

LE SILENCE DE LA GUERRE? FRENCH COMBATANTS' MEMOIRS OF THE
ALGERIAN WAR, 1954-1988.

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department
of History.

Chapel Hill
2012

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ABSTRACT

ANNDAL NARAYANAN: *Le silence de la guerre?* French combatants' memoirs of the Algerian War, 1954-1988
(Under the direction of Donald Reid)

Fifty years after the cessation of hostilities, the memory of the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) remains an open wound in French society. From the time of the war itself, French veterans of Algeria sought to find their voice in a society largely indifferent to them and their experiences. This thesis examines the evolving memory of the Algerian War among French veterans who wrote wartime memoirs, and seeks the relationship of these narratives with the wider French collective memory of the Algerian War, by closely following the constructed figure of the combatant. This study finds that French veterans' narratives of Algeria, while all expressing various kinds of victimhood, evolved in time from the political to the personal, encouraged by governmental amnesties that depoliticized the memory of the war and contributed to the impossibility of a general collective memory of the Algerian War in France.

To the memory of Mr. Donald Hall, who taught me the importance of reading, writing,
and teaching history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my adviser, Dr. Donald Reid, for constantly challenging me to seek new ways to conceptualize my work, and I also thank Dr. Raphaëlle Branche, for opening my eyes to the importance of this line of research, and for her very helpful advice when I was just embarking on this study.

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INTRODUCTION

Silence was inscribed in the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) from its outset, profoundly affecting those who fought it. This war pitted the Algerian nationalist front group *Front de libération nationale* (FLN) and its *Armée de libération nationale* (ALN) against French forces, in a settler colony comprised of some one million European-origin colonists and almost 9.5 million native Algerians.¹ After two years of “operations to maintain order,” conscripts were deployed in 1956, their mission termed “pacification.” About 1.2 million French youth were added to an army of professional soldiers, many of whom had fought in World War II and Indochina (1948-1954), and some of whom had been in the Resistance². The conscripts, on the other hand, 4.6% of the total French population, were chiefly from the generation which grew up after World War II; many were either newlyweds or still lived with their parents³. Conscripts and career soldiers alike returned to an indifferent Metropole that was eager to avoid confronting another national disgrace after the German occupation and the recent loss of Indochina in 1954. Without the mass demobilizations and return rituals following the

¹Daniel Lefeuvre, “Les pieds-noirs,” 267-285 in Mohammed Harbi and Benjamin Stora, eds., *La guerre d'Algérie, 1954-2004: la fin de l'amnésie* (Paris: Laffont, 2004), 267.

²Raphaëlle Branche, “La dernière génération du feu? Jalons pour une étude des anciens combattants français de la guerre d'Algérie,” *Politique, culture, société* 3, (Nov.-Dec. 2007), <<http://www.histoire-politique.fr>> (5 February 2011), 2, and Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Découverte, 1989), 73.

³Stora, *La gangrène*, 293, and Raphaëlle Branche, “Clementines et bifteck, ou le retour d'un appelé d'Algérie vu par ses frères et soeurs,” 67-81 in dir. Bruno Cabanes and Guillaume Piketty, *Retour à l'intime: au sortir de la guerre*, (Paris: Tallandier, 2009), 67.

World Wars, veterans of Algeria were rendered invisible in a way that previous veterans in France never were, and this was the first layer of silence built around their experience.⁴ Returning from a war without a name to a rapidly changing society often reluctant to listen to them, French veterans of the Algerian war struggled to find their voice.

In the decades after the official end of hostilities in 1962, manifold levels of silence enclosed the public memory of the war. Indeed, only in the mid-1990s did French political leaders dare to utter the word “war” in relation to what had been known as “the events of North Africa,” and it was not until 1999 that the National Assembly officially named the conflict in legislative texts as the “Algerian war.”⁵ The eminent historian of Algeria, Benjamin Stora—from a Jewish Algerian family which left Constantine after the war—identified the *refoulement* (repression) of the war's memory in French society in his seminal work *La gangrène et l'oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie*. Stora argues that the French Fifth Republic was ashamed of its birth from chaos—the result of a right-wing military coup in Algiers in 1958—and its associations with colonialism. Therefore, President Charles de Gaulle redirected the Fifth Republic's gaze to its own mythical origins, commemorating the Resistance and refusing to acknowledge the Indochina or Algerian wars.⁶ Moreover, Stora argues that amnesties of crimes during the war, beginning with those proclaimed in the Accords of Évian of March 18, 1962, and continuing through 1981, obscured contentious memories of the war “in a climate of

⁴Branche, “Clémentines et bifteck,” 67.

⁵Mohand Hamoumou and Abderahmen Moumen, “L'histoire des harkis et Français musulmans: la fin d'un tabou?” 317-344 in Mohammed Harbi and Benjamin Stora, *La guerre d'Algérie, 1954-2004: la fin de l'amnésie?* (Paris: Laffont, 2004), 317.

⁶Stora, *La gangrène*, 221.

indifference”.⁷ Because of this public climate, there was no possibility for a single French collective memory of the Algerian war.⁸

However, a large body of writing on the Algerian War has emerged in the decades after 1962. Alongside a majority of works by civilians expressing nostalgia for *l'Algérie française*, a diverse range of French veterans wrote memoirs reflecting on the methods and meaning of the war.⁹ Historians have used these works to study the operational history of the war; however, there has not been a significant study of these veterans' memoirs as products of the eras when they were written. These sources present an important site to examine the relationship between collective and individual memories, and to trace the ways that the Algerian War *was* remembered, by those who fought it.

This study situates itself in this ellipsis: what memory did French veterans develop of this war, beneath a general public atmosphere of silence and indifference? More specifically, how did veterans construct their identities as *anciens combattants* through memoirs of their experiences? Finally, what is the relationship between the narratives put forth by veterans, and the contentious and fractured French collective memory of the Algerian war? My findings accord generally with Benjamin Stora's chronology of the repression of collective memory of the war from public space in France. However, if we examine this chronology specifically through the lens of veterans' memoirs, the picture becomes more complex.

This study follows the figure of the combatant in memoirs as a vehicle for conveying the meaning of the French experience in the Algerian War. It demonstrates

⁷Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli*, 215.

⁸*Ibid.*, 242.

⁹Stora notes that almost 70% of all literature published on the war between 1962 and 1982 is pro-*Algérie française*. *Ibid.*, 238.

that during and immediately after the war, mutually exclusive visions of the war in combatants' memoirs competed for entry into French collective memory, but that the state's amnesties of crimes during the war (particularly in 1968, 1974, and 1981) gradually decreased the impetus for individualistic political stances on the darkest aspects of the war. Therefore the early memoirs are fiercely partisan and unabashedly political, but later memoirs increasingly take a more personal stance, speaking from within particular memory communities. From 1954 to 1988, the evolving figure of the *ancien d'Algérie* in veterans' memoirs both reflects the gradual erection of official silences around the war through amnesties, and manifests a consistent sense of victimhood, the only 'lesson' that could be shared among mutually incompatible views of the war.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The literature on the memory of the Algerian War forms the essential background of this study. Benjamin Stora is the foremost French historian of the Algerian war and its memory; his work *La gangrène et l'oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* traces the willful forgetting of the war by the French public and especially French politicians. This seminal work encouraged scholars such as Claire Mauss-Copeaux to pierce through the silence surrounding veterans: her oral microhistory of veterans from the Vosges region, *Appelés en Algérie: la parole confisquée*, demonstrates that regardless of veterans' political views on the Algerian War, their regional collective memory of the Occupation and Resistance framed their memory of combat in Algeria more than the colonial culture

in which they were raised.¹⁰ Moreover, Mauss-Copeaux notes the dearth of memoirs written by ordinary conscripts, as opposed to officers or career soldiers.¹¹

Other scholars, such as Mohand Hamoumou and Jean-Jacques Jordi, have studied the memory of those whose stories were excluded by the general French *refoulement* of the Algerian years, in particular those known as *Français musulmans*.¹² These were men of North African descent who fought for France, estimated at 263,000 total comprising 20,000 regulars, 40,000 conscripts, and 58,000 *harkis* (supplementary local self-defense units).¹³ Several tens of thousands of *Français musulmans* left in Algeria by explicit order of the French Fifth Republic would be massacred by the FLN after the war, and those who were able to flee to France were often confined to resettlement camps.¹⁴ Arguably, despite its mistreatment and neglect by the French state, this community, as a group, has become more visible in French historical memory of the war than have European-origin veterans; the literature these combatants produced merits another study by itself, which will not be attempted here.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, a new generation of historians has broached the topic of the memory of the Algerian war in particular.¹⁵ A cascade of events in the French public forum beginning in 2000 triggered renewed historical scrutiny of the

¹⁰Claire Mauss-Copeaux, *Appelés en Algérie: la parole confisquée* (Paris: Hachette, 1998), 278.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 9.

¹²Mohand Hamoumou, *Et ils sont devenus harkis* (Paris: Fayard, 1993), and Jean-Jacques Jordi and Mohand Hamoumou, *Les harkis, une mémoire enfouie* (Paris: Autrement, 1999).

¹³Benjamin Stora, *Histoire de la guerre d'Algérie (1954-1962)*, (Paris: Découverte, 1993), 80. Francophone and Anglophone scholars frequently use the term *harkis* as shorthand for the ensemble of native Algerians who fought on the side of France during the war.

¹⁴Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli*, 85.

