

## ARTICLE

# Analysis of the Algerian War of Independence: *Les Événements*, a Lost Opportunity for Peace

Miquel Calçada

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## Abstract

This year is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the long-lasting and merciless campaign for the independence of Algeria. On the French side it was called *les événements* (the events), a euphemistic way to avoid the term war. However, it was a total war that lasted eight long years, and ended with liberty for the Algerian people. Unfortunately, all parties lost. The rage between the parties was so high at the late stages of the war that some of the French citizens — the so called *Pieds-Noirs* — lashed out. They burned hospitals, libraries, reserve fuel tanks, and all kinds of infrastructure, just to leave what had been also their land, like a desert, as it was back in 1830 when the French army defeated the Ottomans and took control of this great African territory. Grim atrocities took place throughout the conflict, but especially at the end of the war, forcing a French-European-rooted diaspora of barely one million people to flee.

## Keywords

conflict resolution, peace culture, Algerian war, colonialism

“Don’t walk behind me; I may not lead. Don’t walk in front of me; I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend”. Albert Camus

“The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong”. Mahatma Gandhi

## 1. INTRODUCTION

From a historic point of view, Algeria’s war of independence (1954-1962) has been extensively researched. No other conflict since WWII has led to such an amount of mixed

feelings from everyone involved: feelings of rage, anger, deliberate indifference and melancholy, especially from those who had to leave the country in the last three months of the conflict.<sup>1</sup> In France, as late as 2002, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the settlement, the media were still cautious when speaking about the issue. Some did not mention it, and others were still condemning the turnaround imposed in 1959 by French President General Charles De Gaulle, who used the word “self-determination” in a speech for the first time.<sup>2</sup> Since the end of the war, a huge number of books has been published, and many explanations have been offered in films, on TV, and in songs, trying to justify, understand, and heal what was the cruellest, most merciless and senseless war since WWII.

1 A. Rowley (1990)

2 See <http://www.ina.fr/histoire-et-conflits/decolonisation/video/CAF88024409/allocution-radiodiffusee-et-telivisee-du-general-de-gaulle.fr.html>



During 2005 and 2006 I had the privilege to conduct a journalistic research for a TV series first broadcast in 2007.<sup>3</sup> For this TV programme I became an Algerian history aficionado, often travelling to former Algerian war zones and conducting many interviews with witnesses. I gained knowledge of the native people as well as the Pieds-Noirs, the French citizens, born in Algeria, who were descendents of French settlers, and I developed various ideas regarding the subject, one of which I will develop in this paper.

To set the framework, it should be recalled that Algiers was France's second most populated city in the 1950s, and the most modern city in Africa, a vibrant capital with an interesting mixed population. The city was somewhat divided. There was a part of Algiers called the European city; modern buildings faced the Mediterranean, and there were wide boulevards and well-illuminated streets. On the other hand, there was the old Kasbah where the native people lived. There were also mixed neighbourhoods like Bab-el-Oued, one of the most popular. These were bustling quarters, where one could hear Italian, Maltese, Catalan, Spanish, and French (evidently with a special accent).<sup>4</sup> Religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism) also coexisted with absolute normalcy. Would it not be possible for such an incredible capital, in the second largest country in Africa, with a long history, a mixed population, many natural resources, and with such assets, to become a new California?<sup>5</sup> This last thought has led me many times to think and rethink what could have been done after or before independence, if anything, to avoid the exodus of around 1,000,000 people, leaving Algerian society bereft of a vital and necessary part of its work force. Engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers, farmers, lawyers and more all fled in large numbers, mainly to France, a country that contemptuously referred to them as Pieds-Noirs. We can see the opposite in a fortunately successful case. What would South Africa have been if the thirst for revenge had succeeded?

