Now a half-century after the end of French Algeria, France has been engaged in a new battle, one over the memory of the colony. This "memory war" is being fought at a variety of locations in the "public theater of history." Perhaps the best known of these engagements involved the second paragraph of the "French law on colonialism," the law of 23 February 2005, which requested that school programs "recognize especially the positive role of the French overseas presence, especially in North Africa." Uproar regarding this initiative was widespread, and by April of that year, hundreds of university professors and students signed a petition opposed to the teaching of an official history. Before Jacques Chirac used his presidential veto to repeal the paragraph, it received copious national and international press in which it was often described as a pied-noir effort to spread a sanitized vision of the colonial past. Related settler projects involving monuments, museums, and other public sites of memory have received similar scrutiny.

It is commonplace to view pied-noir efforts in these 'memory wars' as controversial and dedicated to extreme perspectives on the colonial past; at best, as instances of nostalgia, a pathological nostalgia for Algeria, and at worst, as brash attempts to vindicate a reviled political system, or to present themselves as "victims" of history. This article offers a different interpretation of settler engagement in commemorative activities, based on sustained ethnographic research among former settlers in the Aix-Marseille-Avignon area of southern France.

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Settler Sites of Memory and the Work of Mourning

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Sites and Objects of Memory

Any discussion of "sites of memory" must address Pierre Nora's multivolume series documenting French lieux de mémoire. In an early essay, Nora defined a lieu de mémoire (usually translated in English as a site, realm, or memory space), as "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community." While I employ the concept in this way as well, I do not adopt all of its meanings as articulated by Nora, whose project focused on sites of national memory, and quite explicitly discredited "memory spaces" of national subgroups, such as social classes, or ethnic and religious groups. While the concept of a lieu became more expansive over the course of his project, the overall goal remained to map out the nation's symbolic geography.

By contrast, I am interested in sites at the nexus of memories of subgroups of society, communities smaller than a nation. To approach the question of sites of memory on this scale, I find it useful to turn to the work of French sociologist and Durkheim disciple Maurice Halbwachs; we will return to Nora's project at the end of this essay. In Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire, Halbwachs insisted on a social source of memory, proposing the existence of "frameworks" of memory: social frameworks within which individual memories and thoughts are possible or meaningful. While he admitted that individuals have unique memories due to different life circumstances, he believed that even these individual memories are basically social, for they leave a lasting impression to the extent that they are linked or interrelated to the thoughts "that come to us from the social milieu." He developed these ideas in chapters devoted to social groups of various scales, including the family, religious organizations, and social classes, which in his view were held together by shared memories.

While in this first work Halbwachs neglected to clearly articulate where one might find these "social frameworks," it is in La Mémoire collective (1950) that he emphasized the role of places and objects in recollection. This work, written as a "synthesis and final justification," was never completed; however its chapter on "Space and the Collective Memory" is worth exploring in detail. He asked, "Why does a person become attached to objects?" He explains, because objects "bear our and others' imprint," they are fundamentally social in nature: "Our home—furniture and its arrangement, room décor—recalls family and friends whom we see frequently within this framework." Anticipating contemporary work on material culture, he asserted that "things are part of society," and "circulate" within the group and "stand about us as a mute and motionless society." Objects are significant, moreover, in that they provide a sense of continuity and stability to our otherwise fluid and ever-changing social life. Not only do objects and places offer an image of social stability; they also help shape the direction of social life: "the group not only transforms the space into which it has been inserted, but also yields and adapts to its physical surroundings." As a result of this close symbiosis between space and social group, the social space itself becomes a powerful unifying force: "the group's image of its external milieu and its stable relationships with this environment becomes paramount in the idea it forms of itself, permeating every element of its consciousness, moderating and governing its evolution."

The power of place is perhaps best recognized when we consider place-loss, whether as part of urban renewal, violent conflicts, or diaspora. As Halbwachs explained,

Any inhabitant for whom these old walls, rundown homes, and obscure passageways create a little universe, who has many remembrances fastened to these images now obliterated forever, feels a whole part of himself dying with these things and regrets they could not last at least for his lifetime.

While Halbwachs may have had in mind people he interviewed who were displaced in Parisian urban renewal projects, these passages could also summarize the sentiments of the people I met when they spoke about the loss of Algeria.

Settlers in France

Approximately one million French settlers migrated to France in the final days of the Algerian War (1954–1962). This mass migration was unforeseen by French officials, sudden, and traumatic, as many sources document. Fleeing rising chaos in the months immediately following the signing of the Évian accords in March 1962, migrants were unsure if they would return. Similar confusion awaited them in France, where my interlocutors found temporary housing in hotels, airports, garages, and even abandoned window-less chateaux. They eventually established a new home for themselves in the metropole. In fact, pieds-noirs are often acknowledged to have fully integrated into French society; some scholars argue that they will soon vanish as a subgroup in French society. But the people I interviewed (mid-1990s–2009) still recount vivid tales of the initial hostility they faced from co-workers, schoolmates, neighbors, and strangers during their first years in the metropole. Of course, the Algerian War and its aftermath challenged French living in the Hexagon in ways that are still being sorted out. Pieds-noirs arrived at a time of unprecedented upheaval as France grappled with military defeat and the loss of a colony officially part of the French state since 1848, transforming from global imperial power to nation-state seemingly overnight. As France's colonial heritage turned from point of pride to source of shame, former settlers found themselves further alienated from a country they thought they knew, and it is within this context that they tried to make a new home for themselves in a land void of familiar reference points, void of important sites of memory.
Settlers faced loss of homes, livelihoods, and even a whole sense of themselves in the world, in addition to their social ties. In such a circumstance, as Hallbach’s work suggests, places and objects of memory, no matter how mundane, would prove important mnemonics offering at least temporary reassurance of social continuity in a world in great flux. In contemporary French society, objects of this sort include family members’ possessions—clothing, furniture, dishes, and tools, the minutia of everyday life, which can be viewed as the material embodiment of the family past. Such possessions can elicit stories transmitted about and across the generations. In her work on the social memory of former Jewish residents of Sétif, Algeria, who left in the 1960s, Joelle Bahloul finds that it is “through the evocation of the daily life of objects in the house that narrative develops a description of social life and economic conditions in Sétif. Remembered objects and places are made historiographers, sociologists of the past.”

