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REMEMBERING FRENCH ALGERIA

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REMEMBERING FRENCH ALGERIA

Pieds-Noirs, Identity, and Exile

AMY L. HUBBELL

*University of Nebraska Press
Lincoln and London*

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Portions of chapter 6, “Real Returns: Confrontation, Blindness, and Ruins,” were published as “Looking Back: Deconstructing Postcolonial Blindness in Nostalgie” in *Revue CELAAN Review* 3, no. 1-2 (Fall 2004): 85–95; “(Re)turning to Ruins: Pied-Noir Visual Returns to Algeria” in *Modern and Contemporary France* 19, no. 2 (May 2011): 147–61; and “The Past Is Present: Pied-Noir Returns to Algeria” in *Nottingham French Studies* 51, no. 1 (March 2012): 66–77. A previous version of chapter 7, “The Return of Algeria: Relieving and Sustaining the Phantom Limb,” was published as “An Amputated Elsewhere: Sustaining and Relieving the Phantom Limb of Algeria” in *Life Writing* 4, no. 2 (2007): 247–62, and excerpted and rewritten from “The Wounds of Algeria in Pied-Noir Autobiography,” in *Dalhousie French Studies* 81 (Winter 2007): 59–68.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hubbell, Amy L.

Remembering French Algeria: Pieds-Noir,
identity, and exile / Amy L. Hubbell.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8032-6490-8 (hardback: alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-8032-6988-0 (epub)

ISBN 978-0-8032-6989-7 (mobi)

ISBN 978-0-8032-6990-3 (pdf)

1. French prose literature—20th century—History
and criticism. 2. Pieds-Noirs in literature. 3.

Group identity—Algeria. 4. Collective memory—

Algeria. 5. Decolonization in literature. 6.

Algiers (Algeria)—In literature. I. Title.

PQ629.H83 2015

840.9'355—dc23

2015004317

Set in Lyon by M. Scheer.

Designed by N. Putens.

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PREFACE

In preparation for yet another move to another country, in late 2010 I began sifting through my belongings and letting go of what I could not take with me. As part of that effort, I reviewed videos of my travels and my family that had been stored on a camera for more than five years. As I watched the moving images of people who are no longer a part of my life and places I had forgotten, the experience of viewing what was not originally seen and long since forgotten recalled my vicarious returns to Algeria. Having never been to Algeria myself, my experience of the country is intertwined with shared memories from the Pied-Noir community and Algerians living in France. In 2007 I attended the Amicale de Saïda's eighteenth reunion in Toulouse, France. Five-hundred Pieds-Noirs, along with their friends and family, came together to watch *Saïda, on revient ! Sur les pas de notre enfance*, an amateur film chronicling a return voyage to Saïda, Algeria, undertaken by numerous members of the association in 2006. The shaking amateur footage assembled from the cameras of multiple travelers attempted to offer a unified trip back in time. I struggled through my motion sickness to see Algeria, as it is and as it was. The Pieds-Noirs both on the screen and in the audience called out their recognition of the places of their past. Although the tension between what was being displayed on the screen and what the audience (as well as the travelers in the film) were seeing was apparent to me,

those around me were transported to their homeland. Without having experienced Algeria, I could not recollect, but my mind still strained to recognize the landscape and to match the projected images to my vision.

In this way I remember Algeria. Layered testimonials, literary accounts, film clips, photos of streets, homes, and people, coupled with voices expressing loss, pain, and love, compose my memories. These images, accompanied by vague sensations of extraordinary light, heat, and sea, are implanted memories that have been transmitted to me as the result of years of research, interviews, and social networking. I experience what Marianne Hirsch has called “postmemory,” “a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created” (“Past Lives,” 659). My vision of Algeria is certainly less real than that of the Pieds-Noirs, but is my secondhand memory less valid? Without having been there, I remember Algeria through the numerous accounts, visual and textual, that have taken me there over the past fifteen years. My experience, although more distant, is akin to Leïla Sebbar’s as she expressed it in *Voyage en Algérie autour de ma chambre*, “Je suis née à Aflou [. . .]. Je connais Aflou par la voix et les mots des autres, rencontrés au hasard de mes routes” (I was born in Aflou [. . .]. I know Aflou through the voice and words of others, met by chance on my paths) (15). And as one who legitimately cannot see what she did not know, I have received the same blindness to Algeria’s present that the Pieds-Noirs have transmitted to me alongside their memories. Like them, I primarily know the Algeria of French colonial memory. My work, based on readings and viewings of personal memoirs, is not positioned to assess the real and independent Algeria of the present. In a sense, I am doomed to repeat the same blindness that plagues those caught in the perpetual return to the past. The best I can do is to acknowledge my own shortcomings and inability to depict Algeria as it exists today.

