacques Soustelle, respected French professor at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, ethnologist of pre-Columbian societies, former résistant, and Free French minister. Situating integration within the long history of the French occupation of Algeria, Le Sueur shows that it “essentially . . . translated into a ‘separate but equal’ doctrine for the Algerian ‘province’ and all those in it. The French national budget would finance the administration in Algeria, linguistic and cultural differences would be respected, and all Algerians would be considered the provincial neighbors (if not brothers) of the metropolitan French” (p. 24).

Le Sueur next focuses on the responses by the Comité d’Action des Intellectuels contre la Poursuite de la Guerre en Afrique du Nord to Soustelle’s policy of integration. He highlights the progressive tensions within the Comité d’Action from its formation in November 1955 to its dissolution a year later in its effort to fight against the colonial regime independently from political parties. He argues that “by the end of 1956 the struggle against colonialism had changed completely” (p. 50). The Suez canal crisis and especially the Soviet invasion of Hungary dealt crippling blows to the Comité d’Action’s effort to forge a unified intellectual anticolonialist movement. Jean-Marie Domenach, the editor of *L’Esprit* succinctly encapsulated this paralysis when he said that the Soviet tanks in Budapest presented inescapable problems “of logic, of coherence, and of morality” (p. 52) because they forced communists and fellow-travellers to reconcile their positions on Soviet imperialism and French anticolonialism.

In light of the escalating violence inside Algeria, Le Sueur discusses one of the key initiatives launched by the French government to facilitate reconciliation, the Service des Centres Sociaux, which was an education reform effort that sought to combat Algeria’s poverty and foster “a viable Franco-Muslim community” (p. 56). While detailing the origins, structure, evolution and goals of the Centres Sociaux, which sought to remain apolitical, he shows that after January 1957 when General Jacques Massu was given full police power to destroy the terrorist networks in Algeria beginning the Battle of Algiers, institutions such as the Centres Sociaux were constantly caught in the crossfire of wartime politics. This chapter is indicative of the strengths of Le Sueur’s study since he links the faith of a liberal intellectual like the sociologist Germaine Tillion to the institutions that were supposed to affect the possibility of reconciliation. At the same time, he highlights why Algerian moderates such as Mouloud Feraoun were committed to these institutions, which ultimately resulted in his assassination, even as he and others were critical of the French colonial regime and its ideology.

Le Sueur takes a full chapter to discuss the controversial position taken by  *pied noir*  Albert Camus, who consistently advocated justice for North Africans without supporting national independence. He details Camus’s position from his early journalistic pieces in Algeria in the twenties that advocated “political

and social change for disinherited Algerians” (p. 90) through his multiple interventions into the discussion before the fall of October 1957, when Camus took a position of principled silence that expressed his criticism of the violence of the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN). Camus decided to wait in silence for a more democratic and popular form of organization that would replace the FLN or for the French government or the *pieds noirs* to eliminate the injustices of colonialism. While his position was critiqued from all sides until his untimely death in 1960, the chapter concludes by showing that Camus posthumously has been broadly praised as a result of the violence that followed decolonization and that continues today. *Le Sueur* ends with an engaging question: “Sartre tried to atone for his political miscalculations with his famous phrase that he was wrong, but he was right to be wrong, [and] one has to ask a similar question of Camus. Was he right and was he wrong to be right?” (p. 127). Indicative of a shortcoming of the work, *Le Sueur* does not himself take on this question, which is really at the heart of the controversy about intellectual responses to the Algerian war and its legacy. *Le Sueur* details how, in contrast to Camus, other liberal intellectuals in 1957, such as Raymond Aron, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber (editor of *L'Express*) and Germain Tillion began loudly and publicly to retreat from Empire and from the politics of reconciliation, especially as revelations of torture escalated. Repeated scandals concerning the use of violence on both sides in the Franco-Algerian war began to alter the alliances between Algerian nationalists and French intellectuals: “The first French reactions against torture in 1957, the Melouza massacre, the Audin, Alleg, *Gangrene*, *Pour Djamila Bouhired*, and *Djamila Boupacha* scandals, as well as the Jeanson trial and subsequent Manifesto of the 121 all helped define the new relations and positions within the French left” (p. 211). In what is perhaps his most provocative chapter, he maintains that the politicization of the concept of the Other emerged from the death knell of Franco-Algerian reconciliation and concludes that “using sophisticated theories of *différence* (ethnic, religious, and linguistic) to justify violence had become (and still is today) the hallmark of an ongoing, uncivil war” (p. 255).