Because of the abrupt nature of their departure from Algeria, few such objects were visible in the pieds-noirs’ homes I visited. I once commented on one man’s collection of colonial-era books, and he confirmed that his collection was unusual; unlike most of his friends, he was able to bring so many of his possessions because of a position he held during the war. Most of his friends were not so lucky. People talked about leaving “main devant, main derrière” (hand in front, hand behind, i.e., carrying two suitcases) as they made their way to the ferries. And when asked, they remembered exactly what they had brought with them, some forty years later: “My grandfather’s clock, which is in our bedroom,” a woman from Tlemcen (western Algeria) told me. A man talked about his prized possession, a fish he caught on the beach in Philippeville (now Skikda, eastern Algeria), and framed pictures of himself in his World War II Zouave garb. Another man showed me a family photo album with images dating back to the 1890s. But so much more remained behind.

In what follows, I highlight four kinds of commemorative projects that pieds-noirs in southeastern France have engaged in since their arrival in France, and which stem from seemingly divergent motivations: a desire for public recognition, on one hand, and a need to account for private losses, on the other. These include repatriated structures from the colony, public and private “proxy” monuments to the dead, celebrations of the land itself, and what I term here “non-sites,” missed opportunities that some interviewees found highly symbolic.

Repatriated Monuments from Algeria

An early lieu was not initiated by settlers per se but has garnered their interest recently. This involves the monuments retrieved from the colony in the aftermath of colonialism.

Scholars of colonialism have long noted the transformation of colonial space as demonstration of colonial rule and authority. Perhaps nowhere was a country’s original geography more thoroughly transformed than in colonial Algeria. Monuments abounded celebrating the achievements of French men engaged in colonial conquests. Because some of the more important of these monuments were war memorials, we must briefly review this commemorative complex, which originated in the metropole.

The establishment of monuments aux morts (monuments to the dead), a well-studied French tradition, accelerated dramatically in the metropole in the aftermath of World War I, due to the extreme nature of the war losses. The war’s “chaos of bodies” involved millions of grieving families and masses of human remains, often unidentified. At the war’s end, the government began returning remains to families that requested them, while also promising their perpetual care at massive war cemeteries. When the state provided subventions for war memorials in 1919, they proliferated across France (see Figure 1). Most war memorials were located centrally, and included the names of the dead inscribed on them. These names were especially important in the absence of physical remains, and reading the names became an integral element of the ritual process.

War memorials were not confined to the metropole; in fact, there were good reasons for their proliferation in overseas locations in particular due to the critical military service provided by subject and settler populations. Algerian troops helped in conquest operations and in most colonial and other French campaigns of the nineteenth century, and service increased dramatically during World War I due to mandated conscription and volunteering. Ultimately, approximately 3.7 percent of the entire Muslim population served in that conflict, and settler service included recruits as well as volunteers from among the non-French Europeans; approximately 60 percent of the foreigners of draft age who could have avoided the war decided to serve and in the process became French. Marked patriotism in the colony included parades, demonstrations, elaborate funeral processions, and mass commemorations of the dead. At the war’s end, the war memorial complex proliferated there as in the metropole. Some French Algerian monuments were grandiosities, such as that of Constantine, which was a 21-meter replica of a Roman arc de triomphe. Like their metropolitan counterparts, they listed the names of those who lost their lives fighting for France and were featured in celebrations by veterans and others during the November 11th armistice commemorations.

Colonial-era sculptures carried opposing meanings for settlers and Algerians. For the French of Algeria, they were part of the taken-for-granted backdrop of everyday life, but for many Algerians, they were viewed as clear symbols of French rule. With the war in its final throes in 1961, the Army’s Historical Service (Service historique de l’armée) became concerned about the status of public art and began an inventory. Just before the 1 July 1962 referendum, jubilant Algerians commenced the “statue war,” defacing if not com-
Figure 1. Monument aux morts de la guerre de 1914-18, Cimetière St. Pierre, Aix-en-Provence

Determining the ultimate “resting place” of these vestiges of colonial Algeria has been a labor of love for some pieds-noirs, and the fruits of these labors can be found in several pied-noir publications. In 1975, Alain Amato tracked many down, publishing the book Monuments en exil. This work is itself an important lieu de mémoire, and I saw it in many pied-noir homes: it contains a rich, and to my knowledge, unique, collection of images of these statues and war memorials in their original colonial environment as well as in contemporary France. Amato found their current placement in France was often the result of happenstance: objects were granted to locations with some link to the item in question, such as the birthplace of the individual depicted in a statue, the sister city of the Algerian town where the monument originated, or simply to communes that requested them.