If Algeria can recur in my memory, the memory of its exiles is undoubtedly riddled with its reappearance. As exile-writer Milan Kundera wrote in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, “The myth of eternal return states that a life which disappears once and for all, which does not return, is like a shadow, without weight, dead in advance, and whether it was horrible, beautiful, or sublime, its horror, sublimity, and beauty mean nothing” (3). It is against that nothingness that the Pieds-Noirs struggle still today. Caught in a cycle of perpetual return to their lost homeland, they labor to bring the past into the present and to sustain their vision of their childhood home. They cannot let Algeria die, for their identity depends on it; yet Algeria no longer exists in the way they wish to remember it. Kundera continues, “The idea of eternal return implies a perspective from which things appear other than as we know them: they appear without the mitigating circumstance of their transitory nature. This mitigating circumstance prevents us from coming to a verdict. For how can we condemn something that is ephemeral, in transit? In the sunset of dissolution, everything is illuminated by the aura of nostalgia, even the guillotine” (4). The Pieds-Noirs fight to keep their memory alive, refusing to accept Algeria as past, but the transitory nature of Algeria-remembered has them caught in a perpetual cycle. They nostalgically cling to their homeland, now a shadow or a ghost that is not quite there but refuses to leave them. Through eternal return, “the weight of unbearable responsibility lies heavy on every move we make” (5).

The work of the Pieds-Noirs is imbued with a sense of duty. The community labors to preserve its past and to make its colonial home known to its French compatriots who struggled to forget their past in Algeria from the moment of its independence in 1962 until the 1990s. Now that the willful silence surrounding the war has ended for the French, how should the work of the Pieds-Noirs be classified? How does it fit into the context of “Algerias,” past and present, as they are represented in France today? What do the collective and divergent stories of the *Français d’Algérie* teach us about nostalgia’s role in connection to trauma and loss of home? These questions inform this study of how French Algeria is remembered in literature and film from 1962 to the present.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the culmination of twenty years of research and discovery, and I am indebted to many individuals and institutions that helped along the way. I would like to thank Pi Delta Phi for awarding me with the Yedlicka Scholarship in 1995 to study at the Institute for American Universities in Avignon where I first learned about the Pieds-Noirs. I was subsequently awarded a Fulbright / Institute of International Education (IIE) teaching fellowship in 1996–97 that allowed me to begin my research in Rennes, France, where I met Pieds-Noirs eager to tell me about Algeria. I thank the University of Michigan, Kansas State University, and the University of Queensland for various research funding schemes that allowed me to conduct research at the Bibliothèque Nationale; to attend Pied-Noir community events in 2002, 2007, 2011, and 2012; and to conduct numerous personal interviews with authors, film directors, and artists. I also thank the Northeast Modern Language Association for their summer research fellowship in 2007.

Although she will never read this, I continue to be moved by Marie Cardinal's courage to put her trauma into words. Her writing still speaks to me like a mother. From the Pied-Noir community, I specifically thank Christian Pastor, Jean-Pierre Bartolini, Geneviève de Ternant, Alphonse San Miguel, Louis (Loulou) Baylé and the Baylé family, the Amicale de Saïda, Robert Jesenberger, Max and Andrée Ouahnich, Patrick Altes, and

so many others who have taken time to talk to me and share their work. This book could not have been completed without the help of Marie-Claude San Juan, who has shared her poetry and who introduced me to Nicole Guiraud. In turn, I am forever grateful to Nicole, who tangibly battles trauma to represent it in her art and who has become a friend. I would like to thank Charly Cassan, Marie Havenel, and Jean-Pierre Lledo, who have shared their testimony and films with me and my students in Australia. Without the many members of the Pied-Noir community who have been able to express to me what it means to be cut off and to suffer from a lost homeland, this book would not exist.