## 2. BACKGROUND

It is largely accepted that the hostilities began in 1954, on November 1, on what was called *Toussaint Rouge* (Bloody All Saints, named after the Christian All Saints Day). A series of attacks occurred across Algerian territory. From that day on the situation escalated, following the known spiral of provocation and retaliation. During those first stages, when conflict emerged blatantly, the National

Liberation Front (FLN), had relatively few resources, although we do not know for sure if these attacks were planned and intended to be a provocation. They led to an overreaction on behalf of the French authorities, allowing the FLN to successively "gain support and create a revolutionary situation".<sup>6</sup> This is the official version of how the war began. However, few people are aware of the mass execution that took place nine years before, which is where I think the roots of the conflict lie.<sup>7</sup>

On May 8, 1945, the day that Germany surrendered in WWII, many cities were celebrating the end of the war and the liberation of Europe. That same day, Sétif, a small market town located in the west of Algeria saw the first major clash between French authorities, the gendarme, and thousands of Algerian Muslims celebrating the victory of their brothers in Europe. It goes beyond saying that the majority of the French army that fought in Europe were from the French territories of northern Africa, mainly Algeria. For that reason, the celebration was special. Aroused by words like democracy, freedom, liberation, and so on, the clash began when some Muslims gathered at the festivities flying Algerian flags as a symbol of freedom. The parade ended with shootings and the gendarme killing several demonstrators: the fuse was lit.

Riots followed, and after five days of chaos, 103 French settlers were dead. The retaliation was brutal. Historians seem to generally agree on the number of casualties at what is known as the Massacre of Sétif. Near the town, around 15,000 Muslim inhabitants (a conservative count) were shot by the French army, mainly by Senegalese and other sub-Saharan troops. Although this event was barely reported in metropolitan France, the impact on the Muslim population was tremendous.

For the French authorities and Pied-Noir settlers, it was also a point of no return, and distrust spread through both communities. France had nearly a decade to try to mend relations but unfortunately, nothing was mended. It took 60 years for France to officially offer an apology. In 2005, the French Ambassador in Algeria Mr. Hubert Colin de Verdière, called the massacre an "inexcusable tragedy".<sup>8</sup>

In 1955, the population of Algeria had a 1 to 9 ratio. There were about a million European settlers, mostly living in big cities such as Algiers, Oran, and Constantine, though some were farmers in the countryside. And there was a combined population of nine million Muslim and Tamazight<sup>9</sup> people.

3 M. Calçada (2007)

4 L. Mazzetta (1989)

5 P. Bloch (1961)

6 L. Kriesberg (2009a)

7 A. Rey-Goldzeiguer (2002)

8 See <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2005-05-09-voa29.html>

9 Original settlers were known as Berbers. This term derives from the Latin term *barbarous*, meaning stranger or wild, in a word, not Roman.



Among the population in France, a myth had spread regarding their counterparts in Algeria. The stereotype of a Pied-Noir was that of someone who was well off, care-free and owned land, and was rather hazy about much of the Muslim population. This, however, was not the reality. Although there were some landowners, the majority of the European immigrants were second or third generation, and their families had arrived mainly from the southern parts of Europe to do all sorts of jobs. Some were artisans, some were civil servants, and their peers did everything in between. Undoubtedly, it was worst for the original settlers.<sup>10</sup>

Illiteracy among the Muslim population was widespread, and nothing was being done to reverse this situation. Although there was no legal segregation, few Muslim children attended school, for instance. Unemployment was also a major concern because the economy was not sufficiently strong to absorb big numbers of unskilled workers. Another concern, also present in many other Mediterranean cities, was the increasing number of shantytowns surrounding the capital.<sup>11</sup> Besides that, the majority of Pieds-Noirs considered that the Muslim population was used to living that way, and somehow they were a 'tamed people'. Were these tamed people French, though? They were French of Muslim faith, and they had the same rights and obligations, although education and healthcare did not seem to be among them. They could also vote for the Algerian Parliament, but in a different polling station, so, although there was no segregation or apartheid, there was flagrant inequality precisely because a vote at those stations counted as half a Pied-Noir vote or even less: abstention was high.

Did anyone perceive that this situation could evolve negatively if it was not properly addressed? To answer this question, we have to set our minds in the immediate context of the aftermath of WWII. For instance, segregation was normal in the United States of America, one of the winners in that war, and even the American army at that time had segregated battalions. Apartheid in South Africa was at its peak. Although the world was evolving rapidly during the 1950s, colonialism was still in place. Many empires, like the British, still existed at the time. Many third world countries were ruled by the country which had overcome them, and some states were beginning to experience the communist economy.