Figure 2. Repatriated poilu from monument aux morts of Hammam-Bou-Hadjar, Algeria, now located near Fréjus Municipal Beach, France

Alain Amato refers to these artifacts as “monuments en exil” and this description seems appropriate. The poilu from the monuments aux morts in Hammam-Bou-Hadjar (near Oran), created in 1931 by Albert Pommier, is a case in point: it now graces a traffic circle near the Fréjus public beach, where it appears lost in an alien landscape (see Figure 2). As one elderly gentleman told me, “they seem so out of place.” Yet some pieds-noirs today continue to seek them out, and the internet is now employed as an information-sharing center for repatriates trying to locate these vestiges of Algeria in France. The association Algérie française lists the current locations of monuments and church bells, and devotes part of its website to queries. Monuments aux morts are of special concern. For instance, a Pierre Zammit submitted a lengthy passage about the poilu of Mondovi (town in eastern Algeria), explaining that it and its plaque...
listing the names of those “morts pour la France” are now located in Eragny-sur-Oise, and he would be happy to forward their images to interested parties. 45

From these virtual “sites,” we learn of the mysterious trajectories of the items, with individuals sometimes taking charge of what remains of the colonial landscape they could. A bell from the town of Blida can now be found in the “charming church of St. Agnes in the small town of Tréfumel.” 46 One visitor asked for information regarding the altar from a church in Tlemcen: “It was supposedly recuperated by a Navy commando and repatriated, but where? This knowledge would bring real joy to a family of elderly pieds-noirs.” 47 Other pied-noir publications have similar query sections, and subsequent generations are getting involved. In the journal Algérainiste, for instance, Eugène Brahic asks for an image of the monument aux morts of the Foreign Legion that was sculpted by his grandfather. 48

Websites that allow the visitor to view these remnants of the colonial past in their former colonial environment are an important new lieu de mémoire that may prove more meaningful than the actual structures, whose incongruous appearance in the French landscape may symbolize less an integration of colony and metropole and more the distance between the two worlds.

The Toussaint Dilemma

The second form of pied-noir public monumental structure has a very different origin. What is often overlooked in discussions of pied-noir commemorative projects is the fact that connection to family was severed in a most wrenching fashion: ancestors’ remains were left in Algerian cemeteries. I first thought of this loss during an early conversation with a couple who left Algeria as newlyweds. I wondered aloud if they had always lived in their picturesque village in Haute-Provence. “Oh no,” Mr. Moscufo replied, and he explained that they were first sent to work as teachers near the Luxembourg border—on 25 October 1961. “It was great there, we had wonderful friends, and very fond memories,” he added. His wife interrupted the discussion, adding that it “wasn’t until November 1st that it really hit us.” Her face became contorted as she tried to control her emotions. “That was the worst day. We saw all the people going to the stores, buying chrysanthemums to put on graves in the village cemetery. It was on that day it struck us.” She was tearing up. “I suddenly realized—we have no roots in this country, we are exiles. It was on that day I first realized that we were never going back.” 49

I use this vignette here to bring our attention to what I term the “Toussaint dilemma.” Separation from ancestors’ remains was undoubtedly difficult for some former settlers on a regular basis, but it certainly caused special pain during private commemorations (parents’ birthdays, for instance), as well as during the All Saints’ Day (Toussaint) festival, when across France people return to former towns or hometowns to beautify their ancestors’ tombs.

Figure 3. Plaque to ancestors in Algeria, Carnoux-en-Provence

All Saints’ Day is such an important Catholic holiday that many Catholic-majority countries like France mark it with a school holiday (as do Spain, Italy, and Malta, where many settlers originated). French contemporary practice has its roots in nineteenth-century decrees 50 that established private, individual graves as the rule and led to what Ariès termed a “cult of the dead,” 51 with the cemetery visit “one of the most significant rituals of the nineteenth century.” 52 By 1902, All Saints’ Day attracted approximately 350,000 people to Paris cemeteries alone. Indeed, it was partly to interrogate this tradition that Ariès conducted his magnum opus on death in France to begin with. 53 Pied-noir memoirs document a similar if not identical practice in French Algeria. 54

All Saints’ Day is not universally recognized in France, however. It is a holiday that is simultaneously unifying and divisive; while it brings generations of French Catholic families together, it also alienates people of other faiths and those with ancestors elsewhere, including millions of immigrants and their families. It can be a long holiday, with businesses closed, and city centers emptied. For former settlers who have left their parents and other relatives’ tombs in former colonies, it is a time burdened with guilt and a feeling of disconnectedness. (And former residents of Algeria will remember November 1 as a highly significant date in the Algerian War). 55 Perhaps for this reason, the families I knew organized outings well in advance of the holiday, and during the outing I attended, we discussed everything but the holiday itself.

Avoidance is not the only answer to the “Toussaint dilemma,” however. Other “solutions” would be to repatriate the graves to France, visit ancestors’ graves in Algeria, or create commemorative sites in French towns to serve as proxies for the monuments and people left behind. All of these activities have been pursued, and I review them here.
Proxy Monuments

The need for a physical location for commemorating the dead during Toussaint and other moments led many settlers to establish new memorials to serve as proxy for those left behind in the colony. There are private and public versions: the former includes plaques and small monuments found at individual and family tombs (see Figure 3). We may never know how many surrogate tombstones of this kind have been established in France to symbolically link repatriates to ancestors whose remains lay in family plots an ocean away. The second variation is the public monument. Like the graves and war memorials left behind in Algeria that they symbolize, these metropolitan sites serve in collective and private commemorations to this day. When we look at the wording on these public memorials, however, we find several interesting patterns that distinguish them from their Algerian counterparts: first, there are usually no individual names, and second, their inscriptions are often either so vague or so inclusive as to make them almost meaningless. We will consider two examples here.

In Aix-en-Provence, a grand monument was built right at the entrance to the municipal cemetery only three years after the pieds-noirs’ arrival in France. Pieds-noirs were able to gather there to celebrate Toussaint starting in November 1966. This memorial is significant for how little it states, however (see Figure 4), reading simply “National Memorial,” “French of Algeria,” “Overseas Repatriates.” There is nothing about colonialism, the Algerian War, or even about the dead—who died, or when.

While the Aix monument is impossibly vague, others are impossibly inclusive. The monument established at the public cemetery in Carnoux-en-Provence (see Figure 5) states it is dedicated to the memory of the following people:

soldiers, those who cleared the land, engineers, workers, administrators, judges, researchers, teachers, doctors, pioneers of all trades, origins, and opinions, who brought the French flag to Africa, Asia, America, Pacific, where they died for their country.

