

Thwarting the Other:

A critical approach to the French historiography of Colonial Algeria



"Algeria is France," François Mitterrand, former President of France, quoted in *L'écho d'Alger*, November 12th 1954

Rosalie Calvet

Undergraduate Senior Thesis

Department of History

Columbia University

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Seminar Advisor: Professor Elisheva Carlebach

Faculty Advisor: Professor Rashid Khalidi

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Introduction

L'Algérie c'est la France - "Algeria is France".

— François Mitterrand¹

If some events cannot be accepted even as they occur, how can they be assessed later?

— Michel-Rolph Trouillot²

In 1830, the French soldiers of King Charles X invaded the coastal town of Algiers, following an argument between the Ottoman ruler of the city and the French consul. The French army took over seventy years to trace the borders of what we know today as Algeria, the biggest country in Africa, the Arab World and the Mediterranean basin, stretching from the sea to the confines of the Sahara over 900,000 mi² (see Figure 1). After seizing the littoral territories controlled by the Sublime Porte, French troops moved inland and quelled local resistance while expanding their control towards the South. Whereas French history soberly remembers a "decrease" among the local populations during the conquest, foreign scholars refer to methods reaching "genocidal proportions [...] leading to the death of at least 500,000 people."³

As early as the beginning of the colonization, French and European settlers started moving to Algeria, constituting a population later called the *pied-noirs*.⁴ In 1848 Algeria was divided into three French departments and the local natives became "subjects" of the French state, deprived of their political rights, by contrast with the *pied-noirs*. Algeria was to remain French for one hundred and thirty-two years, to share each episode of its history, from the Napoleonic Empire to the two World Wars. As historian Marc Ferro argues: "elsewhere, there had been invasions, occupations of countries that have lasted ten, twenty maybe thirty years. Yet, this level of occupation, with massive land dispossession and settlements is quite singular."⁵ Algeria was not only *part of* France, *Algeria was* France.⁶

¹ Allocution de Monsieur Mitterrand - Ina.fr," *INA - Jalons*, accessed December 6, 2016

² Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past : Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1995), 73.

³ Asafa Jalata, *Phases of Terrorism in the Age of Globalization* (Springer Verlag, 2016), 92–93.

⁴ In French *pied-noirs* means "black foot." This expression comes from Europeans wearing black-sole shoes. Europeans settlers mainly came from France, Italy, Spain and Malta.

⁵ Marc Ferro, "La Colonisation Française : Une Histoire Inaudible," *La Découverte, Cahiers Libres* 129 (2005).

⁶ Formula first used during the 100th "anniversary" of French Algeria in 1930. During the War of decolonization, future French Prime minister re-used it in an interview to the newspaper *L'Echo d'Alger*: "l'Algérie c'est la France."

In Algeria, French troops encountered much more complex populations than suggested by the colonial labels "indigenous" or "Arabs."⁷ Modern Algeria belongs to the larger cultural unit of the Maghreb, the Western part of North Africa encompassing today Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, that features a history of its own since Antiquity (see map in Figure 2).⁸ Originally populated by the Berbers, North Africa was invaded by the Phoenicians around 800 BC, before being incorporated into the Roman Empire in 200 BC. Christianized during the first and the second centuries, North Africa became a thriving province of the Roman Empire and the cradle of European Christianity.⁹ The Arab Conquest of the VIIth century led to the blending of Berber and Arab culture, the conversion to Islam and the fall of the Christian Church. Between the eighth and the ninth century, a series of Muslim-Berbers dynasties ruled over the Maghreb, achieving its territorial and political unity. Most of the Maghreb, except for Morocco, passed under Ottoman domination in 1553 and remained part of the Empire until the 19th century. During this period, the three political entities composing modern North Africa emerged. While Tunisia and Morocco were to become protectorates of France, respectively in 1881 and 1912, Algeria was to be French for over a century.

Aiming to justify the process of colonization itself, French historiography "objectified, rationalized and eventually inscribed the colonization of Algeria within the narrative of French nation-building."¹⁰ By contrast with the British colonial model of *association*, which pragmatically preserved the pre-existing local power structures and did not interfere with the social organization of dominated territories, the French empire relied on the *assimilationist model*. French colonial administration taught the "subjects that, by adopting French language and culture, they could eventually become French."¹¹ This logic was pushed to the extreme in

⁷ Peter Dunwoodie, *Writing French Algeria* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), 303.

⁸ In this thesis we refer to the traditional meaning of the term Maghreb, however we must signal that in the 1950s emerged the notion of a greater Maghreb encompassing Lybia and Mauritania.

⁹ Augustine was from North Africa. See: Lucien Oulabbib, *Les Berbères et Le Christianisme*, Editions Berberes, 2004, 5.

¹⁰ Nicolas Blancel, "L'histoire Difficile," 2005, La Découverte, Cahiers Libres, n.d., 87.

¹¹ "Assimilation (French Colonialism)," *Wikipedia*, January 29, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Assimilation_\(French_colonialism\)&oldid=762486714](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Assimilation_(French_colonialism)&oldid=762486714).

Algeria, which was annexed to mainland France in 1848. The territory was divided into three departments directly controlled by the Minister of Domestic Affairs. Once “educated,” Algerians were to become proper citizens of the Republic.¹² In the meantime, they were to abide by their status of “subjects” of the Empire as defined by the Code of Indigenous Status, although the Senatus-Consulte of July 1865 ruled that those Algerians choosing to “renounce to their status of Muslims” were eligible to receive political rights.¹³

Instead of cementing the union between France and Algeria, the concept of citizenship became progressively appealing to Algerians as a subversive tool to challenge French power. Political rights evolved from a criterion Algerians appeared to lack and against which they were compared, to become the framework within which they could establish their claims. Algerian nationalism solidified at the turn of the 20th century. Originally a reformist movement led by a small group of elites demanding the opportunity to prove that they could be Muslims and proper French citizens, the movement became more radical after World War I, as France promised a greater autonomy to its colonies as a response to the enrolment of 173,000 Algerian soldiers in the French army. Led by Messali Hadj, influenced both by Lenin's Third International and growing pan-Arab nationalism in the Middle East, the movement was institutionalized by the creation of the Star of North Africa in 1926. Directed at the masses, the Star of North Africa demanded independence. Within this context, Messali Hadj refused the 1936 government proposal to extend French citizenship with full political equality to certain classes of the Muslims, considering this plan as a new “instrument of colonialism [...] to split the Algerian people by separating the elite from the masses.”¹⁴ World War II was to interrupt the negotiations between Algerian leaders and the French government.

As in World War I, Algerians first rallied to the French government and were enrolled in the army in large numbers during the Second World War. History textbooks and public

¹² Jules Ferry, “Discours Sur La Colonisation,” July 1885.

¹³ “Indigénat,” *Wikipedia*, January 5, 2017, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Indig%C3%A9nat&oldid=758373443>.

¹⁴ Messali Hadj, *Les Mémoires de Messali Hadj, 1898-1938* (Paris: JC Lattès, c1982), 28.

ceremonies often understate the major role of North African troops in the liberation of mainland France itself. Most of the “French” troops who landed in Provence in 1944 were Algerian, Moroccan and Senegalese.¹⁵ After Nazi Germany's quick defeat of France and the subsequent establishment of the collaborationist Vichy regime, Charles de Gaulle made Algeria and the colonies the core of the Resistance. The Allies invaded the French territories in North Africa in November 1942 (see Figure 3 for a map of this operation), from where they organized the liberation of Southern Europe. The local governments hitherto aligned with the Vichy regime reacted differently to the operation. In Morocco, the Vichy troops surrendered after three days of fighting while in Tunisia the soldiers of the Axis powers were not defeated until May 1943. In Algeria, French Resistance helped the Allies to overthrow Vichy officials, and soon Algiers became the centre of De Gaulle's Free France.¹⁶

On the 3rd of June 1944, as the liberation of mainland France had become certain, Charles de Gaulle established the Provisional Government of the French Republic, the interim government of Free France, with Algiers as its capital. Reflecting on World War II in his *Memoirs*, De Gaulle claimed: "the Republic never died, it survived within Free France [...] in Algiers."¹⁷ This narrative, named the *resistancialist myth* by historian Henry Rousso, nullified the legitimacy of the Vichy regime and thus negated the collaboration with Nazi Germany: France had resisted the enemy within herself, namely, in Algeria. As analysed by Rousso in *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, a work published in 1987, post-World War II France was built on the negation of the collaboration and the crimes of the Vichy regime. However, the War of Algeria of Independence, which started in 1954, was to excavate the repressed memory of Vichy.

¹⁵ Éric Deroo and Antoine Champeaux, “Panorama des troupes coloniales françaises dans les deux guerres mondiales,” trans. Robert A. Doughty, *Revue historique des armées*, no. 271 (July 3, 2013): 72–88.

¹⁶ For more information on the role of Algeria in the resistance see Jacques Cantier, *L'Algérie Sous Le Régime de Vichy* (Paris: O. Jacob, c2002).

¹⁷ Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), xi.

In the aftermath of World War II, the Algerian nationalist movement was brutally quelled by the French political power. In May 1945, as a response to pro-independence demonstrations, the French Army murdered over 20,000 Algerians.¹⁸ Messali Hadj was imprisoned, and the nationalist political parties prohibited. Yet this brutal repression did not suppress pro-independence claims - on the contrary, they became more radical. In October 1954, five young Algerians created the National Front of Liberation (NFL), which became the leading nationalist organization, and was to rule Algeria after 1962. On November 1st, the NFL broadcasted a manifesto on the radio calling for the "immediate independence" of Algeria, thereby launching a war that was to last eight years, kill over half a million of people, overthrow the IVth Republic in France and eventually create an independent single-party country Algeria.¹⁹

The degree of violence during the War of Algeria was such that the French army was compared, as the conflict was happening, to the SS troops of Nazi Germany by dissenting journalists.²⁰ Tortures, rapes and massacres were the daily reality of the War, both in Algeria, where the NFL and the French army wrecked thousands of civilians, and in mainland France, where the French police massacred Algerian workers and pro-independent French demonstrators.²¹ Yet the War did not only oppose the NFL to the French army, it also divided both French and Algerians. On the Algerian side, two rival organizations claimed leadership of the nationalist movement: the NFL and the National Algerian Movement (MNA). Moreover, some Algerians chose to fight for the French army. These soldiers, called the harkis, were murdered in great numbers by the NFL and abandoned by France after independence.²² On the other side, the pied-noirs had been hostile to the government since the beginning of the War,

¹⁸ Yves BENOT and François MASPERO, *Massacres coloniaux* (La Découverte, 2013).

¹⁹ Secrétariat général du Front de libération nationale, *Appel au peuple algérien*, 1954.

²⁰ For a synthesis on the question see James D. Le Sueur, *Uncivil War : Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, c2005); and for a testimony of an activist during the War Germaine Tillion, *France and Algeria: Complementary Enemies* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1976).

²¹ Éditions Larousse, "Encyclopédie Larousse En Ligne - L'affaire Du Métro Charonne," accessed April 3, 2017, http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/laffaire_du_metro_Charonne/186074.

²² For more informations on the harkis, see Claude Lanzmann (dir.) (*Les Temps modernes*), *Harkis, 1962-2012 : Les Mythes et les Faits*, Paris, Gallimard, novembre-décembre 2011, 315 p.

judging it to be too compromising towards the NFL. In May 1958, a coalition of Generals attempted a putsch in Algiers, denouncing the abandonment of Algeria and calling for De Gaulle to become President. De Gaulle, who had retired from politics in 1946, accepted on condition that a new Constitution reinforcing the executive power be introduced and that he be vested with extraordinary powers for six months. The government of the IVth Republic yielded, and in September 1958, the Constitution of the Vth Republic was adopted by a popular referendum vote of 79%. However, as the conflict continued, independence seemed more and more inevitable, and De Gaulle started leaning towards such a solution. Betrayed by the one supposed to support them, the partisans of French Algeria replied by the creation of a terrorist group, the OAS, in French *l'Organisation de l'Armée Secrète*. This group, which continued to oppose the government after the independence, gave birth to the extreme-right political party *Le Front National*.

During the entire conflict, the War was never named as such: to acknowledge it would have been equivalent to admitting the dislocation of the Republic. Censorship prevented the publication of hundreds of books and dozens of movies testifying to the very details of the conflict. For contemporary observers, "Algeria [was] and must remain[ed] French; no more French Algeria, no more France."²³ As impossible as it might have seemed, the Independence yet put an end to the War. After signing a ceasefire with the NFL on the 18th of March 1962, the French government held an independence referendum in Algeria on the 1st of July, which was approved with 99.72%. One million pied-noirs were repatriated to France, which had just lost the last territory of its Empire, or more precisely, half of itself.

