

Reporting on 1962: the evolution of *pied-noir* identity across fifty years of print media.

Abstract

This article offers a longitudinal review of print media representations of the European population in Algeria, from the final months of the Algerian war to commemorative coverage of the fiftieth anniversary in 2012. It traces the evolution of the *métropole's* relatively hostile view of the *Français d'Algérie* as a 'foreign' people to the depiction of an integrated group whose voice has become incorporated within official memory. With reference to the anniversary coverage of 2012, it argues that while the *pied-noir* lobby was partially successful in persuading the media to adopt aspects of their historical narrative, the socio-political context of the 'guerres de mémoires' produced challenges to that narrative, with the relativisation of the *pied-noir* experience as one aspect of a broader memorial mosaic of the war.

Keywords: Algerian war; *pied-noir*; exodus; media; commemoration

In the interplay of memorial discourses of the nation, the modern media function as a powerful mnemonic agent, their technological reach cutting across the segmenting factors which structured the relatively stable categories of Halbwach's (1925) theory of collective memory. Neither an 'invisible hand' nor a social mirror, the media, as Andreas Huyssen (2000, 30) reminds us, 'do not transport public memory innocently'. Rather, they shape and order the narratives of the past according to their operational and commercial interests, which may conflict with the collective memories of particular cultural sub-groups. One such site of conflict is the Algerian war. After the decades of silence which followed the war, the *pied-noir* community has emerged as the self-proclaimed guardian of the memories of French Algeria, its identity defined by its own account of the Algerian war, and the bounds of its relationship with the French state delineated by its vociferous lobbying.¹ This article uses reports by the metropolitan media to consider the *pied-noir* community through a longitudinal lens, from the press reports of the final months of the war to the commemorative coverage of the fiftieth anniversary in 2012.² What emerges are a series of snapshots of the European population in Algeria as represented by the media to their metropolitan readership. By setting these images in their historical context, we are able to trace the evolution of the *pied-noir* community within wider French society, from a heterogeneous population barely considered as French to a community whose voice has been incorporated within the nation's collective memory, and whose concerns are central to memories of the period. The findings shed light on the changing nature of France's relationship with its colonial past, and offer an insight into the development of what it means to be French in the latter half of the twentieth century, and at the dawn of the twenty-first.

The fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Algerian war was marked by a range of media coverage. While some titles followed the lead of the Algerian authorities and focused on the new state, for most it was an occasion to take a retrospective look over the period of French Algeria, and in particular the events which drew it to a close in 1962. Central to the reconsideration of the colonial era, and to media representations of the commemorations, was the repatriated European population which, in 1962, found itself caught painfully at the nexus of the tensions resulting from the nation's abandonment of the imperial project. Suddenly cast as an unwelcome physical reminder

of the French presence in Algeria, and met with hostility in the 'terre d'accueil' which was also their *mère-patrie*, the *pieds-noirs* have largely succeeded in forging a place for themselves within French society. Through their economic success, their much-discussed political sympathies, and their activism, the *pieds-noirs* have contributed to the shaping of contemporary society, expanding metropolitan conceptions of Frenchness to encompass a dimension of the histories and experiences of North Africa.

This assertion begs the question of *pied-noir* identity, as it was conceived both by the European population in Algeria and by their metropolitan compatriots. While the *pieds-noirs* are often treated as an homogeneous group, this approach overlooks their disparate origins and the varying degrees of their affiliation to France. In addition to the prisoners, revolutionaries, and Communards of popular myth, metropolitan France provided migrants from Alsace, Corsica and *départements* across the Midi (Ageron 1993, 105). Colonial officials, concerned to bolster the French presence, pushed for naturalisation, firstly of the native Jewish population in 1870, and then of the Spanish, Italian and Maltese settlers in 1889. Known pejoratively as the 'néo-Français', the latter frequently maintained strong linguistic and cultural ties to their country of origin.³ While, pre-war, the evolution of the political landscape of Algeria followed the same trajectory as that in mainland France (Comtat 2002, 77–80), economically the Europeans were less well off than their mainland compatriots, a situation not widely recognised in the *métropole* (*Le Meridional*, August 12, 1962). Ambivalence towards France was strengthened by the emergence of a nascent 'Algérianité', symbolised by the works of Louis Bertrand. Placing the young society within a Latin genealogy extending back to Antiquity and focusing on the archetypes of soldier, farmer and engineer as pioneers, the movement viewed Algeria as a melting-pot in which the diverse mix of European origins (although emphatically not the Arabo-Berber majority) would be fused into a new and dynamic people (Dunwoodie 1998, 114; 122). The emphasis was placed on Algeria's youth, energy and drive, contrasting it with the moribund metropolitan society.