What might we make of this polarity, monuments that are either vague or wildly inclusive? Firstly, both kinds of memorials remain name-less because there are far too many people to list. The structures must stand for a whole array of dead: the military dead, often buried in France and represented in the colony by a monument aux morts, obliterated in turn in the aftermath of the war of independence, and thousands of family members’ graves located across Algeria. In addition, Algerian settlers were not a homogenous bloc by any measure, and internal debate and compromise, as well as local politics (or a more generalized silencing of the colonial past) were likely additional constraints. Some pieds-noirs I knew found the end result almost comical. One elderly pied-noir told me one day that he saw in the Aix monument a kind of wishful thinking, retorting, “There is a strange monument in the Aix cemetery to the repatriates from across North Africa—and we’re not even dead yet!”
Visiting and Repatriating Algerian Graves

The Toussaint dilemma raises a thorny problem that has no easy solution: the fate of the burial grounds containing graves of Jewish and Christian French of Algeria whose descendants are now living elsewhere, a problem that can be found in other former colonies. Leaving aside considerations of cost or religious belief, repatriating remains seems an obvious solution, yet has been strongly resisted.

The status of overseas graves became of wider pied-noir interest relatively late, in the 1980s, when people who returned to Algeria reported back on the poor condition of the local graveyards there. Until that time, many people were unwilling to return to Algeria, for reasons I will address shortly. In June 1983, members of Recours-France (Rassemblement et coordination des rapatriés et spoliés d’outr-Men) went to Algeria to survey the state of “European cemeteries” for the first time since July 1962. Three members traveled to the three former departments, and presented a report to the prime minister and the minister of Repatriates about the deterioration of the cemeteries at that time.39 No state efforts were undertaken in response, but another association tackled this question directly. The Association pour la sauvegarde des cimetières en Algérie (ASCA) was formed in 1984, and since then has undertaken the tremendous task of maintaining the tombs of the association members’ families and friends, a project that depends on local Algerians. The association pays local representatives to place flowers on graves on specific holidays and maintain the grounds. They also keep massive cemetery records and assist pied-noirs seeking information about specific sites.60 As part of this project, ASCA members lead regular trips to Algeria, timing visits to fall during Toussaint so association participants can attend Mass and leave wreaths at cemeteries.61 In a conversation with me in June of 2001, then ASCA president Roger Latapie explained this work as an “operation of dignity” needed to “save the memory of their ancestors.”62 Along with the association’s records, which serve as a kind of “memory space,” local town and village-based pied-noir associations have become involved and elaborate websites with images from town cemeteries that allow people to visit their ancestors’ tombs virtually from France.63

Cemetery preservation cannot be carried out in perpetuity, however. After independence, it was difficult if not impossible for the few remaining settlers and parish priests to care for the graves of so many. Vandalism defaced some tombs immediately; crucifixes in particular were targeted. In addition, the graveyards occupy what is now prime real estate, usually at town centers, in a developing country that has experienced extremely rapid population growth over the past several decades. It has been difficult for local authorities to prevent urbanization from claiming these lands. In neighboring Tunisia, the main Bab-El-Khadra cemetery was built over long ago,64 and it is remarkable that such a fate has not yet reached Algeria. Even the leaders of the ASCA are aware of this, stating in 2009 that “the future of the majority of the cemeteries of Algeria, even the ‘large’ ones, appears very compromised and may be short-term.”65

Remembering and the Work of Mourning

I have argued that pied-noir “sites of memory” can be understood as important stages in a wider work of mourning; before turning to a final set of sites, it is worth reviewing Freud’s ideas on mourning here. Freud’s early and seminal essay, translated into English as “Mourning and Melancholia,”66 is largely devoted to setting out a series of hypotheses about “melancholia,” which at the time of his essay was a state of unclear definition (but could be glossed as “depression”).67 According to Freud, melancholia and mourning are similar in that they are both reactions to a loss of some kind. Only melancholy is pathological, Freud explains. Mourning is “the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on.”68 While mourning “involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life,” it is never seen as pathological.69 Melancholia, on the other hand, is manifested quite differently. While it may stem from similar causes, its distinguishing mental features are “a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-reviling.”70

What becomes clear over the course of Freud’s discussion is the contrasting degrees of repression in each of these approaches to loss. Repression of the lost object is found in melancholia (which Freud describes as “an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness”). Not only is it difficult for the outside observer to see what has been lost, it is “all the more reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either.”71 This is in marked contrast to mourning, “in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious.”72

Melancholic patients, moreover, often engage in “many and various self-accusations,” the most extreme of which “are hardly applicable to the patient himself,” but, Freud argues, appear to fit someone “whom the patient loves or has loved or should love.”72 Freud interprets this as evidence of an attachment that has since been shattered. Rather than displacing the “free libido on to another object,” it is withdrawn into the ego; violent self-accusations occur, which really should be directed elsewhere (i.e., to the lost love-object), a process associated with great ambivalence regarding that lost object. Freud adds that the occasions which give rise to the illness extend for the most part beyond a clear case of a loss by death, and “include all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed,” which can reinforce an already existing ambivalence.73
The reader may anticipate at this point that I will be arguing that we should view pied-noir projects as pathological and their activities—the seemingly relentless progression of demands for monuments, the dense network of insular associations, and celebrations of French Algeria of all sorts—as instances of melancholia. It is plausible to assume that many pieds-noirs faced their rejection by Algerians living and working in their midst during the war of independence with considerable and even crippling ambivalence. Certainly some individuals were too afflicted; there is ample evidence that the first years of exile in France were accompanied by high incidences of depression and even suicide (which Freud associated with melancholia). I do not interpret the pied-noir efforts described here as melancholic, however, because they exhibit an entirely different flavor. They do not appear motivated by self-hate, but often the opposite. The works I consider here do not reflect a repression of the lost love object, but rather its mournful worship. Instead, I argue that pied-noir efforts to establish sites of memory in France are part of an extensive and ongoing “work of mourning.”