After the end of the conflict, the French State continued to deny the very occurrence of the War per se. In official texts, it was described instead via a variety of euphemisms, such as “les événements d’Algérie” or “the events of Algeria.” Such a denial had a particular impact on

²³Stora, *La Gangrène*, 17.

society, as in France the Minister of Education sets high school programmes and monitors the content of history textbook while the Minister of Scientific Research has the monopoly upon the funding of academic works. This implies that for over thirty years, the War was barely discussed within academia, media and political debates. Meanwhile, conflicting memories of the War survived through different groups of individuals: the former soldiers of the French army, the pied-noirs but also the harkis repatriated to France, and the Algerian diaspora in France.

In 1992 historian Benjamin Stora published *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*, a book about the erasure of the War of Algeria of Independence from French historiography. Through extensive archival research, Stora excavated the darkest hours of the War while pinpointing how since 1962 the State had used censorship to deny the very occurrence of the War. Stora further analysed the legacy of the War on French and Algerian politics and relations between the two countries. The most renowned French scholar of the history of Algeria, Stora has become the president of the Museum of Immigration in Paris and intervenes frequently in the public sphere to denounce the abuses of memory surrounding the War of Algeria.

After the 1990s, the government adopted a series of memorial laws and policies framing the remembrance of the War. The peculiar practice of the French State to pass laws defining an official version of history intensified during the 1990s. In 1999 the deputies of the French National Assembly voted to replace the "events of Algeria" by the "War of Algeria" in the legal documents of the French Republic, eventually naming the War as such, over 35 years after its beginning.²⁴ In 2005 a law boasting the "positive aspects of colonization" failed to be adopted at the Deputy Chamber, while in 2012 a law recognizing "the civilian and the military victims of the War of Algeria" was voted.²⁵ This brief overview of French legislations regarding the

²⁴ Éditions Larousse, "Encyclopédie Larousse En Ligne - L'affaire Du Métro Charonne," accessed April 3, 2017, http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/laffaire_du_metro_charonne/186074.

²⁵ "Loi portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés," *Wikipédia*, January 19, 2017,

memory of the War exhibits how the memory of this conflict remains a sensitive issue in contemporary France. At this very time, French candidates for the 2017 presidential elections are debating whether French colonization and the War in Algeria should be classified as crimes against humanity.²⁶

Not only does the memory of the War remain a conflicted one on the political level, but scholars themselves also seem hesitant to adopt one or another account of the conflict. Engaged in a radio discussion with Stora in May 2016, French journalist François d'Orcival argued:

We fail to come to an agreement on the memory of the War of Algeria as it remains vivid in the minds of those who experienced it in a way or another. This opposition within ourselves, the national body of the French community, is a kind of *mystery* of the end of colonization that we still have not fully processed.²⁷

Despite being the greatest specialist of the War, Stora agreed with François d'Orcival about the fact that there is still in France a "mystery" about the memory of independence of Algeria, which this thesis hopes to unfold.

“The War of Algeria gave birth to modern France:” it created its contemporary regime, the Fifth Republic, shaped its current political parties and dramatically impacted the demographic evolution of the country.²⁸ To investigate why such a fundamental episode of French history remains so controversial, and even ‘mysterious’ in the mouth of prominent scholars, this paper dissects the historical narratives of the War. Focusing on the work of Stora as a case illuminating the mainstream trends of French academia, this work offers a critical

https://fr.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Loi_portant_reconnaissance_de_la_Nation_et_contribution_nationale_en_faveur_des_Fran%C3%A7ais_rapatri%C3%A9s&oldid=133786812; “Loi du 6 décembre 2012 relative à la reconnaissance du 19 mars comme journée nationale du souvenir et de recueillement à la mémoire des victimes civiles et militaires de la guerre d’Algérie et des combats en Tunisie et au Maroc - Panorama des lois - Actualités - Vie-publique.fr,” text, (December 7, 2012), <http://www.vie-publique.fr/actualite/panorama/texte-vote/proposition-loi-relative-reconnaissance-du-19-mars-comme-journee-nationale-du-souvenir-recueillement-memoire-victimes-civiles-militaires-guerre-algerie-combats-tunisie-au-maroc.html>.

²⁶ “« Oui, la colonisation est un crime contre l’humanité »,” *Le Monde.fr*, February 17, 2017,

http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/02/17/oui-la-colonisation-est-un-crime-contre-l-humanite_5081481_3212.html.

²⁷ Finkelkraut Alain, Benjamin Stora, and François D’Orcival, “La Mémoire de La Guerre d’Algérie,” *Répliques* (Paris, May 2016), sec. 2:00.

²⁸ Ibid.

approach to how the events were narrated, rather than an account of the events themselves. Within this framework, secondary sources become primary ones, to distinguish what happened from that is said to have happened. In the perspective of historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot, whom defined historical production as comprised of fact creation, assembly and fact retrieval, or the making of narratives, this thesis dissects the roots of the silences in the narratives of the War of Algeria. Assuming with Trouillot that any “historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences,” the eventual aim of this work is to pinpoint what structures of power do silences manifest.²⁹ The first chapter highlights the limits of the conventional historiography of the War which relies on the notion of forgetting in collective memory. It argues in favour of an alternative approach to the conflict, defined as *thwarted history*, which requires historians to acknowledge the failure of historical narratives to name certain events. The second chapter analyses what remains unthought-of about the War and what made the independence Algerian *unthinkable*. The third chapter lays down some elements to construct an alternative, and eventually reconciliatory, approach to French Algerian history, by focusing on *who* is absent from historical narratives.

²⁹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past : Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1995) 69.

Chapter I

Collective memory is a French invention. You know this, right?³⁰

—Elisheva Carlebach

In France, collective memory is rooted in those internal crises one could consider civil Wars: Vichy, Algeria...³¹

—Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy*

Forgetting [...] remains the disturbing threat that lurks in the background of the phenomenology of memory and of the epistemology of history.³²

— Paul Ricœur

How does one write the history of the impossible?³³

— Michel-Rolph Trouillot

This chapter hopes to demonstrate the specificities of the writing of the War of Algeria in France while highlighting the impact of post-World War II French historiography upon it. Introducing the singular role of collective memory in French history (1), the following paragraphs provide an overview of the evolution of the French historiography of the War of Algeria (2) before discussing the limits of French scholars' methodology and to argue in favour of an alternative approach by introducing the concept of thwarted history (3).

1. Collective-memory instead of French History

In France, ever since the emergence of the State during the feudal period,³⁴ political institutions have continuously produced norms and symbols framing the collective memory of history in order to legitimize the narrative of French national unity.³⁵ Although such a practice

³⁰ Elisheva Carlebach, Senior Thesis Discussion, October 18, 2016.

³¹ Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Revised edition (Harvard University Press, 1994).

³² Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 285.

³³ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past : Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1995), 69.

³⁴ Usually dated by historians as beginning in the IXth century, for more information on this question see François Louis Ganshof, *Qu'est-ce que la féodalité ?*, Germaine Tillon, *France and Algeria: Complementary Enemies* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1976); James D. Le Sueur, *Uncivil War : Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, c2005), Tallandier, 1998, 296 p.

³⁵ Johann Michel, *Gouverner Les Mémoires : Les Politiques Mémoires En France* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2010), 20.

has often accompanied the development of nation-states in Western Europe and throughout the world,³⁶ political scientist Johann Michel underlines the singular historical trajectory of the French state, which for centuries has had a "monopoly" over collective memory. Indeed, through laws, architecture and celebrations, the State has implemented memorial policies regarding French history. According to Michel, this explains the long-lasting confusion in French historiography between the production of memory and the writing of history.³⁷ For decades, the State imposed cognitive frameworks limiting historians' ability to challenge the official public memory.³⁸

Published in 1925, *The Social Frameworks of Collective Memory* by French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs theorized the concept of collective memory. In Halbwachs's perspective, collective memory is not the sum of individual memories, but the framework through which "present generations become conscious of themselves by counter-posing their present to their own constructed past."³⁹ Because it is defined as the specific ways in which a given social group interprets its past, collective memory enables historical continuity. Social groups reconstruct their history when "imaginatively re-enacting" the past by participating in commemorative collective activities.⁴⁰ The nature of these commemorations is shaped by present-anchored concerns and reflects how the past is "stored and interpreted by social institutions."⁴¹

Concerning the evolution of 20th century French academic conversation on history and memory, the significance of Halbwachs' work is threefold. First, Halbwachs' identification of collective memory is not only an analytical breakthrough following the blueprint laid out by sociologists and historians such as Durkheim, Mark Bloch and Lucien Febvre on social

³⁶ Tilly, Ardant, and Social Science Research Council, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*.

³⁷ Michel, *Gouverner Les Mémoires*, 358.

³⁸ Michel, *Gouverner Les Mémoires*, 359.

³⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 28.

⁴⁰ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 53.

⁴¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 53.

psychology,⁴² but also the opening of an analytical space in French academia. In this regard, *The Frameworks of Collective Memory* was to remain the theoretical baseline of 20th century French scholars. Second, Halbwachs' work explains the importance in France of commemorating and performing history as well as how political institutions govern the remembrance of the past. Third, Halbwachs' work provided the French State with an analytical framework to govern the collective memory of national history.

Discussing the materiality of collective memory through objects such as commemorative plaques, Halbwachs paved the way for the theorization of memory-sites by historian Pierre Nora in *Les Lieux de Mémoires*, published between 1984 and 1992. Defining memory-sites as material, symbolic or functional objects that "have escaped forgetting by receiving a collective emotional investment,"⁴³ Pierre Nora's work was pivotal in shaping social sciences approach to national memory,⁴⁴ and quickly became an inescapable cultural reference in France.⁴⁵ The term *lieu de mémoire* entered the dictionary *Le Grand Robert de la langue française* in 1993, reflecting its increasing common use.⁴⁶ The French government further naturalized this concept. As of today, while the French Ministry of Education promotes "the discovery of memory-sites through the education institution,"⁴⁷ the website of the Bureau Direction of "Memory, patrimony and archives" features a "tourism of memory" page.⁴⁸

At first glance, it seems that the publication of *Les Lieux de Mémoires* through the 1980 and the 1990s constitutes the climax of a multi-secular process consubstantial to the development of the French State. After its emergence in the late Middle Ages, the State

⁴² On the relations between M. Bloch, L. Febvre and Halbwachs in initiating a multidisciplinary approach to psychology and history writing see the introduction of the 1992 edition of *On Collective Memory* quoted above.

⁴³ Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, eds., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 15.

⁴⁴ Nora's work inspired many dissertations and academic books on memory and national history, notably about **Algeria** (see Emmanuel Alcaraz, *les lieux de mémoire de la guerre d'indépendance algérienne*, Thèse, Paris, Université Paris XIII, 2012. Jury : O. Carlier, D. Fraboulet, A. Kadri, B. Stora, P. Vermeren), yet these works remained conducted by French scholars.

⁴⁵ "Lieu de mémoire," *Wikipédia*, November 13, 2016.

⁴⁶ "Lieu de mémoire," *Wikipédia*, November 13, 2016.

⁴⁷ "Mémoire et Histoire - Les Lieux de Mémoire - Éduscol," accessed November 16, 2016, <http://eduscol.education.fr/cid79649/les-lieux-de-memoire.html>.

⁴⁸ Please do not hesitate to visit: <http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/fr>

implemented a memorial regime of national unity framing collective memory through a physical and symbolical system of norms and of representations pinpointed by Nora. For decades, historian Henry Rousso argues, the French State used history to legitimize its power by building a sense of nationhood.⁴⁹ The strength of this narrative was such that even professional historians did not distinguish between History, "the scientific investigation of the past, and memory, the subjective remembrance of past experiences."⁵⁰ Yet after the publication of *Les Lieux de Mémoires*, scholars increasingly started to criticize this model.

2. Tracing the history of the history of the War of Independence

When Nora started publishing *Les Lieux de Mémoires* in 1982, critics accused him of celebrating France's past through arbitrary choices while ignoring those events challenging the official narrative of national unity as well as French colonial history. In 1987, when only the first two volumes of *Les Lieux de Mémoires* had been published, Rousso pointed to the absence of discussion about the "traumatic event of World War II, as well as numerous contemporary fractures" in Nora's work.⁵¹ The same year, Rousso published *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, the first book in French academia openly seeking to unfold the confusion between history and memory by analyzing the impact of Nazi Germany's occupation during World War II on French society. In a recent interview, Professor Rousso explained:

I started working on Vichy during the 1980s because I did not understand my present. I felt the need to deconstruct the dominant discourse undermining the responsibility of the French state in the Holocaust. I belonged to the post War generation, the narrative of national splendour had become ineffective. I was willing to re-assess the responsibilities of the French State. I wanted to re-write history to provide people with tools to understand their past.⁵²

⁴⁹ Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Revised edition (Harvard University Press, 1994), 11.

⁵⁰ Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 11.

⁵¹ Rousso Henry, "Nora Pierre (sous la direction de), Les lieux de mémoire, La nation," *Vingtième Siècle, revue d'histoire* 15, no. 1 (1987): 151–54.