In this context, it is easy to understand why, for the majority of Pieds-Noirs, there was nothing wrong, or at least palpably wrong, with that situation. Furthermore, as Algeria was officially part of France, the French govern-

ment had not ceased building infrastructures like railways, electric lines, roads, ports, and so on. Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the French had treated this part of northern Africa in a substantially different way than they treated colonies like Morocco and Tunisia, not to mention Senegal, Ghana, Chad and all the other sub-Saharan French colonies. Therefore, there was no concern about this inequality. The ones who dared to speak out about their concerns were disregarded as communists or, worse, were branded as intellectuals. Henri Alleg, a member of the French Communist Party (PCF), was one of the voices that spoke out.<sup>12</sup> One of the first to notice these colonialist injustices was Albert Camus, a descendant of Balearic settlers. As well as the best seller *L' étranger* (The Outsider), a novel where he symbolises with extreme rawness the rage of the Muslim population, Camus wrote three specific essays.<sup>13</sup> In the essays, titled *Chronique algérienne* (Algerian Chronicle), he called for an end of the violence from both French and Muslim sides, rejecting the idea of a binary world divided by good or evil, Christian or Muslim. This claim in favour of human rights won him the Nobel Prize in 1957, where he defined himself by claiming his Algerian heritage.

### 3. HISTORICAL MILESTONES

During the eight years of conflict, there were some significant milestones. A month after the Toussaint Rouge, the first military reinforcements were sent to Algeria. It is important to note that this war mobilised hundreds of thousands of French troops. In the First Indochina War (1946-1954), which ended with the absolute defeat of the French army in Dien-Bien-Phu, the use of recruits from France was forbidden. In contrast, the war in Algeria involved thousands of young recruits from all corners of France, who had never thought they would be involved in a war. Officially, there was not a war there — only some 'events'. Coming from a civilised world and originally thinking they would simply be spending a few months in sunny vacation spots, these young French army recruits were terrified when they found out what was going on.

France soon declared a state of emergency and nominated an army general as the General Governor. This was 1955, also the year of the first United Nations debate on the matter, something that upset French authorities. France, as a member of the Security Council, pressed the UN to enact powerless declarations. The declarations supported peace in Algeria but went no further, and they did not bring up the right of Algerian people to self-determination.

10 B. Stora (2004)

11 A. Rebahi (2004).

12 Henri Alleg was the editor of *Alger Républicain* and was detained and tortured in 1957 by military paratroopers. This experience was published in a book entitled *La question* (The Question). See <http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/divbiog/alleg.htm>

13 A. Camus (1958)



The first FNL attacks in Algiers began in 1956. In 1957, General Massu was given responsibility for bringing order to Algiers, an act that led to the infamous battle of Algiers. By 1958, the situation was getting worse. The French army battalion in Algeria was asking for more troops. The French government had been reluctant to send more troops, partly due to public pressure and partly because government officials were seeing that this strategy was going nowhere and draining the public budget. The situation worsened when an uprising in Algeria threatened to extend to France. The man who had been referred to by generals in Algeria as “the French myth of WWII”, Charles de Gaulle, was appointed head of the French Fifth Republic.

De Gaulle’s first political action was a well-planned trip to Algeria, punctuated by huge welcoming rallies, in early June 1958. At that time, General de Gaulle was popular. The people in France loved him because he had been their liberator. The Pieds-Noirs saw de Gaulle as the only man who could listen to and understand them. Muslims felt some affection towards him, because de Gaulle had been a liberator and the Commander-in-Chief of most who had served during WWII.

In fact, General de Gaulle was one of the high-ranking military who rejected the armistice with Germany that led to the invasion of France. In the French psyche, the armistice is still a bitter memory and De Gaulle did not deceive their expectations. In an impressive rally in the middle of Algiers, his first words were “Je vous ai compris!... Je sais ce qui s’est passé ici!” (I understand you... I know what’s been going on here!).<sup>14</sup> The General reformed the French Constitution, was elected as President of the French Republic, implemented social changes for the Muslim population, and offered an honourable surrender to the FLN, but the reforms had come too late and the war was at its peak, in a kind of stalemate.<sup>15</sup> The division in what once was, to some extent, a united community was now clearly insurmountable. One year later, in 1959, on a televised speech, De Gaulle pronounced, for the first time, the words the Pieds-Noirs had long feared: self-determination. Maybe because he realised that in fact change had come too late, or because he saw that the continuation of the conflict seriously threatened the population of France and the economy, or just because he came to the conclusion that France, as a sign of the times, could no longer rule colonies, he finally stepped in.