Mourning takes work. In fact, Freud regularly writes of the “work” of mourning. What does this entail? Termed “reality testing” by Freud, it involves the recognition that the loved object no longer exists, a recognition that is resisted greatly. “This opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis.” Mourning thus occurs slowly, in stages, “bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathartic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged.”

Remembering is a critical element of this process, as Paul Ricoeur emphasizes in his reflection on this essay. Freud writes that “each single one of the memories and situations of expectancy which demonstrate the libido’s attachment to the lost object is met by the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists; and the ego, confronted as it were with the question whether it shall share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of the narcissistic satisfactions it derives from being alive to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished.” He adds that this process is “so slow and gradual” that by the time it has finished, “the expenditure of energy necessary for it” has also dissipated, which could be interpreted to mean that the process carries on to the point of exhaustion.

Before considering the projects mentioned here as stages in a work of mourning, we should ask if it is legitimate to transpose these psychological categories to the “plane of collective memory.” Paul Ricoeur’s answer to this question is a resounding “yes.” Not only do collectivities experience losses and thus wounds to the collective memory, but most collectivities are intimately related to violence:

There exists no historical community that has not been born out of a relation that can, without hesitation, best be likened to war. What we celebrate under the title of founding events are, essentially, acts of violence legitimated after the fact by a precarious state of right. What was glory for some was humiliation for others. To celebration on one side corresponds execration on the other. In this way, symbolic wounds calling for healing are stored in the archives of the collective memory.

In fact, Ricoeur argues that the work of remembering and the work of mourning are especially significant on the level of collective memory. The difficult part is knowing how to proceed: “What it [the collective memory] does not know how to do is the work imposed on it by reality-testing.”

How does one say good-bye to a country, to a former world, indeed, a whole way of life? Freud tells us that the work of mourning involves remembering, and that this will occur in stages, involving a return to “every single one of the memories” involved in the lost love-object. Of course, the “love-objects” here are multiple. Repatriates were severed from each other as well from a myriad of social institutions, and from loved ones left behind in cemeteries. People were also removed from objects and sites of memory that would allow them to mourn lost family members more easily; thus, in my view, the significance in so many pied-noir narratives of the two suitcases, which symbolize all of the stuff of everyday life that had to be left behind. This work of mourning requires considerable energy, and thus cannot occur all at once. In fact, to occur properly, it cannot be rushed, and Freud discourages outside interference: “we look upon any interference with it as useless or even harmful.”

There is a certain periodicity to the pied-noir projects I have discussed that has an underlyingly logic, a periodicity that further suggests that a work of mourning is involved. Let us return to the Toussaint dilemma. Sometimes articles in the French press about pied-noir interest in Algerian cemeteries raise the question of repatriating ancestors’ remains. In many ways, this is the obvious answer to both the practical problem of cemetery maintenance, as well as the dilemma of commemorating the solemn holiday of Toussaint. And yet for many repatriates, this option has been out of the question. Why? On the surface, this may appear to be a last-resort attempt to claim a continued presence in the former colony. We might also assume that people are reacting to the religious and spiritual dimensions of the problem, and want to leave their loved ones in peace. From a mourning point of view, however, repatriation of the remains would be highly symbolic, and would mark a definitive, final break from the colony. Some people have been able to take this step, but many more have not and resist it energetically. Instead, pied-noir organizations first tackled the Toussaint problem by developing the private and public plaques and collective sites of memory in France to serve as their proxy. The second major pied-noir project of this sort involved the maintenance of the cemeteries themselves, a project started on a large scale only in the 1980s, after some people were able to return to the colony and report back.

Interpreting pied-noir activities as the work of mourning also allows us to better understand the resistance of many individuals, at least until very recently, to returning to the former colony. Certainly people resisted doing so
for a whole host of reasons. Scholars studying trauma have noted a similar delay; Cathy Caruth reminds us of the gap between the experience of trauma and its comprehension much later, the "latency period." Returning to the former colony carries with it a sense of finality, and can be viewed as a final step of "reality testing," for it means recognizing that the colonial world as they knew it is gone for good. The work of mourning has to be well underway to even contemplate such a course of action.

This discussion leads us to another type of pied-noir lieu, one that I have not discussed yet, but which is remarkably widespread and which I feel is best understood through the mourning lens. These are memorials to the land itself.

**Metonymic Connection through Nature: The Land as Mother**

Separation from French Algeria required the severing of a visceral, deeply rooted attachment to "home" often symbolized by the land and the natural world. It is impossible to over-emphasize the extent to which family stories and nostalgia are fused with memories of the Algerian landscape. A desire to revisit this original beloved, the desire for a temporary or even imaginary reconnection with that place, should be viewed as an underlying motivation for the remarkably extensive series of projects carried out by pieds-noirs since the earliest days of their "exile" in France. The landscape is returned to again and again in the form of maps mounted on walls, by novelists who try to capture the sights and sounds of the former colony, in family photo albums, and more recently by developing websites dedicated to imagery of former French Algerian towns that populate the world wide web.

Artwork abounds here, and individuals reproduce images of colonial-era landscapes in paintings, postage stamps, public exhibits, and even on the walls of their homes. Author Marie Elbe describes meeting a taxi driver in Paris who was also from "là-bas" who talked about his wife's extreme sorrow during the first days of exile and his solution: the closet. He solicited the help of his brother-in-law, who cleared out the small closet and painted the seascape that the couple had viewed from their balcony every morning:

He painted the bay, as far as the cape of Matifou, the sea, the sailboats, he even painted in the foreground the balcony with all of the decorated ironwork. On one side, the pot of basil, on the other, our cat... It was magnificent. So much so that I asked an electrician friend to light it like the sun. You shut the closet door, it was exile, but from time to time, when the sadness became too much, we would say to ourselves, OK, let's go. We opened the closet, set up two lounge chairs... put a stool between us... and we stayed there, tranquil, "chez nous."  