⁵² Rousso, Sur Vichy et la Guerre d'Algérie. Personal interview, December 9th 2016.

In order to do so, Rousso argues that history should “start leaning towards knowledge and not legitimizing the power of the State.”⁵³ Historians must challenge the narrative of national unity by dissecting the evolution of memory in post-World War II France.⁵⁴ In other words, memory must become an object of historical analysis. The history of memory, Rousso claims, must not be based on Nora's consensual memory-sites, but on the "crises that threatened the unity and the identity of France."⁵⁵

Rousso's work was pivotal in weakening the hegemony of the national unity narrative. During the 1990s, the French state started to officially recognize its responsibilities in the Holocaust.⁵⁶ "It is within this context that the question of Algeria emerged," explains Rousso,⁵⁷

The case of Vichy triggered a very deep change in our society and people had become aware that what had been possible for the victims of Vichy could be possible for other events, including the War of Algeria. Stora is a friend, we talked a lot during this period [ie: the 1990s] about how the memory of Vichy and that of Algeria were connected. With *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*, he tried to enrich the very recent field of the history of memory by tackling one of the most significant crises of post-World War II France.⁵⁸

Published in 1992, five years after *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, *La Gangrène et l'Oubli* displayed the ambition to "understand the causes of the concealment of the War of Algeria of Independence on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea."⁵⁹ Stora's main argument is that the refusal of the French State to recognize the existence of the conflict, torture and massacres as they were happening triggered in the following decades the absence of public discussion about the War. This is the reason why the memory of the War survived at the individual level in the aftermath of the conflict, a phenomenon Stora names "the privatization of memory."⁶⁰ After the publication of *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*, the discussion about the War and its memory became

⁵³ Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Revised edition (Harvard University Press, 1994), 12.

⁵⁴ Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 11.

⁵⁵ Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 11.

⁵⁶ Michel, *Gouverner Les Mémoires*, 1004.

⁵⁷ Rousso, *Sur Vichy et la Guerre d'Algérie*.

⁵⁸ Rousso, *Sur Vichy et la Guerre d'Algérie*.

⁵⁹ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli*, ix.

⁶⁰ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli*, 246.

increasingly important in the public space in France and led eventually to the official recognition of the conflict. As recalled in the introduction, in 1999 the deputies of the French National Assembly voted to replace the "events of Algeria" by the "The War of Algeria" in the legal documents of the French Republic, thus finally naming the War as such.⁶¹ According to Stora, the "conflicting memories of the War of Algeria" seemed to slowly fade away.⁶² In 2004, Stora published in collaboration with Algerian Historian Mohammed Harbi *La Guerre d'Algérie: 1954-2004*, hoping to bring a final "end to the amnesia and the tensions surrounding the War."⁶³

Yet at the same time, during the early 2000s, the trend reversed. The War of Algeria became the object of an unprecedented memorial spree, discussed among historians, politicians, associations while increasingly appearing in literature and exhibitions, testifying to a growing "polemical obsession with the past."⁶⁴ The memory of the War became an issue the government's agenda. For over two decades, the election of a new president has been accompanied by the introduction of a memorial law somehow related to the War. As recalled in the introduction, in 2005 a law boasting the "positive aspects of colonization" failed to be adopted by the Chamber of Deputies, while in 2012 a law recognizing "the civilian and the military victims of the War of Algeria" was voted.⁶⁵ This cacophony of opinions, described as a "war on memories" by Stora, continues to this day despite his numerous publications and public interventions aiming to appease the conflicting memories at stake and suggests that they might be a methodological shortfall in his approach to the remembrance of the War.⁶⁶

⁶¹ "La «guerre d'Algérie» Reconnue à l'Assemblée. Les Députés Adoptent La Proposition de Loi Officialisant Cette Expression.," *Libération.fr*, June 11, 1999.

⁶² "Algérie-France, mémoires sous tension," *Le Monde.fr*, March 18, 2012,

⁶³ Mohammed Harbi Benjamin Stora, *La guerre d'Algérie 1954-2004, La fin de l'amnésie*, Edition Robert Laffont (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004), iv.

⁶⁴ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

⁶⁵ "Loi portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés," *Wikipédia*, November 5, 2016, "Loi du 6 décembre 2012 relative à la reconnaissance du 19 mars comme journée nationale du souvenir et de recueillement à la mémoire des victimes civiles et militaires de la guerre d'Algérie et des combats en Tunisie et au Maroc - Panorama des lois - Actualités - Vie-publique.fr," text, (December 7, 2012).

⁶⁶ "Algérie-France, mémoires sous tension," *Le Monde.fr*, March 18, 2012.

3. From Forgetting in Memory to Silences in History: Repressing the Unthinkable

Addressing the two "cornerstone events" of post-World War II France, Rousso and Stora sought to make sense of the conflicting memories surrounding them by unveiling what official public narratives had "forgotten."⁶⁷ Situating their work in a Freudian perspective, Rousso and Stora both define memory as "the structuring of forgetting."⁶⁸ They further make the claim that both the armed resistance to the Vichy Regime and the War of Algeria of Independence were civil wars that French historiography never named as such. The internal violence inherent to civil conflicts combined with the strength of official memory celebrating the unity of France accounts for the silence surrounding both events in their immediate aftermath. However, as Stora and Rousso write at the turn of the 1990s, they both record the "return of repressed memories."⁶⁹ To deal with and appease these memories, the two authors hope to pinpoint what has been forgotten while analyzing the evolution of collective memory in post-World War II France.

Defining forgetting as the "emblem of the vulnerability of the historical condition," French philosopher Paul Ricœur extensively analysed the relations between memory, history and forgetting in his eponymous work published in 2002. Describing this book as an attempt to shed light on the French early 2000s "obsession with the past," Ricœur's work aims at synthesizing and concluding the ongoing debate opened by Halbwachs, framed by Nora and enriched by Rousso and Stora on collective memory in French historiography.⁷⁰ The *modus operandi* of memory, defined as the ways of representation of the past, necessitates the forgetting of certain elements to retain others. This threatens the reliability of memory and eventually leads to memory abuses. Situating his work in the legacy of Halbwachs, Ricœur

⁶⁷ Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 11.

⁶⁸ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli*, 5; Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 11.

⁶⁹ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli*; Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*.

⁷⁰ Stora, *La Gangrène*, Introduction.

discusses abuses of memory at the collective level, for "individual manifestations of forgetting are inextricably mixed with its collective form."⁷¹ Because forgetting is the complement to memory, abuses of memory can be described in terms of forgetting. Ricoeur further identifies three kinds of memory abuses: commanded memory, or the imposition of what must be remembered and forgotten, manipulated memory, in which the remembrance and oblivion of the past are mediated through narratives, and blocked memory, when what is forgotten is "rendered unconscious by mechanisms of repression."⁷²

Despite pointing to the unperceived character of forgetting, Ricoeur does not explain what makes certain episodes repressed rather than others, ignoring in his entire analysis the answers brought to this question by historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot. Seven years before the publication of Ricoeur's *Memory, History and Forgetting*, Trouillot published *Silencing the Past*, in which he rephrased the question of forgetting in collective memory in terms of silence in historical production. Extensively discussing the erasure of the Haitian Revolution from French historiography, Trouillot showed that any historical narrative is as "a bundle of silences" from which what is **unthinkable** is suppressed.⁷³ Trouillot defines the unthinkable as "that which one cannot conceive within the range of possible alternatives, that which perverts all answers because it defies the terms under which the question was phrased."⁷⁴

The concept of the unthinkable exhibits how Ricoeur ignores the relation between commanded, manipulated and blocked memory. From Trouillot's perspective, commanded memory manifests the narratives of manipulated memory, structured itself by the mechanisms of repression behind blocked memory, namely the unthinkable. In other words, the unthinkable causes memory abuses because it limits what memory can retain. To be fair to Ricoeur, when he wrote *Memory, History and Forgetting* in 2002, Trouillot's work had not been translated into

⁷¹ Stora, *La Gangrène*, 443.

⁷² Stora, *La Gangrène*, 280.

⁷³ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 27.

⁷⁴ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 82.

French and still has not been to this day, ultimately testifying to the incapacity of French academia to acknowledge the unthinkable.⁷⁵ To do so, Trouillot urges going beyond the model of memory-history, which cannot fully unfold the silences in historical narratives. Roussio and Stora hope to renew French historiography by writing the history of collective memory, but fail to comprehend that "what matters is not to acknowledge that many different narratives are produced, but to succeed in giving a full account of the production of a narrative."⁷⁶

As recalled in the introduction, Trouillot identifies four moments when silence enters historical production: first during fact creation or the making of source, second during fact assembly which corresponds to the making of archives, third during fact retrieval which is the making of narratives and finally in "the moment of retrospective significance, the making of history in the final instance."⁷⁷ By the "making of history in the final instance," Trouillot refers to the solidification of a single narrative framework that dominates the remembrance of a given event. While Roussio and Stora unveil the first three silences, they do not eventually disclose those in the final instance. Not only do they fail at unfolding this ultimate silence, but they also prevent others from doing so. Because they claim to have pinpointed forgetting in the remembrance of Vichy and the War of Algeria, their work becomes in turn a narrative of the past silencing the unthinkable.

To properly unfold the silences at stake in French historiography it is necessary to define a new concept, which we shall name *thwarted history*. Thwarted history describes the failure of historical narratives to name the unthinkable and the subsequent perpetuation of silences. To un-thwart history requires acknowledging that forgetting in collective memory manifests silences in historical production. Historians must further recognize that they do not set alone the narratives framework into which their stories fit for "these frameworks are pre-

⁷⁵ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 73.

⁷⁶ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 13.

⁷⁷ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 22.

structured by cycles of silence."⁷⁸ This is the reason why they must come to terms with the transition from the model of history as collective memory to that of history as a narrative structured by silences that manifest structures of power.

In 2016 the French historiography of the War of Algeria in particular, and the colonization of Algeria in general, is still dominated by the model of history-memory and preoccupied with re-assessing the events of the War and their remembrance. Using the concept of thwarted history in an approach like that of Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Chapter II aims at shedding light on what remains unthought-of about Algeria in French historiography.

⁷⁸ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past : Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1995), 13.

Chapter II

I have no idea what you are talking about [i.e. the relevance of Trouillot's work for thinking about the War of Algeria]

— Benjamin Stora, personal interview⁷⁹

Can historical narratives convey plots that are unthinkable in the world within which these narratives take place?

— Michel-Rolph Trouillot⁸⁰

What matters for Historians is not to pinpoint paradoxes. It is to understand how historiography reconciles paradoxes.

— Todd Shepard, personal interview on Vichy and the War of Algeria⁸¹

In a recent interview, Professor Stora asserted: "Yes, I do think that there is still a mystery about the War of Algeria. There is something that resists, and it is the rejection of an independent Algeria."⁸² When asked if he thought that Michel-Rolph Trouillot's concept of the unthinkable could be used to analyse this "mystery," Professor Stora responded that he had "never heard of Trouillot."⁸³

Through a close reading of *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*, the following paragraphs highlight the incompleteness of Stora's analysis of the War and independence of Algeria (1), before showing why the independence and the War were unthinkable as they occurred (2) and eventually how post-1962 French scholars thwarted those unthinkable events (3).

1. On silences in *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*

In *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*, Stora identifies a series of elements exemplifying the extent to which the War and independence of Algerian were unthinkable both as they occurred and in their aftermath, yet he never provides his readers with a substantive analysis of *why* these events

⁷⁹ Stora, *Le Mystère de la Guerre d'Algérie* - Personal interview, November 3rd 2016.

⁸⁰ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past : Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1995), 13.

⁸¹ Todd Shepard, Vichy & Algeria - Personal interview, November 28th 2016.

⁸² Stora, *Le Mystère de la Guerre d'Algérie* - Personal interview, November 3rd 2016.

⁸³ Stora, *Le Mystère de la Guerre d'Algérie* - Personal interview, November 3rd 2016.

are unthinkable. In the first part of the book, Stora focuses on how the French State silenced the War as it was happening between 1954 and 1962. He argues that from the outset, the War was impossible to admit because "Algeria was France."⁸⁴ In other words, to acknowledge the War would have implied to admit the "dislocation of the French Republic."⁸⁵ Despite quoting a newspaper dating from the War period claiming: "Algeria is and must remain part of the Republic, no more French Algeria, no more France,"⁸⁶ Stora does not investigate the implications of such a statement. He further argues that "the Algerian affair" had always been conceived as "an internal French issue," as reflected by this quote from Pierre Mendès France, the Prime Minister in 1954:

No one should expect from us any compromise towards the sedition [...] we cannot compromise when the inner peace of the nation and the integrity of the Republic are at stake.⁸⁷

Stora reports those words without questioning them, and ignores in the opening of the book to address why Algeria was so essential to the French Republic's sense of nationhood.