¹⁵Alec G. Hargreaves, "France and Algeria, 1962-2002: turning the page?" *Modern and Contemporary France* 10 (4), 2002: 445-447, 445.

war on that side of the Mediterranean. In June 2000, *Le Monde* published an interview with an Algerian woman, Louise Ighilariz, who had been tortured and raped by French paratroopers, and in November, General Paul Aussaresses gave an unrepentant interview to the same newspaper, defending the necessity of torture and acknowledging the summary executions he committed.¹⁶ Stéphane Gacon's *L'Amnestie: De la Commune à la guerre d'Algérie* reflects a reinvigorated scholarly inquiry into war crimes of Algeria. This thoughtful work argues that the French state has employed amnesties to consolidate centralized power and to forget the past enough to move beyond national ruptures, a theory which greatly inspires the analysis in this thesis.¹⁷ Raphaëlle Branche's *La guerre d'Algérie: une histoire apaisée?* adeptly outlines the political and institutional bases of the forgetting of the war that Stora identified through the 1960s and 1970s, but also demonstrates the subsequent reappearance of this subject in French consciousness beginning in the 1980s. Mohammed Harbi and Benjamin Stora compiled one of the most comprehensive recent works on the memory of the war, *La guerre d'Algérie, 1954-2004: la fin de l'amnésie?*, which presents studies by leading French and Algerian historians and literary critics.¹⁸ This volume emphasizes the experiences of *harkis*, the FLN, anti-colonialist activists, and the *pieds noirs*, European-origin settlers in Algeria, all of whom were given French citizenship in 1889.¹⁹

¹⁶William B. Cohen, "The Sudden Memory of Torture: The Algerian War in French Discourse, 2000-2001," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 19 (3), Fall 2001: 82-94, 87.

¹⁷Stéphane Gacon, *L'Amnestie: de la Commune à la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

¹⁸Mohammed Harbi and Benjamin Stora, eds., *La guerre d'Algérie, 1954-2004: la fin de l'amnésie* (Paris: Laffont, 2004).

¹⁹David Prochaska, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 146.

However, historical research principally on the veterans of the Algerian War themselves is “practically nonexistent,” according to Raphaëlle Branche, one of the only French historians to have undertaken such work.²⁰ Her article, “La dernière génération du feu? Jalons pour une étude des anciens combattants français de la guerre d'Algérie,” calls for studies of veterans' postwar experiences, which remains a largely unexplored field. Foremost among this scant research is a study of the trauma and shame which the war engendered in some soldiers, psychiatrist Bernard Sigg's *Le silence et la honte: névroses de la guerre d'Algérie*.²¹ This important work argues that the thesis of “*oubli*” and “*refoulement*” does not explain the memory of the Algerian War among its veterans; rather “censorship or self-censorship” has been at work.²² One of the most important works about the experiences of soldiers during and after their service is *Soldats en Algérie, 1954-1962: expériences contrastées des hommes du contingent* by Jean-Charles Jauffret.²³ Another excellent study is *The Algerian War and the French Army, 1954-1962: Experiences, Images, Testimonies*, edited by Martin S. Alexander, Martin Evans, and J. F. V. Keiger.²⁴ Denouncing the “Manichaeian perspective [which...] has framed the great bulk of writing on the Algerian War and the French Army,” this edited volume seeks to “dissolve myths and misleading simplistic images” of both French soldiers as

²⁰Branche, “La dernière génération du feu?”, 3.

²¹Bernard Sigg, *Le silence et la honte: névroses de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Messidor, 1989).

²²*Ibid.*, 25.

²³Jean-Charles Jauffret, *Soldats en Algérie 1954-1962: expériences contrastées des hommes du contingent* (Paris: Autrement, 2000).

²⁴Martin S. Alexander, Martin Evans, and J. F. V. Keiger, eds., *The Algerian War and the French Army: Experiences, Images, Testimonies* (Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2002).

sadistic torturers and the FLN as savage terrorists.²⁵ However, such studies are the exception rather than the rule in the literature.

Because of the paucity of works directly related to the combatants' postwar experiences and memory, this work must also turn to studies of the archetypal *anciens combattants* in France—veterans of the Great War. To many of these older veterans, accustomed to an entirely different kind of warfare, it is quite possible that the war in Algeria did not seem a “real war.”²⁶ Indeed, while there has been no large-scale French military involvement since Algeria, for most of the twentieth century, the veterans of the World Wars were highly visible in daily life as well as in the French historical imagination.²⁷ A number of veterans from these two *générations du feu* established the historiography of the memory of the Great War.

Jean Norton Cru gives us the foundational study of French soldiers' memory of the Great War in *Du témoignage*.²⁸ Himself a veteran of the Great War, he argues that war is an “intellectually tangible experience” that can be studied scientifically, but limits the only valid *témoins* (witnesses) to those who were in combat.²⁹ Drawing upon this work, Antoine Prost, an *ancien d'Algérie*, undertook the preeminent study of Great War veterans' participation in French society. His book, *In the Wake of War: ‘Les anciens combattants’ and French Society*, uses memoirs to trace how the cultivation of veterans'

²⁵Alexander, Evans, and Keiger, 2.

²⁶Branche, “La dernière génération du feu?”, 6.

²⁷However, as Raphaëlle Branche points out, veterans of both Indochina and Algeria are now officially labelled “*la troisième génération du feu*,” which at least linguistically gives them equal recognition to veterans of the World Wars. (*Ibid.*, fn. 1.)

²⁸Jean Norton Cru, *Du témoignage* (Holland: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1967).

²⁹*Ibid.*, 27, 30.

memories helped shape their political organizations, finding that it took almost a decade for these veterans to begin publishing memoirs of their experiences.³⁰ However, some of the memoirs in my study were published before the end of the Algerian War; the time frame for narrating one's war testimony collapsed significantly through the twentieth century. Yet another veteran who studied the memory of the Great War, British World War II veteran Paul Fussell, made a foundational contribution to the field of memory studies in *The Great War and Modern Memory*.³¹ From a literary study of the prose, poetry, and memoirs of the Western Front, Fussell locates the origins of our "essentially ironic" modern sensibility in "the application of mind and memory to the events of the Great War."³²

Bruno Cabanes' *La victoire endeillée: la sortie de guerre des soldats français 1918-1920* approaches the return of French World War I veterans from another angle: it presents the dissonance between joyous narratives of the end of the war, and the reality of veterans' difficult wait to be demobilized and return home.³³ Its emphasis on the fracture between the home front and the realities faced by the combatants is quite pertinent to the present analysis, as the *anciens d'Algérie* often found French society and their families unable or unwilling to understand their experience.³⁴ Daniel Sherman's innovative work

³⁰Antoine Prost, *In the Wake of War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society, 1914-1939* (Berg: Oxford, 1992).

³¹Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). See also Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

³²Fussell, *The Great War*, 35.

³³Bruno Cabanes, *La victoire endeillée: la sortie de guerre de soldats français 1918-1920* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

³⁴For instance, Branche notes in her "Clémentines et bifteck" (*op. cit.*) that her interview with a former conscript was the first time he had spoken with anyone about the war (80).

The Construction of Memory in Interwar France (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1999) traces the development of the collective memory of the Great War in France, in particular through commemorative rituals and monuments; it also establishes an alternative periodization of the emergence of this collective memory, which inspires the chronology I create to portray the development of the genre of veterans' memoirs of Algeria.

THEORY AND METHOD

Both the analytical and narrative methods of this thesis closely parallel those employed by Leonard V. Smith in his *The Embattled Self: Soldiers' Testimony of the Great War*.³⁵ Beginning with a dialogue with Cru's *Du témoignage*, Smith uses literary analysis to locate the origins of the familiar Great War “metanarrative of tragedy,” expressed by Cru and Fussell among many others, in veterans' frustrated attempts to frame their inexpressible experiences in literature.³⁶ Smith portrays the essential *convergence* of a narrative of the Great War, to the point that it became knowable even to non-combatants. However, the present study finds that because of the ultimate *fragmentation* of the memory of Algeria, between strongly opposed political views in society and official silence on the part of the government, the only unified narrative that could be expressed by veterans to the public was one of betrayal and victimhood. The reason that the Algerian War remains problematic as a topic of public or academic discussion in France today is indeed that there *is no* essential 'experience' to be

³⁵Leonard V. Smith, *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers' Testimonies of the Great War* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007).

³⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

understood; it has been refracted among memory communities which often cannot communicate with each other because of vastly different frames of reference.

Philippe Carrard, in a study of memoirs written by Francophone volunteers in the SS during World War II, addresses a number of epistemological, theoretical and methodological concerns pertinent to my study.³⁷ Carrard emphasizes the ambiguity of memoirs as historical documents, since when they were written is often unknown; for this reason, the truth-claims of memoirists must be seriously evaluated.³⁸ Of most direct significance to the present study, Carrard analyzes the "textualization" of experiences into memoirs, emphasizing the disynchronicity between the "'now [...]' at the time of writing," and "the thoughts that they assert they had 'then' [...]." ³⁹ My analysis will both closely consider how veterans textualized their experiences through the figure of the combatant, as well as the importance of disynchronicity in the narratives that they produced to address a contemporary audience.

My study includes memoirs published between the time of the war itself and 1988. This year marked a new era in veterans' memory of the war and its role in French public discourse. In 1988, 50,000 veterans demonstrated in Paris to claim recognition of "their rights as former combatants of North Africa."⁴⁰ It was clear that the state would not take a position on the war without "the pressure of public opinion" or interest groups.⁴¹ Thus the narrative of victimhood that developed in the genre of Algerian War

³⁷Philippe Carrard, *The French Who Fought For Hitler: Memories from the Outcasts* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010).

³⁸*Ibid.*, 5, 8.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 85, 110.