Narratives such as this one longingly describe every remembered detail of the beloved, as we see in Elbe's account, and stories of this sort have been published by the hundreds. In such works, it is often nature, the land itself, the

*meré-patrie*, that is the lead character. We can see in these written and visual reproductions of the colony not only powerful sites around which collective memories are consolidated, as Halbwachs would predict, but also instances of "reality-testing," the work of mourning. A most powerful "site" in this category involves actual pieces of the love-object itself.

Sometimes while visiting pieds-noirs in their homes, my hosts would take me aside and in hushed tones direct my attention to "holy relics" brought over from the colony. These were usually natural objects, such as a large piece of rare coral that was somehow hidden away from customs agents, or a bottle of dirt. These relics gain their power from metaphor, specifically metonym, in which a part stands for a whole. Like tiny fragments of the original cross, or pieces of saints' bones, these innocuous objects—pine-cones, jars of dirt, as we see here in the home of one of my main interlocutors (Figure 6)—stand for all of the Algerian landscape, and thus occupy places of great symbolic power in the homes and apartments of aging pieds-noirs.

**Figure 6.** Private shrine containing dirt from near Algiers, Algeria, Private Residence

**Melancholia, “Non-Sites,” and the Quest for Inclusion**

It is time to turn our attention to the other focus of Freud's discussion of mourning, melancholia, to consider how it might apply in a wider discussion
of French "memory wars." Accompanied by deep-seated ambivalence toward
the lost love object, melancholia involves not remembering but the repression
of this memory-work, a repression of conscious memories of the love object
itself, and self-recrimination. Couldn't this apply, not to the pied-noirs, but to
France itself? The long-standing repression of France's colonial past is widely
acknowledged and is often attributed to a collective silencing of the Algerian
War.87 This repression has certainly not gone unnoticed by pied-noirs, and
before turning to one final type of site, the "non-site," I would like to consider
the pied-noir desire for recognition from wider French society.

A common pied-noir complaint is regarding metropolitan ignorance of
their history. The difficulties their ancestors had encountered in French Algeria
was, many felt, a completely unknown topic. Mr. Rambaud, a socialist of
French and Savoyard origins, was born in Jemmapes (eastern Algeria) in 1918.
On one of our many meetings, he talked about the horrible cholera epidemics
of the nineteenth century, and how Algerians and settlers alike would die,
dropping like flies, because nobody knew how to treat it. "People lived in
tents, and didn't have any sanitation, it was unimaginable, huh?" he
explained, adding, "There are no films about that, huh? There is nothing, it is
taboo." When I asked him why he thought this was a taboo topic in France,
his answer was immediate: "Because nobody wants to praise the pied-noirs
for their efforts. Voilà." As way of explanation, he told me that when he came
to metropolitan France for summer vacation, people would always be sur-
prised to find that he wasn't black. "They had no idea what the French
colonists were all about!" he explained. Interestingly, when I asked why there
had been so much contempt, he corrected me swiftly: "No, rarely contempt.
It was disinterest."88

I discussed this topic with the Barraults, a couple I met in the mid-1990s.
Madame Barrault was the third generation born in Algeria, of German ances-
try, and grew up on a wheat farm established by her grandfather in the depart-
ment of Oran. Her husband was an unusual "pied-noir" in that he was born
and raised in Lyon, and arrived in Algeria "en pleine guerre" in September
1942; he was an only child and his parents feared what would happen to him
if they remained in France. He finished high school in Algeria and attended
the University of Algiers, where he passed his bac, and was named English
professor in Oran. Both husband and wife were secondary school teachers their
whole lives; his wife taught the classics.

When I asked in 2001 how they felt now about living in France, Mr. Bar-
rault said he felt "good there, 50/50, good because I am at home. It's my
country. I love it, it is beautiful, etc. But the other 50 percent is because of
the French, they rejected us, they throw us out!" His wife challenged him on his
tone, adding that in her opinion, the French were just very badly informed.
After taking a moment to reflect, he explained, "The other 50 percent, it's the
nausea I felt when we had to leave Algeria because the French of France, of
the hexagon, of my country, voted against us without knowing anything about us!

Thinking that most of the time we were living it up in North Africa. The ques-
tion of Algeria? That didn't interest them at all." He went on to explain that
another reason why he has "had it up to here" with the French was due to the
media: "The television and sometimes the press... On television, it's 100 per-
cent—not 99 percent of the time—when there is something about Algeria, no
matter who the speakers are, it is always skewed."89

To many pied-noirs, lack of recognition of their military service in the
national collective conscience was particularly galling. Mr. Rambaud, who had
served in the war with one lung, was a learned man and active attendee of
conferences, at which he sometimes tried to correct misinformation. He once
heard a speaker report that pied-noirs were with the army that landed in
Provence. He told me he explained to the speaker that this army was 80 percent
pied-noirs, adding, "You might also say that even the so-called Free French
Army was also mostly pied-noirs."