For support in the writing process, I thank my dissertation adviser, Jarrod Hayes, whose editorial feedback was formative. I am grateful to Alison Rice for her insightful review of my work, to the other reviewers of this book, and to my collaborators on related projects, Névine El Nossery and Natalie Edwards, for always pushing me forward. Thank you especially to Kristen Elias Rowley, Ann Baker, and the entire team at University of Nebraska Press for support and encouragement throughout the publication process.

On a personal level, my French host family, Christian, Hélène, and Stéphanie Maillot, have always opened their homes to me, providing emotional and intellectual support throughout my studies. My partner, Douglas Powell, has continually and carefully edited and encouraged me to be more incisive while providing love and support throughout this journey. My daughter, Sorenne Powell, has helped me understand family, and her unconditional love has allowed me to see the profound suffering of exile for those studied in this book.

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

Translations to English are my own unless otherwise indicated. Where I have provided the translation, only one page reference is given to indicate the corresponding page in the original published work. After previously published translations, a page number is given for both the original text and its translation, and the translator's name and the title of the translation appear alongside the translation page references.

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1

Introduction

NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN REWRITING ALGERIA

Reflecting on the political situation in North Africa during the Arab Spring in early 2011, a fifty-three-year-old Pied-Noir, Didier Lestrade, wrote “Pied-Noir et pro-Arabe” for the *Revue Minorités*:

Et je me dis que la dernière génération de pieds-noirs à laquelle j'appartiens devrait manifester sa joie et l'imposer à l'autre partie des pieds-noirs, plus âgée, celle qui truste les associations et les leaders politiques, celle qui empêche littéralement la France de sortir de cette rancœur vis-à-vis des arabes. À cause d'eux, l'Algérie souffre toujours, à cause d'eux on ouvre des musées qui glorifient le colonialisme et on vote des lois qui lavent leur conscience. À cause d'eux, la classe politique française ne peut dépasser le traumatisme de l'indépendance et accompagner le développement des autres départements français qui souffrent encore du colonialisme comme les Antilles. C'est toute une chaîne de blocages qui est entretenue par les anciens pieds-noirs.

And I think that the last generation of Pieds-Noirs, to which I belong, should demonstrate its joy and impose it on the other, older Pieds-Noirs, those who monopolize the associations and who are the political leaders, those who literally keep France from getting over this resentment toward the Arabs. Because of them, Algeria is still suffering; because of them, we open museums that glorify colonialism

and we vote for laws that clear their conscience. Because of them, the French political class cannot get past the trauma of independence and join the development of other French departments that are still suffering from colonialism, like the French Caribbean. It's a whole chain of blockages that is kept up by the old *Pieds-Noirs*.

The burden of memory, particularly that imposed by the older generation of *Pieds-Noirs*, has rarely been laid so bare in a public forum. Lestrade calls to end the reign of the first generation in order to heal the relationships between France and its former colonies so that he and other *Jeunes Pieds-Noirs* can one day return to their homeland and form relationships of their own:

Notre amour de nos racines n'a pas pu être exprimé à cause de ces origines dramatiques. Nous n'avons pas pu développer de vraies amitiés et de vraies histoires d'amour avec des arabes car le poids des morts reste entre nous. L'immense majorité d'entre nous n'a pas eu le bonheur de retourner sur son lieu de naissance et c'est le moindre des prix à payer pour l'histoire.

Our love of our roots could not be expressed because of these dramatic origins. We could not form true friendships and true love stories with Arabs because the weight of the dead remains between us. The vast majority of us have not had the chance to return to our birthplace, and this is the least of the prices to pay for history.¹

The desired healing and future collaboration between the communities can only begin when the oppressive communal memory is laid to rest.