The dilute nature of the Frenchness of colonial Algeria, of concern to officials on both shores of the Mediterranean, was a refrain in newspaper reports of the time. If, in 1920, Jean Méliá could claim that 'Non, l'Algérie n'est pas une colonie; c'est la France elle-même' (*L'Echo d'Alger*, Jan 9, 1920), in 1929 he expressed concern that Algeria was made up largely of a population whose Frenchness was legally ill-defined (Méliá 1929, 26). Moreover, colonial Algeria's attachment to France was far from constant. Jonathan Gosnell (2002, 89–99) argues persuasively that the attitudes of the settler population altered in response to geo-political events, from the apogee of the 1930 centenary to a period of protest following the election of the Popular Front, which was soon replaced by a wave of solidarity and patriotism in response to the national crisis of 1940. Gosnell argues that colonial newspapers played an important role in both translating and influencing the fluctuating Franco-Algerian relationship, allowing Algeria to share in national events such as celebrations and sporting fixtures, whilst emphasising the colony's distinctiveness. His findings emphasise the diversity of the settlers in Algeria, whose disparate origins, political affiliations and socio-economic status set against a constantly evolving political backdrop all contributed to a complex and shifting relationship with mainland France.

If the European population perceived itself as distinct from the metropolitan France, the view was equally firmly held by those on the opposing shore of the Mediterranean. While the beginning of the Algerian war united the settlers in two groups – those in support of French Algeria,

and those, much smaller in number, who supported the FLN rebellion – which remained consistent throughout the war, metropolitan attitudes were subject to a pronounced evolution. Thus while Pierre Mendès-France and Mitterrand could state to the National Assembly in 1954: ‘L’Algérie, c’est la France’ (12 Nov 1954), the metropolitan attitude towards the conflict, into which hundreds of thousands of young *appelés* were being sucked, quickly hardened. Albert Camus (1955), himself a journalist, famously implicated the press in the fabrication of inaccurate but seductive stereotypes responsible for enlarging the gulf between *métropole* and colony: ‘A lire une certaine presse, il semblerait vraiment que l’Algérie soit peuplée d’un million de colons à cravache et à cigare, montés sur Cadillac.’ The process of identifying the scapegoats blamed by the other side continued in press reports throughout the war. As the eventual outcome of the war became clear in 1961, journalists saw the anger of the European population directed blindly against the *métropole*. ‘Ils sont sans doute désespérés mais leur désespoir prend un tour hostile: une nouvelle bête noire est apparue qu’ils chargent de tous les maux. Ce n’est plus le musulman, ce n’est plus bien sûr le militaire, c’est le métropolitain.’ (*Midi-Libre*, April 28, 1961). Writing on the evolution of the relationship between France and Algeria, Jean-Jacques Jordi concludes, ‘Du début des “événements” de la Toussaint 1954 aux accords d’Evian, l’opinion métropolitaine est passée d’un soutien inconditionnel aux Français d’Algérie à un rejet quasi systématique de cette population d’outre-mer’ (Jordi 1995, 37).

By March 1962, the outcome of the war was beyond doubt, yet the violence against civilians in Algeria was reaching new heights. This period was to prove critical in establishing the foundations of post-war narratives of the *pieds-noirs*. While the Paris-based press reported daily on the violence and kidnappings in Algeria, as negotiations for peace advanced an increasing emphasis was laid on detailed accounts of the guarantees being offered to the European population around nationality, property and personal security, and political representation. These reassurances were published in tandem with details of the benefits (‘prestations’) to which *rapatriés* would be entitled. Against a backdrop of metropolitan anxiety about OAS attacks and anti-*colon* Communist publicity, the reports encouraged the view that the colonial settlers were being offered the best of both worlds, largely at the *métropole*’s expense. Moreover, the reports underscored the sense that, despite their French citizenship, the settlers were distinct from the *métropole*. Writing in *Le Monde*, the celebrated journalist Eugène Mannoni draws on the ‘Algerianism’ of Bertrand to elide the many differences among the Europeans, and claim that the action of the Algerian melting-pot is complete: ‘Un homme nouveau est apparu, qui n’est ni métropolitain, ni Italien, ni Espagnol, mais “Français d’Algérie”’. Presenting his readers with a potted history of multinational migration and settlement in Algeria, Mannoni argues that this new people represent a profound otherness, a difference as much physical as it is behavioural, speaking of ‘des compatriots qui seraient aussi des étrangers [...] finiront par acquérir une physionomie particulière’. In addition, the North African has ‘son caractère politique. Il se fait Européen face à l’Arabe, Algérien face au métropolitain’ (*Le Monde*, April 25, 1962). Reports of this nature served to emphasise the gulf which separated the metropolitan French from their compatriots in Algeria.