Misinformation, or something worse? When I asked him about: metropolitan
unawareness of overseas French military service, the Tunisian-born
founder of a Maltese social club had a more benevolent explanation. He vol-
unteered at the age of 17 and served in the French Second Armored Division
(deuxième DB). He explained, "When we debarked in Normandy, we were
dressed like Americans. We had the insignia of the deuxième DB, but people
didn't see it, it took several days before they knew we were French."90

Mrs. Barrault was more skeptical. "People are always saying it was the
Allies who liberated Marseille," she told me during her discussion of French
misinformation, adding, "But of course it isn't true. Marseille was liberated by
the First French Army. Sure, the Allies gave us all the matériel, but the First
French Army was directed by the Maréchal Juin. It was he with the other gen-
erals who at the time were in Algeria. But here, nobody says anything about it.
Why? Obviously because nobody wants to say that it was the pied-noirs who
liberated Marseille. People are always taking positions, constantly."91

The desire for a national, public acknowledgment of their legacy is so
great that pied-noirs sometimes misread the monuments that surround them
as dedicated to repatriates. For instance, when I was driving across Marseille
one day with two elderly women, one started shouting and pointing—"Look,
look, there is the Monument to the Dead of the French of North Africa!" The
statue she indicated was impressive (see Figure 7), and we stopped to take
some pictures. But in fact, she was wrong. The statue, the Monument aux
morts de l'Armée d'Orient, was inaugurated in 192792 during the height of
French imperialism to symbolize Marseille as the "gateway to the East" and to
honor soldiers of the Oriental Army who died in World War I. However,
Monique was nearly correct, for behind this impressive structure is a small
plaque established by local repatriate organizations who sometimes unite
there for commemorations.93 When asked about this confusion, the wife of an
activist explained, "They [pied-noirs] have such a need for national recog-
nition that they make mistakes, and imagine that this monument had been
erected for them. Moreover,” she added, “the small plaque for the pieds-noirs doesn’t look like a “real” monument, while the other is beautiful, in the classical style, and really does.”

Figure 7. Monument aux morts de l’Armée d’orient, Marseille

Another lieu that perhaps best demonstrates metropolitan neglect of pied-noir contributions to French history is the national war ceremony. The fact that these locations, which are ready-made to integrate pied-noir history into an existing national commemorative tradition, are not regarded as such speaks volumes about the disjuncture between the metropolitan and pied-noir ways of conceptualizing the national past. One such place, known locally as the “American cemetery,” is just a few miles from Aix, and I learned about it from Mr. Rambaud. He knew the cemetery intimately, and told me one day with a twinkle in his eye that it really was a “pied-noir” cemetery, and told me to take a look.

Aix has a well-organized tourist office, so I first went there to get directions and to see if I could learn more about the cemetery. “Oh yes, in Luynes,” the woman behind the counter specified. I asked if it was also a cemetery for repatriates. “Repatriates?! Oh no, it is an American cemetery, you know, from the Battle of Provence” (World War II). She consulted others behind the counter, and they all concurred. When I drove out to Luynes the next day, locals I asked echoed this view, although some people had additional information. Apparently it had been called the “American” cemetery because American soldiers from the Battle of Provence had been buried there; these bodies had since been exhumed and returned to the United States. As I investigated further, I found that Mr. Rambaud was right: it also includes hundreds of graves of overseas soldiers who had perished in both World Wars.

Thousands of men died during the battle of Provence, a pivotal series of engagements, which occurred from 15–28 August 1944. Initially, the dead were buried where they lay or brought to municipal cemeteries across southern France, as had been the practice for the First World War. The Americans were eventually recuperated, and as local cemeteries filled, the government began to exhume war dead to locales requested by descendants or to central sites where they would be maintained in perpetuity by state funds. Luynes was selected to be the nécropole nationale for southeastern France and now includes 11,424 tombs, mostly from World War I. It was inaugurated in 1969.

Does Luynes include graves of colonial troops? I asked the cemetery manager this question on several visits, and each time he said they did not, only poor souls whose families never reclaimed their remains. However, he was too young to have served in World War II, and may not have recognized the acronyms on the graves (the only means of identifying potential overseas dead). Mr. Rambaud, however, undoubtedly did. I cite only a few examples here: in the “Muslim Sector,” for instance, we find dozens of men from Algeria, such as Ben Bachir Ben Amar of the Second Zouaves, killed in 1944; hundreds of men from Senegal, such as Tiegoura Timae, Second Class, 5th Division of the BTS, “mort pour la France 18 août 1915.” But we also find men of European surnames born in Algeria. Jacques Cerda is buried here, listed simply as “10e, BFM 1944.” Only with further research do we learn that he was born some time in 1915 (00/00/1915), in Tlemcen, Algeria. He died 28 December 1944, in Marseille, no cause of death reported. His cemetery “neighbor,” Joseph Martinez, is listed simply as “102E COSM 1944,” but further research here is also revealing. He was born 24 July 1905 in El Ançor, Algeria, served in the 2nd Regiment of the Tirailleurs algériens, and died 15 September 1939. It took some patience to find him, however: the Department of Defense’s website includes no fewer than eleven “Joseph Martinez” (and eight men named
Jean Martinez), nineteen individuals in all who died in World War II, three of whom were born in France, four in Spain, and thirteen in North Africa, including twelve from Algeria.55

We can find "pied-noir" war dead a different way, by starting with distinctive patronyms. Azzopardi, for instance, is a classic Maltese surname. Of the fifteen Azzopardis who died in either world war, only one man was born in metropolitan France; the vast majority were born in Algeria.56 These men are not buried in Luynes, however: their graves are found in other national cemeteries across France. Yet their presence often remains unnoticed. At Luynes, their overseas origins is not mentioned anywhere on the tombs, nor in the summary of the Battle of Provence that is prominently displayed at the entrance-way. These national "non-lieux" exemplify the gulf between metropolitan and pied-noir understandings of the national past. When I asked a leader of a repatriate genealogical society in July 2009 about the silenced Luynes dead, she explained, "Everyone calls the Luynes cemetery the American cemetery. Nobody seems to know that the Americans were sent back." In her view, this was a prime example of the silencing of pied-noir contributions to French history: "The French are always trying to erase our past," she declared. And yet she could think of so many points where the histories of France and French Algeria intersect, adding, "But these points of contact are poorly known. Nobody wants to see these connections: it's delicate."597

It is significant that important commemorative locations that could serve as potent symbols of the integration of metropolitan and colonial histories, and of the pieds-noirs and colonial subjects into the national narrative, are not recognized in this way. Recent interest in France in the war service of overseas troops598 may lead to a shift in perspective at some time in the near future. But for now, the Luynes nécropole is not even known locally as a cemetery for French or overseas war dead. Instead, it is known as the "American" cemetery, an appellation that marks it as foreign, drained of local or national significance, a memorial to outsiders.