Since the end of the Algerian War for Independence in 1962, France has had considerable difficulty dealing with its colonial past, often repressing it through what historian and *Pied-Noir* Benjamin Stora has described as collective amnesia: "In the period 1963–81, France appeared increasingly occupied with erasing the traces of a war she had lost and her presence in Algeria; with liquidating concepts such as 'integration,' 'pacification,' and 'assimilation'; with minimizing her 'Algerian years' putting them 'between parentheses'" ("Women's Writing," 84). Todd Shepard, in *The*

Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France, argues that decolonization “allowed the French to forget that Algeria had been an integral part of France since the 1830s and to escape many of the larger implications of that shared past” (2). The brutal seven-year war for Algerian independence from France included numerous acts of torture and terrorism and ended in the exodus of nearly one million *Français d’Algérie*, who took up residence in France. The Evian Accords, which marked the end of the war on March 19, 1962, and several subsequent French laws granted amnesty to the Algerian rebels and French military for offenses committed during the war (Khanna, *Algeria Cuts*, 247).² Amnesty only allowed the French to further suppress their memory of involvement. However, as the French now uncover what was “willfully forgotten,” to borrow historian Richard Derderian’s term (“Algeria,” 29), narratives about the war and the French colonial presence in Algeria are becoming increasingly common. Many of these written memoirs of Algeria are controversial as the different parties attempt to shift the blame for colonization and the war on each other. Some groups, such as the former French colonists and French military officers, began inscribing their innocence in their versions of the war during the immediate silence that followed Algerian independence in 1962.

Algeria and the Algerian War are no longer “forgotten,” but the self-justifying narratives remain. In his article “Algeria as a *lieu de mémoire*: Ethnic Minority Memory and National Identity in Contemporary France,” Derderian largely supports Stora in stating that the war could not be, and indeed was not, forgotten because of the many people who participated.³ In *Imaginaires de guerre: Algérie-Viêt-nam en France et aux Etats-Unis*, Stora refers to the memories of the war as “*mémoires tronquées*” (truncated memories) or “*mémoires cloisonnées*” (cloistered memories) because until recently the memories had been isolated by communities (190). Each of the parties involved in the war fostered its own version of Algeria, holding on to separate pieces of the past. While the French minimized its importance, the war became the foundation for the construction of the fledgling Algerian identity after independence. Stora explains in an interview with Kersten Knipp for Qantara.de:

For a long time—for almost 30, 40 years—France primarily fostered a culture of forgetting. People didn't speak of Algeria; they wanted to put that era firmly behind them—the war and, of course, the defeat, the ignominy of ultimately having to withdraw from Algeria. After all, the French considered this North African nation to be an integral part of their national territory.

The Algerians, on the other hand, were faced with “too much” history. For them, it was about a memory that they could use to legitimise the existence of the nation and, above all, political power, which they tried to legitimise through heroic stories. (“Bitter Legacy”)

With little correspondence between the varied versions of history, Algeria remains fragmented in the French imagination. Thus, Derderian suggests an interrogation of the “communit[ies] of memory,” or the cloistered memories of diverse groups and private citizens, as well as a collaboration of texts that would challenge “the multiple imaginings of the Algerian War” (Derderian, “Algeria,” 31).

Part of this recasting of the history of colonial Algeria began in 1999, when the French National Assembly finally recognized the “conflict” as the Algerian War in order to meet the demands of former combatants. More recently, when France passed the unpopular French law that obliged teachers to instruct their students on the positive values of colonialism (February 23, 2005), the ensuing debates reanimated discussion of France's colonial past. Stora argued in *L'Humanité* in December 2005,

En valorisant l'œuvre coloniale, il ne reconnaît pas les aspirations des peuples colonisés qui s'étaient exprimées sur les principes du passage aux indépendances politiques. Cette régression est dangereuse, elle choisit de privilégier une mémoire contre une autre. Ce morcellement de la mémoire nationale ouvre sur de nouvelles guerres mémorielles pouvant conduire aux pires débordements.

By putting a favourable slant on the colonial project, it denies the aspirations of colonized peoples who had gained a voice in the transition to political independence. In favouring one memory over another,

this represents a dangerous step backwards. Such a fragmentation of the collective national memory opens up the possibility of further memory wars, with potentially more serious consequences.⁴ (“Début”; Drummond, “Colonialism”)

