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Abstract

Keywords
Pieds-Noirs, Memory, Trauma, Collective Amnesia, Algeria/France.

In *Remembering French Algeria: Pieds-Noirs, Identity, and Exile*, Amy Hubbell explores the varied historical and psychological forces at work in Pied-Noir narratives of post-revolutionary Algeria. Indeed, between 1954 and 1963, thousands of French settlers were driven out of Algeria. After suffering this violent expulsion, they were subjected to harsh discrimination upon their arrival in France. From these incidents, fraught with anxiety and ambiguity, derive accounts that aim to preserve memories and represent French Algeria as experienced by the Pied-Noir population. Their discourse, Hubbell suggests, exemplifies the controversial and deeply divisive nature of Algerian independence, as well as a collective historical amnesia regarding the French-Algerian war that, to varying degrees, concerns and continues to affect both countries. According to Hubbell, an early historical mis-representation of this community is rooted in the pejorative conception of the term ‘Pied-Noir.’ Coined by the metropolitan French who wanted to distinguish themselves from the new arrivals, the term was initially intended to designate French settlers at the time of their forced return to France. However, this appellation has been widely used retroactively, even by historians, as a general term referring to any and all French settlers, even those living in Algeria long before the War of Independence. This historical slippage, Hubbell sustains, adds to the confusion between the present and the past and to the Pied-Noir’s experience of an often split identity. Furthermore, Hubbell remarks, the denomination of ‘Pied-Noir’ conveniently erases both the word ‘French’ and ‘Algeria’ from the collective memory. The omission of the first word advantageously disencumbers France entirely of its responsibility and shifts the blame onto the Pieds-Noirs themselves. The omission of the second word similarly reinforces the collective amnesia regarding the French-Algerian war and erases the French settlers’ affiliation with Algeria. Hubbell deduces: “In short, the Pieds-Noirs are no longer considered French, the French are no longer related to Algeria, and this separation aids in the willful forgetting of the lost war” (18). Entrapped by the conditions of their forced exodus, the inhospitable climate in France upon their arrival, and the impossibility of returning to Algeria, the Pieds-Noirs commit to remembering and preserving their identity and community, and to fighting both France’s refusal to acknowledge the realities of the past and their own tendencies to forget it.

Hubbell interprets their autobiographical writings and films, characterized by loss and nostalgia, according to two different principles of organization: returning and repetition. The urgency to look backward or to return to Algeria is deeply rooted in the articulation of their collective identity. In fact, it is in the common longing for a shared lost homeland that the Pieds-Noirs start to perceive themselves as a community. Repetition and perpetuity also characterize their return, which
Hubbell exemplifies through the myth of Sisyphus, “as a metaphor for the Pied-Noir who continually struggles to bring the past Algeria back to the present in France, all while confronting the futility of this task” (40). Seeking to articulate the trauma associated with their expulsion and unwelcome arrival, the Pieds-Noirs manipulate and fictiona...
the subject matter. *Remembering French Algeria* is a relevant resource and a valuable tool for both specialists in the field of Postcolonial Studies and those with general interests in literature, history, and ethics.

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