Stora titles one of the first section of the book: "The double crisis of the Republic and of the Nation: what needed to be forgotten." Stora describes in-depth the incapacity of the leftist government to deal with the rebellions in Algeria and the subsequent "collapsing" of the Socialist and the Communist Parties, which were unable to define a clear position towards the conflict and its outcome.⁸⁸ Stora thereafter discusses De Gaulle's strategy after he came to power in 1958, and whether or not he had envisioned independence from the outset. He then turns to a description of the French army's rout in Algeria and shows how the soldiers felt betrayed by the civil authorities. He finally analyses the emergence of the OAS as "a nationalism against the nation," supporting an ethnic definition of the nation based on the idea

⁸⁴ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli.*, 15.

⁸⁵ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli.*, 15.

⁸⁶ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli.*, 15.

⁸⁷ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli.*, 15.

⁸⁸ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli.*, 76.

of civilization, against a more liberal view of the nation as the frame of individual emancipation.⁸⁹ To summarize, throughout those twenty pages, Stora argues that the collapse of the IVth Republic and of the French left, as well as that of the radical nationalism of the OAS, accounts for the double crisis of the Republic and of the Nation during the War. Treating the War as a purely internal French political problem, Stora does not question why politicians feared that the loss of Algeria would jeopardize the integrity of the French Republic.

In Chapter 7, Stora claims that the end of the War has "blown away the consensus that emerged in France as an outcome of the Resistance" to Nazi Germany, the very consensus named the *resistancialist myth* by Rousso as recalled in the introduction.⁹⁰ Stora argues:

The War of Algeria occurred only ten years after World War II. Back then the dominant discourse, that of the IVth Republic, suggested that the French people, except for a handful of traitors, joined the Resistance, or were silently faithful to De Gaulle. [...] After World War II, the former Resistants were very involved in French society. The War of Algeria undermined those networks [...] and revealed gaps between leftist and rightist Resistants.⁹¹

Again, his analysis of the fractures triggered by the War focuses on the internal divisions of the French Right and Left and includes quotes such as:

As long as we [the French] have Algeria, we are tall, we are strong, we are to last. Through Algeria, we are promised an incomparable destiny.⁹²

Stora explains that the War of Algeria threatened French nationalism because it questioned "a certain idea of France, of its role, of its 'civilizing mission' in its colonies."⁹³ Yet Stora forgets what is yet apparent in the material he quotes: Algeria was not a colony among others, Algeria was France. Arguing that the War of Algeria led to the implosion of the *resistancialist myth* because it sealed the end of the French Empire omits the fact that Algeria was not part of the Empire but of the Republic.

⁸⁹ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli.*, 80.

⁹⁰ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli.*, 110.

⁹¹ Ibid., 110.

⁹² André Figueras, *L'Algérie française*, éd A.F., Paris, 1959. qtd in Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli.*, 110.

⁹³ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli.*, 113.

As he asserts that the War of Algeria has shattered "the fraternity" created by the resistancialist myth and significantly impacted French society, Stora also claims in Chapter 7 that the majority of the French population accepted the independence of Algeria in 1962 with a great deal of indifference.⁹⁴ Stora highlights a twofold reason for this situation: the length of the War, which created a feeling of weariness among the population, and the fact that "the majority of French people did not care as much as it seemed about maintaining Algeria in France [...] probably because colonization was 'never in France a collective project embracing a large range [of the population].'"⁹⁵ Besides being again fairly questionable, such a statement forgets that Algeria was France and not a colony, and contradicts an assertion made a couple of pages earlier: "Algeria [is] an integral part of France."⁹⁶

If Stora emphasizes the role of the War of Algeria in the collapse of the IVth Republic, he does not highlight that the Vth Republic and the institutions of contemporary France are the product of this very conflict. In the first part of the book, he does not even explicitly recall that De Gaulle did not simply become the head of the executive authority during the War, but established an entirely new institutional system. Similarly, Stora does not underscore the centrality of De Gaulle in the course of the conflict, nor how he seized the opportunity of the War to reinforce his image of a "man of Providence."⁹⁷ Stora argues that the War of Algeria triggered a political crisis in France, yet he does not discuss in depth the implications of the institutional changes entailed by this crisis. Concerning the establishment of the Vth Republic, Stora simply writes: "The War gave birth to a political regime ashamed of its origins." Here, the connotations of the term "origin" are particularly ambiguous. It is unclear whether Stora refers to the unusual legal procedure that led to the establishment of the Vth Republic, to the incapacity of said Republic to put an end to the War of Algeria for over four years or to the

⁹⁴ Stora., *La Gangrène et L'oubli.*, 116.

⁹⁵ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli.*, 116.

⁹⁶ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli.*, 16.

⁹⁷ Phrase of historian Sudhir Hazareesingh, whom argued that during the War of Algeria, De Gaulle staged his action to create the *gaullien myth*, in which he appeared as the "savour of the Nation." See Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Le mythe gaullien*, GALLIMARD edition (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2010).

massacres committed by the army and the State under De Gaulle. Furthermore, arguing that the Vth Republic is "ashamed of its origins," Stora ignores De Gaulle's prestige among French people in 1954 and that the Constitution of the Vth Republic was endorsed by a popular referendum in September 1958 with a 79.25% majority.⁹⁸

In a recent lecture given at the French consulate about racial issues in France organized at the initiative of Ta-Nehisi Coates, Professor Stora claimed: "like in the case of the United States, a civil war shaped modern France. Yes, France had its War of Secession, it was the War of Algeria."⁹⁹ This statement reflects Stora's ambiguous and contradictory use of the notion of civil war throughout *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*. While the first part of the book describes the fractures of French society during the War and the second part the divisions among the Algerian pro-independence movements, the last parts of the book trace the evolution of the remembrance of the War, in both post-independent French and Algerian societies. However, Stora does not describe the NFL's rebellion against the French State as a civil War, therefore reinforcing a historical situation he denounces, namely that Algerians were never considered proper French citizens, and ignoring the paradox that "Algeria was France" but Algerians were not.

2. Unthinkable Independence

Although a close reading of *La Gangrène et l'Oubli* reveals that Algeria's independence was properly unthinkable until 1962, the book does not yet investigate why Algeria was so critical to the French sense of nationhood. To answer this question, it is crucial to bear in mind that "France had been a colonial power years before it became a Republic, and that it remained so in the years separating post-1789 France's Republics."¹⁰⁰ After the French Revolution, "the nation became a permanent *conquest*," a conquest characterized simultaneously by "a

⁹⁸ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli*, 224.

⁹⁹ Stora and Coates, When Will France Have its Barack Obama? Albertine Bookstore, New York NY, November 6th 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Wieviorka, 9. *La République, la colonisation. Et après...*

reaffirmation of national boundaries and a thirst for universal expansion."¹⁰¹ As the "French model [was] by definition unique, universal [and] superior," France had the responsibility to embrace its "civilizing mission."¹⁰² Progressively, colonization became consubstantial with Republican ideology. From the outset, colonization was "a collective project transcending social classes as well as political fractures" and "associated to Republican values: progress [...], equality and the splendour of the nation."¹⁰³ As recalled in the introduction, the construction of the French empire relied on the *assimilationist model*, the idea that colonized subjects could be turned into French citizens by embracing French language and culture. The concept of assimilation was rooted in the creation of the French hexagon by successive conquest and annexations. A long "experience of turning peasants and culturally exogenous provincials into Frenchmen" served as a rational for French colonialism, claiming that the same could be done for colonized populations of Africa and Asia.¹⁰⁴ Yet, as emphasized earlier, among 19th century French territorial conquests, the case of Algeria is quite singular. From being a colony under the authority of the Minister of Colonies, Algeria became a metropolitan territory divided into three departments equal to those of mainland France and fully integrated to national boundaries.

19th and early 20th century French historiography "objectif[ied], rationaliz[ed] and therefore inscrib[ed] the invasion of Algeria within the narrative of French nation-building."¹⁰⁵ Algeria's history was "rewritten by and for French people."¹⁰⁶ Having established that "where history is concerned, [Algerians were] unbelievably incompetent" and ignoring "the role of Muslim scholars in preserving and disseminating key texts of the Ancients," 19th century French scholars and writers such as Felix Gauthier rewrote the history of Algeria as starting in 1830.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Bancel and Blanchard, *1. Les origines républicaines de la fracture coloniale*.

¹⁰² Bancel and Blanchard, *1. Les origines républicaines*.

¹⁰³ Bancel and Blanchard, *1. Les origines républicaines*.

¹⁰⁴ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen : The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1976).

¹⁰⁵ Bancel, Nicolas. "L'histoire Difficile." *La Découverte, Cahiers Libres*, 2005, 87.

¹⁰⁶ Dunwoodie, Peter. *Writing French Algeria*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 123.

¹⁰⁷ Dunwoodie, *Writing*, 123.

Pre-1962 century French textbooks and academic works featured a chapter of French history in Algeria, the history of a land "tamed and fructified by European settlers forging a valiant new 'race' despite the aimless opposition [of the native populations]." ¹⁰⁸ In the 1930s, a re-mapping of France's geography further facilitated the incorporation of Algeria in French history. Scholars like Gabriel Audioso or René-Jean Clot redefined the "Mediterranean [as] an internal sea of *la grande France* [the Great France]" ¹⁰⁹ by producing historical narratives "reinscribing the southern part of France within a common Mediterranean space France shared with Algeria." ¹¹⁰

The incorporation of Algeria to France's history, geography and national boundaries sheds light on the "mystery" about the end of the War of Algeria. Stora argues that this mystery stems from the "rejection of an independent Algeria," yet what is at stake is rather the impossibility to conceive it. ¹¹¹ The War and *a fortiori* independence were unthinkable for they contradicted decades of historiographical narratives inscribing Algeria into French national construction. As historian Marc Ferro argues:

Historically, there are no similar cases [to the history of French Algeria]. Elsewhere, there had been invasions, occupations of countries that have lasted ten, twenty maybe thirty years. Yet, this level of occupancy, with massive land dispossession and settlements is unique. Algeria was an integral part of France and thus French nationalism has always considered Algeria as part of itself. How can one turn against oneself? ¹¹²

The War and independence of Algeria meant that the French idea of the nation had "begun to conflict with itself" and thus explains the silences of-1962 French historiographical narratives about the very occurrence of the conflict. ¹¹³

At least partially, some French scholars have pinpointed that losing Algeria was

¹⁰⁸ Dunwoodie, *Writing*, 123.

¹⁰⁹ Dunwoodie, Peter. *Writing French Algeria*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 179.

¹¹⁰ Dunwoodie, *Writing*, 180.

¹¹¹ Stora, *Le Mystère de la Guerre d'Algérie* - Personal interview, November 3rd 2016.

¹¹² Ferro, Marc. "La colonisation française : une histoire inaudible", *La Découverte, Cahiers Libres*, 2005, 129. (translated from French).

¹¹³ Ferro, "La Colonisation française."

unthinkable because "for a hundred and thirty-two years, Algeria was France."¹¹⁴ There is, however, another factor explaining why Algeria was so crucial to France's sense of nationhood that has not been explored by French historiography yet: the role of Algeria in the construction of post-World War II resistancialist myth. The main architect of this myth was Charles de Gaulle, who established a clear-cut distinction between the "French State, that had capitulated to German imperialism, and the French Nation, that had resisted."¹¹⁵ According to De Gaulle, the resistance of the Nation implied that "the Republic never died, but survived within Free France."¹¹⁶ This is the reason why in his famous speech after the Liberation of Paris on the 25th of August 1944, De Gaulle asserted:

The Republic never stopped being. Free France and the French Committee of National Liberation, have in included the Republic. Vichy had always been and remains a null and void. I am myself the President of the Government of the Republic. Why then would I proclaim [the Republic]?¹¹⁷

As demonstrated by Rouso, post-World War II historiography embraced the resistancialist myth and ignored the collaboration between Vichy France and Nazi Germany while underscoring the continuity of the French Nation and Republic, incarnated by the Resistance and personified by De Gaulle.

The resistancialist myth relies on the claim that the "history of France was written in [...] Algiers between 1940 and 1944" - a point Rouso briefly mentioned yet does not emphasize.¹¹⁸ As recalled in the introduction, Algeria became the headquarters of the Resistance during World War II. Securing the support of the territories of North Africa and the French Empire for the Free French Forces reinforced De Gaulle's position as the legitimate chief of France towards the Allies. This explains why after World War II the Allies included France among the winners of the war, thus further solidifying the resistancialist myth. Algeria,

¹¹⁴ Ferro, "La Colonisation française."

¹¹⁵ Henry Rouso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Revised edition (Harvard University Press, 1994), 91.

¹¹⁶ Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), xi.

¹¹⁷ Charles De Gaulle, Discours de l'Hôtel de Ville, August 1944.