Reaction in Algeria was immediate. Pieds-Noirs felt betrayed and bitter towards everyone — the French people, the army as an institution, the French government, and above all General de Gaulle. This betrayal led to all manner of upheavals, a barricade revolt, and paradoxically,

Pieds-Noirs fighting against the French army. The bitterest result of this turmoil was the creation of the Organisation de l’Armée Secrète (the OAS, the Secret Army Organisation), in 1961. At that time, the independence of Algeria was inevitable, although there had been no referendum. The OAS was the most sinister terrorist organisation, established by civilian Pieds-Noirs as well as army defectors, most of whom were paratroopers. Led by General Raoul Salan, the OAS sowed terror attempting massive bombings in Algeria as well as in France.

After negotiations in Évian (France) between the FNL and the French government, a referendum held in France approved the so-called Évian accords. Finally, on July 1, 1962, the majority of the Algerian population voted “yes” to the self-determination referendum. Two days later, the French government recognised Algerian independence.

## 4. FRAMING THE CONFLICT

A recent article from *The New York Times* about the rebellion in Libya, citing a study conducted by the self-same author, emphasised that “over 50 percent of the nonviolent movements from 1900 to 2006 succeeded, compared with about 25 percent of the violent insurgencies”.<sup>16</sup> Obviously, the conflict we are framing falls within the last group, specifically as a type of conflict that Professor Kriesberg of Syracuse University outlines as those in which “the cost of the violence is huge (...) and alternatives may have been better”.<sup>17</sup>

An overwhelming number of African and Middle Eastern countries achieved their independence between the late 1950s and the beginning of the 1970s. Starting in Libya as early as 1951 and finishing in Zimbabwe as late as 1980, the peak of decolonisation was in the 1960s. The liberations were very diverse; for instance, Morocco and Tunisia, neighbours of Algeria, gained their sovereignty partly as a consequence of the events that were taking place in Algeria, and also because, as noted, decolonisation was a characteristic of the times. Algeria, although a colony, was believed by the French government and population to be part of their territory. This is a structural frame paradigm whose main concerns were defined by Professor Dayton as a blatant structural inequality (casting of ballots in a second-class polling station, and deficient, if any, access to health care and education by the Muslim population) and an unfair distribution of power and resources (best farmlands, energy sources, etc.) by the Pied-Noir.<sup>18</sup> In fact,

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.ina.fr/media/petites-phrases/video/I00008238/charles-de-gaulle-je-vous-ai-compris.fr.html>

<sup>15</sup> B. Dayton (2011, January 28)

<sup>16</sup> E. Chenoweth (2011)

<sup>17</sup> L. Kriesberg, personal communication, April 13, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> B. W. Dayton (in print).



the French government did not want to recognise these structural asymmetries “that relate also on demography, economic resources, coercive resources, normative claims and other factors”<sup>19</sup>

The Algerian society, prior to *Les Événements*, was basically an absolute, tolerant and peaceful society. Yet the concept of *negative peace* matched this society completely. We are describing not only a lack of physical violence, but harsh relations, structural violence and a place “where poverty and death rates are greater than those of many others in the society”<sup>20</sup>. Indeed, a great majority of the Muslim population had learnt to accept those inequalities as “the way things are”<sup>21</sup>.

Then how was it possible that this absolute, tolerant and negative-peaceful society engaged in such a horrendous conflict? There are several answers. For instance, the growing thrust of ‘identity’. It is known that this is a basic and “non-negotiable human need that cannot be suppressed”<sup>22</sup>. When describing the background earlier, I recalled that what was known as the Massacre of Sétif took place immediately after the end of WWII. That was a catalytic moment for Muslim-Algerian identity, and also one of the few times when a flag other than the French one, was seen publicly (afterward came the carnage mentioned above). The handcrafted Algerian flags raised that day were the expression of a sentiment by part of the community — the Muslim community — thus a symbol of a nation. And a nation is a community “which normally tends to produce a state of its own”<sup>23</sup>. This fact is also related to identity. For the first time, Pieds-Noirs clearly were witness to a threat to their own French identity. For the first time, they were perfectly aware of a real psychological and physical danger.<sup>24</sup> Conflict took a little longer, but in terms of history, it was about to begin.