We find a parallel neglect of the colonial past in the delimitation of themes in Nora’s Lieux de mémoire project. This encyclopedic effort includes chapters on the flag, national holidays, Marianne, the Larousse dictionary, and important historical texts and paintings. Notably absent is any attempt to incorporate elements of France’s colonial legacy or to move beyond the boundaries of the Hexagon.59 In a later interview, Nora notes that his focus was on the nation state, and especially the early Third Republic. In the volume, La République, for instance, he wanted to test the validity of the nation at a precise time, "the most foundational moment of the republican synthesis, the start of the Third Republic."598 Of course, colonial historians know that this Third Republic included Algerian departments, and that some of the most important efforts to "make Algeria French" were carried out as part of this "republican synthesis." Why did he exclude the Third Republic’s Algerian-based efforts and focus only on their metropolitan counterparts?

Nora explains that this is because the colonial past was not significant in the national memory:

I have been criticized for ignoring the colonial dimension. There, I will defend myself because what struck me the most regarding the importance and the historical weight of the colonial experience, it is the absence of visible traces in the collective conscience of French. This will perhaps change the day when the weight has lifted on the whole colonial episodes which is there because of the Algerian War.101

In this statement, Nora outlines a perspective shared by many, that the repression of the colonial past in the national collective consciousness is tied to the shame and trauma of the Algerian War.102 Without in any way meaning to dismiss the trauma that that period undoubtedly caused, we might also link this repression to loss, one that is blocked from view. Freud describes melancholia as a painful "object loss" that is "withdrawn from consciousness,"511 and writes about an associated loss of self-respect attached to melancholia, and an unwillingness to even perceive the love-object. Couldn’t Algeria or the colonies more generally, the colonial ideal, be that phantom love object? As Freud writes, melancholia is tied to an internal struggle associated with a deep-seated ambivalence: "If the love for the object … takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering."104 The reception of the settlers is relevant here. For over four decades there has been a denial of the humanity of this population,105 which is often portrayed negatively with an othering best captured in the very term “pied-noir.” As late as 1993, they were seen as an illegitimate subject in academia.106 We might interpret both anti-pied-noir animosities and the widespread repression of the national colonial past as a single parsimonious explanation, one involving an incomplete, repressed form of mourning tied to an unacknowledged loss, classic expressions of melancholia.

In Conclusion

Severed from significant places and objects of memory, former settlers of Algeria have developed an array of new private and public "sites of memory" as they settled in the metropole. These projects, including novels, memoirs, journals, websites, paintings, public monuments, and private plaques, have often gone unnoticed in French society, or have been viewed with derision or suspicion. However, if we view these activities not in isolation but as elements of a broader complex, we can see them as stages in the work of mourning. Some of these projects seem clear examples of "reality-testing," episodes of remembering "every single detail" of the lost beloved that the work of mourning requires. Viewing Halbwachs’ insights through a Freudian lens suggests that such objects will become all the more important for people undergoing
significant change: for diasporic groups in particular, seemingly innocuous household items such as a father's chair become all the more significant vehicles for the repeated remembering required by the work of mourning, especially in their absence. At the same time, this case speaks to human motivation and creativity as people suffering loss develop new objects in their stead.

A comparison of pied-noir and Nora's lieux de mémoire projects brings into relief a key contrast: in many ways, these projects celebrate the pasts of two different "nations," and concern different national communities. For Nora, the relevant national community is that of the Republic delimited by present-day national borders, a definition that excludes past colonial territories and their populations, even those currently living in the Hexagon. In contrast, most pieds-noirs I met truly believed that French Algeria was a part of France; in this regard, their lieux de mémoire concern lost pieces of their beloved nation whose exclusion from the metropolitan collective conscience seems baffling or heartless, as does the systematic denial of linkages between colonial Algerian and French pasts. This denial is not only exemplified by the topics covered by Nora's multivolume masterpiece, but also by the many "non-lieux" found across the French landscape.

Freud also proposes that normal mourning requires turning one's attention from the lost love-object to a new love. It is here that pied-noir efforts on the public stage in particular—attempt to gain recognition for services already completed on behalf of the fatherland, by spending years of their lives trying to include themselves in school curricula or by developing new public commemorative structures—can be best understood. Through all of these activities, are not pieds-noirs indicating who that new love is? The metropole, of course. Thus, rather than interpreting the pied-noir memorial projects as rigid attempts to insinuate a sinister reading of French history into a national narrative, they might also be viewed as works of mourning, and assimilatory in spirit, signifying simultaneously a move toward separation from Algeria and a request for acceptance by and incorporation into the French patrie.

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Notes
11. Ibid., 355–56.
15. Ibid., 129, 130.
16. Ibid., 134.
RAYONNEMENT ET PROPAGANDE CULTURELS 
FRANÇAIS AUTOUR DE LA « PANLATINITÉ »
Les échanges entre intellectuels français et hispano-américains au début du vingtième siècle

Amotz Giladi
Centre de sociologie européenne


La présence d’écrivains-diplomates hispano-américains dans la capitale française faisait partie d’un phénomène beaucoup plus vaste : celui des trajectoires intellectuelles migratoires qui, au tournant du dix-neuvième siècle et au cours des premières décennies du vingtième siècle, amenaient à Paris un grand nombre d’écrivains de nationalités différentes3. Or, loin de constituer un « havre » de cosmopolitisme pour écrivains étrangers, le Paris de ces années fut marqué par des processus puissants de nationalisation de la culture qui atteignirent leur sommet avec la Grande Guerre.
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