⁴⁰Branche, *La guerre d'Algérie*, 42.

memoirs could be seen breaking through into civil society in the year 1988; even the official naming of the war by the French National Assembly in 1999 "suggested the idea that these soldiers were, but perhaps also *had been*, victims."⁴²

This thesis intentionally employs broadened definitions of the categories "memoir" and "combatant" in order to render apparent both the political diversity within the genre of Algerian War memoirs, and the great complexity of the combat itself, which involved not only conventional warfare and counterinsurgency, but also terrorism, psychological operations, and civilians engaged in a Franco-French civil war. Paul Fussell defines the "memoir" in literary terms as "a kind of fiction," different from the "'first novel' [...] only by continuous implicit attestations of veracity or appeals to documented historical fact."⁴³ Even Jean Norton Cru in his search for the strict empirical reality of war allowed in his sources a very broad definition of testimony: "[...] all the memories of war under whatever form they appear, provided that they are personal memories and not borrowed from the real actors."⁴⁴ Since I focus on veterans' memory and not the factual experiences of the war itself, the essential criterion I place on my sources is that they be reflections in prose published during or after the war by combatants describing their experience of the Algerian War.

In the interest of highlighting the diverse combat experiences of French actors in the Algerian War, I employ a broadened definition of 'combatant'. Cru argues that "combatant" should be limited to those who experienced "exposure to danger" in the war,

⁴¹Branche, *La guerre d'Algérie*, 101.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 103, original emphasis.

⁴³Fussell, *The Great War*, 310.

⁴⁴Cru, 33.

rather than merely the "bearing of arms."⁴⁵ Drawing upon this distinction, I consider as combatants French citizens who were physically present in Algeria and participated in the diverse manifestations of fighting from 1954 to 1962. Alongside memoirs written by French conscripts, officers, volunteers, and career soldiers, I will also include memoirs written by civilians who participated in combat, such as members of the OAS, and Gaullist counter-terrorist police troops (known as "*barbouzes*," secret agents sent to fight the OAS).⁴⁶

As for the selection of my sixteen sources themselves, within each historical stage I have identified in the construction of the memory of Algeria among veterans, I have sought to balance representativeness on three axes: political opinions on the war (anti-colonialist, pro-French Algeria, or ambiguous/indifferent), quality of military service (conscripts versus career soldiers, volunteers and officers), and origin (Metropolitan versus *pieds noirs*). However, the limits of my source base necessarily determine the narrative of the Algerian War that I derive from the genre of memoirs. Claire Mauss-Copeaux notes that *pieds noirs*, French officers, and OAS members have been vociferous in publishing their experiences, but that conscripts have remained largely silent: "their few writings are most often self-published," or published by presses with very limited circulation.⁴⁷ Indeed, in a bibliography of the Algerian War compiled by Benjamin Stora, out of the approximately 100 books that I was able to identify as veterans' testimonies, the overwhelming majority was written by mid-level or high-ranking officers as well as

⁴⁵Cru, 33.

⁴⁶The *Organisation de l'Armée Secrète*, a pro-*Algérie française* paramilitary group operating in Algeria and the Metropole, was organized in spring 1961 by General Raoul Salan and Pierre Lagaillarde in reaction against upcoming negotiations with the FLN. Stora, *Histoire de la guerre d'Algérie*, 58.

⁴⁷Mauss-Copeaux, 9.

pieds noirs.⁴⁸ Attempting to counterbalance this quality of the sources, where my access permitted, I have tried to include outliers on all three axes of political tendency, military service, and origin. However, as Leonard Smith and Philippe Carrard both concede about their sources, I cannot claim to have obtained a "representative sample" of the memoirs of the Algerian War, but with an understanding of both the general tendencies of the genre, as well as its outliers, this thesis nevertheless finds a persistent narrative of the Algerian War among the diverse group of veterans who felt compelled to publish their experiences.⁴⁹

This study reads memoirs within the narrative of silence and *refoulement*, identified by Benjamin Stora and others, and expands it to include the dialogue between veterans' competing understandings of the war, seeking the 'said' and the 'not-said' expressed through the figure of the combatant. The method draws heavily on literary analysis: regarding the memoirs as documents composed with a certain narrative voice, register, structure, and word choice, with certain details and themes included and excluded. Rather than looking *through* these memoirs for the history of the Algerian war, as other historians have done, I look *at* the memoirs as documents presenting competing narratives of the war and views of the combatant, as the *refoulement* of the war's memory progressed. Placing each memoir in dialogue with both the era when it was written and the events that it recounts is central to my analysis. Raphaëlle Branche cautions that "self-justification is often present in [veterans' memoirs], even when it is presented as an analysis of the facts," and this is certainly evident from even a cursory reading of my

⁴⁸Benjamin Stora, *Le dictionnaire des livres de la guerre d'Algérie: romans, nouvelles, poésie, photos, histoire, essais, récits historiographiques, témoignages, biographies, mémoires, autobiographies: 1955-1995* (Paris: Harmattan, 1996).

⁴⁹Smith, 18, and Carrard, 5.

sources.⁵⁰ I operate on the assumption that each memoir contains a project of self-justification, overt or subtle, while expressing a personal and political message to a particular audience or audiences. Moreover, as both Smith and Carrard note, soldiers in particular are "not prone to admitting their wrongs," especially when they are writing from the losing side of history, and this is an important consideration in my analysis of the political messages that veterans of Algeria convey through their depiction of the combatant.⁵¹

I use the term "memory community" to indicate particular groups of combatants who relate their memory through reference to a particular shared experience in the war. These communities were not necessarily coherent and self-conscious groups *at the time of the experiences*, but become stable and self-defining through the creation of narratives of memory *after the fact*. Memory communities could, for instance, include naïve young Metropolitan conscripts, tough and indifferent paratroops, anti-colonialist war resisters, or unrepentant OAS members, provided that individuals' retrospective narrative of their experiences rely on describing themselves as part of these groups, which became better defined as the temporal distance from the war grew. Moreover, these memory communities frequently overlap in the narrative of a single memoirist.

My use of the term memory community draws on Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka's critique of Maurice Halbwachs' "collective memory." Halbwachs' "collective memory" describes a body of memories through which certain groups define themselves, and which exists independent of any individual. Without the "affective community" wherein "there are enough points of contact" between the individual and the group's

⁵⁰Branche, *La guerre d'Algérie*, 219.

⁵¹Carrard, 202, and Smith, 90.

memory, the individual effectively ceases to belong to the group which defines itself through that memory.⁵² Assmann and Czaplicka's adaptation of this model is more useful in my analysis, however. They point out that Halbwachs' collective memory remains within the bounds of “everyday communications,” and that his analysis ignores “objectivized culture,” including rituals, monuments, films, and texts.⁵³ They argue that groups also self-consciously define and reproduce themselves through the “cultural memory” expressed in these external products, which have “the structure of memory” themselves.⁵⁴ This theory is immensely helpful to my study, as I analyze memories concretized into texts, but I must modify it slightly, because I examine the cultural memory of competing *memory communities* within a society, and not of a society at large. A further clarification to the idea of memory communities also helps orient my study: Konrad Jarausch's description of certain groups' memories “competing [with other] recollections in the public realm, vying to have their version accepted as binding [...]” aptly conveys the stakes of the French memory wars over Algeria, and the fragmentation of memory between different camps.⁵⁵

My method examines the literary means through which veterans construct

⁵²Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950), 12.

⁵³Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, “Collective memory and cultural identity,” *New German Critique* 65 (Spring/Summer 1995), 125-133: 128. (Of course, Stora's 1989 analysis of collective memory in *La gangrène et l'oubli* does include concrete cultural products such as documents and films, so the term's meaning and use have evolved since its invention.)

⁵⁴Assmann and Czaplicka, 128.

⁵⁵Konrad H. Jarausch, “Living With Broken Memories: Some Narratological Comments,” 150-199 in ed. Christoph Klessmann, *The Divided Past: Reuniting Post-War Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2011), 172. Claire Elridge, “*Le symbole de l'Afrique perdu*: Carnoux-en-Provence and the Pied Noir Community,” 125-136 in eds. Kate Marsh and Nicola Frith, *France's Lost Empires: Fragmentation, Nostalgia, and La Fracture Coloniale* (Lanham: Lexington, 2011), 126, defines “memory wars” as “a phrase used to describe the rapid escalation in tension between various memory carriers as each competes to see their particular interpretation of the [Algerian] War of Independence enshrined in public discourses and commemorative rituals.”

themselves *as veterans* in their memoirs, and the political messages that they convey using this identity. Foremost, I pose questions about the figure of the combatant in the text: his political orientation, his identity within a memory community or lack thereof, his sense of what he is sent to do, and his sense of what is done to him as a soldier. Next, I ask questions about the text itself: the effect of recent governmental amnesties of war crimes on the content the author feels compelled or able to convey, the balance of the said and the not-said. Ultimately, I seek to uncover what 'lessons' of the war the veteran wants to teach his audience, through his constructed authority as a combatant. Through putting these questions to the memoirs, as well as situating each within its historical context, I hope to contribute a more complex understanding of the limits of silence around the memory of the Algerian War.

Quoting Paul Ricoeur, Raphaëlle Branche emphasizes the layers of critical inquiry which historians must aim at memoirs as sources: “the perception of the lived experience, [...] the retention of the memory, [...] and] recovery of the characteristics of the event.”⁵⁶ My analysis will focus in particular on the latter two elements: which aspects are retained and discarded or minimized in the memoir, and how they are presented in order to speak to the contemporary era and the intended audience. The narrative that emerges from 1954-1989 in the genre of combatants' memoirs of the Algerian War is initially political and collective, but moves toward more personal, affective accounts; nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of memoirs surveyed portray the combatant as a victim in order to engage in debates with contemporary French society.

⁵⁶Branche, *La guerre d'Algérie*, 226.