We can establish though that ‘threat’, the first step in escalation, and intractability appeared for the first time in Sétif or, nine years after, on November 1, 1954, *Tous-saint Rouge*. The emergence, maintenance, and growing affiliation of the FLN, led to this organisation becoming the main stakeholder against the colonialist power. This was only in part “attributable to the internal dynamics of the movement itself”<sup>25</sup> the rest was the ‘merit’ of the French government and army.

During 1954 and 1955, retaliation against the FLN was fiercely endorsed by the French government, but instead of defeating it, this overreaction meant the FLN won support in a classic strategy.<sup>26</sup> This support was achieved not only because of the retaliation itself, but as a result of the treatment applied to the whole Muslim population, “helping to merge movement and solidarity layers”<sup>27</sup>. This treatment was especially dire in the countryside. Entire villages were displaced and the inhabitants separated to avoid any kind of contact or shelter for the so-called rebels. This was obviously very distressing but, as long as it happened far from the main cities, and far from the majority of European settlers, a sense of distortion arose among this population. Distortion is a “psychological response to threat”<sup>28</sup> that leads to rigidification, which was achieved when the conflict moved to towns and cities, especially the capital, Algiers. That was in 1957, and polarisation was clearly visible on the streets, especially when the French army took charge of the situation and turned the city into a battlefield to retaliate against the Muslim population. This was the time of countless bombing attacks by the FLN against French security officers and the general population with French counter-intelligence responding by setting bomb traps. Thus, polarisation aroused the behaviours of both populations, the Muslims and Pieds-Noirs. Not only these behaviours were considered ‘threatening’, but also the beliefs or even characteristics of the other (...) over time.<sup>29</sup> This is the classic stage when long-time relations among neighbours and between homeowners and servants, Muslim workers and employers, peasants and landlords, etc. began to break up. This phase of the conflict is described in detail in a 1962 pioneer documentary film called *Les oliviers de la justice* (The Olive Trees of Justice),<sup>30</sup> and more recently in the two-chapter TV series offered by French public television, TF1, *L’adieu* (The Farewell, 2003).<sup>31</sup>

A salient issue during the phase of rigidification is the reinforcement of the conflict by ‘dehumanisation’. This concept comes from maintaining the “domination-submission relationship, between low and high-status groups”<sup>32</sup>. Professor Tidwell’s description of hatred and enmification is consistent during this stage of the Algerian war, known as the “Battle of Algiers”<sup>33</sup>. Actual violence was the norm

19 L. Kriesberg (2010)

20 L. Kriesberg (2009b).

21 T. Northrup (1989)

22 Lecture delivered by Professor B. Dayton. Friday, February 4, 2011 at 10.00 a.m. 111 Maxwell Hall.

23 A. Smith (1983)

24 T. Northrup, Op. cit., p. 65

25 K. Andrews (2001)

26 L. Kriesberg (2009a), p. 160 citing Debray, 1967 and Fanon, 1966.

27 W. Gamson (1991).

28 T. Northrup, Op. cit., p. 69 citing Kelly, 1995.

29 T. Northrup, Op. cit., p. 70.

30 *Les oliviers de la justice* <http://www.ina.fr/histoire-et-conflits/decolonisation/video/CAF97063633/un-film-sur-l-algerie-les-oliviers-de-la-justice.fr.html>

31 *L’adieu* [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xcfdv8\\_l-adieu-2003-trailer\\_shortfilms](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xcfdv8_l-adieu-2003-trailer_shortfilms)

32 T. Northrup, Op. cit., p. 72.

33 A. Tidwell (1998)



and became a cultural value. In fact, “without anyone to keep a watch, some people may simply go on a rampage of uncontrolled vilification”.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, this was not just ‘some people’, but the majority of the paratroops deployed to suppress the wave of bombings perpetrated randomly by the FLN, as torture and inhumane treatment spread.