Despite the many column inches generated by their predicament, the settlers themselves were rarely given a voice, and even less frequently, a name. The effect was one of depersonalisation, which worked against generating sympathy for a people who, by their history and by their wartime experience, saw themselves as different and separate from the mainland. In one of the brief reports which questioned settlers in Algeria in the months preceding independence, an Oranais, identified only as ‘le maître de maison’, expresses his anxiety: ‘Nous avons toujours été à la limite de la

citoyenneté française, mais nous étions Français quand même. Nous allons passer de ce stade à celui d'otages.' (*Le Monde*, April 3, 1962). Seen through the prism of the metropolitan press, the *Français d'Algérie* constituted a homogenous mass, distinct from the *Français de France* but without any of the personal details which would encourage empathy for the human tragedy unfolding. A notable exception to this was the famous cover image of *Paris Match* from 2 June 1962. Featuring a young nuclear settler family on the deck of a ship departing Algeria, the father holding his young, blonde child while his wife stems her tears in a handkerchief, the image was supported by the reverberating headline: 'La France nous aime-t-elle toujours?'. Here, what Welch and McGonagle (2013, 129) have called the 'iconography of exodus' conveyed the human cost of the end of French Algeria in a way that the written press failed to do.

By May the exodus of Europeans was well underway. The papers continued to carry reports of the wide range of measures put in place to receive *rapatriés*: the cost of accommodating a *rapatrié* during the first year was put at 12,000 NF, with the total for 1962–65 estimated at 7.2 billion NF (*Le Monde*, May 8, 1962), although this greatly underestimated the numbers of *rapatriés*. Opinion polls recorded a rise in resentment amongst the metropolitan population (Verdès-Leroux 2001, 21), whilst the press reported complaints by *rapatriés* who, having left possessions and livelihoods behind, felt that not enough was being done to help them. In Marseilles, numerous papers reported verbal abuse and worse towards disembarking *rapatriés*. Such attitudes sat uncomfortably alongside the *rapatrié* discourse of 'la valise ou le cercueil'. The exodus continued: June saw the highest monthly figures for repatriation, reported in *Le Monde* as 225,000 (July 5, 1962), although Jordi (1995) cites INSEE figures which put the total much higher, at 328,434. In the face of such numbers, the tone changed subtly: reports of the difficulties of accommodating the *rapatriés* segued into discussions of the 'problem' of the *rapatriés* themselves.

The local papers in the Bouches-du-Rhône such as the Communist *La Marseillaise* and the anti-colonial *Le Provençal* took their cue from the Communist Mayor Gaston Defferre, whose published comments 'Qu'ils quittent Marseille en vitesse, qu'ils essaient de se réadapter ailleurs et tout ira pour le mieux' (*Paris-Press*, July 26, 1962) were less influential than the attributed phrase 'Il faut jeter les pieds-noirs à la mer!'. A notable exception was right-wing *Le Meridional* which, as the numbers arriving in Marseilles grew, mounted a campaign on behalf of the *rapatriés*, arguing for a more co-ordinated welcome in the long-term interests of both the *rapatriés* and the region as a whole. The newspaper opened a 'service de réfugiés' which helped individuals to find work and housing and, whilst acknowledging the challenges faced, brought the shortcomings of government measures to public attention. But its call for compassion from the majority population was a lone voice, and its post-independence reports on the continued kidnappings of Europeans in Algeria lacked relevance for the residents of Marseilles for whom there were already more than enough *pieds-noirs*.

At a national level, the press constructed a narrative around the problems caused by the *rapatriés*. *Le Monde* which, in the months following the ceasefire, had maintained a sober tone on the political developments in Algeria, in keeping with its objective of becoming an internationally-respected title, in the summer of 1962 began to focus on the adverse economic and social effects of repatriation, with headlines such as 'Sur 100 000 rapatriés fixés dans la région marseillaise 200 seulement ont trouvé un emploi' (July 9, 1962), and 'La plupart des agresseurs arrêtés en métropole avaient agi pour l'O.A.S. en Algérie' (August 22, 1962). The latter article reported the statement from

the Garde des Sceaux that of those arrested for 'banditisme', 80% were *Français d'Algérie* who had acted for the OAS. On the other side, the *rapatriés* quickly grew bitter at the continual stop-and-searches performed on cars matriculated with Algerian number-plates, as police tried to clamp down on the activities of OAS members. The conflation of settlers and OAS, a theme which had been established in popular discourse in the last months of the war (Shepard 2006, 193), was taken up enthusiastically by both the national and regional press which throughout the summer months published reports on the increase in 'crimes racistes et fascistes' (*La Marseillaise*, July 27, 1962) since the arrival of the *rapatriés*.