CHAPTER I

“A SINGULAR MORAL EDUCATION”⁵⁷

In the vanguard seeking to define the *guerre d'Algérie* and its *anciens*, memoirs written before the Accords of Évian of March 1962, needed to take a determined stance, frequently to justify their authors' crimes. On the French negotiators' insistence, the first article of the Accords both gave amnesty to all who “participated or gave aid to the Algerian insurrection,” and to those who had committed “actions [...] in the context of the operations to maintain order directed against the Algerian insurrection,” both of these on Algerian soil only.⁵⁸ Therefore, veterans writing before de Gaulle's amnesty of the OAS and political criminals in 1968 had compelling reasons both to take principled stands, and to justify their behavior in the war based on these principles. This section examines four memoirs that manifest the uncertain identity of the combatant early on: aggrieved not by the enemy, but by forces in the Metropole, he faces an untenable moral situation requiring unconventional and often illegal action.

The few memoirs published during this initial period all reflect their authors' strong political views on the war and collective views of wrongs done to French society; we find some of the most striking outliers in the whole genre in this era. Jean-Louis Hurst, author of *Le Déserteur*, had vague orders from the *Parti Communiste Français*

⁵⁷Robert Bonnaud, *Itinéraire* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1962), 47.

⁵⁸Gacon, 256.

(PCF) to work against the war; the edition house *Éditions de Minuit* gave Hurst immediate leftist and Resistance connotations in France.⁵⁹ A socialist who had left the PCF, Robert Bonnaud in *Itinéraire* describes his political reflections on Algeria, subtly leading to his decision to aid the FLN. These two memoirists are outliers in the genre because they were deserters, and because they wrote during the time of the war itself, both to justify their illegal actions and to galvanize opposition to the war. A fierce partisan of *l'Algérie française*, *pied noir* businessman Joseph Ortiz describes in *Mes combats: carnets de route, 1954-1962* his role as an organizer of both the May 13, 1958 putsch, and the “week of barricades” putsch in 1960.⁶⁰ Lastly, Daniel Blanc's work, *Après les armes, citoyens: (la place du contingent dans la guerre d'Algérie et de la République)*, parodies the military genre “Report on the morale of the troops,” to defend the reputation of the maligned and neglected conscripts.⁶¹ In chronological order, we will examine how each author casts the figure of the combatant to justify their actions in the war or authorize their response to it.

From the beginning of his narrative, Jean-Louis Hurst sets himself apart as more politically discerning than the mass of French troops, which allows him to justify the individual decision he arrives at to desert and aid the FLN. Hurst tries to engage his soldiers in political discussions, and is troubled by most conscripts' lack of interest in the politics of the war: “[w]e touched on all subjects: Brigitte Bardot, [...] Cape Canaveral,

⁵⁹Jean-Louis Hurst, *Le Déserteur* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1960). Jean Bruller (best known as Vercors), Resistance fighter and author of *Le silence de la mer* (Minuit, 1942), cofounded Éditions de Minuit in 1941, and was a signatory of the *Manifeste des 121* of 1960, one of the few public statements of opposition to the Algerian war made by intellectuals in France.

⁶⁰Joseph Ortiz, *Mes combats: carnets de route, 1954-1962* (Paris: La pensée moderne, 1964).

⁶¹Daniel Blanc, *Après les armes, citoyens (la place du contingent dans la guerre d'Algérie et de la République)* (Paris: Le pré au clé, 1964), 139.

Fidel Castro, but the war, almost never.”⁶² Hurst notes that he tried to prevent his men from “playing the sadist,” but fears he was not effective enough.⁶³ Hurst’s failure to reach the majority of the men he leads compels him to seek more radical means to resist the war. The memory community with which he aligns himself, and from which he receives absolution, is that of radical political exiles. Speaking with a Spanish woman at an international camp for Europeans aiding the FLN, Hurst confesses his guilt at deserting; Juanita emphasizes that his struggles are nobler than those of the comrades he left behind, because they must only serve for twenty-eight months, while he might never return home.⁶⁴ Hurst establishes himself as a combatant in a morally troubling war, with strong political ideals but very vague direction from the PCF, to explain his decision to desert and provide material support to the FLN in Algeria.

Robert Bonnaud sets himself apart more abstractly, as a voice of reason on the moral meaning of the war for France. He was not a member of the PCF when he was conscripted, but he clearly intended to resist the war however he could, beginning with organizing demonstrations at the departure of his battalion.⁶⁵ This memoir describes very few of Bonnaud’s direct actions as a soldier. Indeed, other soldiers are not mentioned at all except in discussions of atrocities. For instance, “Periodically, the parachutists of Colonel Bigeard [...] come to reinforce us [...] The ‘suspects’ arrested in these operations are tortured [...] then shot in a nearby ravine.”⁶⁶ Bonnaud does, however, portray

⁶²Hurst, 10.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 124.

⁶⁵Bonnaud, 20.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 15.

himself as belonging to the memory community of metropolitan conscripts when he astutely observes that “Our luck [...] is to witness the beginning of the Algerian War.”⁶⁷ Largely, however, Bonnaud separates himself from the mass of French conscripts (“these abandoned children”), while invoking them to convey his forceful message about the morality of the war, as we will see below.⁶⁸ As combatants, Bonnaud and his comrades experience betrayal by Metropolitan politicians: their essential goal as soldiers “is to save our skin and to return to France to demand a reckoning from some people (including those who voted for certain special powers).”⁶⁹ Bonnaud is silent on his decision to aid the FLN, but it is a foregone conclusion that he must fight against the “social fascism” of the colonial order.⁷⁰

Joseph Ortiz constructs the most defiant combatant of all the memoirists in this period. His narrative immediately justifies his combat to preserve *l'Algérie française*: he was laying flowers on his father's grave in Oran when the FLN launched their insurrection on Toussaint, 1954.⁷¹ He also establishes his credentials as a French patriot because he had participated in Resistance activities in Algeria, preparing for the success of the Allies' Operation Torch in November 1942.⁷² As a combatant, Ortiz' mission is to defend French Algeria when the “aberrant politics” of de Gaulle have “plunged Algeria into chaos,” and the Euro-Algerians could no longer “have total confidence in the Army

⁶⁷Bonnaud, 16.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 84.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 22. The “certain special powers” were those that the National Assembly granted to Guy Mollet in 1956, authorizing the drafting of conscripts and allowing for the rapid escalation of the war.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 149.

⁷¹Ortiz, 17.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 19.

[...].”⁷³ Interestingly, Ortiz situates himself against the memory community of *pieds noirs*, at several points criticizing the European civilians in Algiers for refusing to “fully engage, leaving others to worry about saving you.”⁷⁴ He identifies with exiled *pied noir* defenders of *l’Algérie française*, dedicating his memoir to “those who suffer, far from their native soil, because they committed the crime of wanting to remain French on a French territory.”⁷⁵ He views himself as a combatant who was turned into a criminal by politicians and the Army, and abandoned by the civilian *pieds noirs* he sought to protect; his identity as a patriotic combatant who remained true to the Resistance spirit—when even de Gaulle betrayed it—justifies the putsch he launched in 1960 and for which he remained in exile while writing this book.

Daniel Blanc was a conscript but in his memoir, the combatant is a collective figure; writing in the unusual genre of a “report on the morale of the troops,” he aims to cultivate sympathy for the conscripts among civilians. While Blanc notes that the conscripts never believed in the colonial “order which allowed a minority community to exploit and subjugate [...] another community,” he also emphasizes their lack of concrete political understanding (“[...] they were barely twenty. Politics bored them [...]”), which increases the pathos of their situation.⁷⁶ Charged with preserving a colonial order in which they had no stake, their impossible mission left “on their lips the bitter taste of bad conscience and uselessness,” and “[a]ll their lives they will feel the blows” of this double

⁷³Ortiz, 184, 18.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 284.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁶Blanc, 28, 21, 139.

injury.⁷⁷ The conscripts have been wronged by politicians and by a callous Metropole: robbed of their youth for a mission they did not believe in, now they must reintegrate into a society where “their fellow citizens ignore them” and enter a modernizing economy where “every undereducated man will be out of work.”⁷⁸ The gravity of the conscripts' exploitation, and the challenges they face returning to society, justify Blanc's innovative use of a military genre to plead for civilian sympathy for the young veterans.

These memoirists frame the figure of the combatant in an unacceptable moral plight both in order to support their project of self-justification, and to convey the conditions leading 'naturally' to the lessons they derive from the war. For Hurst, the reprehensible politics of the war lead him to make an individual choice to go beyond the law. His desertion and aiding of the FLN are justified because he is in a “revolutionary party that fights colonialism,” and because he ultimately finds no possibility “to organize opposition movements among the conscripts.”⁷⁹ Although he had left the PCF in 1956, Robert Bonnaud arrives at a similar conclusion with a stronger moral component. He finds that the way France is prosecuting the war, with torture and summary executions, means that “France is a place without honor.”⁸⁰ Moreover, he decries the “singular moral education” being given to “hundreds of thousands of child-citizens” in guerilla combat, and fears for the effects on the “national destiny” of the war.⁸¹ Because he believes there

⁷⁷Blanc, 29, 85.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 140, 143.

⁷⁹Hurst, 27, 44. In fact, the PCF maintained a Stalinist and therefore anti-nationalist position after 1953, and had voted for Guy Mollet's “special powers” decree in 1956. Nevertheless, after Mollet's repression in Algeria in 1957, the PCF turned around to clandestinely support sabotage movements within the army and came to publicly support the FLN. (Stora, *L'histoire de la guerre d'Algérie*, 21).