On September 29, 2010, General Paul Aussaresses, former Captain and Chief Intelligence Officer, declared without reserve in an interview that he himself had perpetrated torture through the most atrocious methods.<sup>35</sup> What are the mechanisms that make ‘normal’ people commit such horrific actions? The explanation, as stated above, stems from the concept of dehumanisation as a precursor to enmification. This process dissociates humans from guilt and “creates a web of rationalisation, justifying and explaining enmity”.<sup>36</sup> Obviously, such a process makes violence more tolerable and makes it “easier to harm something or someone construed as not human or inhuman”.<sup>37</sup>

The final stage in Professor Northrup’s process of escalation and intractability is collusion. This stage not only serves to crystallise the conflict; the awareness of ending the conflict “contributes to [its] intractability”.<sup>38</sup> We can clearly envision this stage in two precise phases of the Algerian war. Undoubtedly, one is more acute than the other. The first time the FLN unleashed its violence in Algiers was in retaliation for the bomb trap of the hard-liners. Pieds-Noirs organised the paramilitary group in Rue Thèbes in the Kasbah, killing 71 Muslims, including women, elderly people, and children. This was a fast track to violence — a step beyond, sudden escalation. The second time was in early 1961 (January 8, 1961), when the referendum on self-determination was first approved by 75% of voters in France. To the European population in Algeria this was the final proof of betrayal. As mentioned, they were clearly aware that their presence in their native land would be threatened. Like an animal backed into a corner, this perception was a key factor in establishing the OAS.

So far, I have intended to frame the conflict mainly from the point of view of the European settlers, the Pied-Noir population, which accounted for roughly a tenth of the 10 million inhabitants of Algeria at that time.

Knowing the dirty, and not-so-dirty, war waged by the French army and authorities, it is easy to understand that

they achieved exactly the opposite of isolating the so-called terrorist group, trying to “woo moderate constituents” to challenge the first skirmishes of the FLN.<sup>39</sup> This aside, what was the FLN strategy to demonstrate it was gathering all ‘combatants for freedom’ and, at the same time, get rid of any other stakeholders on behalf of the Muslim population? First, using the classical action-reaction model, the FLN, as mentioned, became much more than a minor piece on the Algerian political chessboard. Second, the historical context (decolonisation) could also explain their constant growth. The Muslim population’s general ingrained beliefs about revolution also led to the idea that “non-institutional tactics can advance that cause”.<sup>40</sup> As we have seen, FLN actions “produced an overreaction by the adversary that [made] them win wide support,”<sup>41</sup> as “increased costs do not always result in decreased participation in the movement”.<sup>42</sup> The FLN clearly managed the conflict within a structural framework, yet with a revolutionary and deconstructive technique. Indeed, the slogan of the FLN at that time was: *La Révolution algérienne, un peuple au combat contre la barbarie colonialiste* (The Algerian revolution, a fighting population against barbarous colonialism).<sup>43</sup>

The second most salient framework would be the ‘emotional frame’.<sup>44</sup> As noted, the creation of OAS was the last resort to overcoming the mixed feelings of fear, grief, and loss, both physically and geographically, that the majority of Pieds-Noirs experienced by 1961. In the summer of 1962, when the whole Pied-Noir population fled from Algeria, most were not aware that healing would be needed. In fact, some of them, even today, in a sort of cognitive dissociation, deny that any wound exists.

## 5. TRANSFORMING THE CONFLICT. POLITICAL SCI-FI

...Mais les faits, eux, n’ont pas changé et, demain, il faudra encore en tenir compte pour déboucher sur le seul avenir acceptable: celui où la France, appuyée inconditionnellement sur ses libertés, saura rendre justice, sans discrimination, ni dans un sens ni dans l’autre, à toutes les communautés de l’Algérie.