¹¹⁸ Rouso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 89.

moreover, gave a physical reality and a spatial legitimacy to the resistancialist myth. On the 3rd of June 1944, as the liberation of mainland France became certain, Charles de Gaulle established the Provisional Government of the French Republic, the interim government of Free France, with Algiers as its capital. In other words, the resistancialist myth required Algeria to be French to insure the narrative continuity of the Republic.

As they wrote in the 1990s, both Roussio and Stora acknowledged the intricacies that existed between the memory of the Vichy regime and that of the War of Algeria. While Roussio argues that the "return of De Gaulle to the forefront of the political stage and the War of Algeria briefly revived the repressed memory of Vichy in the 1950s," Stora expresses a series of contradictory claims about the question.¹¹⁹ As analysed earlier, he starts by asserting that the War of Algeria blew away the resistancialist myth. However, his position shifts when he argues in chapter 7 that "the France's colonial wars, that of Indochina and that of Algeria, allowed for mourning of the Vichy period."¹²⁰ Yet Stora further argues that "looking directly at the course of the War of Algeria would mean to take the risk of thinking about Vichy. This will be a good reason to talk about neither of the periods," thus suggesting that the silence surrounding the War of Algeria is rooted in the shameful collective memory of Vichy.¹²¹ Despite their ambiguity, those statements share the presupposition that the War of Algeria revives the memory of Vichy because both conflicts generate shame and intertwined political divisions. In the introduction to *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, Roussio makes a similar claim:

French history is structured by a series of crisis that have threatened the unity and the identity of the country: the French Revolution, the Dreyfus affair, the Vichy regime and the War of Algeria. Each of these crises is rooted in the previous one, and thus each of them reactivate the memory of the others.¹²²

This is the reason why Stora argues that "the War of Algeria, even faster than the Vichy regime,

¹¹⁹ Roussio, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 283.

¹²⁰ Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli : La Mémoire de La Guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), 88.

¹²¹ Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli*, 112. Daho Djerbal, 'Qui est le sujet de l'Histoire?', January 2017.

¹²² Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli*, 11.

was forgotten in its aftermath to preserve the axis connecting the past to the present."¹²³ However, contrary to Vichy, the War of Algeria entailed an irretrievable physical loss jeopardizing both the century-old narrative in which Algeria was France and the post-World War II constructed myth underscoring the continuity of the French Republic during the Vichy regime.

3. "The Invention of Decolonization"

When interviewed about the threat the independence of Algeria posed to the resistancialist myth, Professor Todd Shepard, a specialist in 20th century French imperial history, explained: "The prism of Vichy-Algeria is very productive analytically speaking. But think about this: one could believe that independence would have triggered the collapsing of the resistancialist myth, and yet it did not collapse. France still lives on it."¹²⁴ What needs to be analysed, Professor Shepard argued, is how the narrative of independence and the resistancialist myth became compatible in French historiography. To conduct such an analysis, "using the work of 1980s/1990s French scholars as primary sources is the right place to start, because their work has left numerous issues unexplored and thus created many silences in the contemporary remembrance of both traumas [Vichy and the War of Algeria] in France."¹²⁵ Using Shepard's book *The Invention of Decolonization*, a work published in 2006, the following paragraphs investigate what has gone unremarked by French scholars that had allowed them to ignore the contradiction between the independence of Algeria and the resistancialist myth.

Neither Stora nor Rousso underscores how after the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958, "French discussions transformed the descriptive term of decolonization into a historical category, an all but inevitable stage in the tide of History."¹²⁶ Making this argument the narrative backbone of the *The Invention of Decolonization*, Shepard demonstrates how during the last

¹²³ Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli.*, 214.

¹²⁴ Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli.*, 211.

¹²⁵ Todd Shepard, Vichy & Algeria - Personal interview, November 28th 2016.

¹²⁶ Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization* (Cornell University Press 2006), 10.

years of the War, scholars, journalists and politicians "rewrote the Algerian history of France [...] [so that] the role played by Algeria in the construction of the French nation-state disappeared."¹²⁷ Analysing administrative documents, newspapers, political debates and statements, Shepard demonstrates how French bureaucrats, politicians, and journalists rewrote the history of imperialism and anti-imperialism so that "decolonization was the predetermined end point."¹²⁸ After 1958, in Algeria, as elsewhere, decolonization appeared as wholly consistent with the renewed narrative of progress legitimizing the construction of the Fifth Republic. Within this narrative, the History of France since the Revolution became that of the ongoing extension of national self-determination and its corollary values: liberty, equality, fraternity, and Human Rights. While the Vichy episode became supplementary evidence testifying to the eternal loyalty of French people to fraternity, the independence of Algeria now appeared as initiated by the French government, willing to honour its commitment to liberty and justice.¹²⁹

This radical shift in narratives is not mentioned in French historiography. Neither Stora nor younger authors engage with how intellectuals and journalists "invented decolonization" during the last years of the War. Shepard dissects the role played by both the French Left and Right in making the independence of Algeria inevitable, and highlights the influence of Sartre and Aron on this process. While Sartre's Marxist understanding of history pictured colonialism as a system inherently rooted in imperialism, the ultimate stage of capitalism, and thus doomed to fail, Aron viewed colonization as an obstacle to mainland France's economic interests. Sartre and Aron, reflecting respectively communist and liberal French agendas, shared the presupposition that "Algerians and French were too different to coexist together, and thus needed to live in separated states."¹³⁰ In other words, they had come to terms with the end of the

¹²⁷ Shepard, *The Invention*., 11.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

"assimilationist ideal."¹³¹ Whereas he also discusses both Sartre and Aron's public declarations during the War of Algeria, Stora understands those as illustrating the resignation of French people towards independence during the last years of the War. In other words, Stora does not see that French leaders and intellectuals actively sought to legitimize the independence of Algeria in the late 1961 and in 1962 by producing discourses picturing decolonization as an inevitable step within the "Tide of History."¹³² To that extent, Stora's work is entangled within this War-built narrative, for he lacks any reflexivity about it.

La Gangrene et l'Oubli traces how the War of Algeria was suppressed from French official history through censorship. The book merely discusses why such was the case, taking for granted that this suppression was rooted in the collective shame about the exactions perpetuated by the French army during the conflict. Stora addresses the symptoms of a process, namely the absence of public discussion in academia, newspapers and politicians' discourses of the War, yet he barely discusses the causes behind this absence. Todd Sheppard's analysis sheds light on the radical paradigmatic change in French narratives that insured the continuity between the end of French Algeria and the establishment of the Fifth Republic: decolonization became a logical step in French history, rewritten within the borders of the Hexagon. Without being aware of this shift, post-1962 French historians contributed to solidifying it. When he coined France's memory-sites, Nora ignored the colonial past of France. When he defined the resistancialist myth, Rousso did not point to the role of Algeria in the construction of this myth. When he wrote *La Gangrene et l'Oubli*, Stora eventually fostered the narrative according to which independence was unavoidable.¹³³

Complementing Shepard's analysis, this thesis hopes to bring attention to the fact that French historiography has not to this very day challenged the narrative picturing

¹³¹ Shepard, *The Invention* 72.

¹³² Ibid., 82.

¹³³ Although Stora mentioned that De Gaulle sought to make the French accept the Independence, he did not reflect upon the inevitability of the event in itself.

"decolonization as a victory and the celebration of the daring of De Gaulle."¹³⁴ After 1962, Charles de Gaulle focused on "reinventing the French Republican tradition" by trumpeting the glory of mainland France. As demonstrated by Shepard, De Gaulle carried out an intense pedagogical work through multiplying public speeches to forge a new definition of French nationalism focusing on mainland France and "forgetting the rest."¹³⁵ Under De Gaulle's presidency emerged the fiction that "the 'Algerian experience' had been an unfortunate detour, from which the French Republic had now escaped."¹³⁶ Interviewed about this fiction, Stora explained: "Yes, De Gaulle is the key. He is the one linking Vichy, Algeria, and the silence. He is the common thread, the pivotal character."¹³⁷ Yet Professor Stora was reluctant to elaborate on this point, which the following paragraphs further analyse.

After 1958, along with the journalists, bureaucrats and intellectuals mentioned previously, De Gaulle rewrote the history of France since the Revolution. Those figures thereby framed for decades the analytical scope of French historiography, to an extent such that even the most subversive French scholars were not able to completely challenge the War of Algeria-built narrative picturing the independence of Algeria as a victory. In 1958, when the IVth Republic invested De Gaulle with extraordinary powers on condition that he put an end to the War of Algeria, he established new institutions compatible with the construction of Europe and the elimination of colonies. After the signature of the ceasefire between the French State and the NFL, De Gaulle declared that this agreement reflected France's commitment to let "populations choose their destiny."¹³⁸ Within this new framework, the War of Algeria was re-conceptualized as an internal French political crisis, that did "not happen in Algeria, but in mainland France," and that was not about Algerians, "but about French people."¹³⁹

Such a shift sheds light on the central place of collective memory in post-1962 French

¹³⁴ Shepard, *The Invention* 12.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹³⁷ Stora, *Le Mystère de la Guerre d'Algérie* - Personal interview, November 3rd 2016.

¹³⁸ Shepard, *The Invention*., 101.

¹³⁹ Rashid Khalidi, *On the War of Algeria* - Personal interview, October 26th 2016.

historiography introduced in Chapter I, now limited by the narratives set by De Gaulle and French bureaucrats, scholars and journalists during the last years of the War. Such a framework re-categorized Algeria as one colony among others, marginalized the significance of colonization in French history and identified decolonization as an achievement of the Vth Republic. This way, in French historiography, the War of Algeria became one crisis among other political controversies of post-1789 France, and the independence of Algeria became a resounding success of the French state, concealing the entire history of France in Algeria.¹⁴⁰ This agenda, avoiding at all costs to engage with the challenges of Algerian nationalism, "allowed the foundation of the now wholly 'European' republic that emerged in the process of excluding Algeria and Algerians from France and French history."¹⁴¹

This Chapter started with the hope of disclosing what is still unthought-of about the War of Algeria in French historiography. A closer look at the production of narratives reveals that what remains thwarted in French historiography is *who* is absent from history - which shall be done in Chapter III.

¹⁴⁰ Such a shift explains why Rousso does not find any contradiction in identifying "the Revolution, the Dreyfus Affair, Vichy and the War of Algeria" as four internal "crises that have threatened the unity and the identity of France." Rousso thereby ignores that contrary to those previous "crises," the independence of Algeria entailed the irretrievable physical loss of three French departments and 19 millions subjects of the Empire.

¹⁴¹ Shepard, *The Invention*., 15.

Chapter III

As far as history is concerned, Algerians are unbelievably incompetent.

— French colonial archives.¹⁴²

Who is the subject of history?

— Daho Djerbal, personal interview, Algiers 2017.¹⁴³

It is time for Africans to enter the course of History.

— Nicolas Sarkozy, former president of France, Dakar 2007.¹⁴⁴

Moving from the suppression of one of the leaders of the Haitian Revolution to that of the entire event from French historiography, Trouillot argues that “they are silences within silences, those silences that are thrown against superior silences.”¹⁴⁵ Similarly, the “invention of decolonization” as an outcome of the War of Algeria is one aspect of a much broader silence in French historiography: the suppression of colonized populations. The final chapter of this thesis investigates how during the colonial era and the War, Algerians were excluded from historical narratives (1), then how post-1962 French historiography perpetuated this dynamic of power (2) and eventually how this situation triggered the displacement of colonial stigmas to the migrant populations in France (3).

1. 1830-1962: suppressing the Other from History

Between 1830 and 1954, French scholars, bureaucrats and journalists’ discourse on Algeria was an “ambivalent mode of representation that relied on a colonial Manicheanism in which the indigenous population was either absent or present merely as a signifier of Otherness.”¹⁴⁶ In the first part of *Orientalism*, Said demonstrates how 19th century colonial England and France constructed stereotypical and reductive discourses about the “Arabs” through art and literature. In *Writing French Algeria*, historian of France Peter Dunwoodie

¹⁴² Qtd in Dunwoodie, Peter. *Writing French Algeria*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 123.

¹⁴³ Djerbal, Qui est le sujet de l’Histoire?

¹⁴⁴ “Discours de Dakar,” *Wikipédia*, January 17, 2017,

https://fr.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Discours_de_Dakar&oldid=133725617.

¹⁴⁵ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past : Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1995), 69.

¹⁴⁶ Ali Behdad, “Writing French Algeria (Review),” *L’Esprit Créateur* 41 (n.d.): 113–14.

details the mechanism of this process, reinforced by the post-1789 aggressive assimilationist ideology introduced in Chapter II. Dunwoodie's book, published in 1998, has not been translated into French to this day and has no equivalent within French academia. As a glimpse of this alternative understanding of history, the following paragraphs summarize how French colonial historiography established a typically orientalist representation of Algerians.