The picture which emerges from the press reports of the first half of 1962 represents the European settlers as a unified group, disregarding their heterogeneous origins, political sympathies and varying degrees of affiliation to France. While their right to return to France was unquestioned, journalists borrowed elements of the *Algérianists'* own discourse in order to depict the settlers as the foreign element of French citizenry: they are dynamic and strong, and their vitality may enable them to regenerate the French economy in the areas in which they settle (*Le Monde*, May 8, 1962), but they are irreducibly *other*, a new people forged by the heat of the Algerian sun. Furthermore, as Shepard (2006, 183–86) has argued, in March 1962 the FLN ceased to be the enemy, and the ongoing hostilities became a civil, 'Franco-French' war in which the *pieds-noirs* were suspected of being on the opposing side. Consequently, the *rapatriés* found themselves met for the most part with hostility, where resentment at the putative preferential treatment earmarked for them (but which did not include compensation for their losses) was combined with accusations that they were to blame for a crime wave sweeping the Midi. The extent of the challenge facing both them and the Republic was recognised by *Le Meridional*:

Si l'on veut véritablement, comme on le proclame verbalement, sortir les rapatriés de la misère et du désespoir qui sont actuellement leur lot, si l'on veut efficacement les aider à s'intégrer dans la vie nationale et en faire des Français à part entière, si l'on veut vraiment éviter des troubles sociaux qui sans cela ne manqueraient pas de se produire, il faut de toute urgence voir la situation en face, dans sa cruelle réalité [...] Le but ne sera atteint que le jour où les rapatriés qui sont, qu'on le veuille ou non, des 'déracinés', sentiront qu'ils sont compris et adoptés par leurs compatriotes et d'abord par l'Etat (May 13, 1962).

Viewing these lines in 1962, the readership of *Le Meridional* might have been forgiven for thinking that it was a tall order. Yet if 1962 marked the end of French Algeria, it also marked the start of something new: the birth of the *pied-noir* community.

'Ce n'est pas 1830 qui crée le pied-noir, mais 1962. Le rapatriement massif et tragique de l'été devient l'élément fondateur de la communauté en exil' (Jordi 1995, 114).

As the discussion above makes clear, in colonial Algeria the European population lacked a common history: its origins were diverse and, other than the experience of fighting for France in the World Wars, it could look back on few shared experiences. An unanticipated consequence of the exodus was the creation of a community united around a shared memory of injustice and exile. However, as

this revolution simply brought the *rapatriés* into line with the existing beliefs about them held by the metropolitan French, it passed largely unnoticed. What brought the newly formed *pied-noir* community to the attention of the wider public was its consistent and effective demand for compensation. Spearheaded by individuals such as Col Pierre Battesti, associations such as the ANFANOMA lobbied vigorously and successfully for the *pied-noir* cause throughout the 1960s and 1970s.⁴ Unlike other newly-arrived groups, the *pieds-noirs* were familiar with the channels and institutions of the French state and prepared to engage with them in their quest for material redress; for their part, French politicians were not slow to recognise the political influence of this new constituency, which today is estimated at an electorate of some 3.2m (Cevipof, in *Le Monde*, April 15, 2012). This, coupled with the determination of the *pieds-noirs* to improve through their own efforts the dire financial situation in which the exodus had left them, and the swiftness with which the Algerian war was expunged from the nation's recollection, facilitated their integration within metropolitan society, to the point that, as William Kidd (2010, 21) argues, *pied-noir* memory has assumed 'le statut d'une memoire officielle'.

There is a certain irony in the fact that 1962 functions as a pivot in metropolitan understandings of the European population in Algeria. At the very moment at which they have lost everything, their homeland, possessions, their very sense of self, they begin the (admittedly gradual) move from difference – Mannoni's 'un homme nouveau' – to assimilation as 'Français à part entière'. As a result of the silence which fell over the subject of the war in Algeria, the resulting apathy of many in France, and their own efforts towards economic integration, the distinctiveness of the *rapatriés* was diminished. Paradoxically, while at an individual level they began to assimilate into the cultural mix of wider society, simultaneously a tiny but vocal minority set about constructing a narrative which would define their distinct collective identity. With their immediate demands for material aid established, if not entirely met, the primary challenge for *pied-noir* activists was achieving a symbolic place for their community within wider society. Accordingly, their efforts were directed towards obtaining an official recognition of their history, and in particular, acknowledgement of what they saw as a betrayal by the Gaullist authorities. Addressed to the French state, the narrative was necessarily selective and simplified; as Joëlle Hureau (1987, 81) notes, 'cette mémoire, écorchée vive, qui se construit et qui "s'impose" gagne en stabilité ce qu'elle perd en réalité.' The exodus can therefore be construed as a community-constitutive myth which shapes the establishment of relations between the community and wider society. Analysis of print coverage of the *pieds-noir* community post-1962 must therefore recognise not only the media's own agenda, but the extent to which titles respond to and incorporate the narrative of *pied-noir* campaigners, as part of what Patrick Charaudeau (2005, 82) calls 'le processus d'événementialisation'.