While *Le Sueur* writes with the ease and clarity of a more seasoned scholar, his claims often remain buried in the presentation of the multiple positions within the intellectual field he reconstructs. The work clearly evinces his erudition, but he rarely pauses to analyze or evaluate critically an individual position, preferring to indicate how other intellectuals responded to a particular article or book rather than connecting intellectuals’ positions to the larger points the book seeks to historicize. The work, while carefully organized to reveal and contextualize the spectrum of different positions within the intellectual field, therefore sometimes reads like a summation of the major and minor texts written by intellectuals during the period of Algerian decolonization. For example, he might have drawn out more explicitly how and why his history, which is “intended to encourage today’s researchers to pause before using the concept ‘Other’ and think through its political, social, and epistemological repercussions” (p. 216), should serve as an important historical antecedent for contemporary postcolonial debates. A summation of his conclusions about where different intellectuals were positioned within the ideological map that he outlines in the book would also have proven a real contribution.

Moreover, in light of the historiography on the role of the intellectual in France, some of the key arguments that *do* emerge in *Uncivil War* require a more forceful defense than they receive. Since they are of real significance they deserve to be debated. One central claim is that 1954-1962 marked the most significant moment for a rethinking of the fundamental links between French enlightenment values institutionalized by the Revolution and universalism. While the French-Algerian war was certainly a watershed in reevaluating the exclusions of particularity created by universalist assertions, this

rethinking was already significantly underway in the immediate aftermath of World War II and specifically as a response to the Shoah, something that in fact is abundantly evident in the quotations provided by Le Sueur himself. The constant comparisons to the Second World War during the French-Algerian war explored by Martin Evans in *The Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War (1954-1962)*, among other works, would have nuanced this extremely important thread in Le Sueur's discussion.

Furthermore, Le Sueur claims that the Algerian war marked a shift in French intellectual life in terms of the links between intellectual identity, violence, and alterity that led to a major refashioning of intellectual legitimacy. While he agrees with Francois Furet and Tony Judt that "many intellectuals fell far short of the expectations (and illusions) created by and for them in the postwar epoch" (p. 3), he insists against Judt that the French-Algerian war was a major turning point for French and Algerian intellectuals. While there can be no argument that this was the case for Algerian intellectuals, Le Sueur is not totally persuasive in his claim regarding French intellectual identity. The polemics concerning the sanctioning of violence in the name of revolutionary ideals that Judt and Furet focus on in *Past Imperfect* and *The Passing of an Illusion* certainly mitigate against his claims, as do the debates concerning fascism in the thirties.

The history of the intellectual's self-identification and self-legitimation going back to the Dreyfus affair likewise augur against Le Sueur's position that the French-Algerian war marks a break with respect to notions of intellectual identity and how it is structured in relation to "Others." Venita Datta, David Carroll, myself, and others have shown that crucial to defining the role of intellectuals in France since the Dreyfus affair was their interventions on behalf of the downtrodden, oppressed, and marginalized Other, specifically 'the Jew' as other. The merit of Le Sueur is to show that in the fifties and early sixties, it was the 'Oriental' and Third World other that progressively became the subject of history for whom French intellectuals spoke in the name of values such as truth, justice and liberty. Le Sueur's own argument, however, that intellectuals "played off the overlapping symbolism of the Dreyfus affair as a means of endowing the anticolonialist movement with symbolic capital" (p. 3) weakens his claim that intellectual legitimacy was fundamentally refashioned by the French-Algerian war. The broader question is then precisely what he means by "intellectual legitimacy," an important term in his argument that he never adequately defines.

Despite Le Sueur's tendency to catalog rather than analyze and his failure to forcefully stake out his views, defend them, and indicate why they are important, *Uncivil War* makes a significant contribution to intellectual history and to understanding the cultural debates on decolonization in France. He has uncovered multiple alternative paths to violence articulated during the war itself, he shows the links between intellectual positions and the institutional affiliations that made them viable proposals during the conflict, and he carefully traces the shifts in the dispute in light of changes in the political environment. Perhaps most importantly, Le Sueur suggests why it is important to revisit these debates at precisely the moment when French historiography is taking its own postcolonial turn and when politics and life in Algeria have turned more violent than ever.

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