34 Tidwell, Op.cit., p. 134.

35 See <http://www.ima.fr/histoire-et-conflits/guerre-d-algerie/video/CAB00060096/plateau-invite-general-paul-aussaresses.fr.htm>. See also *Le petit soldat* (1960) by Jean-Luc Godard, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJZ3xEkDaSs&feature=related>

36 Tidwell, Op.cit., p. 137.

37 T. Northrup, Op. cit., p. 74.

38 Ibid., p. 76.

39 L. Kriesberg (2009c)

40 E. Hirsch (1990)

41 L. Kriesberg (2009c), Op. cit.

42 E. Hirsch, Op. cit.

43 B. Stora, Op. cit.

44 B. W. Dayton (in print)



Aujourd'hui, comme hier, ma seule ambition, en publiant ce libre témoignage, est de contribuer, selon mes moyens, à la définition de cet avenir.<sup>45</sup>

The words written by Albert Camus in the first foreword of his 1958 book *Actuelles III, Chronique Algérienne, 1939-1958* are both a premonition of future struggles and a claim for justice and equality. The whole book is filled with thoughtful opinions on the unstable Algerian situation. I would suggest that Camus was not alone in having these insights. In many other conflicts, a large portion of the population is not polarised. When a conflict escalates, people are forced to choose between one side and another. Fortunately for Camus, he was not forced to choose. Unfortunately for the rest of us, he died in a car accident on January 4, 1960, when the worst was still to come.

The Algerian revolution had no single strong leader but had powerful leadership. Many were from a completely new generation with new insights and perspectives. Young leaders like Ben Bella, Abane Ramdan, Mohammed Boudiaf, Didouche Mourad, Larbi Ben M'Hidi, and Yacef Saâdi were all in their mid-twenties and early thirties. They all realised that guerrilla warfare and sabotage were the only means by which the French government could be forced to redress the blatant inequalities.

Other more moderate political actors, such as Messali Hadj and Ferhat Abbas, were soon put aside, especially the Algerian National Movement, which had some clashes with the FLN in the beginning of the struggles and was rapidly wiped out. Therefore, despite the ongoing great examples of non-violent movements led by people such as Martin Luther King, Jr., who was engaged in the civil rights movement in the USA, and Mahatma Gandhi, who led India to independence in 1948, the FLN was still young and eager to overthrow the world around it. Would it have been possible before the Toussaint Rouge, or even after it, to have avoided these first steps in the conflict? In many other societies, these blatant inequalities mean "the struggle for social justice is likely to make [part of the population] feel that they have to stand by those under attack".<sup>46</sup> However, the huge majority of the European settlers had remained silent for decades. What should have been done to make the shift in the Pied-Noir psychology? How could they have been made to realise that the world was profoundly changing and that if they did not change they would be swept away? Once again, in my opinion, the answer is the

emergence of a great leader: a sort of precursor to Mandela. A great leader of the Muslim population who could have convincingly reassured European settlers that it was normal to be afraid and that, achieving the goal would not "damage the highly important interests and values of the adversary".<sup>47</sup> Maybe a leader of the Pied-Noir population who could have fostered a true sense of *jus soli*, law of the land, nationalism always heralded by France, a gigantic leader engaged in honest patriotism, the kind of patriotism that embraces all people living in a territory and that is "based on equal and shared political rights, and allegiance to similar political procedures".<sup>48</sup> Nelson Mandela is the quintessential example. He reassured the white population "regarding their property and the essential unity of all South Africans, whatever their colour".<sup>49</sup>

I have mentioned two occasions, one prior to the Bloody All Saints and another just after, where handling the situation would have been feasible. Had the 1945 massacre in Sétif not taken place, possibilities would have been greater. A third occasion arose after the attack against the Muslim community in the heart of the Kasbah (Rue Thèbes). This resulted in the FLN, for the first time, indiscriminately attacking the European civil population of Algiers. In fact, before the Rue Thèbes attack, secret peace talks had been taking place between French government representatives and FLN members, but the Muslim deaths in the attack on the Kasbah by hard-liners escalated the conflict and resulted in this brutal retaliation from the FLN. Even then, despite the intractability of the parties, it would have been a great moment for the French government to shift its identity "involving core aspects related to the conflict. Such structural changes, or core changes in identity, [affecting] the entire system".<sup>50</sup>

After a sort of coup by the commanders of the army in Algeria, General De Gaulle appeared to be the only one capable of disentangling the conflict. This opinion was held by the Pied-Noir, Muslims and the French. In June 1958, De Gaulle was a major celebrity and had absolute moral authority among his peers. Depending on his behaviour, he could have been a real threat to the FLN's violent goal, but unfortunately he came on the scene too late. He tried an honest approach to the conflict by attempting to redress some blatant inequalities. He initiated ballot reform together with reforms in education, housing, etc. All of these reforms came too late for a population that was ripped apart. Perhaps he should have taken assertive and effective action against the