⁸⁰Bonnaud, 36.

is no way to bring the “French popular masses” to understand “colonial oppression and exploitation,” Bonnaud finds that the only way to resist the war is to aid the FLN, a decision for which he was imprisoned until the Accords of Evian.⁸²

Joseph Ortiz, too, who would loathe to be compared to Bonnaud and Hurst, finds a strong moral justification for his political decisions. Deeply regretful for having believed General de Gaulle's promise to create an Algeria of “full-fledged Frenchmen” [*français à part entière*], on June 4, 1958 in Algiers, Ortiz nevertheless takes satisfaction in the fact that he bears the true banner of the Resistance and is unrepentant of his involvement in two failed putsches.⁸³ Finally, Daniel Blanc uses his authority as a combatant to denounce the exploitation by the French government and the indifference of society toward the conscripts, “who are now France, [but who] do not speak, do not reveal themselves.”⁸⁴ Despite the extreme diversity of political opinion between these memoirists, all use the image of a combatant facing a morally impossible situation in order to convey a political message about collective wrongs incurred during the war. Surprisingly, even though Blanc was the only one of these authors who did not feel compelled to commit illegal actions, he conveys the strongest image of the combatant as the chief victim of the war, an image that will only strengthen in the genre over time.

⁸¹Bonnaud., 47.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 48.

⁸³Along with the phrase “Long live French Algeria!” which de Gaulle uttered during a visit to Mostaganem in June 1958, “Full-fledged Frenchmen” seems to have been “anchored in the minds” of pro-*Algérie française* partisans in their bitter narrative of Gaullist deception. (Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli*, 80.)

⁸⁴Blanc, 140.

Chapter II

THE “BAD SHEPHERD”⁸⁵

Paradoxically, De Gaulle's final amnesty of 31 July 1968—which released former OAS members in a bid for electoral success and to promote political reconciliation after the nation had almost been torn apart by “*les événements de mai*”—negated one of the darkest phases of the Algerian War while rendering the struggle for the meaning of the war more public.⁸⁶ With an upsurge of publications by high-ranking officers, memoirs published between 1968 and 1974 portray the figure of the combatant as the victim of hypocrisy, often to the point of questioning fundamental aspects of his identity. General Jacques Pâris de Bollardière published *Bataille d'Alger, bataille de l'homme* in vehement protest of General Jacques Massu's *La Vraie bataille d'Alger*, which portrayed torture as instrumental to the French success in the Battle of Algiers.⁸⁷ De Bollardière faced being fired from the Army when in 1957 he published an open letter denouncing torture; he ultimately quit after the generals' putsch in 1961, feeling that he could not continue in the Army and remain honorable. Pierre Dominique Giacomoni, a *pied noir* civilian who claims to have been the top killer of the OAS, published *J'ai tué pour rien* to warn French

⁸⁵Colonel Antoine Argoud, *La décadence, l'imposture, et la tragédie* (Paris: Fayard, 1974), ii.

⁸⁶Gacon, 286, 289, and Branche, *La guerre d'Algérie*, 30.

⁸⁷General Jacques Pâris de Bollardière, *Bataille d'Alger, bataille de l'homme* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1972).
General Jacques Massu, *La Vraie bataille d'Alger* (Paris: Plon, 1971).

youth about the dangers of racist hatred and atone for his actions, yet his work also denounces the hypocritical way the French government framed combat in the Algerian War.⁸⁸ Finally, the putschist Colonel Antoine Argoud's *La décadence, l'imposture, et la tragédie* conveys the strongest portrait of a combatant betrayed by hypocrisy; Argoud's arch-enemy Charles de Gaulle failed French soldiers by giving them an impossible mission and repeatedly breaking his word. Among these diverse memoirs, the figure of the combatant holds faithfully to his mission, failing because of the hypocrisy of the government, that of the Army, or both.

No veteran writing in this period defends himself as ardently as General Jacques Massu, seeking to dispel what he sees as lies and distortions in both Saadi Yacef's *Souvenirs de la Bataille d'Alger*, and Gillo Pontecorvo's 1967 film *La bataille d'Alger*.⁸⁹ Throughout his memoir, Massu portrays himself as a simple soldier who was forced by “Providence or Destiny” into making difficult political choices.⁹⁰ Citing the widespread fear in Algiers of FLN terrorism—“savagery” against both Europeans and Algerians—Massu's goal as head of the tenth division of colonial paratroops in the Battle of Algiers was to end terrorism and reestablish civilians' trust in France.⁹¹ Massu does not strongly align himself with any memory community, since he seeks to defend his reputation and portray his role as instrumental in the success of the Battle of Algiers. He does, however, note that he fought for Free France against Vichy, and has a reputation among older officers for disobedience, but nevertheless emphasizes that he is a good soldier and would

⁸⁸Pierre Dominique Giacomoni, *J'ai tué pour rien* (Paris: Fayard, 1974).

⁸⁹Saadi Yacef, *Souvenirs de la bataille d'Alger* (Paris: Julliard, 1962).

⁹⁰Massu, 11.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 38, 11.

accomplish any mission received.⁹² Accordingly, he firmly asserts the French victory in the Battle of Algiers, and defends the necessity and limited, unofficial use of torture in this mission, which was “dangerous” to the soldiers practicing it, but nevertheless not “degrading” to the subjects.⁹³ As a combatant, he narrates a betrayal not by a higher military or political power, but by a hypocritical society that wanted terrorism in Algiers to end but did not want to acknowledge the means necessary to defeat it.

General de Bollardière depicts himself as a combatant with a strong human rights orientation. He grounds this view in his formative experiences in the Resistance; charged with the interrogation of two German prisoners of war in 1942, he felt “shame” and “something like a holy fear,” and desisted from using torture on them.⁹⁴ Indeed, having experienced torture as part of his initial training in the Resistance, de Bollardière concludes that it “degrades he who inflicts it even more than he who undergoes it.”⁹⁵ De Bollardière seeks to correct misunderstandings among the French public, to whom torture was at first “denied with righteous indignation” and is now being justified by figures such as Massu.⁹⁶ He does not align himself with any memory community, because his is the narrative of a principled outcast. De Bollardière's loyalties are torn between what he perceives as the mission of the Army in Algeria—to win “even a provisional victory, no matter the price,” after the humiliations of the Occupation and Dien Bien Phu—and his

⁹²Massu, 55, 28.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 11, 321, 167, 165-6.

⁹⁴de Bollardière, 35.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 11.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 133.

personal principles of “respect for the human being,” to never become like the Nazis.⁹⁷

In this narrative, the combatant is betrayed by the moral hypocrisy of the Army itself, where “justice became a blind force [...] dialogue took the ignoble form of torture.”⁹⁸

Pierre Giacomoni's book strongly reflects the disynchronous nature of all memoirs—the separation in time between the self who experiences and the self who recounts. Although according to the publishers, he writes in the “desperate hope that no future adolescent” will succumb to such violence and hatred as he did, his narrative actually privileges his morally relativistic political views before his arrest in June 1962. The combatant in the narrative considers himself a soldier in the OAS, and denounces the hypocrisy of a judge who reproaches him for this comparison, asking “And all the young metropolitan conscripts who came to make war [...] it was for killing Arabs, wasn't it? Who sent them and for what motive?”⁹⁹ Giacomoni's memory community is certainly that of the *pieds noirs*. His best friend growing up was an Arab named Kader, and he vividly relates the experience of surviving a terrorist attack in a sports stadium in February 1957, emphasizing the effect the war is having on the children of Algeria, Arabs and Europeans: “I have never forgotten the vision of this kid, victim of the folly of men.”¹⁰⁰ Despite having little initial interest in politics, Giacomoni decided to join Pierre Lagailarde in the “first *pied noir* army” during the week of barricades, “since my goal is to save *l'Algérie française*.”¹⁰¹ Throughout the memoir, Giacomoni details how his

⁹⁷de Bollardière, 65, 98.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 105.

⁹⁹Giacomoni, 308.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 71.

participation in the OAS makes him “a monster,” and by the time of his capture, laments his “mutilated life, for a lost cause: the OAS”¹⁰² While Giacomoni takes personal responsibility for his decisions and his moral fall, he also blame de Gaulle for deceiving and abandoning the *pied noir* people: “[t]hey felt overwhelmed, betrayed by the one man in whom they had placed all their confidence.”¹⁰³ Giacomoni was in fact amnestied by de Gaulle in 1968.

Colonel Antoine Argoud's denunciation of hypocrisy manifests the most skillful cognitive dissonance out of all the memoirs examined in this period; he attacks Charles de Gaulle as a traitor to the French government since June 1940, yet justifies his own participation in the generals' putsch of April 1961 in the name of honor and higher principles. Argoud distinguishes himself from the ineffectual government and from other military leaders, including de Bollardi re, whose “unending speculations on good and evil” and Gaullism both gall him.¹⁰⁴ Positioning himself as an outsider, Argoud does not find a place within any memory community; “unconditional obedience” seems to him “incompatible with the dignity of a free man.”¹⁰⁵ Argoud's mission was to fight against “revolutionary war”; he emphasized that for revolutionaries, war is total, and “[n]o moral consideration limits the use of force,” a fact which he reproaches other military leaders of forgetting.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, he sought to protect the indigenous population, faced with the “permanent threat of recourse to violence” by the FLN, while viewing them as dependent

¹⁰²Giacomoni, 40, 7.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁰⁴Argoud, 137.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 354.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 122.

on France to continue developing their land and society.¹⁰⁷ These goals were betrayed by military leaders who proceeded as if fighting a classic war, and political leaders who seemed to have forgotten that “the Indochina war had ever taken place.”¹⁰⁸ After the failure of the putsch in April 1961, Argoud took flight and was captured by “Gaullist *barbouzes* [secret agents]” in Munich; he takes this as a sign that he was one of de Gaulle's chief enemies.¹⁰⁹ Unrepentant after his release from prison in July 1968, Argoud concludes that he has been betrayed by Gaullist hypocrisy, finds no honor in contemporary French society, and indeed pronounces his “shame at being French [...]”.¹¹⁰

The combatant in these memoirs is a victim of hypocrisy on the part of the government, the military, or French society; such narratives often serve as a warning against dire futures that the author believes France will face. General Jacques Massu juxtaposes gruesome eyewitness accounts of FLN mutilations in Algiers with the “very vague orders emanating from the government” to justify the ostensibly limited and unofficial use of torture, which led to a definitive success in the Battle of Algiers.¹¹¹ In the time he is writing, however, French society remains “ungrateful” for this successful mission, due to the propaganda of the film *La bataille d'Alger* portraying the battle as the first step toward an FLN victory.¹¹² General de Bollardi re's narrative conveys that, from

¹⁰⁷Argoud, 123.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 330.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 355.