In spite of the recent increased investigations into the French-Algerian past, in a 2010 interview with *Paris Match*, Stora insisted the Algerian War remains taboo because “elle a été, aussi, une guerre civile franco-française, et algéro-algérienne. Elle ne s’est jamais terminée par un consensus entre Français, et une réconciliation avec l’Algérie indépendante. Cette absence de vision commune ne facilite pas l’écriture sereine de l’Histoire” (it was also a civil Franco-French and Algero-Algerian war. It never ended by a consensus among the French and a reconciliation with independent Algeria. This lack of common vision does not allow history to be peacefully written) (“Algérie,” 32). Stora confirms that much remains to be reconciled in the history of the Algerian War, but likewise, the position Algeria maintains in French memory today needs to be interrogated. He explains in *Imaginaires de guerre* that in addition to the traumas invoked by the war, the official censure in France had a strong impact on the version of the war that has been presented and accepted by the French public.⁵

This book joins individual and communal memories to a broader context. Because of the complexities, shame, and trauma invoked by the war, literature from each community, especially from the Pieds-Noirs and former French and Algerian military officers, has taken the place of history. By analyzing the narrative strategies that the former French citizens of Algeria employ to talk about Algeria’s past, this study attempts to appropriately situate their writing among the many voices on Algeria. Primarily through the study of perpetual return, I demonstrate the use of autobiographical writing and film as a means of creating stability after the loss of a homeland. The inherent movement in these return narratives, however, is a destabilizing force that can ultimately deconstruct the attachment to the past. The process of return sustains the community, but it also threatens to undo the unification it strives to create.

The need to return to Algeria through shared memories and both written and physical voyages is predominant in Pied-Noir texts. Even for those who never travel back to Algeria, the idea of returning haunts them. Monique Ayoun and Jean-Pierre Stora address the anxiety surrounding return in the preface to their work *Mon Algérie*:

“Et si on allait à Alger ?” Jean-Pierre Stora, mon cousin, a lancé un jour cette idée dans l’air et elle y est restée, quelques mois, sans qu’aucun de nous deux ose la reformuler. Ces mots : “Alger-Algérie”, sonnaient comme l’impossible, comme l’interdit. Acheter un billet pour Alger, c’était s’offrir un voyage dans le temps, croquer la madeleine proustienne. On ne peut franchir ce pas sans appréhension : quelles choses enfouies en soi par le travail des années va-t-on brusquement éveiller ? Ne risque-t-on pas de faire surgir quelque monstre insidieusement lové dans les recoins les plus cachés de la mémoire ? Doit-on tirer de leur repère les images endormies ? Et si c’était la déception, ou pis encore, l’indifférence ?

“And if we went to Algiers?” my cousin Jean-Pierre Stora one day threw this idea out into the air, and it remained there for several months, and neither of us dared repeat it. These words—“Algiers-Algeria”—rang out like the impossible, like the forbidden. Buying a ticket to Algiers was equivalent to buying a trip back in time, to bite into the Proustian madeleine. We could not take this step without apprehension: What things buried inside ourselves over the years were we going to abruptly awaken? Aren’t we running the risk of conjuring up some monster insidiously curled up in the most hidden corners of our memory? Must we drag out the sleeping images from where they belong? And if it meant disappointment, or even worse, indifference? (17)

While many exiles return with precisely this mission of chasing after the sensations—the rhythms, the sounds, and the tastes—of Algeria, Ayoun and Stora fear resurrecting the essence of the past. Likening this return to Proustian memory, which is most often associated with pleasure, they, like many Pied-Noir writers, recognize the possibility of also awakening

a beast within. Most, however, seek to sustain the pleasure of the past through writing, and by continually reliving specific memories, they suppress others.

This book explores repetition and return as fundamental elements of Pied-Noir identity. Although the Pieds-Noirs claim to use repetition as a means of preserving the past, as a psychological practice, repetition is a means of fixing and rehearsing the past to avoid the present. While many of the authors studied in this book concentrate on the physical sensations of the past evoked through real returns and memoir writing, a few directly address their fixation on the past and their inability to overcome nostalgia. Algerian-born authors Albert Camus, Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, Leïla Sebbar, and Marie Cardinal, among many others, wrote multiple post-exile works centered on Algeria. Regardless of the authors' overt textual goals, they continually evoke Algeria, demonstrating that the repetition of homeland is never complete.