The extent of the *pieds-noirs'* success, and the rehabilitation of the community as part of French society, can be tracked through the media coverage of the key anniversaries of 1962. As Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz (1991, 379) note with regard to American commemorations of Vietnam, official remembrance poses a particular problem when it concerns a conflict which, rather than unifying the nation, produces trauma and division. In such circumstances, a range of competing narratives are produced which reflect the various stake-holder interests. Peri (1999) argues that the media treatment of the commemoration represents one, particularly influential, reading of these narratives which may be based on their professional requirements (such as desire for circulation or viewing figures) rather than other considerations. In their efforts to construct a sense of perceived

historical authority, the media frequently employ archival images (photographs or documentary film) which lend a veneer of authenticity to the coverage and the narratives being constructed. More relevant than vistas of colonial-era buildings in a land no longer French or orientalist images of Muslim workers were the *petits colons*, who consequently became the focus of French remembrance.

Studies of the history of the Algerian war in France commonly refer to the silence which surrounded it, and which only began to dissipate in the late 1990s with the Papon trial of 1997–98, and the official acknowledgement of the war by the Jospin government in 1999. In the absence of ongoing discussion of the war and, indeed, French Algeria more generally, the *pied-noir* lobby served as the main reminder of France's colonial presence in North Africa.⁵ Consequently, the *pieds-noirs* and the exodus came to assume a central role in coverage of key anniversary dates. Welch and McGonagle (2013, 45–7) survey the symbolic anniversaries between 1987 and 2002, and note the frequency with which images of *pied-noir* departure serve as the focal point for print commemoration of the war as a whole. The effect of foregrounding images of anxious families waiting uncertainly on the quayside, or gazing longingly at the disappearing Algerian coastline is to depoliticise memories of the event, transforming it from the post-script to the long and bitter struggle for independence, and rewriting the war as a universal human tragedy in which the *pied-noir* community takes centre stage. No longer positioned as 'une nouvelle race', the *pieds-noirs* are shown leaving one home, to return to another which they did not yet know. Right-leaning titles such as *Paris Match* were particularly faithful in their coverage, which consistently featured the experiences of the European population. Indeed, Welch and McGonagle (2013, 46) note that in both 1992 and 2012 the magazine reprinted the famous 1962 photo of the young family discussed above, a reprising which acknowledges the potency of the image and the narrative which it supports. In addition, in 2002 it published a two-part retrospective on French Algeria, part one of which celebrated what it referred to as 'La grande aventure des Français d'Algérie'. For Welch and McGonagle (2013, 46), the colonial project is presented as 'an essentially diverting or ludic spectacle' in which 'the historical, material and political consequences of European settlement ha[ve] been gently neutralised or washed away by the passage of time'. A two-page spread depicts a group of settlers standing before an American combine harvester. The caption, which reads: 'inventifs et ingénieux, les paysans du desert font jaillir l'or vert', reaffirms the founding myth of the settlers who, by their sweat and blood, and through their superior technology, succeeded in transforming the arid desert into fertile land. The emphasis on the modernity and industrialisation of the settler population binds them to the developments taking place in the *métropole*. But if the *petits colons* are here presented as heroic figures who have overcome adversity, the second part of the retrospective shows them transformed into the tragic victims of forces beyond their control, as it returns to the familiar images of the exodus.

The commemorative coverage of 2012 might have been expected to follow the same template, but for a change in the socio-political context which, as Maurice Halbwachs (1925) has shown, structures our collective memories. According to Pierre Nora (1992, 975–1012), in the mid-1970s France entered what he called 'l'ère de commémoration', the beginning of a fascination with the past which grew throughout the decades which followed, to reach a climax during the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy.⁶ As the Algerian war moved from what Anne Donadey (1996, 215–32), following Rousso, has referred to as a period of denial and repression to a new phase of analysis and revisiting, it became part of a wide-ranging series of controversies over France's relationship with its

past, with postcolonial theorists such as Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel and Françoise Vergès arguing for the recovery of voices absent from the historical narrative and ranged against writers, including Daniel Lefeuvre, Pascal Bruckner and Max Gallo, who condemned against any move towards a 'repentance' for past actions committed by the French state. The result was a cacophony of voices competing for recognition. In the general *mêlée*, *pied-noir* associations and lobby groups were given broad support by the political (far) right in their campaign for a positive historical view of colonialism. The degree of support and success was evidenced by the law of 23 February 2005, 'portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés', which included an article (ultimately withdrawn) which stipulated that 'les programmes scolaires reconnaissent en particulier le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord'.⁷

Notwithstanding the vocal protests from historians and human rights groups which greeted this article, and which ultimately led to its withdrawal, the years which followed 2005 arguably marked a high-water point for the *pieds-noirs*. While their attempts to have state recognition of their positive contribution to Algeria defined in law and education ultimately foundered, their campaign for national pride in the achievements of France's colonial past received support from President Sarkozy himself, who entered the debate denouncing the tendency towards 'repentance' as 'une mode exécration'.⁸ Against this backdrop, *pied-noir* campaigners might reasonably have expected to make further gains in national recognition of their loss as France remembered fifty years since the end of French Algeria. Yet the situation was to be more complex. Analysis of the commemorative coverage of 2012 provides some indication of the changing narrative of remembrance.