¹¹¹Massu, 95.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 11, 321.

its earliest stages, the war should have had a political solution; instead, the French government “hardly seemed to have learned any lessons from the war of Indochina,” and political leaders “installed themselves with fatalism in a chimerical war.”¹¹³ After discussing his resignation from the Army after the generals' putsch, de Bollardi re criticizes both the Army and Gaullism: he warns of the humiliation which faces “a country which [...] risks gradually losing its soul and its liberty in a regime that no longer dares to defend itself against the menace of a rising totalitarianism.”¹¹⁴

Pierre Giacomoni also portrays the combatant as a victim of hypocrisy; the memoir concludes with a scene of young Giacomoni addressing the judge who arraigns him in 1962: “The word 'war' would be too damning to attach it to the politics of our government [...] 'Maintenance of order' allows for unsullied consciences and permits the absolution of many crimes.”¹¹⁵ Thus, Giacomoni relativizes his criminal actions in relation to those he perceives in the government and Army, in a book ostensibly written to atone for his crimes. Colonel Antoine Argoud's narrative presents the most directly political narrative of betrayal by perfidious leaders; he portrays himself as a principled victim of the government's moral hypocrisy. Imprisoned for treason himself, Argoud turns this accusation back upon the man who ordered his capture: “[de Gaulle] has never ceased to affirm that the regime of Vichy was illegitimate, because he had betrayed it.”¹¹⁶ In his view, the generals' putsch was justified because de Gaulle, a soldier who had “for

¹¹³De Bollardi re, 83, 136, 75.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 150.

¹¹⁵Giacomoni, 305. It is unclear when Giacomoni wrote this book, published in 1974, but it is nevertheless significant that he ends his narrative giving voice to his younger self, unrepentant and critical of what he sees as the French government's hypocrisy.

¹¹⁶Argoud, 73.

twenty years [...] affirmed the existence of higher principles than the rules of military obedience,” had broken his word and failed to save *l'Algérie française*.¹¹⁷ Although these memoirs bear divergent messages about the meaning and the purpose of the Algerian conflict, their narratives all agree that Metropolitan forces have betrayed the combatant through amoral cynicism, and point to the loss of honor which now stains the country.

¹¹⁷Argoud, 230.

CHAPTER III

“THIS CHAOTIC ALGERIA”¹¹⁸

Soon after his election in 1974, President Valéry Giscard-d'Estaing promulgated the first amnesty of the Algerian War since de Gaulle's death in 1970. This largely "symbolic reparation" restored military decorations and legal fees to those convicted of crimes "committed in relation with the events of Algeria."¹¹⁹ An important step in the legal whitewashing of the crimes and complexities of Algeria, this amnesty both returned to the fold of the Army, civilian and police administration, thousands of those who had lost their positions due to participation in the April 1961 putsch, and restored their decorations such as the *Légion d'honneur*.¹²⁰ Symbolically, this amnesty opened the space for more direct criticism of the French government's management of the war because it cast both the Fifth Republic, and the generals' rebellion against it, in greater ambiguity. The memoirs published in this era accordingly convey a sense of political disjuncture: the combatant was a victim of a government which either failed to give him a clear political mission, or which cynically manipulated the military while deciding the outcome of the war well in advance of the Accords of Évian.

¹¹⁸Pierre Hovette, *Capitaine en Algérie* (Paris: Presses de la cité, 1978), 220.

¹¹⁹Gacon, 299.

¹²⁰Branche, *La guerre d'Algérie*, 30. The putschist generals themselves, André Zeller, Raoul Salan, Edmond Jouhaud, and Maurice Chall, would not be fully amnestied until 1982.

All memoirs surveyed from this period insist, with levels of military detail not seen in earlier memoirs, that the war was succeeding on the ground, but was either bungled or deliberately forfeited by de Gaulle and his government, and most convey a strong sense of regret or inevitability. André Zeller, one of the putschist generals, wrote *Dialogues avec un général* to narrate the betrayal of the military by de Gaulle.¹²¹ Although he would not be fully amnestied for the putsch until 1982, Zeller in 1974 is unrepentant for his actions and scathing in his criticism of de Gaulle, all the while relying on the narrative of honor before discipline, itself embedded in the Gaullist Resistance memory. General Marcel Bigeard in *Pour une parcelle de gloire* narrates his many military successes counterpoised with a lack of guidance from the government, and a sense of inevitability about the outcome of the war.¹²² Bigeard led the 3rd regiment of colonial paratroops (RPC) under General Jacques Massu, and during the war had a public following rivaling that of Charles de Gaulle himself. Pierre Hovette presents an unusual combatant's memoir in *Capitaine en Algérie*, a novelistic account of pacification very early in the war, which nevertheless can be taken as a fictionalized memoir of the experiences of this commander of the first and second companies of the 3rd RPC. With great literary attention, Hovette narrates the painstaking process of pacification, village by village, against the backdrop of incoherent Metropolitan Algerian politics, which seem poised to undermine the soldiers' efforts from the beginning. Jean-Marc Lavie, an Army pilot in the last stages of the war, provides the outlier for this group of memoirs. His work *Pour l'honneur* speaks for the *pied noir* memory community and narrates his

¹²¹Général André Zeller, *Dialogues avec un général* (Paris: Presses de la cité, 1974).

¹²²Général Marcel Bigeard, *Pour une parcelle de gloire: tome II: la dernière des guerres* (Paris: Plon, 1975).

experiences flying for the French Army before he crashed in 1961, while generally distancing himself from politics.¹²³ Nevertheless, Lavie insists, as do the other authors in this period, that the war was being won militarily while the government showed its lack of faith in the military and negotiated with the enemy.

These narratives use the epistemological position of the combatant to oppose the military situation on the ground with the incoherence of French policy on Algeria. As Army Chief of Staff, André Zeller is most removed from combat; nevertheless he portrays himself foremost as a soldier, hesitant to enter the intrigues and partisan politics of military administration.¹²⁴ Indeed, from the beginning of Zeller's narrative, the government "preferred to play the politics of the ostrich," ignoring the opinions of military leaders, and only doling out policy decisions "day-to-day."¹²⁵ As a soldier, Zeller's immediate military goal is "achieving peace under the sign of the French *patrie*;" only then can the "political and personal status of Algerians" be transformed to "wholly French [*français à part entière*]"¹²⁶ What is done to Zeller as a combatant is to be reduced, along with other military leaders, to the role of "message carrier" by de Gaulle.¹²⁷ In the climactic scene of the whole narrative, Zeller tells de Gaulle before the referendum in 1958 that the officers feel they are on the verge of "definitively sav[ing] French Algeria," and need reassurances as to the old general's intentions. De Gaulle responds that "Algerian politics is much more complex than you can imagine,"

¹²³Jean-Marc Lavie, *Pour l'honneur* (Frontignan: Hérault, 1980).

¹²⁴Zeller, 15.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, 20.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 95, 92.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 110.

exclaiming three times, “*L’Algérie, c’est moi!*” and adding that “The Army is an instrument. You hear me, an instrument!”¹²⁸ The accuracy of this striking account notwithstanding, it conveys Zeller's sense that de Gaulle had decided the fate of Algeria well in advance. Zeller adds that it was not so much the future of Algeria that concerned him, but the soldiers and officers “who would continue to [...] kill and be killed with false ideas—or without any idea at all—of the goal [...]”¹²⁹ Traitors and heroes are both defined through the “see-saw game of History,” but in light of the fact that the Army had “total success in sight” when de Gaulle took irrevocable steps toward Algerian decolonization, Zeller justifies his orchestration of the 1961 putsch as a defense of military honor and duty, which sometimes must come before discipline.¹³⁰

Without the scathing political commentary of Zeller, General Marcel Bigeard portrays himself as a successful soldier who ends up the scapegoat of a government unwilling to provide its military with a clearly defined mission, in a war which was winnable from the beginning. Bigeard is unusual among these memoirists in that he considers the Algerian War “*ersatz*”; he repeatedly emphasizes France's overwhelming superiority in materiel and manpower over the FLN.¹³¹ He defines himself as a combatant in terms of his own successes—both in reforming his regiment, and his rapid promotions and rise to celebrity status in France—as well as through descriptions of the “courage and tenacity” of his adversary.¹³² A veteran of Dien Bien Phu and former

¹²⁸Zeller, 109.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 110.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, 105, 165.

¹³¹Bigeard, 9, 16.

¹³²*Ibid.*, 120.

prisoner of the Viet Minh, Bigeard fights resolved to “not see Algeria fall under a regime like that which I knew in captivity.”¹³³ Despite this memory, he describes his mission in strictly military terms: to create “a magnificent instrument of combat which must become invincible and win without losses.”¹³⁴ Repeatedly, he emphasizes that he is “a soldier, not attempting to play any political role,” yet bemoans the government's consistent failure to give the military “clear and well-defined missions.”¹³⁵ He insists that the French soldiers, if properly “oriented, helped, supported, would have an ideal greater than that of the adversary,” but even after making such an appeal to President de Gaulle, Bigeard is not convinced that the government takes this problem seriously.¹³⁶ Bigeard emphasizes that the *fellagha* “were not the Viets,” and with the support of the government, “[w]e could have won this conflict, militarily at least, very quickly.”¹³⁷ What is done to Bigeard as a combatant is his ignominious fall from favor due to military politics; in a larger sense, however, what is done to him is the reduction of his military successes by the course of history, which demanded that France “abandon” Algeria: “[...] I have largely fought for nothing.”¹³⁸

Despite lacking a rapid ascent and fall from glory, Pierre Hovette conveys the most subtly tragic narrative of a combatant's ardent efforts doomed by the incoherence of Metropolitan politics. The captain in Hovette's narrative is engaged in the slow work of

¹³³Bigeard, 17.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, 32.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 218, 65.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, 228, 242-4.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, 269.