Analysing the works of French travellers in North Africa and using the critical insights of Said, Dunwoodie demonstrates that colonized populations were primarily described as appealingly exotic. Either spectators of "oriental otherness" or participants in "orientalist, erotic fantasies," French writers, artists and bureaucrats concealed this way thereby fact of colonial occupation. The Romantic movement, combined with colonial ideology, further reinforced the production of reductively exotic discourse about Algeria.¹⁴⁷ In *A Summer in Sahara* French writer Eugène Fromentin's describes metaphorically Algiers as the incarnation of the oriental woman:

The capital and the real queen of the North Africans. She has always had her Casbah as her crown, with a cypress, the last vestige of the gardens of Hussein Dey: a thin cypress, pointing out to the sky like a dark thread, but, from far, that looks like an egret on a turban. Whatever we do, it is still, for a long time, I hope, Al-Bahdja, that is to say the whitest city perhaps in all the East. And when the sun rises to shine and turns to this ruddy beam that comes every morning from Mecca, one would think Algiers comes out from the eve of a huge block of white marble veined with pink.¹⁴⁸

Iconographically, Romantic painters such as Eugène Delacroix further reinforced the sensuality and the "primitiveness" of Algerians. In the 1834 painting featured below titled *Women of Algiers*, Delacroix highlights the lascivious poses of the characters and their idle way of spending their spare time. The increasing number of exhibitions during the 19th and 20th century combined with the growing audience of readers willing to discover Romantic poetry resulted in orientalist literature and art occupying a central place within French society, to this very day.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979, 102.

¹⁴⁸ Fromentin, Eugène. *A Summer in Sahara*. Paris: Gallimard, 1857, 53. (translated from French)

¹⁴⁹ Schaub, Nicolas. *Représenter L'Algérie: Images Et Conquête Au 19e Siècle*. Paris: CTHS, 2015, 25.



Fig. 4. Delacroix, Eugène. *Women of Algiers*. 1834. The Louvre, Paris.

In French academia, the term “orientalism” still refers to the “literary and artistic movement that appeared during the West during the 19th century [...] illustrating the interest of the time for the cultures of North Africa, Turkey and the Arab World, that declined [...] after the independence of Algeria.”¹⁵⁰ On the French Wikipedia page of Orientalism, there is no reference to Said’s critical approach to Orientalism as a representation of the Middle East characterized by cultural imperialism and imposed upon colonized societies.¹⁵¹ Not only does contemporary French historiography ignore the fabrication of cultural superiority through Orientalism, but it also celebrates the daring of Oriental painting, especially in the last two decades. In 2003, the French Institute of the Arab World hosted an exhibition titled “From Delacroix to Renoir, Painter’s Algeria.” The aims of the exposition was to “reveal the diversity of individual approaches to the Algerian experience and the richness of cultural exchanges,” and how orientalist “artists were driven by beliefs and images [...] and overcame their preconceptions.”¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ “Orientalisme,” *Wikipédia*, February 16, 2017, <https://fr.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Orientalisme&oldid=134602261>.

¹⁵¹ The reader should feel free to do this fascinating experience : go to the English wikipedia page of Orientalism, talking in length about Said, and then click on the left on the French link redirecting to the page. The reader will find a short article, talking about art history and literature.

¹⁵² “From Delacroix to Renoir, Painters’ Algeria” (Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, 2003).

Along with this romantic-driven orientalism in Algeria, French scholars developed contemptuous narratives dismissing the history, the culture and the social organization of the Other. As demonstrated by Algerian scholar Daho Djerbal in a recent essay on French philosophy, European intellectual progression during the colonial period is inseparable from the systematic description of colonized populations as inferior to the colonizers.¹⁵³ Djerbal focuses on the case of Alexis de Tocqueville, the author of *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, an iconic and undisputed reference of political history in France and the West. As an introduction to the translation of *De la Démocratie en Amérique* in Arabic; Djerbal discusses a text of Tocqueville that has gone somewhat unremarked by scholars. It is a report of Tocqueville's trip to Algeria in 1841, in which the author consistently describes the populations as barbarous, their culture as "backward" and their "human nature as substantially opposed to that of Europeans."¹⁵⁴ Djerbal's remarkable feat is to demonstrate that colonial ideology was not a system evolving in parallel with the development of 19th century European rational thinking, but in symbiosis with the latter. In other words, the entire tradition of European thought rooted in the Enlightenment relies on and necessitates the existence of "the Other, the defeated, the colonized."¹⁵⁵ Colonial ideology justifies his disenfranchisement, which in turn legitimizes the well-founded political system and mode of government of European countries.

As analyzed by the Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist, philosopher and activist Frantz Omar Fanon: "French colonialism settled within Algerian individuals and proceeded within them to a profound sweep operation of self-dispossession, a rationally-conducted mutilation."¹⁵⁶ Concretely, this process consisted in the construction of an allegedly scientific discourse depriving the Other of the essential qualities of "higher forms of life: reason, national identity,

¹⁵³ Djerbal Daho, "Alexis de Tocqueville, De La Colonie En Algérie," March 2015.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Sociologie D'une Révolution (l'An V de La Révolution Algérienne)* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1975), 57 .

and evolved social structures."¹⁵⁷ Colonial archives picture the "native fellah" as "ignorant and pitiful, scratching the surface of the soil with a primitive plough, going round obstacles such as parasitic plants instead of tearing them out."¹⁵⁸ The image of a primitive, barbaric, immobilized, idle, childlike Arab recurs through colonial reports, novels and newspapers."¹⁵⁹ Through this process, the "Arab" was also "classified, quite simply and irremediably" by French colonizers.¹⁶⁰ The first step of this classification was to destroy and rebuild the organization of Algeria. When the French launched colonization at the beginning of the 19th century, they immediately associated Algeria's tribal organization and "lack of nationhood as the manifestation and cause of its barbarity."¹⁶¹ Colonial administration thus embarked on a policy of "breaking up the tribes," first through military conquest, and second through the manipulation of property rights.¹⁶² In 1873, the Warnier Law established that all land transactions in Algeria should be made in accordance with French law, which prevented the tribes from perpetuating their own modes of spatial organization. Instead of tribal units, the French built state structures and institutions similar to those that existed in France: this is how Algeria was divided into three departments, each of which was organized around a prefecture and directly subjected to the authority of the central government.

The legal status of the native-born inhabitants of Algeria is perhaps the best reflection of their objectification by colonial administration. As argued by Todd Shepard, after the 1789 Revolution, French citizenship evolved into a quality restricted to those individuals capable of rational decision-making.¹⁶³ On this ground, the "backwardness" of colonized populations was seen as "regrettable yet surmountable."¹⁶⁴ Within this framework, it was the Republic's mission

¹⁵⁷ Dunwoodie, Peter. *Writing French Algeria*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 123.

¹⁵⁸ A. Girault, *Principes de colonisation*, (Paris, 1936), 440 qtd. in Dunwoodie. (translated from French).

¹⁵⁹ Dunwoodie, Peter. *Writing French Algeria*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 66.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 303.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶³ On this topic, Sheppard draws a quite compelling comparison between the destiny of women and that of colonized populations in French law.

¹⁶⁴ Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The War of Algeria and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 21.

to facilitate the “transition of the colonized through education.”¹⁶⁵ This explains why French colonial administration sought to “recreate Algerians in its own image, to turn Algerians into Frenchmen,” so that they could be eventually assimilated to the French Republic.¹⁶⁶ Because from the outset the colonial state saw Islam as the defining characteristic of Algerians’ culture, eradicating Islam from Algerians’ sense of identity became a priority of French colonial policies. The Senatus-Consulte of July 14th 1865 granted the right to apply for French citizenship to those who had renounced their personal status as Muslims. Not only did this law established a “direct link between ethnicity and political and civil rights,” but it also presented Muslims with a clear ultimatum: religion or political rights.¹⁶⁷ In 1870, this logic was pushed one step further, when the IIIrd Republic issued the *Crémieux Decree*, that granted the French citizenship to Algerian Jews. Codifying a legal hierarchy between the different cultural groups composing Algeria, French colonial administration created and perpetuated fractures within the Algerian society, while building a “civilization” spectrum, with France at one end and Islam at the other.

During the entire colonial period, however, some prominent writers did not consider the exclusion of most Algerian men from the *polis* as temporary, and advocated in favour of the recognition of hierarchies among races – the *coexistence* policy as opposed to the assimilationist ideology. Racist theorizing was extremely important in nineteenth century France: major theorists of race such as Joseph-Arthur Gobineau, Ernest Renan and Gustave Le Bon were French. Racism enormously affected the daily experience of Algerians, from an economic and a social standpoint. Germaine Tillon demonstrated that racism led to the pauperization of most of Algeria’s population¹⁶⁸ and Patricia Lorcin showed the long-lasting effects of racial

¹⁶⁵ Ferry, “Discours Sur La Colonisation.”

¹⁶⁶ Hill, J. N. C. *Identity in Algerian Politics: The Legacy of Colonial Rule*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009. 31.

¹⁶⁷ Hill, J. N. C. *Identity in Algerian Politics* 31.

¹⁶⁸ Patricia Lorcin demonstrated how the impact of the colonial constructed the Kabyle Myth. “Because the Kabyles were the descendants of Algeria’s original Christian inhabitants [...] and the Kabyle society, unlike its Arab equivalent, bore several marked of similarities to that of France,” qtd in Patricia M. E. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*,

hierarchies in Algeria.¹⁶⁹ However, until the War, government policies remained aligned with the assimilation ideology. Therefore, when and whether all Algerians would become full citizens of the French Republic remained an unresolved question. In the meantime, the State pragmatically maintained Koranic, Hebraic and Berber law at the local level, above which it superimposed the reach of metropolitan law and institutions.

Analyzing laws, artistic modes of representation and colonial archives reveals that the status of colonized populations in Algeria was characterized by exclusion, disenfranchisement and confusion. During the entire colonial period, there was no consensus on how to name the native inhabitants of Algeria. This situation reflected a more fundamental question about the very nature of native-born *vis-à-vis* French and European people. In this regard, the work of Emmanuelle Saada in *Les enfants de la colonie* complements the analysis of Said in *Orientalism*.¹⁷⁰ Both authors show how the relation to the Other encountered in Algeria, resembling the colonizers yet presenting undeniably distinctive features, blurred the line between who was and was not French while disrupting the definitions of nationality and citizenship. One of the most significant consequences of this situation is the ongoing absence in narratives of Algerians as active historical agents.

2. 1962-1992: Ignoring “The Dividing Line of Historical Reason”

The absence of Algerians in French post-colonial historiography stems from the analytical void in academia to think the Other. While since the publication of *Orientalism* by Edward Said in 1978 Anglo-Saxon scholars have increasingly sought to unveil how Western historiography has used knowledge to objectify and suppress colonized populations

¹⁶⁹ Patricia M. E. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities : Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (New York: Distributed by St. Martin's, 1995); Germaine Tillion, *L'Algérie En 1957* (Paris: Association des anciennes déportées et internées de la Résistance, 1957).

¹⁷⁰ Emmanuelle Saada, *Les Enfants de La Colonie : Les Métis de L'empire Français Entre Sujétion et Citoyenneté* (Paris: Découverte, 2007); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

from history, thereby giving birth to post-colonial studies, French academia has remained quite reluctant to decolonize the past.¹⁷¹ In 2010, the prominent French scholar Jean-François Bayart, a specialist in the historical sociology of Sub-Saharan Africa, published *Les études post-coloniales, un carnaval académique* (“Post-colonial studies: an academic carnival”) to make sense of the absence of post-colonial theory in French academia. He argues that this analytical void testified to the clairvoyance of French scholars, aware of “the risks of intellectual deterioration [posed by post-colonial studies to] the academic progress of the last thirty years.”¹⁷² Bayart claims that colonial studies generalize excessively and over-estimate the impact of colonial empires on their subjects. He further minimizes the influence of imperial states on colonized societies. He maintains that post-colonial scholars must admit that colonization was not only motivated by colonial projects, but also produced by the agreement of the colonized. Inviting his fellow colleagues to study the lexicon accompanying the development of the imperial state, Bayart advocates that studying the “civilizing mission” of the colonial French state would shed light on how colonized populations accepted the empire. In other words, Bayart suggests that, to a certain extent, colonization was a well-founded project consequently well-received by the colonized. Bayart refutes that in French orientalism the Other became a “thing” that can be studied, depicted and reproduced.¹⁷³

In a recent interview about such a position, Professor Stora explained that French academia’s reluctance to embrace post-colonial studies resulted from the “deliquescence of post-independence states, that retrospectively justified the colonial period.”¹⁷⁴ He did not clarify his personal standpoint towards the legitimacy of the colonial project, nor did he comment on his own lack of reference to *Orientalism* in *La Gangrène et l’Oubli*.¹⁷⁵ When asked why French

¹⁷¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 19.

¹⁷² Jean-François Bayart, *Les Études Postcoloniales : Un Carnaval Académique* (Paris: Karthala, c2010), 43.