For both France's media and its politicians, 2012 posed a challenge: what exactly was being commemorated, fifty years on? From the French perspective, 1962 represented defeat, loss and the end of the state's pretensions to an empire, even if de Gaulle's rhetoric went a long way to presenting the situation as the start of a new era. For this reason it is perhaps unsurprising that there was no official state commemoration of the ceasefire (Cailletet 2012, 20).⁹ Indeed, such was the extent of the silence surrounding 'les événements' in Algeria that many media outlets, recognising that for many readers aged under fifty it was an unfamiliar period of history, centred their coverage around an historical overview of the century or so of colonial presence in Algeria. The multiple television documentaries and press special issues, many produced in collaboration with recognised historical authorities such as Benjamin Stora and drawing on archival footage, offered putatively authentic traces of the past and so lent credibility to the media as mnemonic agent, but they also met the media's requirements in terms of what Tuchman (1973) called 'prescheduled, continuing news', and public entertainment. For the press, the constraints of space produced certain issues: just as in Mannoni's article from 1962 which delivered a brief history of settlement in Algeria before presenting the settlers as a homogenous new people, the effect of trying to summarise the colonial project was inevitably one of simplification.¹⁰

The media's treatment of history had the effect of creating what Huyssen (2000, 27) has called a constructed 'imagined memory' in an audience which had little previous knowledge of the events. Acknowledging that all memory is imagined, Huyssen invokes the term in order to distinguish between memories deriving from lived experience and memories which are, as he says, 'pillaged from the archive and mass-marketed for fast consumption'. This description accords with the footage of ships laden with Europeans leaving Algeria definitively which again featured heavily in

2012. While the high proportion of women, young children and the elderly presents the *rapatriés* as hapless victims of tragic forces outwith their control, simultaneously the enduring image of the returning *pieds-noirs* is set within, and as the concluding chapter to, the pioneer chronotope, the founding myth of French Algeria which, in an echo of the *Mayflower*, saw ships set sail in 1848 bearing the courageous men and women who would build the new colony. The uncertainty of the pioneer experience is replicated in the anxious faces of the *rapatriés* who are inscribed within a narrative tradition which demands fortitude and resilience, qualities which continued to be associated with the *pieds-noirs*.

The reprising of archival material provided both newspapers and *pieds-noirs* with a suitable historical backdrop against which to set more detailed accounts of war-time experience. In contrast to the anonymous accounts of 1962, in 2012 personal testimony was placed centre-stage as individual *pieds-noirs* were invited to recount their experiences or those of their family. Almost invariably these witness accounts presented the *pieds-noirs* as victims of a catastrophe which continues to haunt them, a position reinforced by the use of their words either as headlines – ‘Pour nous, le cicatrice ne s’est jamais renfermée’ (*Le Figaro*, January 27, 2012) – or as photograph captions – ‘On a été un peuple sacrifié’ and ‘Je continue à rêver presque chaque nuit d’Alger’ (*Le Monde*, March 19, 2012). *Le Monde*, in particular, in its headlines chose to emphasise the *pieds-noirs*’ continued dislocation: ‘Pieds-noirs: portraits d’exilés’ and ‘Le dernier exil des pieds-noirs’ (March 19, 2012, and July 5, 2012, respectively). Individual memories therefore served a dual purpose: they were useful to newspaper editors in that they served to humanise a period of history unknown to many readers, whilst simultaneously allowing the *piéd-noir* lobby a platform for their narrative of the past.

Many of the testimonies made reference to two separate incidents which have assumed totemic significance within the *piéd-noir* community but which are relatively unknown to wider society: the massacre on 26 March 1962 in Algiers, in which 46 *Français d’Algérie* were shot dead and 150 wounded on the rue d’Isly by French forces, and the better known massacre of Europeans in Oran on 5 July 1962, in which somewhere between 500 and 1000 civilians were either kidnapped or killed. Without doubt these events, and the wave of ‘disappearances’ and kidnappings which took place between and following these dates, were some of the most traumatic of the war for the European population. In addition to the witness accounts, the main press titles carried additional articles, particularly about the Oran massacre. Overlooked amidst the violence of 1962 (Mercier 2003, 48), neither event attracted substantial press coverage at the time, and their heightened profile in 2012 was evidence of the centrality of *piéd-noir* experience to the official commemoration of the war.¹¹ The opportunity to recount ‘the truth’ about these events offered a number of advantages to the *pieds-noirs*. Firstly, it enabled them to tell of the suffering endured by their community, thus reinforcing the argument that they had no choice but to leave Algeria (an assumption called into question in 2012 by certain articles in the press, as we shall see). Secondly, and as importantly, it offered an opportunity to shape the narrative of the end of the war by promoting 26 March and 5 July as the dates deserving of commemoration, in preference to 19 March, the effective date of the ceasefire, and 3 July, the date of independence. Unlike Algeria, France had no reason to commemorate independence officially but the situation concerning 19 March has been more controversial. Long been marked by the army as the day on which official hostilities ceased, in 2012 moves to install it as the official day of remembrance of the war caused widespread controversy.¹² The choice of this date has long provoked heated protests from *piéd-noir*

associations, who see it as an affront to the thousands of civilians who ‘disappeared’ or were killed in the months following the ceasefire, and their position was duly reflected in media reports throughout 2012.