¹³⁸*Ibid.*, 265, 362.

pacification in 1955, negotiating submission of arms for French material support to remote villages in Little Kabylia; his goal is to “reaffirm French sovereignty” in a zone long devoid of any French presence.¹³⁹ Discussing the double role of soldiering and diplomacy given his company, Hovette strongly places himself in the memory community of the *paras*: “It was up to us to show [...] that the *paras* can succeed at things other than war!”¹⁴⁰ Hovette's captain emphasizes the sacred duty the French soldiers have to protect Algerians, especially in light of the “haunt[ing]” nature of the *paras'* memory of Indochina.¹⁴¹ Hovette elides what they are haunted by, but it is clearly the abandonment of civilians in a French colony the military had sworn to protect. Hovette portrays himself as a soldier of peace, citing an Arabic proverb “Peace is in the shadow of the spear” on the title page, and arguing against the “strong and hard” tactics urged by his comrades with the reminder that “[b]lood only calls for more blood.”¹⁴² Political criticism remains vague in Hovette's narrative, yet he dismisses Metropolitan French Algerian politics as “so many years of incoherence,” and at one point he wonders whether the government's constant rearrangement of various units in the field is the result of “more stupidity, or sabotage.”¹⁴³ Hovette's narrative ends with a personal success, a dramatic scene where he visits the house of the President of a village unarmed, to show good faith and negotiate the final collection of arms; while such feats “satisfy [his...] pride,” he retains serious doubts about the long-term value of such actions “in this chaotic

¹³⁹Hovette, 9.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 30, 52.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 82, 130.

Algeria.”¹⁴⁴

Among these authors, Jean-Marc Lavie is the only physical victim of this war, almost meeting his end in a plane crash; while his memoir does not engage politics very directly, he hints that the French government was playing a double game with the enemy, which rendered sacrifices such as his worthless. Although Lavie frames his narrative with the *mise en abyme* of his plane crash, he surprisingly does not dwell bitterly on the experience itself: “This was the end of my existence as a war pilot and the beginning of another [...with] a new spirit, a man whose former thoughts were washed away by fire.”¹⁴⁵ He depicts himself as a youthful *pied noir* eager to prove himself to the Metropolitans in the Army; several times he refers to the collective identity of “[a]ll of us, the French of Algeria, we are but one, despite our diverse origins [...]”¹⁴⁶ Moreover, his political opinions on the war come directly from the *pied noir* collective memory: France “liberated” Algerians from the Turks, and gave value to the land in a way that the Arabs never could.¹⁴⁷ As a war pilot, Lavie's mission is to “uncover Arab terrorists,” but he also notes that the more important “non official struggle” is to keep *attentiste* Arabs neutral and “allow the French Army to solve the problem.”¹⁴⁸ Lavie uses his plane crash to portray soldiers in general as victims of the Fifth Republic's machinations: “our combat and the sacrifices that it led to had no sense,” because the soldiers were ignorant of the government's negotiations with the FLN, which would “[obliterate] our success on the

¹⁴⁴Hovette, 220.

¹⁴⁵Lavie, 11.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 42, 39.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 56.

ground.”¹⁴⁹ While presenting this indirect collective political criticism, the vast majority of the memoir merely recounts Lavie's personal career as a pilot; his memoir strongly reflects the trend of personalization of the memory of the Algerian War that will only increase in the next decade.

Through balancing the visible potential of military success with a sense of sacrifice in vain, these combatant figures all bear the message that the war was lost either through political mismanagement or cynical manipulation of the military. André Zeller bemoans the lack of a trusting relationship between civil and military powers, which was “the essential cause of our current losses.”¹⁵⁰ Zeller justifies his step outside of legality in the April putsch in light of how even “the highest official put himself outside of the rules;” de Gaulle reduced the Army to the “mute intermediaries” of a “secret politics,” and therefore “made [us generals] into rebels.”¹⁵¹ Marcel Bigeard considers that the Algerian War should have been easier to win than the Indochina War, but was similarly bungled through “lying from all echelons.”¹⁵² The war was lost both because the government did not take it seriously, and because of political “backtracking” resulting from false electoral promises.¹⁵³ With an even more intimate sense of the disjuncture of political and military goals in Algeria, Pierre Hovette describes his efforts to win over the hearts and minds of Algerian civilians despite his soldiers' lack of a clear understanding

¹⁴⁹Lavie, 75.

¹⁵⁰Zeller, 27.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁵²Bigeard, 108.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, 18.

of the “politics of France.”¹⁵⁴ Indeed, because of distant Metropolitan “partisan interests without any concession [...] to the common interest,” Hovette senses that ultimately, France will have “nothing to brag about.”¹⁵⁵ Finally, Jean-Marc Lavie juxtaposes the brutal escalation of combat from 1954 to 1961 with the government's obstinate refusal to use the word “war.”¹⁵⁶ As the only direct physical victim of the war from among these memoirists, Lavie questions the value of his sacrifice, since the French government was undermining a successful military effort with “secret negotiations with our adversaries.”¹⁵⁷ In this stage of the development of Algerian War memoirs, the personal is certainly gaining dominance over the political, yet the figure of the combatant still remains a victim, this time of an inept or duplicitous Metropolitan government.

¹⁵⁴Hovette, 19, 147.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 17, 220.

¹⁵⁶Lavie, 70.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 75.

CHAPTER IV

“A FULL-FLEDGED BARBARIAN”¹⁵⁸

The final step in the negation of crimes of the Algerian War—President François Mitterrand's rehabilitation of sanctioned Army members, including the putschist generals—manifests in memoirs after 1981.¹⁵⁹ With a sharp turn away from the polemics of earlier periods, these authors depict the combatant as pathetic or bitter, and resigned to violence; this was also the first period when sarcasm and humor became conceivable narrative tools. Without the need to justify crimes that no longer existed, veterans, often rank-and-file conscripts or volunteers, personalized the war, describing how combat affected them, or decrying the official history leveled against them. Lucien Bitterlin wrote *Nous étions tous des terroristes: histoire des “barbouzes” contre l'O.A.S. en Algérie* to set the record straight on the Gaullist secret police.¹⁶⁰ Civilian activists in the *Mouvement pour la communauté en Algérie* (MPC) initially sought an associationist consensus in Algeria, but became counter-terrorist agents in the franco-French civil war with the OAS. Jean-Pierre Hutin, a volunteer paratrooper from a Metropolitan military family, wrote *Profession: j'aime pas la guerre*, an unrepentant testament with some

¹⁵⁸Jean-Pierre Hutin, *Profession: j'aime pas la guerre* (Paris: Lettres du monde, 1986), 23.

¹⁵⁹Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli*, 283, and Gacon, 299.

¹⁶⁰Lucien Bitterlin, *Nous étions tous des terroristes: histoire des barbouzes"contre l'O.A.S. en Algérie* (Paris: Éditions du témoignage chrétien, 1983).

bitingly sarcastic political commentary. Jean Forrestier was a conscript and served in the Light Infantry (*chasseurs à pied*), then the colonial paratroopers; his memoir *Une gueule cassée en Algérie* describes how combat has personally affected him, with minimal political commentary.¹⁶¹ Finally, Resistance and Indochina veteran General Jacques Bourry's *Itinéraire de soldat* is an outlier; this strongly polemical work was written to lament Gaullist deception, and to argue against the rising trend of colonial repentance in French society.¹⁶² As a rule, however, the genre in this period foregrounds individual testimony, and political commentary recedes to become a more personal matter.

Lucien Bitterlin's memoir exemplifies the embrace of violence in the literature in this period. Bitterlin asserts that his violence was a matter of “political engagement.”¹⁶³ A civilian Gaullist activist, he joined the MPC initially to forge a “*rapprochement* between liberal, Gaullist, and undecided Europeans, and nationalist liberal Muslims.”¹⁶⁴ Bitterlin blames the *pièdes noirs* for refusing to negotiate with the FLN, who had been making overtures since 1956.¹⁶⁵ With OAS attacks increasing and the local police unwilling to fire on fellow Europeans, the MPC took up arms. Bitterlin hesitates to discuss his own acts of violence directly, yet does describe the kidnapping, interrogation, and subsequent release of OAS members “without resorting to electric torture [*la gégène*],” and reports “vigorously” disapproving of civilian terrorist bombings attempted

¹⁶¹Jean Forrestier, *Une gueule cassée en Algérie* (Paris: Saurat, 1987).

¹⁶²General Jacques Bourry, *Itinéraire de soldat* (Marseille: P. Tacussel, 1989).

¹⁶³Bitterlin, 23.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 53.

by a colleague.¹⁶⁶ Bitterlin views himself as the spokesman for the embattled memory community of Gaullists in the MPC, derided as *barbouzes* by the OAS and described as “professional killers” by the press and history books after the war's end.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, Bitterlin uses the word “terrorists” in the title to “[...] demonstrate that terrorism can be a synonym for resistance and can be a legitimate act, or at least understandable, if not always permissible.”¹⁶⁸ This framing equates his resistance with that of the FLN. What has been done to Bitterlin as a combatant is abandonment by those whom he considered allies, even other Gaullists. It was not until 1982 that the MPC was recognized by a parliamentary commission for its combat against the OAS.¹⁶⁹

Jean-Pierre Hutin's humorous and unrepentant memoir illustrates the distance between the government and the combatant, and the wounds that the war inflicted upon the soldier's soul. The scion of a military family who looked forward to Algeria as 'his' war, Hutin conveys the paradoxes of his life with a pun in the title: “I profess/Profession: I don't like war.” Throughout the narrative, he repeats the line “I was stupid. I didn't know [...]” to explain his willingness to fight for a cause he did not understand.¹⁷⁰ Hutin identifies strongly with the memory community of paratroopers, describing them as “leopards” and often speaking in the first person plural. Hutin is clear about his mission on a military level: his company of paratroopers must stop the FLN in Algiers from

¹⁶⁶Bitterlin, 236, 237.