To more completely understand the importance of Algeria in French memory today, this book undertakes Derderian's project of interrogating the cloistered memories of colonial Algeria so they might be integrated into a context of Algerian histories. The colonial experience in Algeria is an important factor to both the present of Algeria and that of France, but the problem for most Pied-Noir writers is that the Algeria that interests them no longer exists. Thus, this book focuses on authors who have traditionally been viewed outside the Pied-Noir community but who employ many of the same strategies of remembering. These authors offer both reductive and productive models for examining a colonial past. In addition to establishing a place for colonial memory, *Remembering French Algeria* attempts to distinguish the strategies at play in communal memory and to express how individual memories are often incorporated into larger efforts.

WHO ARE THE PIEDS-NOIRS?

The term "Pieds-Noirs" is used in this study to loosely refer to the French-born citizens of colonial Algeria who were exiled to France during and after the Algerian War for Independence (1954–62). When referring to

the French still living in the Algerian colony, the term “*Français d’Algérie*” will be used. While the majority of authors studied in this text, notably Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, and Leïla Sebbar, are not generally identified as Pieds-Noirs, their attachment to and repetition of Algeria, deconstructed as it may be, is no less powerful and apparent. Even Marie Cardinal, whom I read as representative of Pied-Noir identity, struggled to articulate something separate from her community’s experience.⁶ Consequently, these authors provide a valuable counterbalance to the predominant nostalgic re-creation of colonial Algeria. Likewise, while I would argue that Albert Camus was not a Pied-Noir because he was exiled from Algeria in 1940, long before the Algerian War for Independence, and he died in 1960, before it ended, his nostalgia for and repetition of his homeland are significant factors in his literary and philosophical work, and in many ways he provides the model for the authors who followed.

Although the term “Pied-Noir” can also refer to those Europeans from Tunisia and Morocco, this book will only consider memory of Algeria. Unlike the military protectorates of Tunisia and Morocco, Algeria was a *colonie de peuplement*, or a settler colony. As a result, the *Français d’Algérie* were generationally implanted in their country after the Algerian conquest in 1830. Because many *Français d’Algérie* had family ties in Algeria dating back more than a century, they felt that they had a strong ancestral claim to the land. The longevity of their presence in Algeria further created a more specific culture and political climate for the European settlers than it did in other colonies. Equally specific to Algeria is the difficulty of decolonization. Officially a part of France beginning in 1848, Algeria was liberated through a war that continued from 1954 to 1962. This war was particularly complicated because French officials refused to label it as such and both sides practiced torture.⁷ Furthermore, the Organisation de l’Armée Secrète (OAS), formed in 1961, threatened physical attack on the *Français d’Algérie* not aligned with the group’s ideals of maintaining a French Algeria. Civilian massacres and the widespread use of torture intensified the traumatic departure from Algeria. As Jean-Jacques Viala documents in *Pieds-Noirs en Algérie après l’indépendance* (Pieds-Noirs in Algeria after independence), many had hoped, and a minority did try,

to remain in Algeria after independence, but they soon found that this would be impossible.⁸ The violence surrounding their departure together with the absence of their homeland made the compulsion to return and repeat their experiences even more potent.

PIED-NOIR IDENTITY

The articulation of a collective Pied-Noir identity has always been based on the concept of return: it was on their so-called return to France that the *Français d'Algérie* earned the nickname Pieds-Noirs. While it is often assumed that the *Français d'Algérie* were returning to their homeland, most had never been to France, and a significant percentage were not of French heritage but were naturalized citizens. The French term "*Français d'Algérie*" is preferred in this book to refer to the colonial French because it clearly indicates that the Pieds-Noirs were French citizens from Algeria.⁹ Whereas the Pieds-Noirs sometimes insist on their dual identity because it lends them a sense of authority and belonging, few of them are what would be called today "Franco-Algérien."