But if the *piéd-noir* lobby succeeded in its aim of shaping the ‘official’ narrative of commemoration, beyond the carefully selected testimonies other, less choreographed pieces appeared in the press which reflected the machinations of politicians and lobbyists in a presidential election year. The efforts of the presidential candidates to appeal to the *piéd-noir* vote generated headlines such as ‘Nicolas Sarkozy veut renouer avec les piéd-noirs’ (*Le Monde*, March 9, 2012) and ‘Le FN accuse Sarkozy de “manipulation” sur les harkis et rapatriés d’Algérie’ (*Le Monde*, March 9, 2012) whilst the politicking of the ‘nostalgériques’ – that ‘frange extrémiste d’une communauté, présumée homogène’ (*Le Monde*, September 14, 2012) – was laid bare in the furore which surrounded the exhibition celebrating the centenary of the birth of Albert Camus, planned for Aix-en-Provence in November 2013. Although not directly linked with the commemorations of 1962, such headlines effectively bifurcated the *piéd-noir* narrative: victimhood was spliced with political manoeuvring.

Furthermore, despite the *piéd-noirs*’ successes, there were also indications that that the ‘guerre de mémoires’ had overtaken them. Huyssen (2000, 28) raises the question of whether, in the contest of fragmented identity politics, forms of collective consensual memory are still possible today, a view which appeared to be borne out by the press coverage. Perhaps conscious of the charge of oversimplification, perhaps in reaction to the violence of the debate between ‘postcolonialistes’ and ‘anti-repentants’, the more serious press titles strove throughout 2012 to give a voice to all sides in the conflict. Of particular note, and reflecting the growing number of conscript memoirs appearing in recent years, were the accounts of those who had fought in Algeria, reproduced in press articles such as ‘La mémoire refoulée des appelés d’Algérie’ (*Le Monde*, March 15, 2012). Most striking was the slick web dossier compiled by *Le Monde* in association with the Algerian daily *El Watan*, a reminder of Peri’s assertion (1999, 107) that when there is a struggle between mnemonic communities over the commemoration process, the media play a critical and highly influential role. With individual testimonies from representatives from nine of the various groups involved in the war – *piéd-noir*, OAS, *appelé*, *combattante du FLN*, *Fédération de France du FLN*, *combatant du FLN*, *armée des frontières*, *habitant d’un camp de regroupement* – the aim was clearly to create, not a cacophony of competing interests, but a comprehensive memorial mosaic which would contribute towards an holistic view of the war. In practice, writing in *Le Monde*, Benjamin Stora highlighted the danger of an agonistic approach to the past: ‘Le risque existe d’une apparition de mémoire communautarisée, où chacun regarde l’histoire de l’Algérie à travers son vécu, son appartenance familiale’ (*Le Monde*, March 18, 2012). The effect was to reduce the *piéd-noir* experience, often presented by their associations as ‘la vérité’ on the war, to one account among many, a relativisation by any standards. And while the contemporary reporting style accorded the interviewees far greater space in which to share their story than had the wartime reports, those *piéd-noirs* who looked closely might also have been disappointed to notice a reductive element: Pierre Massia, whose testimony spoke for the *piéd-noirs* in *Le Monde*’s online dossier, was also their main representative in further articles which appeared on 15 and 19 March (both also included the same testimonies from a *piéd-noir* father and son), and again on 4 July 2012. If the aim had been breadth of coverage, it appeared to have been achieved at the expense of depth.

More damaging to the hard-line *pied-noir* narrative was the ubiquitous presence in 2012 of former *Libération* journalist Pierre Daum. Openly critical of the *pied-noirs* in articles such as 'Etudes biaisées, mémoire selective' (*Le Monde diplomatique*, January 2012), his book *Ni Valise ni Cercueil* appeared in 2012 to challenge the community's founding myth. Arguing that around 200,000 Europeans and Jews remained in Algeria after 1962, Daum took aim at the twin pillars of *pied-noir* orthodoxy: all *pieds-noirs* left in 1962; and they were faced with no choice.¹³ Despite trenchant criticism from the historian Guy Pervillé (2012), the book's claims were taken up by a number of press titles which went on to conduct their own features on individuals who had remained in Algeria (*Le Figaro*, March 16, 2012; *La Dépêche*, March 10, 2012). The widespread publicity surrounding the book's publication, which included articles by and interviews with Daum, and the subsequent media reports cast doubt on the narrative which portrayed the *pieds-noirs* as helpless victims, and created the suspicion, never far from the Left, that their departure was motivated in part by a racist refusal to live under the authority of an Arab-led administration.