¹⁷³ Bayart, *Les Études Postcoloniales*; Said, *Orientalism*.

¹⁷⁴ Benjamin Stora, *Le Mystère de la Guerre d’Algérie* - Personal interview, November 2016.

¹⁷⁵ Said is not quoted once in the entire book.

scholars were unwilling to acknowledge the analytical breakthrough introduced by Said, Stora answered: “During and after the War, there has certainly been a refusal to see the Other as politically equal, organized and coherent.”¹⁷⁶ Regarding the years of the War *per se*, Stora merely recognizes that the “enemy” was all the more threatening that he was invisible.¹⁷⁷ Even in this passage briefly mentioning the place of the Other in colonial Algeria, Stora does not proceed to a proper analytical discussion of this question, ignoring once more the contributions of post-colonial studies and Said. The only Algerians *named* in *La Gangrène et l’Oubli* are the leaders of the NFL. In the second part of the book, Stora discusses the strategy of the NFL during the War. In the third and the fourth part of the book, Stora analyses the parallel evolution of the memory of the War in France and independent Algeria. In other words, some Algerians are recognized as historical subjects in Stora’s work: the political elites.

On this ground, Stora reproduces one of the most singular colonial practices of the French Republic: to recognize agency only to those colonized individuals having adopted the codes of and the language of the colonizers. Stora incidentally acknowledges the invisibility of the majority of Algerians during the War, yet he does not discuss their actual role during and after the War, leaving them out of the course of history. As demonstrated by the Subaltern Studies Group, the past cannot be decolonized if Western historians focus only on socio-economic colonized elites. Instead, the political role of individuals constituting most of the populations must be acknowledged. In post-colonial theory, those populations have been described by Indian scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as the subalterns. Derived from the work of Italian Marxist Gramsci on cultural hegemony, the notion of subaltern refers to those individuals silenced by colonial archives and suppressed from the course of history – what Trouillot describes as silences in the making of archives and sources. Recognizing the agency of the subalterns necessitates adopting a new perspective on imperial history considering the

¹⁷⁶ Stora, *Le Mystère de la Guerre d’Algérie* - Personal interview.

¹⁷⁷ Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et L’oubli : La Mémoire de La Guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), 15.

voices of colonized populations, and not only that of their elites and colonizers. Failing to proceed to such a shift, *La Gangrène et l'Oubli* perpetuates hegemonic structures of history-writing inherited from the colonial era.

The work of Daho Djerbal sheds light on the ways in which those structures of power shape the writing of contemporary French history. In an essay published in the last issue of the review *Naqd*, Djerbal recalls his state of mind as a young Algerian scholar working on colonial history.¹⁷⁸ “At the start of my career as a researcher I had the idea that contemporary French history was also, in a certain way, the history of colonial Algeria” explains Professor Djerbal.¹⁷⁹ With time, he progressively realized that: “While there is, in France, an historiography of colonial France, there is no history of colonized Algeria.”¹⁸⁰ This situation, rooted in the colonial era, continued after independence in the work scholars specialized in the history of the War and colonization of Algeria. During colonization, scholars, colonial administration and writers created a divided space in Algeria, separating the colonized from the colonizers while denying the latter agency as citizens, political actors and equal humans. This bisection, which Djerbal names the “dividing line of historical reason,” reached a paroxysmic point during the War and remained the dominant analytical framework in French historiography after 1962.

Concretely, the dividing line of historical reason is a mode of history writing relying on differentiation and exclusion. In narratives about the War and the colonial epoch, there is “only one subject who elaborates, who defines and activates the past, the present and the future.”¹⁸¹ By opposition to this dominating subject, the colonized “remains in the shadows,” he is either silenced or barely present as a symbol of Otherness.¹⁸² “When he claims to be the subject of his own history, he becomes unbearable, inaudible, he terrorizes.”¹⁸³ Djerbal takes the example of

¹⁷⁸ *Naqd* is a bilingual and international review, in French and Arabic, based in Algiers and directed by Professor Djerbal. It focuses on North Africa and the Middle East.

¹⁷⁹ Daho Djerbal, “History Writing as Cultural and Political Critique ; Or, On the Difficulty of Writing the History of a (de) Colonized Society,” *Revue, Revue d’Etudes et de Critique Sociale, Ecritures historiennes du Maghrbe et du Machrek* (n.d.).

¹⁸⁰ “Djerbal, “History Writing as Cultural and Political Critique.”

¹⁸¹ “Djerbal, “History Writing as Cultural and Political Critique.”

¹⁸² “Djerbal, “History Writing as Cultural and Political Critique.”

¹⁸³ “Djerbal, “History Writing as Cultural and Political Critique.”

a group that blurred the dichotomy between French and Algerians: the harkis. As recalled in the introduction, the harkis were native-born Algerians that fought on the side of the French army during the War of Independence. After independence, contrary to its promises, the French State abandoned the harkis in Algeria, where they were at the mercy of the NFL's retaliations. After a couple of months, some of them were repatriated to France, where they were cooped up in camps.¹⁸⁴ While the *pied-noirs* remained full citizens of the Republic for they were "French of European stock," the harkis became "French of North-African origin;" a term indicating the incomplete integration of "this 'auxiliary' population in thought as well as in political practice as fully-fledged French citizens."¹⁸⁵

Since 1962, French historiography has continued to evolve within the epistemological boundaries of the colonial era. Scholars' approaches to the War of Algeria or colonial history "are solidified into this unique if not univocal referential system" that excludes all particular forms of individuation.¹⁸⁶ This is the reason why "in French historical and political sciences the majority of Algerians continues to occupy the place of the repressed, the unthought-of, the unthinkable."¹⁸⁷ Scholars keep "repeating colonial French historiography and its dualism:" they only acknowledge the leaders of the Algerian national movement as active historical agents for their discourse was "nothing but the dominant discourse reversed."¹⁸⁸ Combining Djerbal's work with the concepts defined in Chapter I, it appears that in contemporary French historiography *the subject of colonial history is thwarted*. Eventually, thwarting the masses of colonized populations from history has justified since the 1990s the re-legitimization of colonial ideology.

¹⁸⁴ A report of one of these camps stated: "The harkis are constantly suffering abuses of authority. Racist insults are frequent. The sanitary conditions are miserable. The children cannot go to school. The parents are being systematically rejected whenever they search a job." Since the 1960s, the harkis have suffered continuous racism, rejection and social exclusion.

¹⁸⁵ "Djerbal, "History Writing as Cultural and Political Critique."

¹⁸⁶ "Djerbal, "History Writing as Cultural and Political Critique."

¹⁸⁷ "Djerbal, "History Writing as Cultural and Political Critique."

¹⁸⁸ "Djerbal, "History Writing as Cultural and Political Critique."

3. 1992 to the present: Thwarting the Other while re-burnishing colonial history

At first, it might look like French historians are aware of “the dividing line of historical reason.”¹⁸⁹ In a recent article, Stora wrote: “It is striking to notice in French movies the *absence* [...] of the colonized. In a way, the colonial world has never really been represented.”¹⁹⁰ Yet just like in *La Gangrène et l’Oubli*, Stora does not further elaborate on this point nor does he advocate in favour of a paradigmatic shift. Stora seems to consider that acknowledging this absence is sufficient. Stora thus exhibits how the “greatest specialists of French colonial history, those have agency within and beyond academia, have a hard time challenging conservative narratives rooted in the colonial era.”¹⁹¹ The incapacity of French scholars to revisit the question of who is the subject of colonial history triggers two particularly regrettable consequences in contemporary France. First, the displacement of the exclusion of the Other from colonial history to the marginalization of the migrant in post-1962 France. Second, the increasing rehabilitation of the “positive aspects” of colonization.¹⁹²

To understand the continuity between the suppression from historical narratives of colonized populations and the experience of migrant populations from Algeria to France, it is critical to recall the history of Algerians’ presence in mainland France. During the colonial period, a significant number of Algerian men moved to the Hexagon to become workers. As in Algeria, their legal status remained undefined: “neither French nor strangers” they were “subjects” of the Empire.¹⁹³ In addition to this juridical void, their status in France was always temporary: workers kept moving back and forth between France and Algeria, where their families remained. Those movements were arbitrarily regulated by the French government, both

¹⁸⁹ Djerbal, Qui est le sujet de l’Histoire?

¹⁹⁰ Benjamin Stora, 3. *Quand une mémoire (de guerre) peut en cacher une autre (coloniale)* (La Découverte, 2010), http://www.cairn.info/resume.php?ID_ARTICLE=DEC_BLANC_2005_01_0057.

¹⁹¹ Djerbal, “History Writing as Cultural and Political Critique ; Or, On the Difficulty of Writing the History of a (de) Colonized Society.”

¹⁹² “Loi portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés.”

¹⁹³ Peggy Dedder, “L’immigration Algérienne En France,” Musée de l’Histoire de l’Immigration, n.d., <http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/dossiers-thematiques/caracteristiques-migratoires-selon-les-pays-d-origine/l-immigration-algerienne>.

willing to use colonial populations to support industrial development and to avoid the migration to the metropole of entire families of Algerians.¹⁹⁴ The sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad further explains that during those decades, the experience of these workers within mainland France was primarily characterized by isolation, disenfranchisement and invisibility.¹⁹⁵ Spatially, they were marginalized and concentrated in precarious housings in isolated suburbs. Compared to European workers, they constantly faced discrimination, exclusion and racism.¹⁹⁶ This is the reason why the sociologist Michel Andr  e wrote in 1956 that “the structures of power between Algerian workers and the rest of the population in France was nothing but the reproduction of the colonial situation.”¹⁹⁷ During the War of Algeria, the Algerian community living in mainland France was a crucial financial and ideological support for the NFL. After independence, the French State established freedom of movement between France and Algeria. Consequently, immigration from France to Algeria changed: Algerian workers started moving with their families. The emergence of entire communities of Algerians across France triggered the displacement of colonial stigmas to the migrants.

In *L’immigration ou les paradoxes de l’Alt  rit  * (ie *Migration or the paradoxes of Otherness*), Abdelmalek Sayad argued that Algerian migrants and their descendants were irremediably confined in a provisional status: “They are defined as *immigrants*, although most of them never actually migrated.”¹⁹⁸ Their existence as proper citizens is “a fiction:” they are systematically reminded of their otherness and excluded from the political sphere.¹⁹⁹ For this reason, they become what Sayad names “insider migrants:” a population that is unthinkable.²⁰⁰ Complementing Sayad’s work with the previous analysis, it appears that the symbolic and physical exclusion of Algerian communities in post-1962 France is rooted in the suppression

¹⁹⁴ After World War I, the entire Algerian community was expelled from mainland France.

¹⁹⁵ Abdelmalek Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004).

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ A. G., “Michel Andr  e. — Les travailleurs alg  riens en France,” *Population* 12, no. 3 (1957): 549–50.

¹⁹⁸ Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 12.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Sylvie Th  nault, *Categories in Trouble: The Politics of Identity in North Africa, 19th-20th Centuries*, October 2016.

of colonized populations in colonial archives. After the independence of Algeria, the French state and people could not recognize the agency of the former “subjects” of the Empire as their existence had been reduced for decades to that of dominated Others. This situation was further solidified by post-independence French historiography, which claimed a renewed perspective on colonial history, while in fact never giving a voice to both colonized and migrant populations from Algeria. During a conference given at Columbia University, Sylvie Thénault, one of the most prominent French scholars working on colonized populations in Algeria, was asked how could she specialize on such questions without knowing Arabic. She answered: “I do regret not to speak the language, but it does not bother me in my research, because I have access to colonial archives.”²⁰¹

The War of Algeria disrupted the colonial narratives negating the agency of the Other: the existence of colonized populations as active historical agents became undeniable. The War of Algeria challenged the epistemological framework defining who was and was not the subject of history that French historiography had relied on for decades. This is maybe the most significant reason why the War was censored by the French State in the years following it. In the historical narratives produced during the 1980 and 1990s about French Algeria, only the conflict and its elites were acknowledged, the Other remained unthinkable. While the internal political divisions during the War continued in France through debates about the place of Islam within the nation, “the practice of regarding the life of Algerians as insignificant, negligible compared to that of French, became a reality deeply anchored in French society.”²⁰² The figure of the Other remained and remains unnamed, unspeakable, excluded from the sphere of “fully-fledged” French citizens.²⁰³ This situation triggers for Algerians living in France what Sayad describes as “the crisis of the double absence: the social identity of these communities is defined

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli*, 294.

²⁰³ Djerbal, “History Writing as Cultural and Political Critique ; Or, On the Difficulty of Writing the History of a (de) Colonized Society.”

as a series of negations. Neither French nor Algerians, their entire existence relies on exclusion.”²⁰⁴ If one wishes both to improve and to understand the status of Algerian communities in France, it is impossible for one to ignore the dynamics of power French historiography has perpetuated in narratives since the colonial period.