45 "...however, the facts remain unchanged, and tomorrow we will have to take them into account to go towards the only acceptable future: a future where France, relying completely on its spirit of freedom, will know how to do justice, without discrimination on one side or another, within all Algerian communities. Today as yesterday, my only ambition publishing this witness-book, is a humble contribution to this very future". [Author's translation]

46 W. Gamson (1991), Op. cit., p. 47.

47 L. Krisberg, (2009c), Op. cit., p. 11

48 L. Krisberg, (2010), Op. cit., p. 22

49 L. Krisberg, (2009c) Op. cit., p. 13

50 T. Northrup (1989), Op. cit., p. 78



Pieds-Noirs from the first visit, instead of flattering them with his comment, “*Je vous ai compris*”. At that time, he had the opportunity, the capacity and the will to address the conflict. However, the Pieds-Noirs did not have the will. Yet, let us imagine how General Charles De Gaulle, with all his authority, could have pushed hard in all directions. As a first move, he should have addressed inhumane practices, such as torture basically against the Muslim population, in order to “promote nonviolent mechanisms that reduce adversarial confrontation [minimising] and ultimately eliminate[ing] violence”.<sup>51</sup> In fact, he should have urgently put in place a credible mechanism for restorative justice on both sides. There were cases of extreme and indescribable horror that required reparation on behalf of the victims. That would have been a basic concern or a central focus in the words of Professor Zeher.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, he attempted to implement basic structural changes too late.

After the settlement between the French government and the FLN was signed, many efforts to build peace should have been undertaken after such a destructive conflict. Regrettably, there were fewer conflict resolution paradigms than today. It was impossible to think of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission at that time. Reconciliation implies many more elements than merely understanding the word itself. Today’s reconciliation theories embrace elements as fundamental as truth, justice, and security. However, unearthing the truth often happens “many years after extreme acts of violence”.<sup>53</sup>

Criminal justice without restorative justice makes peace somewhat illusory. “Simply put, truth plus justice equals a sustainable peace”.<sup>54</sup> In 1960, reflection on all these concepts was non-existent.

## 6. FINAL WORDS

In July 2012, تيبي عشال تي طارق دميدل تي ريزانجال تي وروهم جلا (the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria) celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. There are still many untold stories today that were willingly hidden. A deep sense of sorrow fills large segments of the population on both Mediterranean shores. There are still unchanged mental frames on both sides. In fact, we can recognise that “framing is [as] central to well-being as eating and sleeping”.<sup>55</sup> However, although a long time has passed, the old-fashioned mental frames have not changed. The French president should now take the lead by honestly recognising what the French did wrong at the time. He should do so clearly, bravely, and sincerely, without expecting anything in return, in an effort to foster reconciliation and to make the concept of France as a nation, even greater. He has a perfect reason to review the past. As Professor Arthur theorised: “The past needs to be reviewed because it has the capacity to be resurrected in a malign manner”.<sup>56</sup> Let us hope that this day of reconciliation will come. ■

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51 J. Lederach (2003)

52 H. Zeher (2002)

53 L. Kriesberg (2009b), Op. cit., p. 7

54 Lecture delivered by Professor David Crane. Wednesday, February 23, 2011 at 11.00 a.m. 100 Eggers Hall, Sponsored by the Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs.

55 Lecture delivered by Professor B. Dayton. Friday, February 4, 2011 at 10.00 a.m. 111 Maxwell Hall.

56 P. Arthur (2009).



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## ■ About the author

**Miquel Calçada**  
[mcalcada@syr.edu](mailto:mcalcada@syr.edu)

Miquel Calçada is a Catalan journalist and media entrepreneur. Having an extensive communications background, in 1992 he established what later became Grup Flaix, with two leading radio channels: Flaix FM and Ràdio Flaixbac. In television, his latest works on conflict regions try to frame divergences from a different angle. Calçada has a Master's in Public Administration and International Relations focused on Conflict Resolution, from the Maxwell School of Syracuse University. Recently he has been appointed as the 1714 Memorial Commissioner by the Catalan Government. Calçada regularly publishes articles in the Catalan Press.



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