The column inches devoted to illustrating Daum's claims highlighted the extent to which the print media was content in 2012 to follow the news agenda set by others, satisfied with producing commemorative coverage which could be pre-planned, and reacting to political and literary events as they developed. The comparison with the zenith of investigative journalism was made explicit as *Le Monde* looked back on its role at the turn of the millennium, in 'Comment "Le Monde" a relancé le débat sur la torture en Algérie' (*Le Monde*, March 17, 2012). For the *pieds-noirs*, too, the media coverage of 2012 was a mixed blessing. Despite the challenges to their self-assumed position as arbiters of the memory of the Algerian war from both the 'guerre de mémoires' and Daum's book, a comparison of 2012 with 1962 reveals the extent to which they have become fully incorporated into the French nation. In contrast to the metropolitan's 1962 view of them as 'other', any sense of *pied-noir* distinctiveness is now generated from within their community, as their activist members continue their pursuit of recognition and justice. The corollary of their successful integration has been the insertion of a dimension of the histories of North Africa into the contemporary life of the nation, and a concomitant broadening of the category of 'Frenchness'. Throughout this process, the media have served as a powerful mnemonic agent, whose active mediation of the narratives of the past will continue to shape public perceptions of this and other periods of history.

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¹ This article follows convention in referring to the European population in Algeria as *Français d'Algérie* during the period leading up to 1962, and as *pieds-noirs* following independence in 1962.

² Is it arguable that over the period visual media, and television in particular, has assumed a greater influence in shaping representations of the *pieds-noirs*. However, due to censorship and in the interests of 'national cohesion', television initially reflected the Gaullist position in a way that the print press did not. The trajectory of televisual representations of the Algerian war therefore developed quite separately to that of print media; analysis of it lies beyond the scope of the present article. For more details, see Fleury-Vilatte (2000).

³ The largest European population was of Spanish origin; its centre was Oran, where a number of Spanish-language newspapers were distributed daily (Gosnell 2002, 169).

⁴ Note that although the final indemnification law was passed in 1987, as recently as 2014 legal action for compensation was being launched by individual *pieds-noirs* (*Le Figaro*, Feb 19, 2014).

⁵ It may be argued that the growing population of Algerian immigrant origin, which began to assert itself during the 1980s, also functioned as an embodied reminder, but its ethnic difference and the fact that many of the younger generation had been born in France as French citizens meant that its presence resonated with the realities of the postcolonial present, rather than France's imperial past.

⁶ For a discussion of the so-called 'memory wars' see Blanchard and Veyrat-Masson, 2008.

⁷ The full text is accessible at <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000444898&dateTexte=&categorieLien=i> d (accessed 3 March 2014).

⁸ Nicolas Sarkozy, speech at Caen, 9 March 2007. Available at <http://sites.univ-provence.fr/veronis/Discours2007/transcript.php?n=Sarkozy&p=2007-03-09> (accessed 3 March 2014).

⁹ The Algerian government also declined to commemorate the ceasefire, preferring to mark instead the birth of their new state on the anniversary of independence itself (Cailletet 2012, 20).

¹⁰ The special issue of *Géohistoire* (no.2, avril-mai 2012, 21 March 2012) included a chronology whose subtitle – 'Algérie française: un pays, deux histoires. De 1830 à 1962, les événements vus côté français et algérien' – revealed the difficulty in communicating the complexities of an extended period which comprised not two opposing viewpoints, but a spectrum of experiences.

¹¹ It should be noted that in both cases the French authorities, in the delegated form of the army, were accused of playing a central role, leading to ongoing calls from the *pieds-noirs* for acknowledgement of the state's guilt and so contributing to a narrative which positioned the *rapatriés* as victims of both the FLN and the French authorities. Absent from both the *pied-noir* narrative and the press coverage of 2012 is the context in which the events occurred, which implicates the OAS in the guilt which the *pieds-noirs* reserve solely for the French authorities. With regard to the Isly massacre, on 23 March and in response to OAS attacks French

forces had thrown a cordon around Bab-el-Oued which remained in place over the days which followed. It was in protest against this siege that the OAS called a civilian demonstration which, when it encountered the road-block, led to the shootings. Similarly, in the days leading up to independence in July, the OAS had been particularly active in indiscriminate attacks around Oran, creating a climate of fear amongst the Muslim population. When shots were fired the assumption was that the OAS was responsible, and a riot ensued.

¹² The date had long been rejected by successive governments because it marked not the end of a war, but of 'opérations de maintien de l'ordre'. It officially became the national day of remembrance of the dead of the Algerian war in November 2012, after months of controversy widely reported in the press. The vote in the Assemblée nationale was opposed by the centre and right wing parties which, following the *pieds-noirs'* argument, saw it as a divisive measure.

¹³ Daum acknowledges that many of those who initially stayed chose to leave in the years which followed 1962, disappointed by the new government and its policy of Arabisation.