The once pejorative term "Pieds-Noirs" is packed with conflicting myths of its origins, two of which will be explored here. The predominantly held source of the term is that native Algerians saw the black boots of the French soldiers during the conquest in 1830 and called the colonists "Pieds-Noirs." The second major myth is that the Pieds-Noirs stomped their grapes to make wine, leaving a black resin on their feet.¹⁰ In both versions the term "Pied-Noir" is attributed to the Algerians, and both attribute the coining to a time before the term's actual invention. If indeed the indigenous Algerians created the name, there is no explanation for the beginning of the term in French, especially as there was a great linguistic gap between colonized and colonizer in the early nineteenth century. Although it has not entered into Pied-Noir mythology, the official version conveyed in French dictionaries is that the term was created in 1901 to refer to the driver of Algerian boats (Robert, *Petit Robert*, 1433; Domas, *Maxidico*, 841). The *Robert* dictionary, whose author, Paul Robert, was a Pied-Noir, also cites the term as later being used to refer to an "*Arabe d'Algérie*" in 1917 (1433). The *Petit Larousse illustré* uses

Pied-Noir to refer to a “Français d’origine européenne installé en Afrique du Nord, et plus particulièrement en Algérie, jusqu’à l’indépendance” (French of European origin living in North Africa, and more specifically in Algeria, until independence) (781).¹¹ These conflicting versions of the “origins” of the Pieds-Noirs reconfirm another important aspect of Pied-Noir identity: the source of origin is eternally displaced, and it is the return toward an origin that defines the Pied-Noir.

The truth of the Pieds-Noirs is that their feet were never considered black until those French colonists who had been born in the North African colonies began their “repatriation” in France as early as 1956 (Hureau, *Mémoire*, 7). As almost a million *Français d’Algérie* arrived in France, primarily between 1961 and 1963, the term “Pieds-Noirs” was used as an insult to express disgust with the political and social climate of the time. Cardinal explains in *Les Pieds Noirs*, “Nous n’avons été Pieds Noirs qu’au moment de partir. On dit que ce sont les Arabes qui nous ont appelés comme ça du temps de la Conquête, parce que les premiers colons débarquaient avec des souliers noirs [. . .]. En vérité, ce sont les Français de France qui nous ont donné ce nom” (We didn’t become Pieds-Noirs until the moment we left. They say it was the Arabs that called us that during the Conquest, because the first colonists landed with black shoes [. . .]. The truth is it was the French from France that gave us this name) (80). Historian Jean-Robert Henry believes that the French gave this term to the “*Français d’Algérie rapatriés*” (repatriated French of Algeria) in order to show themselves superior to those colonists who were soiled by Algeria: they were both planted in the soil and dirtied by the country (Martini, *Racines*, 3).

At first a derogatory term, “Pied-Noir” eventually was reappropriated to this group and became a symbol of pride.¹² Cardinal explains, “Au début nous avons pris ça pour une insulte ou pour une moquerie, ça nous ‘faisait perdre la figure’ de nous appeler comme ça. Et puis nous nous y sommes faits. Personnellement je suis fier d’être Pied-Noir” (In the beginning we took it as an insult or a joke; it made us “lose face” to call us that. And then we got used to it. Personally, I’m proud to be a Pied-Noir) (*Pieds-Noirs*, 80). Eventually, this visually evocative name became

a mark that the *Français d'Algérie* were proud to carry. It further became a source of collective identity once the Pieds-Noirs were transplanted in France, and some emphasized certain stereotypical aspects of their identity to more readily identify their community.¹³ In the 1980s, when most of France remained publicly silent about the end of colonial rule in Algeria, associations for Pieds-Noirs sprang up around the country, and they are still largely active today.

Because of their mixed origins, when arriving in France, the Pieds-Noirs seemed markedly different from the *Français de souche*, or native-born French. Many of the Pieds-Noirs were of Spanish heritage. In Oran in 1911, for example, there were ninety-five thousand people of French ancestry, ninety-two thousand naturalized French citizens of Spanish origin, and ninety-three thousand Spanish citizens living in Algeria as foreigners (Stora, *Histoire de l'Algérie coloniale*, 31). Stora writes that the first *Français d'Algérie* were a mix of peasants who had lost their social standing in the Industrial Revolution, of exiled peoples, and of “communards” who would eventually want to become landowners (31). Added to this mix were Maltese, Italians, Corsicans, and many other less populous groups of peoples. The Crémieux Decree naturalized the Algerian Jews in 1870: as the Jews were not Arab, they could then be incorporated into what was “European” at the time. There has been recent speculation that the decision to give French citizenship to the Jews already living in Algeria long before colonization was the cause for great animosity from the Arab population of Algeria at the time. Adding to the diversity of the colonial population, the law of June 26, 1889, imposed French citizenship on any foreign-born person in Algeria who did not claim the nationality of his or her father (32). The melding of the group, although begun in the colony, would predominantly take place through communal reinforcements once in France. As Patricia Lorcin points out, “The defensive mechanism of the *pieds-noirs*, against both metropole French and the loss of their former identity, was to coalesce into a tight-knit community of ‘exiles’” (*Historicizing*, 171–72).