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 15, 16.

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁶⁹*Idem.*

¹⁷⁰Hutin, 9.

“killing, mutilating children, women, Muslims.”¹⁷¹ However, he seems unconcerned with ideology or nationalism; Hutin at numerous points compares the “leopards” in his regiment with the “fels” of the FLN, and in one spectacular fantasy, describes how they could fight side by side to “liquidate the Pied Noirs, the intellectual Arabs, our deputies, theirs, just like that [...]”¹⁷² Hutin elides what he does as a combatant, but it is intimately tied to what is done to him. In a description of the paratroopers' mission in Algiers, he states that “[t]orture is a choice which humanely, no one has the right to use. If you make this choice, you must accept to lose your soul.”¹⁷³ Because “*la belle France* dealt us the blow of indifference,” the soldier who is expected to become “a full-fledged barbarian,” who loses his soul, is the real victim of the war.¹⁷⁴

Jean Forrestier also portrays the combatant as a victim of the war, employing pathos in a way that results in far less direct political commentary. Forrestier receives high praise in the preface by General Marcel Bigeard, under whom he fought in the battle of Algiers; the narrative is almost completely silent on politics. Like Hutin, Forrestier relates his mission in routine military rather than ideological terms, only once putting extra quotation marks around the term “‘pacification,’” perhaps to question the feasibility of the paratroopers' mission.¹⁷⁵ He seems less strongly attached to the memory community of paratroopers, usually speaking in the first person singular; instead, his memory community is that of wounded veterans. He describes his actions more directly,

¹⁷¹Hutin, 55.

¹⁷²*Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁷³*Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 25, 23.

¹⁷⁵Forrestier, 10, 107.

for instance admitting that he was afraid in a close encounter with an enemy soldier, but shot him anyway, and confessing that he struck an enemy prisoner over the head with a rock but felt ashamed afterward.¹⁷⁶ This combatant is resigned to excesses of violence by his comrades; Forrestier saw no point intervening when a group of paratroopers beat down an Arab veteran of Indochina and World War II (“And another one won over to our cause!”): such events happen frequently, and “what is the use playing the moralist in front of my brothers-in-arms?”¹⁷⁷ What is done to Forrestier is largely framed as personal, with no direct political dimensions: he is disfigured by close fire, becoming a *gueule cassée* (“broken face”, a term recalling veterans with facial wounds from the Great War). Forrestier laments that a generation of “mutilated” and “hateful” veterans now wonder, “for whom, for what [were] we fighting?”, but never goes as far as direct criticism of the war or its handling.¹⁷⁸

Similar to the memoirs of other high officials and generals, which “seem to manifest a kind of refusal of history,” Jacques Bourry's memoir depicts a patriotic combatant forced to abandon his duty because of governmental betrayal.¹⁷⁹ Characteristic to this period, however, Bourry makes heavy use of pathos. Bourry's memory communities are those of career soldiers, and of resentful *Algérie française* partisans who consider that the defeat was for “solely political reasons,” when it could have been won militarily.¹⁸⁰ Bourry describes his direct actions as a combatant very

¹⁷⁶Forrestier, 129, 85.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁷⁹Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli*, 240.

¹⁸⁰Bourry, 16.

sparsely, but he does detail his attempts to help undertake de Gaulle's Constantine Plan. What is done to Bourry as an honorable combatant is linked to his political message: it is natural for a soldier who “receives the order to abandon everything” for “solely political reasons” to feel “that he has fought for a cause foreign to his country.”¹⁸¹ It is the pathos in Bourry's narrative that makes this a personal rather than a collective wrong. Bourry gives a human face to de Gaulle's “politics of abandonment” when he describes personal encounters with “Muslims” asking the French Army to stay and protect them from the FLN, and wonders what will be the lot of “miserably poor” *pieds noirs* with no ties to the Metropole.¹⁸²

Appearing within a political context where the crimes of the Algerian War had been largely effaced, memoirs written after the final amnesties more often portray the combatant as a personal victim of violence or a pathetic situation rather than of political betrayal. Lucien Bitterlin alone can claim victory, although the MPC was the victim of derision by the press for decades. He was on the winning side of history with de Gaulle; their common mission was to obtain a cease-fire, which the FLN leaders asked for when they saw “French civilians [with the government's backing] participat[ing] in the struggle [...] against the OAS.”¹⁸³ Bitterlin's narrative relies on comparing the MPC to the Resistance—describing de Gaulle as “the head of the French terrorists” in World War II.¹⁸⁴ For Jean-Pierre Hutin, however, the war “was lost from the beginning” on a military level, since the government considered politics “way over [the paratroopers]”

¹⁸¹Bourry, 17.

¹⁸²*Ibid.*, 248.

¹⁸³Bitterlin, 286.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 20.

heads.”¹⁸⁵ Although Hutin presents himself as a victim of the political exigencies requiring that he become a torturer and lose his soul, he concludes with a defiant “JE NE REGRETTE RIEN,” signifying a personal rather than a political triumph.¹⁸⁶ Jean Forrestier presents the strongest image of the combatant as pathetic; during his evacuation after being disfigured in combat, he chants, “I am twenty years old, I don’t want to die.”¹⁸⁷ The closest he comes to political criticism is lamenting the physical and psychic mutilation of his cohort, who never “knew the ideal, the faith of the FLN combatants.”¹⁸⁸ General Jacques Bourry, on the losing side of history, narrates his political victimhood; the military was deceived by Charles de Gaulle, who was planning the “abandonment” of Algeria as early as May 13, 1958.¹⁸⁹ Bourry concedes that decolonization might have been inevitable, but that it could have been undertaken in a more honorable and “less brutal manner,” without abandoning “French Muslims” to the “genocide” of the FLN.¹⁹⁰ Because they write in an era that no longer requires strident political stances to justify their decisions during the war, and because of their irreconcilable views on decolonization, all that is left for these memoirists to agree on is the victimhood of the French combatant and the pathos of the Algerian experience.

¹⁸⁵Hutin, 138, 60.

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 155. Hutin begs Mme Piaf’s pardon for taking the liberty.

¹⁸⁷Forrestier, 134.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁸⁹Bourry, 248.

¹⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 248, 250.

CONCLUSION

This study of the genre of French veterans' memoirs of Algeria both confirms Benjamin Stora's thesis of the repression of the war's memory, and expands on Stéphane Gacon's explanation of the effects of Gaullist amnesties of war crimes. The impossibility of a collective narrative of the Algerian war in French society as a whole did not arise *ex nihilo*, nor was it inevitable. It resulted from the continued official refusal to acknowledge the war *as* a war, the gradual erasure of crimes during the war through presidential amnesties, the misdirection of commemorative attention toward the myth of the Resistance, and the gradual channeling of debates about the war into different memory communities incapable of dialogue with each other or with society at large.

The veterans who wrote memoirs in this climate did arrive at some accord about the nature of their Algerian experience, despite their disagreement about its meaning. Following Leonard Smith's model, I have sought to unearth the narrative of the Algerian War emerging from the genre of veterans' memoirs. Between the war itself and 1988, the vision of the “embattled self,” as expressed by combatants as diverse as conscripts, elite paratroopers, four-star generals, OAS members, and Gaullist secret police, was initially political and collective, but became more personal and affective; nevertheless, it is a

narrative of victimhood throughout. The combatant is first the victim of an untenable moral situation, then of moral hypocrisy, then of political miscalculation or manipulation, and finally he is a personal victim of wounds from the war, or of being forgotten by History.

During and immediately after the war, when the ideological and juridical stakes over the meaning of the war were the highest, the figure of the combatant is in an impossible moral situation, which justifies either illegal action, or a plea to society for understanding. The narrative at this point is of political betrayal. After de Gaulle's final amnesty in 1968 and the period of political and social upheaval leading up to it, the combatant becomes the victim of moral hypocrisy, sometimes to the point of questioning his own identity, and the narrative often foreshadows a grave future for France. After the symbolic restitution in 1974, the figure of the combatant senses his sacrifices have been in vain, because of political ineptitude and indifference, or calculated misdirection of the military. Finally, after the last war amnesty in 1981, the figure of the combatant emerges as distinctly apolitical; aside from chagrined high-ranking officers and the *nostalgiques of l'Algérie française*, political commentary seems merely a side-note or source of one-liners. The narrative now is that of individual victimhood—being forced to abandon one's duty, having one's contributions forgotten by History, or the physical and psychic wounds incurred during the war. Because of the erasure of criminal status of the darkest aspects of the Algerian War, the resultant lack of need for strong political justification for one's views on the war, and the general public and official indifference toward the subject of the war for decades, the only common thread that could remain in the genre of veterans' memoirs in this period is personal victimhood.

And it is arguably this sense of personal victimhood and abandonment that fueled numerous movements for recognition and commemoration of veterans of the Algerian War. While the combatants who felt compelled to recount their experiences in memoirs may not be representative of the population of French veterans of Algeria as a whole, the narrative of victimhood and betrayal apparent from this study offers an intriguing question to test in future research. If many veterans of this war conceived of themselves foremost as victims, how did that affect their integration and identity within a society which would not even recognize their war until the turn of the twenty-first century?

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