The second consequence of the absence of the Other in French historiography is the reinstatement of colonial ideology within French society. This situation is rooted in the description of the War as a purely internal French crisis by 1990s French historiography. In *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*, the War is analysed as a “civil war” pitting the Left against the Right, and later the State against the OAS.²⁰⁵ From then on, to overcome the political divisions created by the War, politicians sought to boast “the mission achieved in Algeria during the colonial era” as a way to bury the fractures of the War under the consensual and positive memory of colonization.²⁰⁶ Politicians were able to do so because the voices of the colonized remained absent from mainstream French historiography, leaving the narratives touting the benefits of colonization unchallenged.

On the margins of dominant French historiography, but also within works of fiction, counter-voices have been surfacing in France since the 1990s. Those authors focus on the place of colonized populations in Algeria between 1830 and 1954, but also during the War as well as the situation of Algerian communities in France since independence. In line with the work of Etienne Balibar, a prominent French philosopher openly opposed to the exclusive sense of secularism on which citizenship relies in France, younger scholars increasingly advocate in favour of “the decolonization of the past and the recognition of the violence of the present.”²⁰⁷ However those historians “have a hard time finding recognition within academia, as publishing

²⁰⁴ Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, 66.

²⁰⁵ Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli*, 12.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 76.

²⁰⁷ Talal Asad, Étienne Balibar, and Mohamed Amer-Meziane, *Beyond the Secular State: Secularism, Empire, Hegemony*, n.d.

companies are quite often directed by established [conservative] scholars.”²⁰⁸ In the realm of fiction, authors’ agency is similarly quite limited. Despite the publication of novels such that of Zahia Ramani highlighting the continuity between colonial violence and racism, or that of Kamel Daoud, whom re-wrote Camus’ *Stranger* from the point of view of “the Arab,” many cultural institutions remain aligned with mainstream consensual narratives.²⁰⁹ The best illustration of such practices is perhaps the nature of the exhibitions organized by the Museum of Immigration History, which opened in 2012, and that is headed by Professor Stora.

Such a situation ultimately reveals the close relations between some French scholars and policy-makers. Since the 1990s, it seems that the work of the most visible historians within French academia have served as the basis for many memorial policies and that reciprocally, memorial policies have defined the scope of dominant historical narratives. Within this framework, one can better understand why colonization is still described in textbooks as “an achievement of France,” why politicians keep introducing laws about “the positive aspects of colonization” as “a cultural sharing” and giving speeches about what “colonizers gave to Africa.”²¹⁰ In substance, official discourses about colonization, the War of Algeria and immigration are nothing but a simplified version of hegemonic narratives rooted in the colonial era and persistently renewed within mainstream French academia. A critical and *authentic* perspective on colonization “would jeopardize France’s national narratives; it would necessitate revisiting history programs to take into account the perspective of populations that have experienced the past from the other side,” to repeal certain memorial laws and to promote alternative readings of colonial history.²¹¹ If such a project might seem impossible, it is nevertheless the only path imaginable to reconsider the past in order to sooth the tensions of the present.

²⁰⁸ Djerbal, “History Writing as Cultural and Political Critique ; Or, On the Difficulty of Writing the History of a (de) Colonized Society.”

²⁰⁹ Zahia Rahmani, *France, Story of a Childhood* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016). And Daoud, Kamel. *Meursault, Contre-Enquête : Roman*. Alger: Barzakh, 2013.

²¹⁰ “Loi portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés.”

²¹¹ Michel Wieviorka, 9. *La République, la colonisation. Et après...* (La Découverte, 2010),

Conclusion

Investigating why the most prominent historian of the War of Algeria in contemporary France publicly acknowledged that a *mystery* persisted about it, “we are back into this present that we thought we could escape after [...] [the end of decolonization].”²¹² In French historiography, the incompleteness in the writing of the history of the War crystallizes the incapacity of French scholars to address a simple question: “Who is the subject of History?”²¹³ This question necessitates reconsidering French colonial history in Algeria from the conquest to independence by looking at *who is absent*, rather than at what is silenced. Eventually, the suppression by colonial archives and post-independence historical narratives of the Other encountered in Algeria sheds light on the delicate relations in France between the State and the individuals of Algerian roots that have moved to the Hexagon since the 1960s. After the independence of Algeria in 1962, French historians failed to come to terms with the colonial period with *authenticity*, namely by acknowledging that they engage with the past both as actors and as narrators.”²¹⁴ French scholars lack reflexivity upon their practices of historical narration thus ignoring that such practices were set by colonial administration and framed by the narrative accompanying the establishment of the Vth Republic. To that extent, the historiography of French Algeria necessitates the renewal of those “practices of power and domination, a renewal that can only happen in the present.”²¹⁵

This thesis hopes to leave the reader with some keys to lay down the foundations for this renewal. In the first place, it advocates in favour of a paradigmatic shift regarding how French historians deal with what is *absent* from archives. Focusing on the case of *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*, as a case illuminating the position of mainstream French historiography, it appears

²¹² “Loi portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés,” *Wikipédia*, November 5, 2016.

²¹³ Djerbal, *Qui est le sujet de l'Histoire?*

²¹⁴ Authenticity is defined in the sense of Michel-Rolph Trouillot: a practice urging historians to acknowledge that their relation to the past duplicates the two sides of historicity.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

that the War had been exclusively analysed in terms of forgetting in collective memory. The question of the War of Algeria had surfaced in French historiography in the wake of a renewed debate about the Vichy regime. Thus Professor Stora used in *La Gangrène et l'Oubli* an approach similar to that of Professor Rousso in *Le Syndrome de Vichy*; namely, the model of memory-history. Contrasting this approach with the work of Michel-Rolph Trouillot, this work argues that the Independence of Algeria must be revisited as an “unthinkable” episode of French history: an event that defies the operating epistemological framework of academia. It suggests defining a new concept to uncover what remains unthought-of about the War: that of thwarted history.

Thwarted history describes the failures of narratives to unveil how and why silences enter historical production. To un-thwart the history of the War, it is primarily critical to acknowledge that for a hundred and thirty years, Algeria was not one colony among others, but a physical extension of mainland France, which made independence unthinkable. There is, however, more. Going back and forth between the work of Rousso and Stora, it appears that their work fleshes out two conflicting narratives: if the French Republic had survived in the person of De Gaulle in Algiers under the Vichy regime, then what did the loss of Algeria mean for the resistancialist myth? To overcome this paradox, scholars, journalists and politicians produced during the last years of the War a narrative picturing independence as an achievement of the Fifth Republic. French historiography has not to this very day challenged the narrative picturing decolonization as a victory. On the contrary, the works of Stora and Rousso perpetuate and add material to this narrative. To this regard, when considering the history of the history of the War of Algeria, Stora and Rousso are not only involved as historians, but also as proper actors.

For Stora and Rousso, the War of Algeria was nothing but a purely French internal political crisis. This is the reason what remains fundamentally unthought-of of about the War is its Algerian historical actors. In that regard, the War of Algeria constitutes the paroxysmal

point of a practice rooted in the colonial era consisting in the suppression of colonized populations from history. Indeed, French intellectual progression during the colonial era was inseparable from the systematic description of colonized populations as inferior to the colonizers and standing beyond the course of history. The War of Algeria remains a blind spot in French historiography because it “summoned France and the world to see the paradoxes, limits and incoherencies of Western universalism, as well as the violence it required and thus produced:” the existence of the Other as an active historical agent became undeniable.²¹⁶ Yet post-1962 French scholars did not adopt a critical perspective on these hegemonic ways of writing history and thus they continued to *thwart the subjects of colonial history*.

Those narratives significantly impact the experience of the Algerian diaspora in France. Since 1962, colonial stigmas have been displaced in narratives from the Other in colonial history to North African communities. The absence of Algerians in French post-colonial historiography stems from the analytical void in academia to think the Other. If since the publication of *Orientalism* by Edward Said in 1978 Anglo-Saxon scholars have increasingly sought to unveil how Western historiography has used knowledge to objectify and suppress colonized populations from history, French academia remains reluctant to embrace an alternative approach to its imperial past. In post-1962 France. Moreover, the proximity between certain scholars specializing in colonial history and policy-makers leads today to the increasing rehabilitation of the “positive aspects” of colonization.²¹⁷ In this regard, this thesis is not as much about the War of Algeria as it is about the present, or more precisely, about how a critical approach to the narratives of the War of Algeria can help to build a more reconciliatory present.

It is first and foremost critical for French scholars to acknowledge that historical narratives remain framed by the Republican tradition of post-1789 France relying on an aggressive definition of citizenship and necessitating the existence of the Other, either absent

²¹⁶ Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, 12.

²¹⁷ “Loi portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés.”

from history, or present as a mere signifier of Otherness. Secondly, it is crucial to highlight that during the colonial era, historians created a divided space in Algeria, separating the colonized from the colonizers while denying the latter agency as citizens, political actors and equal humans. The War of Algeria challenged the epistemological framework defining who was and was not the subject of history that French historiography had relied on for decades. Third, it must be recognized that post-War scholars perpetuated hegemonic structures of history-writing, relying on differentiation and exclusion.

It is crucial to embrace a quite opposite mode of history writing, from the perspective of those who have been thwarted, suppressed and silenced from the dominant narratives. Those populations must be given a voice in their own terms, namely, in Arabic. This means returning to colonial archives with a critical perspective as well as incorporating other sources, including oral ones, to historical narratives. It is only by adopting this alternative approach to colonial history that scholars could open a conversation that, given their agency in France and the circulation between academia, media and politicians, might alleviate the damaging social and political consequences of current academic practices. Indeed, “the meaning of history is also in its purpose.”²¹⁸

²¹⁸ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 152.

Appendix

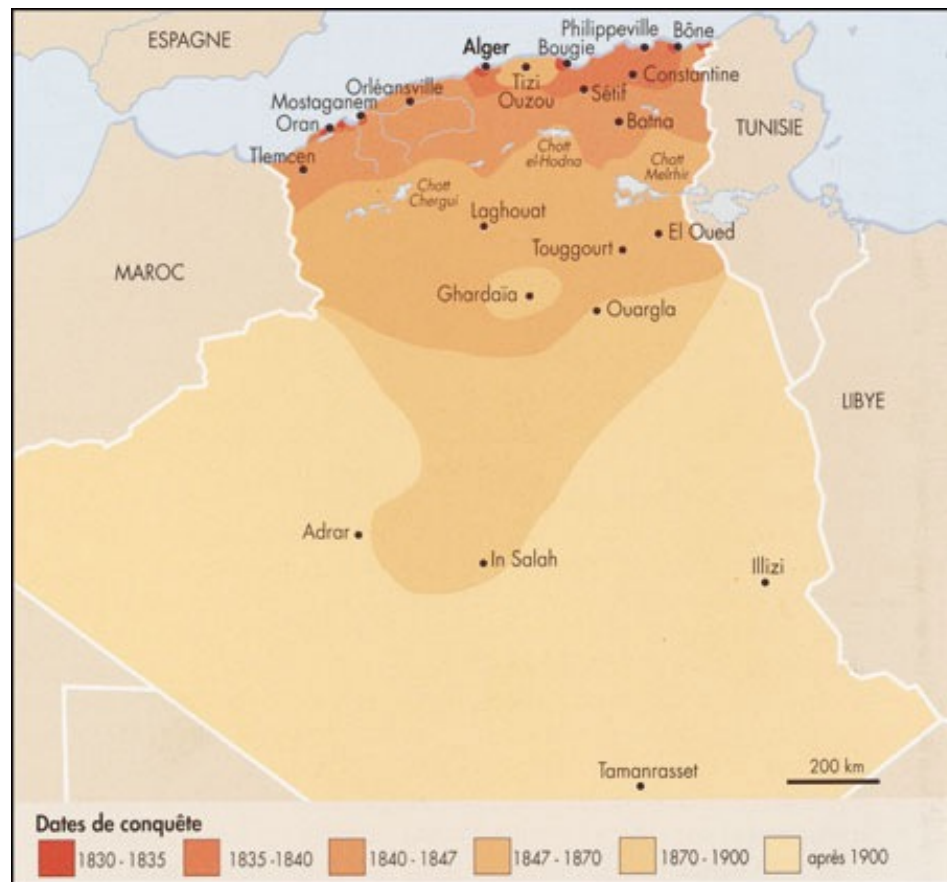


Fig 1. The stages of the Conquest of Algeria by the French army, extracted from <http://crc-resurrection.org/toute-notre-doctrine/restauration-nationale/algerie/terre-francaise-1830-1916/>



Fig 2. Map of the greater Maghreb, encompassing Mauritania and Libya in addition to Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, extracted from <https://www.dreamstime.com/stock-photo-maghreb-sahel-political-map-capitals-national-borders-english-labeling-scaling-illustration-image47920053>



Fig 3. Operation Torch, November 1942, extracted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Torch#/media/File:Operation_Torch_-_map.jpg

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