While the term “*Français d'Algérie*” allows for a variety of people (at least of different social classes and religions) to belong to the group,

the visually descriptive term “Pied-Noir” reinforces the idea that only one kind of person participated in colonization. Jean-Pierre Hollender gives a detailed physical description of this type in his *Plaidoyer pour un peuple innocent*:

gros, gras, rouges et suants, cigare aux lèvres, jetant nos billets de banque par la portière de notre voiture ou fouettant les glaneurs qui osaient ramasser les blés abandonnés par les grosses moissonneuses batteuses. Les femmes étant couvertes de bijoux et passant leurs journées affalées sur des sofas en mangeant des “loukoum,” pendant que des négriennes au moyen de grands éventails chassaient les mouches en les ventilant.

fat, sweaty, a cigar on the lips, throwing our banknotes out the door of our new car or whipping the gleaners who picked up wheat left behind from our big combine-harvesters. The women, covered in jewels and spending their days on couches and eating Turkish Delight while their black servants chased away flies with large fans while fanning them. (16)

Conglomerating all the *Français d'Algérie* under the rubric of Pied-Noir erases the great variety of cultures, classes, and ethnicities as well as a diverse history of those people who participated in the colonization of Algeria. This erasure, however, is perhaps necessary for sustaining the Pied-Noir population in France at a time when its members feel they are dying out.

The derogatory term “Pied-Noir” additionally served to create a type of person who participated in colonization of North Africa. The Pieds-Noirs were perceived to talk differently, eat differently, and dress differently from the metropolitan French, and their differences were thus viewed as the group’s identity. The literary figure of Cagayous, who appeared in Algeria near the end of the nineteenth century, became one of the primary fictional representations of the Europeans of Algeria. Although his stories (published by Musette) appeared between 1894 and 1920, he still clearly represents this difference of

the “colonial race,” as historian David Prochaska calls it in his article “History as Literature, Literature as History: Cagayous of Algiers.” Cagayous was a conglomerate of French, Spanish, Italian, and Maltese (among others) and spoke a “pataouète” (675), and many Pied-Noir organizations still use Cagayous as a representation of their collective identity.¹⁴

The Pieds-Noirs find both strength and communal ties by recuperating the stereotypes placed on them in the postcolonial world. Numerous recent texts written by Pieds-Noirs embrace and reinforce the image of the “merguez-and-couscous-loving Pied-Noir in Algeria.” This act of endorsing the Pied-Noir stereotype serves to further the common identity of the Pieds-Noirs. As an example of this reinforcement, an invitation to a Pied-Noir gathering in Uzès for June 1, 2003, states,

Vous trouverez sur place: Boissons, merguez et pâtisseries orientales. Bônois, Constantinois, anciens de Tunisie, Pieds Noirs de tous horizons, amis et sympathisants, venez nombreux participer à cette journée, afin de retrouver des visages connus, d'échanger des souvenirs impérissables et d'assurer dans la joie et la bonne humeur le succès complet de cette manifestation. Chacun apporte son “Couffin” ou sa “Cabassette”, sa petite table et chaises pliantes. N'oubliez pas les verres pour l'Anisette (se délecter avec modération).

On site you will find: drinks, merguez and oriental pastries. Bônois, Constantinois, and the older generation from Tunisia, Pieds-Noirs from all backgrounds, friends and supporters, come one come all to participate in this day, to reunite with familiar faces, to exchange everlasting memories, and to ensure the total success of this gathering with joy and good humor. Bring your own “Couffin” or “Cabassette,” your folding table and chairs.¹⁵ Don't forget the anisette glasses (to be enjoyed in moderation). (ABCT, “Rappel La Saint-Couffin!”)

The Pieds-Noirs themselves now embrace this collective label as their survival is dependent on their unity and, thus, sometimes conformity to these stereotypes.